

*PÜSÖK Sarolta*<sup>1</sup>:

## To Serve with Words, Letters, and Deeds – The First Stage of the *Református Család* [Reformed Family] Periodical's Publication (1929–1944)<sup>2</sup>

### *Abstract.*

The study firstly addresses the crisis period, which made the creation of the periodical necessary. The first issue was published in 1929, but our time travel to understand the era needs to take us back at least to the 19<sup>th</sup> century since the roots of the crisis can be found there: the defeat of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848; the worker optimism following the 1867 Austro-Hungarian Compromise, which, in addition to spectacular results, further deepened the economic and ethnic gap between the various strata of the population; the people-centred, fickle ideological basis of theological liberalism; the horrors of World War I, the Republic of Councils of Hungary, the Treaty of Trianon.

The second main topic outlines one of the successful areas of crisis management, i.e. the domestic mission aspirations unfolding in the Transylvanian Reformed Church District: the role of theology professors, Véc's Society, associations mobilizing certain strata of church members, and related press releases and press products.

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<sup>2</sup> This article was subsidized by the Committee of National Remembrance.

The third chapter presents the first release period of *Református Család* from 1929 to 1944: objectives of the periodical, columns, readers, editors-writers.

**Keywords:** *the Hungarian Reformed community in Transylvania, crisis period, home/domestic mission, Transylvanian Reformed Women's Association (1928–1944), Református Család periodical (1929–1944).*

### *1. The Roots of the Crises in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century*

Firstly, we must examine the period itself and the factors that caused the crises in the context of which the periodical *Református Család* embarked on its journey so that we can also reveal the direct reasons for the periodical's creation. It is worth looking back at least to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to understand the context. Following the Austro-Hungarian Compromise, the inhabitants of the monarchy experienced a long period of peace, when a series of imposing public buildings were built, and progress in technology and science was also dynamic. Theological thinking was also permeated by the spirit of the age, the feverish optimism, which, with its human-centredness, proclaimed the infinite possibilities of man and thus a false security that later had a bitter price. An analyst of the era aptly states in retrospect that “liberal theology, with its relative value and relative standards, did not provide security.”<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, the gap between dreams and reality gradually widened, and the whispering complaints of the ethnic and economic anomalies of certain social strata condensed into a threatening storm along the edge of the horizon. Poor people were often driven by their own misery and their desire for a better life to seek employment as guest workers in faraway lands, beyond many borders. The first wave of emigration began as early as the defeat of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848, but “it was not until 1880–90 that the desire to emigrate gained more momentum. It is estimated that at this time about a hundred thousand Hungarians were living in the narrower ‘United States’ ..., those who happened to see the end of the war in America and gave up their intention

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<sup>3</sup> MÁRKUS, Jenő (2005): *A liberális szellem a református egyházban – A magyar református liberális teológia*. Budapest, Kálvin János Kiadó. 138–139.

to return home almost without exception.”<sup>4</sup> It is difficult to tell the exact number of emigrants because some went back up to three times as they could buy land and a house with the dollars they brought home, and newer plans compelled them to set out for new journeys.

The turn of the century was imbued with a strange feeling, a belief in development, the hope of a better life, which gave man a false self-image and self-confidence that swept him further and further away from God. Then came World War I with its horrors and infightings, and what was left was scorched by the trauma caused by the Soviet Republic and the Trianon Treaty. These events acted on people like a sudden wake-up call would on a sleep-walker, who does not even know where s/he is and what to do, as millions came under the rule of another state overnight, without any change of place, while most of them did not speak the new official language. Families and institutional networks found themselves on different sides of the border, and since not everyone could escape to the small part of the country that remained under Hungarian rule, the majority had to make a choice between fading away/ assimilating into the majority population and being an independent minority. Choosing the latter triggered a whole series of events and actions among the Reformed as well.

## *2. Successful Crisis Management Strategies*

It is much easier to point out the causes of the crisis from a historical perspective than in the midst of or immediately after the crisis. There were people at the turn of the century as well who perceived the wrong direction they were heading to, who were not victims of delusion and were not completely blinded by the spirit of the age. Such vigilant perceptions always require an external, objective reference basis that science can best provide. It was known as early as in the ancient times that movement can hardly be perceived from a curtained car, but when the passenger looks out the window, s/he immediately becomes aware of the movement based on the fading landscape. For the Reformed people of Transylvania, the window of science to the world was primarily the

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<sup>4</sup> MAKSAY, Albert (1998): Magyarok. In: Maksay, Ágnes (ed.): *A régi fal szomszédságában*. Cluj-Napoca, Protestáns Teológiai Intézet. 26.

Faculty of Theology of Kolozsvár/Cluj. Domokos Szász, the church-building bishop, who recognized and consistently exploited new opportunities, moved the pastoral institute from Nagyenyed/Aiud to Kolozsvár/Cluj in 1895 with the stated intention of making possible for its professors and students to join the bustling spiritual, cultural life that had developed around the renewed Ferenc József University. His idea was successful – the faculty “... was the spiritual and intellectual hearth of our whole church. The courageous critical work of our scholarly professors protected our church from shallowness. .... In the years of war, this critical vision was deepened into a confession of sins as a result of the work of the same men, and from the struggle against illusions the search for the ultimate reality, the will of God was born.”<sup>5</sup> Responsibly minded theologians were later preoccupied with examining the causes of the crisis in the context of crisis management, which also meant honestly looking in the mirror. Sándor Makkai (1890–1951), a professor of theology turned bishop, provides such an analysis, a self-examination and at the same time a plan for the future in his epoch-making work *Magunk Revíziója* [Our Own Revision], in which he states: “*We must take responsibility for the past! Precisely because we see and know where the past has led us to. As it is our own sin, we must take it upon ourselves so that we can put it down, repent, and never commit it again... [...]... Taking responsibility, repentance, and atonement are the greatest acts by which a nation can prove its right to life and its viability.*”<sup>6</sup>

The biggest mistake of the church in the previous era was undoubtedly that it did not resist the spread of the liberal theological trend, even though “liberal theology did not have a definite programme either for man or for the church. In the absence of such a programme, it could not pass on the values in its principles to the church even though the individual and the church were in great need of communicating values.”<sup>7</sup>

The new church organization, the Reformed Church of Romania, had to reinterpret the concept of church in its first decade because without proper self-interpretation it could hardly have thrived in the arising difficult situation. The creation of the

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<sup>5</sup> JUHÁSZ, András (1991): Az Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület. In: „*Tebbened bíztunk eleitől fogva...*” – *A magyar reformátusság körképe*. Debrecen, Magyar Református Világtalálkozó Alapítvány. 62.

<sup>6</sup> MAKKAI, Sándor (1931a): *Magunk revíziója*. Kolozsvár, Erdélyi Szépművés Céh. 12.

<sup>7</sup> MÁRKUS 2005, 139.

new programme was obviously a complex and multi-stakeholder process,<sup>8</sup> one of the much-mentioned results of which was a booklet written in 1926 by Sándor Makkai – who occupied the episcopal chair – entitled *Öntudatos kálvinizmus* [Self-Conscious Calvinism]. The eloquent title summarizes an important goal of the era, the need for church members to consciously strive to carry out the Calvinist heritage. Makkai explained in this work as well that instead of a liberal, misguided church, there was a need for a church that recognized its mission and focused on preaching and living the gospel.<sup>9</sup> Clear vision, and especially its awareness, both in the most affected inner circles of church society and in the wider community, were hampered by the fact that in the chaotic state of the early twenties many false expectations were formulated for the church, mainly due to the haunting theological liberalism and the desperate lifesaving. A decade later, Makkai recalls this period: “The torn and tangled strand of all national, social, cultural, and even economic problems could climb onto and cling to this single pillar, which was also shaken, and it was demanded that the church be the maintainer, insurer, and protector of national life, social order, Hungarian culture, and Hungarian existence.”<sup>10</sup> By rejecting wrong expectations, he is actually pointing to the essence of the church: “The church is: church! ... its foundation is not the nation, not the culture, not society, not wealth, it is not the human and the secular at all.”<sup>11</sup> Based on the above demarcation, one should not think of any kind of confrontation as neither the writer of the above lines nor his fellow professors withdrew from the service of preserving the nation and caring for the culture. A series of folk education lectures delivered and social responsibility statements made by theology professors attest to their continued involvement in the above, as evidenced by the simultaneous literary work of Makkai. A significant change compared to previous ages occurred in their theological vision – they were no longer operating under the auspices of cultural Protestantism but along a church programme built on a biblical foundation.

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<sup>8</sup> It would stretch the limits of this study to go into details, but many historical works cover both the description of the process and the analysis of the roles of those involved, friendships and tensions, especially the relationship between professors of theology and the church leadership.

<sup>9</sup> MAKKAI, Sándor (1926): *Öntudatos kálvinizmus – A református magyar intelligencia számára*. Kolozsvár, Az Út. 35–51.

<sup>10</sup> MAKKAI, Sándor (1931b): Erdélyi református problémák. In: *Protestáns Szemle*. 40, 5. 357.

<sup>11</sup> Op. cit. 358.

They now consciously professed that neither the development of culture nor that of the nation can be merely an end in itself, which, in some cases, classifies the church as one of the institutions that serve it. The primary ministry of the church is the proclamation of the gospel of Christ and the realization of a way of life according to Christ, which has the beneficial effect on the lives of individuals and communities of providing comfort and guidance to church members in the present instead of looking into the past and political squabbles. As for the future, it is a win-win situation for everyone if the church focuses on its fundamental task of directing individuals to Christ and urging them to organize communities of love, as this is expected to change the quality of their work and their entire lives. Makkai's ideas on the above are nicely summarized in the following excerpt from his 1944 work titled *Teológiai önéletrajz*:

“Culture and nation, realities to be sanctified with the gospel, may be idols in themselves; they only become truly valuable and appreciable in the service of the cause of Christ. The days of the institutional and administrative official church organization that exists for itself are numbered, the time of grace of the spiritual, missionary church ensues, and therefore the church cannot be a sign and cover of a national policy of grievance, but, within the given conditions, it should be the spiritual guide of the life of the people entrusted to it, the sanctifier of their daily work, their comfort in their time of sorrow, and their organizer into an active community of love arising from faith.”<sup>12</sup>

### *2.1. The Unfolding of the Transylvanian Reformed Church District's Domestic Mission*

The creation of the Church's programme of service outside the church walls and beyond Sunday services was not only a response to a post-World War I emergency but the culmination of an older process. Géza Nagy already speaks of the first director of the Institute of Theology of Cluj-Napoca, the later bishop, Béla Kenessey, as the “apostle of the domestic mission”,<sup>13</sup> whose initiatives could not penetrate the whole church body. We

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<sup>12</sup> MAKKAI, Sándor (1990): *Szolgálatom*. (József, Barcza – ed.). Budapest, Református Egyház Zsinati Irodájának Sajtóosztálya. 101.

<sup>13</sup> NAGY, Géza (1937a): Kenessey Béla, mint a belmisszió apostola. In: *Akik kösziklára építettek – Egyháztörténeti dolgozatok*. Kolozsvár. 214.

have previously pointed out that responsibly-minded theologians began to discover their true duties as early as the pre-war period. At this early stage of consciousness, the recognition of shortcomings in their own environment, the misery on the one hand and the abuses on the other certainly played a major role, but the history of theology also speaks of life-changing encounters. In 1908, *Bethlen Gábor Kör* (Bethlen Gábor Circle) in Cluj-Napoca, represented by Lajos Imre, was also invited to Balatonalmádi for the conference of the *Magyar Evangéliumi Keresztény Diákszövetség* (Hungarian Evangelical Christian Student Association) of Budapest. The student community in Cluj-Napoca was not truly influenced by the spirit of the gospel at that time, or if it did influence some people, it affected others rather negatively. As a result of the summer meeting, “*John Mott*, the American Methodist church worker and evangelist, Secretary General of the World Student Christian Federation (1865–1955) came to Cluj-Napoca in May 1909”.<sup>14</sup> Mott was famous for his extraordinary lecturing skills, and his interpreter, Viktor János, also proved to be an excellent translator and theologian. Lajos Imre recalls this meeting with devotion many years later: “Many of our professors and colleagues have seen that the work of the Student Association is not about gracious moaning, as many of them here imagined and practised, but about acknowledging and experiencing the real, redeeming power of Christ. Many of us felt that our faith had been strengthened and we gained strength for the work that we then began to do more seriously in the Bethlen Gábor Circle.”<sup>15</sup> Posterity is, of course, mostly interested in the nature of the impulse that gave impetus to the unfolding of the Transylvanian domestic mission – which central thought was at the heart of Mott’s presentation and what specific tasks he bestowed upon his audience. Based on contemporary publications and accounts, the Dutch biographer of Lajos Imre summarizes the essence of the lecture held in Cluj-Napoca as follows: “There are people, who really want to be Christians; they are not satisfied with accepting certain doctrines; Christians cannot take a break in the practice of honesty and selflessness. This speech faithfully described the Christianity-awakening activity of

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<sup>14</sup> JUHÁSZ, István (2015): *Jézus Krisztus egyháza – Az egyháztörténet vázlatja*. Kolozsvár, Kolozsvári Protestáns Teológiai Intézet. 426.

<sup>15</sup> IMRE, Lajos (1999): *Önéletírás*. In: Adorjáni, Zoltán – Buzogány, Dezső (eds.): *Erdélyi Református Egyháztörténeti füzetek*, 2. sorozat. Kolozsvár, Kolozsvári Református Teológiai Akadémia PET. 77–78.

John Mott. He did not give us a theological system but pointed out practical Christianity.”<sup>16</sup> He confronted both novice and practising theologians with the unforgettable theological truth that, of the three components of faith, no matter how valuable faith in the realm of intellectually perceived knowledge and emotions is, these are always measured by actions manifested at the level of the will. Honest acts of faith are always needed, but the world had perhaps never been as hungry for these acts of love as it was in the midst of the deplorable post-war conditions. Our theologians could now sharply see what they had only suspected on the eve of the war, that the people could only be comforted by faith in action, by the gospel. Their great recognition was taken seriously by their environment when they organized into a small community of friends and made it public. In 1921, it was announced in the columns of *Református Szemle* (Reformed Review) that a small group of pastors held a conference in Marosvécs (Brâncovenesti) on 9–12 August, where they decided to support each other in a friendly manner “in the faithful and evangelical service of the Transylvanian Mother Church [...] in introducing family worships and Bible studies, in working on scientific pastoral training and further training, in transplanting the gospel spirit into the people through the pure gospel living of the pastor ...”<sup>17</sup>

Among the initiators of the community of friends later known as Vécs Society, we can also find four theology professors. Next to them, there were pastors of different theological orientations (liberal, pietist, orthodox), who complemented each other nicely. Lajos Imre, who soon joined them, says: “There was a spirit of early Christianity within the community, where members of all theological approaches and personalities agreed on one thing: the service of Christ.”<sup>18</sup> The reconciliation of differences is striking, but so is the reconnection itself as in this era the whole of Europe was threatened by disintegration and distancing. Károly Fekete calls it a *miracle* that “in the summer of 1920 the search for a spiritual community appeared in Pécel and in the summer of 1921 in Marosvécs, and it is a *miracle* that the sense of pastoral responsibility awakened within this lethargic shock of mutilation, and in this humanly impossible time, pastors with a living faith

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<sup>16</sup> ENDE, Magda van der (1990): *Imre Lajos élete és teológiai munkássága*. Budapest, Ráday College Press. 28.

<sup>17</sup> Lelkészi konferencia (1921). In: *Református Szemle* XIV(August). 167.

<sup>18</sup> IMRE 1999, 214.



longed for the complementarity, for being consciously aware of each other.”<sup>19</sup> The nature of a miracle suggests, however, that what is humanly incomprehensible can be realized through God. In this case, it seemed highly unlikely that people who were so different and struggling with so much would embrace each other, but the presence of Christ in their lives overwrote what could be humanly expected of them and resulted in great ideas and actions. Similar associations already existed at this time – *Lelkész Egyesület* (Pastors’ Association) was founded barely a year earlier, but it was too preoccupied with current church policy issues, even allowing room for liberal ideas. *Evangéliumi Munkások Erdélyi Szövetsége* (Transylvanian Association of Evangelical Workers) was moving towards the other extreme, experiencing piety whilst setting such universal goals which made one forget national affiliation and the clarification of current issues. Both associations were hostile towards Vécs Society, as if they saw their own rival in it.<sup>20</sup>

The first summary of the fifteen-year history of Vécs Society was completed by Géza Nagy, who, as a church historian, makes the suggestive statement that “the development and work of this association are inseparable from the recent history of our Mother Church.”<sup>21</sup> Initially, they added the critical but missing growth-ensuring yeast to the work of a church government that shared views somewhat different from theirs.

In the time of Károly Nagy, “when it was no longer possible to conceal their ‘opposing views’, Vécs Society relaunched the periodical *Az Út* [The Way] in 1923 to inform the public. In contrast to the officiality of *Református szemle*, this represented the voice of constructive church criticism. This will be carried on by *Kálvinista Világ* [Calvinist World] from 1929 and *Kiáltó Szó* [Word of Exclamation] from 1934.”<sup>22</sup> After the election of Makkai as bishop in 1926, they separated from each other, the members of the association continuing to perform the often unpleasant task of the “control group”

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<sup>19</sup> FEKETE, Károly, ifj. (2008): *Tudománnyal és a hit pajzsával*. Kolozsvár, Az Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület. 23.

<sup>20</sup> NAGY, Géza (1937b): Tizenöt év a Lelki Egyház szolgálatában. In: *Akik köziklára építettek – Egyháztörténeti dolgozatok*. Kolozsvár. 222; FEKETE 2008, 25.

<sup>21</sup> NAGY 1937b, 221.

<sup>22</sup> FEKETE 2008, 29; see also: KOZMA, Zsolt (2003): A Kálvinista Világ és a Kiáltó Szó repertórium. In: *Erdélyi Református Egyháztörténeti Füzetek* 14. Kolozsvár, Kolozsvári Református Teológiai Akadémia PET.

under the spiritual leadership of Lajos Imre and Sándor Tavaszy.<sup>23</sup> The election of János Vásárhelyi as chief notary (deputy bishop) and then bishop also drives the members of the association further away from the governors of the church, while both church leaders take further and implement the domestic mission plans brought to the fore by the association. Beyond the relations of the persons involved, partly imbued with sincere friendship and partly burdened with tensions, the domestic mission of the Transylvanian Reformed Church flourished during this period.

Several concrete steps in the development of the domestic mission are attributed to the practical theologian Lajos Imre, who was the domestic missionary lecturer of the Transylvanian Reformed Church District between 1924 and 1944. At the meeting of the Board of the Transylvanian Reformed Church District on 17 November 1922, he proposed that the issue of domestic mission be put on the agenda and he put forward his proposal for the Domestic Mission Committee. One attendee protested against the election of professors of theology to the committee, which resulted in the formulation of his response, which was absolute and extended far beyond its time. “Imre Lajos rejected the protest by saying that the Institute of Theology also has the task of leading the domestic mission, and even if theology professors are not elected to the Committee, the spirit of theology must lead this work because all its disciplines look to the mission, if not directly, then indirectly.”<sup>24</sup> The theology professor present credible arguments since the theologians of the era meant this seriously and met the above formulated need within the scope of their own subjects and fields of research. Obviously, it would have been more convenient for them to behave in the way that was characteristic in peacetime for economically more developed countries, that is, to retreat into the ivory tower of scientific research. However, the true theologian was able to withstand this temptation of the scientific world and did not relinquish the primary task of theology, mission, and putting the truths of faith that it reveals into the public domain. The debate over scientific research work versus social presence is still alive today. Representatives of various disciplines are also held accountable for the promotion of science, the direct proof of

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<sup>23</sup> FEKETE 2008, 29; IMRE 1999, 215; NAGY 1937b, 232–233.

<sup>24</sup> ADORJÁNI, Zoltán (1996): Imre Lajos (1888–1974). In: Kozma, Zsolt (ed.): *Akik jó bizonyágot nyertek – A Kolozsvári Református Theológia tanárai 1895–1948*. Kolozsvár, Kolozsvári Protestáns Teológiai Intézet. 249–250.

social usefulness, as modern universities expect their lecturers to open up to the world from time to time in addition to the solitude of efficient creative work. It would be an unforgivable selfishness on the part of the theologians to distance themselves from their own society, especially their own ecclesial community. The theology professors of the studied period considered this community service highly significant. Even though their research work, their professionalism, and the quality of their publications were rightly comparable to any theological workshop in the world, they did not turn away with intellectual pride from the church struggling with everyday problems. Their behaviour also revealed their human, Christian greatness.

Their church truly needed their guidance as evidenced, for example, by their service in establishing the principles for the domestic mission. Lajos Imre, who was elected not only to the committee but also as its head, points out the peculiarities of the mission models known up to that time. According to the German model, the domestic mission, the so-called “Innere Mission”, is carried out by associations, foundations, or institutions that may have employees who are only nominally or barely affiliated with the church. He considered the Anglo-Saxon example better because the tasks of the so-called “home, or domestic mission” are the direct responsibility of the members of the church and the associations and institutions they establish, and thus the work done is a clear testimony of Christ, who called them for this work. As such, he “clarifies what domestic mission actually is. *Domestic mission is the task and work of the church itself and the congregation, which encompasses church community building, church social and religious education.* These should not be done by any institutions but by the church, *the members of the congregation* themselves. If this work is not done at the level of the congregation members, it can no longer be called domestic mission.”<sup>25</sup>

There were precedents for domestic mission activity in the Hungarian Church as well. The undivided Reformed Church created a position for a board member, called *mission lecturer*, in 1888, who was in charge of developing the diaspora and the domestic mission; however, from 1892 onwards, they entrusted this work to a secretary and an assistant secretary, which then, in the absence of the proper spirit, proved to be dead. The essence of Lajos Imre’s suggestion is not to entrust the domestic mission to officials

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<sup>25</sup> ADORJÁNI, Zoltán (2000): A nőszövetség és a belmisszió. In: Molnár, János (ed.): *Jézust szerető asszonyok*. Kolozsvár, Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület Nőszövetsége. 22.

and to associations and institutions that also allow for a lack of the sense of vocation, because “bureaucratic bias kills the work. This work does not primarily require administration but inspiration.”<sup>26</sup>

## *2.2. The Work of Church Members Organized into Associations*

Following the establishment of the principles of domestic mission, the above goal unfolded in practice and became a success story. The small church, faced on a daily basis with the social and financial disadvantages of being a minority, was able to realize great ideas. A hospital was established in Cluj-Napoca and an orphanage in Szászváros/Orăștie, which were maintained only due to the determined missionary spirit that permeated all strata of the church. From the halfpence of the widows all through the more generous donations of the aristocrats, perhaps the most important thing was that the deaconesses who served in these institutions were trained by their church for the work but undertook it obeying the call of Christ.

The church tried to take the Word out into the world, to deliver it to the distant, desperate people or those who dropped away. They realized that the merciful, forgiving, and healing God of Christians was unknown not only to the pagan inhabitants of remote, exotic lands but also within their own circles; even among those who belonged to them only nominally, many were hungry for the gospel. The domestic mission programme of the twenties was aimed at addressing all sections of church society. By implication, they first started working with children as the foundation of faith must be established in childhood. The Sunday school movement for children was started by the Christian student association of Cluj-Napoca, the Gábor Bethlen Circle, a decade earlier.<sup>27</sup> From 1924, Lajos Gönczi, a teacher of practical theology, was at the forefront of the field with great devotion. Following the example of YMCA, IKE and FIKE<sup>28</sup> mainly gathered school- and young working boys as well as the university youth. An educated

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<sup>26</sup> IMRE, Lajos (1923): A belmisszió problémája. In: *Az Út* 5, 1–3. 65, 67.

<sup>27</sup> IMRE 1999, 78–82.

<sup>28</sup> IKE, i.e. *Ifjúsági Keresztyén Egyesület* (Youth Christian Association), FIKE, i.e. *Főiskolás Ifjúsági Keresztyén Egyesülete* (College Christian Association of Young People).

but Christ-loving teacher was asked to direct the work of addressing girls,<sup>29</sup> as there were no qualified women theologians at the time. Mária Pilder (1888–1966) proved to be a brilliant choice. The teacher of German descent, who was also familiar with theology, understood the mysteries of the spiritual world of her students thanks to her pedagogical knowledge and could thus successfully address first of all the educated young ladies. The Girls' Association, established in 1923, is the forebear of the later women's association, as youth is a transitional period in everyone's life. The same goes for the boys; it was no accident that the senior class of IKE was formed, and later the Association of Consistory Members, which was also made up of men. Meanwhile, the church employed Mária Pilder as a travelling secretary between 1924 and 1927 with the aim of mobilizing the pastors' wives as it was hoped that they would become chief leaders of the female branch of the domestic mission.

In 1928, the unanimous response of the Transylvanian Reformed women arrived to the call to service, and the wives of the men leading the church district as well as many aristocratic women formed the Women's Association of the Transylvanian Reformed Church District.<sup>30</sup> Following the model of other church associations, the women's association took over the structure of the church's subdivisions, i.e. it was organized at the congregational/parish level, then at the diocesan level, and finally at the church district level. The latter two were intended to facilitate the work in the congregations with ideas accessible for everyone and by implementing central measures. Decades earlier, there had been isolated women's associations that were mainly involved in charity work at the local level. This time, a national movement was launched.<sup>31</sup> Following the circular issued by Bishop Makkai in 1927, the blessed initiative spread like wildfire, and women's union groups were formed in the most remote congregations as well.

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<sup>29</sup> ADORJÁNI 2000, 25.

<sup>30</sup> The inaugural meeting of the Women's Association of the Transylvanian Reformed Church District was held on 25 November 1928 in Cluj-Napoca, Makkai Sándorné being its first president.

<sup>31</sup> János Vásárhelyi (1888–1960), later bishop, as a young pastor in Beszterce/Bistrița, called for the establishment of an alliance of the pastors' wives, while he reported that the Saxon Lutherans organized a central Women's Association covering the whole of Transylvania in 1886. See: VÁSÁRHELYI János (1915): A papnék egyháztársadalmi munkásságáról. In: *Református Szemle* VIII(August). 462.

The objectives, statutes, and ideas formulated by the central governing church body helped the efficient operation of the individual communities. The threefold goal was clear from the beginning: to serve and work in the field of SPIRITUAL LIFE, DIACONY, and CULTURE, which is also clearly stated in the statutes. According to contemporary records, the life of the women's association was very eventful, but the greatest benefit of the feverish desire to do something and to belong somewhere was that thousands of women turned towards the Scripture again, turning to God with trust and to each other with love.

### *2.3. Written Mission*

The ministry performed through writing had been a known practice since ancient times. In the period between the two world wars, the desire to write took on unprecedented proportions among the Hungarians forced into minority status. Between 1919 and 30 August 1940, 1,260 newspapers and periodicals were published under a total of 1,672 titles in the 69 settlements in Romania,<sup>32</sup> some of which were short-lived, while others proved to be good service instruments in the long run.

## *3. Data on the First Release Period of Református Család (1929–1944)<sup>33</sup>*

### *3.1. Objectives and Main Topics of the Periodical*

The first issue of the periodical came out on 6 January 1929. The periodical was initially published every other week, with 18 issues the following year and 12 issues per year until the penultimate year and then with 8 issues until August 1944. During the time of the global economic crisis, although the periodical was still written and edited

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<sup>32</sup> See: MONOKI, István (1941): *Magyar könyvtermelés a román uralom alatt. 1919–1940.* vol. 2. *Hírlapok és folyóiratok.* Budapest, Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum Országos Széchényi Könyvtára.

<sup>33</sup> The data in this chapter, unless otherwise indicated, are from the issues of *Református Család* published between 1929 and 1944. The complete series can be found in the library of the Protestant Theological Institute in Cluj-Napoca.

by volunteers, it must have been a nerve-wracking work to get to the printing stage at all, which is reflected in the frequent calls of the subscribers for settling their subscriptions, respectively the forgiveness of debts. World War II created serious obstacles at all levels; the articles and photographs of the periodical sometimes reflected the specific political situation and the official attitude towards the war.

The idea of launching a periodical was included in the work plan of the Transylvanian Reformed Women's Association from the very beginning. As they wrote regarding the objectives set out in the first issue: "the press is a very important aid and complementary tool in the service of an organization that extends to the whole country".<sup>34</sup> The paper was not intended for one-way communication; the headquarters of the organization did not want to monopolize it, but they also asked their member organizations to share their own issues: "... we wish to give even the most remote rural member organizations the chance to publish their accounts, have their collections publicly acknowledged, open up about their problems and difficulties, receive answers to their questions, and take an active part in the educational work for which the Women's Association launched this paper."<sup>35</sup> The above aims were carried out within the years of release because throughout its existence the periodical proved to be a forum that collected from all sources and published news and questions on women's organizations. In addition to the member organizations, each reader was also addressed and asked to contribute, one of such opportunities being to send articles or to promote the paper and recruit additional readers.

The title of the periodical suggests that it was not only intended for the members of the women's associations countrywide but also for their entire families. With regard to the objectives of the periodical, the wife of Sándor Makkai wrote: "It intends to look for and to find Reformed Hungarian families and give them gap-filling, refreshing, joyous, nobly entertaining reading material... it wishes to approach families in their own intimate community, so it can then use the fruits and results of the spiritual blessings and inspirations communicated to them and gained from them to the *prosperity of the*

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<sup>34</sup> MAKKAI, Sándorné (1929): Lapunk célja. In: *Református Család*. Kolozsvár, Erdélyi Református Nőszövetség, 1929.01.06. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Op. cit. 2.

*entire Transylvanian Reformed Church.*”<sup>36</sup> However, they did not want to serve the cause of the church in isolation from the surrounding world but to be open to its peculiarities in order to make the development of the Reformed identity as comprehensive as possible. “Our periodical... aims to deal with the manifestations of social life, literature, arts, the dissemination of knowledge, to provide noble entertainment to our families; it will have a section for children and will provide advice and information to those who approach it in this manner.”<sup>37</sup>

When reading the old issues, one can see that several topics return more than once; occasionally, readers also write articles to express their supportive or even dissenting opinions. Such is the case of the election of women as church elders, a topic on which opinions were still divided in those times and which appeared several times in the first year’s issues of the periodical. The initiative remained viable even in the most difficult years probably because it was not received with indifference, and those who wrote the articles did it with the undiminished ambition to improve, to produce a public benefit.

### *3.2. Target Group/Readers*

On the one hand, *Református Család* is a periodical with a specific target audience, which is a good promoter of an organization’s work, whereas, on the other hand, it was intended for a wider target group, and it is especially valuable because it was a *true family periodical*. They tried to address all members of the family as well as families who lived in diasporas, scattered from larger communities. The 1,000-1,200 subscribers covered thus a much larger group of readers. In those times, as incredible as it may seem looking back from our Facebook age, people were highly excited as they waited for the mail-coach to arrive in their village and receive the “fresh” reading materials every two weeks or each month. The list of subscribers was usually published in the periodical; determining their exact identity would require serious investigative work as only the person’s name and the place were included in the register. However, the list of women participating in

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.



the Reformed Holy Weeks<sup>38</sup> also indicated their occupation and identity, and after comparing the two lists, one can see that there are a lot of matching names; therefore, we can conclude that the vast majority of subscribers were pastors' wives, female teachers, and wives of male teachers.

### *3.3. Editors/Authors*

The editor-in-chief of the first series was theology professor Albert Maksay, a New Testament researcher, who stood by the periodical to the end, taking only a short pause. In the first five years, Mária Pilder, who was the travelling secretary of the women's association at the time, proved to be an extremely useful staff member. In 1934, the next travelling secretary, Mária Lőrincz, worked at the periodical. She also did a nice job but left the country very soon, and after a short training in Basel, she moved to Manchuria as the wife and missionary companion of Sándor Babos.<sup>39</sup> There were four female editors in the following period: Klára Póczy Mihályiné Kiss and Vidovszky Ferncné (as of 1935), Székely Jánosné (as of 1939) as well as Éva Dr Borbáthné Vajna (as of 1942, instead of Székely Jánosné). In the last six years, another theology professor, András Nagy, the famous Old Testament researcher, was co-editing the periodical.

Two aspects concerning the editors and authors need to be highlighted.

*On the one hand*, the selfless activity of theology professors is striking in this area as well. The heads of the New Testament and the Old Testament departments did not have the task of editing periodicals, nor did their fellow professors of undertaking other church periodicals. In addition to the aspects mentioned earlier, the commitment to the ministry of the Word of the new reformer theological trend also played a role in their social work. The contemporary theologian aptly states about them: "Self-conscious Calvinism, the

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<sup>38</sup> Reformed Holy Weeks are central events organized for domestic mission organizations, the printed material of which provides, in addition to the detailed programme and individual lectures/preachings, information about the participants (Sepsiszentgyörgy/Sfântu Gheorghe – 1924, Marosvásárhely/Târgu-Mureş – 1925, Nagyenyed/Aiud – 1926, Brassó/Braşov – 1927, Torda/Turda – 1928).

<sup>39</sup> In May 1934 (issues 7–8), she writes from Switzerland, while in issues 9–10 she writes letters from Manchuria.

aspirations of domestic mission, and, to a lesser extent, the tendency of piety that occurred only in certain individuals were the medium in which the seed of the Word sprouted and the theology of the so-called new reformer Word found a home – much more lastingly than anywhere else abroad.”<sup>40</sup> In the columns of its issues, a highly efficient way of spreading the message of the gospel could be realized.

*On the other hand*, it is characteristic of this era that the dominant personalities of the female work areas are primarily men. Although there are women in the leadership of the women’s association, they rarely got there in their own right as most of them were wives of pastors and church leaders. The exceptions were aristocratic ladies, who had always had a distinct freedom of action in society compared to other women, and single women living in almost monastic solitude. It was almost unthinkable for mothers to take on social roles and additional activities during this period. The training for newspaper editing and regular journalistic activities was also granted to only a few as universities barely opened their gates to women. For example, the first woman could enrol to the Institute of Reformed Theology in Cluj-Napoca in 1917, but it was not until 1930 that a female student first took the final exam, which did not depend on the preparedness of female students but on the ecclesiastical decision that allowed them to apply for the exam, which, until then, was considered equivalent to an authorization for pastoral service. Mária Lőrincz already belonged to this new generation. The positive aspect of the issue, however, is that domestic mission paid attention to women as well and provided a spiritual, cultural, and infrastructural background between the two world wars that could educate female staff for the future. The irony of history is, however, that after World War II both professing Christian men and women were forced by the communist dictatorship to take a step back, which led, among other things, to the cessation of the periodical.

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<sup>40</sup> KOZMA, Zsolt (1996): Nagy András (1899–1974). In: Kozma, Zsolt (ed.): *Akik jó bizonyágot nyertek – A Kolozsvári Református Theológia tanárai 1895–1948*. Kolozsvár, Kolozsvári Protestáns Teológiai Intézet. 384.

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