

*Serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear*

(Heb 12,28)

# THE CIRCLE OF PÉCEL

## EVANGELICAL MOVEMENT IN THE HUNGARIAN REFORMED CHURCH OF THE 1920s

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## **Research Topic, Aim and Methodology**

The thesis deals with the Circle of Pécel, an evangelical movement which was part of those movements looking for the renewal of the Hungarian Reformed Church in the first half of the 20th century. The research is focused on the beginnings of this movement, the involved people and the issues brought up. Related to the movement many meetings and conferences were held in various parts of Hungary. The two most important conferences were the Pécel Conference of 1920 and the Kunhegyes Conference of 1921 among the participants of which we find quite a number of prominent figures of the Hungarian Reformed Church. A detailed analysis of these two events is given in the thesis.

The aim of the dissertation is exploring the church historical and ideological background of the Pécel Circle evangelical movement, and inspecting its afterlife. Many issues raised by the movement are concerned also in the ecclesiastical life of our days, e.g. church membership, public confession, church discipline, autonomy etc. It is important to explore the answers to these problems given by our forefathers of the 20th century. Though this thesis does not analyse the questions of the Pécel Circle in

the historical and ideological context of our days, it could be part of a following research to perform such an analysis and to find an application of their solutions to our days.

There was no detailed research of the Pécel Circle before, so our research is mainly based on primary sources. The Ráday Archive stores the legacy of Forgács Gyula, which proved to be an excellent source. The newspaper of the movement, the Reformáció (Reformation) is also available revealing many details and valuable information about the whole time of the movement. Other newspapers, like the Sárospataki Református Lapok, the Dunántúli Protestáns Lap, the Egyházi Értesítő and the Kálvinista Szemle among others were also processed. The secondary literature is quite scarce, but for delineating the historical and theological background it was useful.

## **Structure of the thesis**

The issues of the Pécel Circle were to be found in the church life already in the middle of the 19th century. Thus to have a proper understanding of the theological background of this movement it is important to look back to this time period. In Chapter 1

there is a detailed description of the theological trends of those days, mainly the liberal theology and orthodoxy. There is a great emphasis on the home mission societies, which are tied to our movement by many personal strings. In many cases the home mission societies had such purposes, which were claimed to be the task of the institutional church, but could not be achieved among its frames. Many members of the Pécel Circle had their backgrounds and roots in these societies, which underlines the importance of the context of these organizations.

Chapter 2 gives a short overview of church history from the end of the 18th century to the end of World War 1. From the rich literature of this time period the issues of our movement were emphasized with a special view to the relationship between the church and the state, to church membership and to schools, which were treated both in the Pécel Programme and in the Memorand of Kunhegyes.

In Chapter 3 we learn about the history of the Pécel Circle, especially the conferences in Pécs and in Kunhegyes. We can read about the organizing of the conferences, the events of the two outstanding meetings and their impact in different parts of the country.

The two outstanding documents of the Pécel Circle, the Pécel Programme and the Memorand of Kunhegyes were already mentioned. These two documents were the two defining writings of the movement, and reached a larger audience in the church of the time. Chapter 4 presents and evaluates them. The full texts of these two documents are reproduced in the appendix.

Finally, in chapter 5, the impact of the Pécel Circle is briefly discussed. Although the secondary sources are rather silent about it, the movement achieved important results not only at the level of the local church, but also in the Reformed Church District of Dunamellék and even at the 1928–1933 Budapest Synod, where the impacts of the movement can be traced in the missionary and church discipline laws.

The Appendix contains the full text of the Pécel Programme and the Memorand of Kunhegyes, as well as the list of participants of the meetings in Pécel, Órszentmiklós and Kunhegyes.

## **The main findings of the thesis**

1. The ideological background of the formation of the Pécs Circle is to be found in the home mission movements and Calvinism.
2. The diffuse movement of the Pécel Circle has traces of both confessional Calvinism and general Christianity
3. Forgács Gyula, Reformed minister in Pécel is the central person and promoter of the movement
4. The Pécel Circle flourished from the Pécel Conference until the spring of 1922. It lost its importance as a side result of the dispute between Sebestyén Jenő and the Bethánia, and due to Forgács' pastoral call to Sárospatak
5. Nevertheless, the movement was able to achieve real reforms in several churches regarding confessional church membership, church discipline and public confession
6. Under the influence of the Pécel Circle, the Reformed Church District of Dunamellék addressed several issues related to church membership

7. The influence of the Péceli Circle is also reflected in the laws on mission work and church discipline passed at the 1928 Budapest Synod

## Papers related to the thesis

1. Vásárhelyi Bálint Márk: *A Péceli Kör és az egyházi egyesületek*. In: Hagyomány, Identitás, Történelem 2022. KRE HTK Egyháztörténeti Kutatóintézet. 2023. 533–544. doi:10.61376/hit.2022.vasarhelyi.37
2. Vásárhelyi Bálint Márk: *A református egyház és az állam kapcsolata 1848 és 1920 között*. In: 14th International Conference of J. Selye University. Theological Section. Conference Proceedings. 2023. 77–92. doi:10.36007/4485.2023.77
3. Vásárhelyi Bálint Márk: *A Péceli Program*. In: Fiatal Kutatók és Doktoranduszok X. Nemzetközi Jubileumi Teológuskonferenciájának Tanulmánykötete. Budapest, 2022. 93–105.
4. Vásárhelyi Bálint Márk: *A Péceli Program*. In: Fiatal Kuta-

tók és Doktoranduszok XI. Nemzetközi Teológuskonferenciájának Rezümékötete. 2021. 130–131.

5. Vásárhelyi Bálint Márk: *A Kunhegyesi Memorandum református teológiai értékelése és ekkleziológiai aspektusai*. In: Fiatal Kutatók és Doktoranduszok X. Nemzetközi Jubileumi Teológuskonferenciájának Tanulmánykötete. Budapest, 2020. 636–648.

6. Vásárhelyi Bálint Márk: *A Kunhegyesi Memorandum teológiai értékelése*. In: Fiatal Kutatók és Doktoranduszok X. Nemzetközi Jubileumi Teológuskonferenciájának Rezümékötete. Budapest, 2020. 166–167.

7. Vásárhelyi Bálint Márk: *A Kunhegyesi értekezéslet*. In: 12th International Conference of J. Selye University. Theological Section. Conference Proceedings. 2020. 69–73.  
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## Other publications in theology

8. Bálint Márk Vásárhelyi: *Common Grace in Abraham Kuy-*



*per's Lectures on Calvinism*. British Reformed Journal, Autumn 2020 (71). 14–24.

## Educational articles related to the thesis

9. Vásárhelyi Bálint Márk: *A Kunhegyesi Memorandum*. In: Margit István (szerk.): *A Péceli kör 100 esztendeje*. Ébredés Alapítvány. Pécel. 2021.

## Other educational articles

10. Vásárhelyi Bálint Márk: *Szükséges, hogy a presbiter tanításra alkalmas legyen*. Biblia és Gyülekezet. 2023. XXXV/2. 12–13.
11. Vásárhelyi Bálint Márk: *A megtévesztő álangyal*. Biblia és Gyülekezet. 2022. XXXIV/3. 10–11.
12. Vásárhelyi Bálint Márk: *A vérré lett tenger*. Biblia és Gyülekezet. 2022. XXXIV/1. 5–6.
13. Vásárhelyi Bálint Márk: *A szerencsejáték és a hirtelen jött gazdagság*. Biblia és Gyülekezet. 2021. XXXIII/1. 15–16.

14. Vásárhelyi Bálint Márk: *A választott nép*. Biblia és Gyülekezet. 2020. XXXII/2–3. 14–15.
15. Vásárhelyi Bálint Márk: *A korinthusi egyház bűnei: erkölcsi bukások és hatásuk a gyülekezetre*. Biblia és Gyülekezet. 2019. XXXI/2. 7–8.
16. Vásárhelyi Bálint Márk: *A jeruzsálemi egyház növekedése*. Biblia és Gyülekezet. 2019. XXXI/1. 15–16.
17. Vásárhelyi Bálint Márk: *A Messiás-Király – Jézusra utaló próféciák beteljesülése*. Biblia és Gyülekezet. 2018. XXX:1. 9–11.

## Books

18. Vásárhelyi Bálint Márk, Vezsenyi Péter: *Két imádság. A farizeus és a vámszedő példázata*. Ébredés Alapítvány. Pécel, 2024.
19. Vásárhelyi Bálint Márk: *Isten meghívólevele – Az Ézsaiás 55 magyarázata*. Ébredés Alapítvány. Pécel. 2019.

## Translations

20. David Engelsma, Herman Hanko: *Tanúim vagytok*. Ébredés Alapítvány, Pécel, 2023.
21. John Owen: *A bűn megöklése*. Presbiteriánus Kiadó. Budapest, 2023.
22. R. C. Sproul: *Mi az evangélium?* Presbiteriánus Kiadó. Budapest. 2022.
23. Ronald Hanko: *A kegyesség tudománya*. Ébredés Alapítvány. Pécel. 2021.