

**KÁROLI GÁSPÁR REFORMÁTUS EGYETEM
HITTUDOMÁNYI KAR
DOKTORI ISKOLA**

**HISTORY OF HUNGARIAN REFORMED UNIVERSITY
MISSION, ACTUAL STATUS, IN PARTICULAR
THE BUDAPEST REFORMED UNIVERSITY
CHAPLAINSHIP**

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Budapest, 2013

Justification of dissertation's chosen theme

The university is the scene of the intellectuals' education. Apart from the last 50 years the number and the rate of university students was not notable. It was only a minority, but its effect was as important as salt's in food. The Master sets responsibility on the young people at university: *"you are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot..."* (Matthew, 5.13, 16)

Salt is not only gives taste and character for the food, but preserves and prevents from ruination. The mission of the university students and intellectuals is similar to society: determines its nation's life and plays prophetic role. Those intellectuals, who do not fill in its role- to be the salt- loses itself, its country and church, too. Intellectual role was always determining in the Hungarian Reformed Church.

Till the end of 18th century education in most of the universities were made in Christian spirituality. Science and theology were mutually influencing each other, the norms were determined by evangelical spirituality. During enlightenment faith and knowledge became opposite, secularization of autonomous sciences took place. Social and economic changes caused by Industrial Revolution radically transformed the universities students spirituality.

The end of 20th century EU economics needed high education and skills on the workforce market, the number of students grow up radically.

Majority of students from high schools came from countryside, facing the colourful social and cultural life in big

cities, tearing off from security of familiar countryside. Church becomes only one from multitude of possibilities to address the fundamental questions of life.

Responsible presence of reformed intellectuals in Hungarian society during history was always decisive, albeit the small number of. Reformed church has a long history in middle level education but presence in the university level was minor. After many tryings only in 1993 had a real possibility to make the foundation of Károli Gáspár Reformed University.

The mission to evangelise students is not to increase the size of Reformed Church but preaching the Lord Jesus and fulfil the mission command of.

Theme of dissertation

The topic of the Ph.D. thesis is the mission of the Hungarian Reformed Church at universities. In the thesis I introduce the history, the present and the future of the 'university mission'.

The history and analyse of reformed mission in high schools and universities, presence and future of, particular trough Budapest Reformed University Chaplainship (1989–2008).

Aim is to prove the necessity of having – like many others – a dedicated mission amongst students.

I conclude my thesis hereinafter:

Although according to canon law university communities are not congregations, but according to The Holy Script they considered to be congregations. It follows that:

The Reformed Church must care young intellectuals, in particular students in a separate mission.

Peculiarity of student life, campus life represents a huge mission challenge. This is the time for identity searching, the time of intimacy crisis, and sometimes time to look for spiritual life – beginning of commitment.

In the latest years the number of students increased significantly (an order of magnitude) but same time commitment to church on the contrary. (in 1990 10% said to be committed but in 2008 only 3%)

Current Hungarian society (like in many modern societies) is dominated by selfish individualism whilst community life is forced in background. Traditionally church life is community based life around the Gospel, and it does not fit the individualistic nature of modern life. Authority of church does not counter-balance it. Young Christians are not really interested in theological issues, they need a place and a group where they have opportunity to grow spiritually. If these people do not meet students congregations they search for another place to join to Christ body.

In the beginning spontaneously movement has been born, there was no need for a separate congregation, but after a while when this mission grew to a certain limit students university congregation was born.

The university, as a result of the characteristics of its development, is an institution of high degree of autonomy. Until the Age of Enlightenment, the universities provided philosophical and ethical orientation in addition to the professional training. By the end of the 20th century, most universities have become secular institutions. Religious education was not mandatory in Hungary

for decades, the majority of the high schoolers was not able to gain any knowledge on faith; the students graduating from secondary education in church schools, need a deepening of their religious knowledge corresponding to their ages, as well as a church community.

The conserving effect of Reformed Church mission can be demonstrated.

In the history of the Hungarian Reformed Church, the university mission formed within the Soli Deo Gloria (SDG) Student Association in the late 1920s.

The convent of the Reformed Church strongly supported the activities of the SDG in its missionary work plan; thanks to which, Sándor Kiss was appointed as a college Chaplain in 1936. Due to the political changes after the Second World War, the framework of the mission among the university students was also changed. After the dissolving of SDG, the mission could continue with the leadership of the university Chaplains until 1955.

In 1989, the worship community of the metropolitan reformed universities were *established as a spontaneous initiative of missionary purposes*. The worship community was led by a Community of Employees without a permanent Chaplain. In 1994, the bishop appointed the first university Chaplain (Tamás Kovách) and in the following year, presbyteries were elected by the congregation. The presbyters summarised the goals of the community as follows: *to ensure a congregation for students learning in Budapest and to provide a spiritual community for the young people studying at Reformed colleges*.

In 2002, the congregation received a separate location on the Buda side of Budapest, in the new university area. In 2003, the statuses of the Chaplains of the congregation were arranged.

In 2005, the maintainer, the Reformed Church District of Dunamellék, adopted the Deed of Association of the university congregation.

Based on the analyses of the surveys carried out by the University and College Reformed Congregation of Budapest (BREFGY) the university congregation is homogeneous regarding denominations; the ratio of the Reformed was more than 80% between 1989 and 2011. Four-fifths of the members received religious education, the proportion of students graduating in church schools shows a continuous increase. The gospel standards played an important role in the daily decisions of the majority of the young people, therefore they deliberately sought the contemporary university communities where they could practice their faith.

Most of the young people received higher education, two-thirds of the students' parents had higher degrees.

The average age of the members of BREFGY shows a reduction: in 2006, it was 24.5 years, and in 2011 it was 21.9 years. It is a result of the changes in the university education, the relationship maintained with the church schools, and the congregation's web site and Facebook page. The period during which the members of the university congregation attended the church shows a radical reduction: from 4.4 years between 1989 and 2008 to 1.3 years in 2011. It is a result of the changes in the university education.

The members of the BREFGY are a community regularly praying, reading and serving the Bible. However, the intellectual nature of the congregation due to the changes in the university education is being pushed to the background.

The rate of those undertaking services in the congregation is varying between 30-40%. Subsequent to their graduation, more

than 90% of the congregation members join *adult* congregations; they are active in their new communities in similar proportions. Many of the university congregation members undertake volunteer services during the programs organised by the Council.

In 2011, there were 12 Reformed university communities in the Carpathian Basin. According to the conducted surveys, the members of the congregations are mostly young people who grew up in Christian families and were already committed as a child.

The University Chaplainship is a place where confessor reformed intelligentsia is conserved and has the potential of revival. However, the university congregations is less effective in addressing the non-believing young people.

The actual structure of Reformed Chaplainships is not suitable and not adequate for mission amongst students, there is a need for cooperation between the e Reformed Church and other Cristian youth organizations.

As part of the home mission, Christian youth associations were established. Regarding the topic, the most relevant is the association *World Student Christian Federation* established in 1895, which influenced the foundation of the *Hungarian Evangelical Christian Student Association* (MEKDSZ) in 1910.

The dominant and efficient service in the Hungarian *reformed* university mission was performed within the limits of the *Soli Deo Gloria Association* founded by students of Theology in 1921.

The first SDG summer college conference was held in Zánka in 1925; from 1928, this program took place in the camp of Szárszó. The SDG programs were announced in the most important higher education institutions of the capital from 1928. In 1929, the SDG leaders developed the *Collegium program* for

colleges, within the framework of which a threefold goal was intended to be achieved: spiritual-Bible study group sessions, seminary-intellectual-philosophical lectures, and implementation of practical work for the purpose of the physical and spiritual edification of the students. The SDG established a boarding school for the provincial students. In the 1930's, about 20 Bible study groups worked in the universities country-wide. The coordination of the work and the spiritual care of the students was conducted by college secretaries.

In 1949, the Christian associations were dissolved, therefore the separate, university mission of the church was also terminated.

Today, the communities serving in the Hungarian university mission carry out a determining service, their activities complement each other.

In a non-official form, the *Hungarian Evangelical Christian Student Association* operated even before 1989, as soon as it was possible, the association was re-established. The number of student groups is between 30 and 35.

Since the late 2000s, the association, besides operating the Bible study groups, has placed great emphasis on the addressing of the non-religious young people. (2007 “*vagyOK*” (*iAM*) *Evangelization*, 2008 “*Érdeklődő Vagyok*” (*I'm interested*) small group evangelistic method, 2009 “*Folyt köv*” (*To be continued*) *evangelistic festival* 2011 *One-question-festival*). In 2011, with the help of the *Grund Apologetics Camp* the students could prepare for giving answers to the faith related questions of the members of their generation.

Bill Bright established a company called *Campus Crusade for Christ* in the U.S. in 1951, to evangelize students. The

Timothy Society (TS) was founded in 1990 as a part of this company.

The Timothy Society considers its mission not only to preach the gospel, but the making of disciples too: *"And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others"* (2 Timothy 2:2). They consider evangelism and discipleship tasks complementing each other. TS programs specifically for university students:

- *Youth at the Doorstep of Life* program (*Fiatalok az Élet Küszöbén* - FÉK), officially registered student organization at the Corvinus University of Budapest.
- Members of the Timothy Society hand out 8000 *survival kits*. In the course of the program, they talk to 500 university, which results in about 30 students reforming themselves each year.

The MEKDSZ mission aims to visit and keep the faith of young believers, the TS seeks and addresses the students who are just showing interest. The Christian Youth Association carries out a college mission only in Transylvania: a Reformed university community operates within the IKE in Transylvania.

Credal associations are currently absent from the university mission. Following its re-establishment, the Soli Deo Gloria Student Association generally limits its activities to the Reformed secondary schools.

Because of historical reasons and the strengthening of individualism, the association is no longer as popular as it was in the first half of the 20th century, yet it could be a great medium for the university mission. The associations (may) appear for the young people to be more authentic and open than the Church. Students are more willing to participate in association programs,

though few of them actually become official members of the organization. The young people have the chance for church service in the self-organising groups of the MEKDSZ and the Timothy Society. Volunteering is an attractive opportunity for students, to which they are pleased to dedicate 1 or 2 years of their lives. Thanks to the international relations of the organizations, the young people can travel abroad and learn languages as a volunteer associate.

The weakness of the associations is that they do not provide a community experience or convey the image of the Church. When the young people complete their studies and leave these Bible study groups (associations) they (might) find it hard to find a community. This is a problem especially for those who were reformed in the MEKDSZ Bible study groups or in the Timothy Society. In this case, the young people consider the profession of faith a characteristic related to certain life situations.

The communities are linked by personal relationships rather than formal cooperation.

The reformed chaplainship is less efficient in engaging non believer youth than Christian youth organizations created for this purpose. These organization are not limited by church traditions, prejudice, they use boldly creative ways to accomplish mission (innovative approach, novel tactics for addressing youth). While addressing is necessity, is not enough: there must be a way to integrate the new-born believers in Church, the existence of chaplainship is proven.

When converted students finish their studies and leave educational institutes and University Chaplainship they search for a „mature” church in their new place, integrating organically into the new place.

Vision and future of university mission

Mission between students must be done in the following three main fields:

1. *Independent University Chaplainship.*
2. *Chaplainship inside the structure of Universities.*
3. *In the resacralization of sciences by content of education*

All three are appropriate to create small communities (praying, groups, and Bible study groups) and organizing mass events (revivals, church service, festivals).

Familiarization with the University Chaplain's service and acceptance in the church and cultural life is important, as soon students finish their studies they became members of the Church as confessor intelligentsia.