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Hoekendijk, Bossey, Hungary

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After the turbulent years of the Second World War Hungary became part of the Soviet sphere of interest as its territory was occupied by the Red Army in 1945. Although some feared that the new Soviet rulers would introduce a harsh Communist dictatorship and a direct persecution of churches right after the war, it did not work out that way. A multi-party democracy was established in which the non-Communist parties had a certain, limited freedom of political activities and the churches could reorganize their life and ministry. Although the whole political landscape was controlled by the Soviet army and by the officials of the Allied Forces, this unexpected freedom caused an unprecedented optimism in the ranks of the historical (mainline) churches. In the Reformed Church in Hungary representatives of several spiritual directions established new organisations and hoped to initiate a movement of inner reform and renewal of the spiritual life of the church.¹

The issue of Christian mission played an important role in the rhetoric of almost all of these renewal movements. It became almost a commonplace that the Reformed Church in Hungary (RCH) had failed to fulfil her missionary calling in the previous decades and now, after the crisis of the war, the re-assessment and reorganisation of the missionary activity of the church should play a crucial role in the renewal of the church (cf. the idea of the “reciprocal effect of mission”).² This was one of the most important motivations to seek contacts with sister churches in Europe, especially with those in the Netherlands. The circles interested in renewal of the church hoped that a cooperation in missionary work with

¹To the situation of the RCH after the WW II see: Bogárdi Szabó, István: *Egyházvezetés és teológia a Magyarországi Református Egyházban 1948. és 1989. között*, Debrecen, 1995.; Colijn, Jos: “Kicsoda ellenünk?”. *Törésvonalak a második világháború utáni magyar református egyház- és teológiatörténetben*, Kiskunfélegyháza, d.n., [1992]., Kool, Anna Maria: *God Moves in a Mysterious Way, The Hungarian Protestant Foreign Mission Movement 1756-195.*, Zoetermeer, 1993., Vischer, Lukas: “The World Council of Churches and the Churches in Eastern Europe during the Time of the Communist Regimes: A First Attempt at an Assessment”, *Religion, State and Society*, Vol. 25. No.1., 1997, pp.61-68, Fazakas, Sándor: *Új egyház felé?*, Debrecen, 2000.

²Cf. Kool, A. M op.cit. pp. 661-705.

churches having a long tradition of missionary activity could help wake up the missionary consciousness of the Hungarian church public and could result in a joint missionary venture on a (preferably Reformed) mission field. It is particularly interesting that the building of these contacts began at the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey in the years of 1946-47 where courses were held about the “Renewal of the Church” for lay and ordained members of European and American churches. It was the Dutch theologian, Johannes C. Hoekendijk (1912-1975) who played a central role in rebuilding ecumenical relationships with the RCH. Later as the General Secretary of the Netherlands Missionary Council (NZR) he was instrumental in kindling missionary interest in Hungary during the short years of “democracy” until 1948, when the Iron Curtain fell and after which date almost all missionary activity was officially impossible in Hungary for several decades. In the following we focus our attention on the beginnings of Hoekendijk’s contacts with the Reformed Church in Hungary.

J. C. Hoekendijk’s Personal Contacts to Hungary

When trying to discover the ways through which Dr. Johannes C. Hoekendijk may have exerted an impact on Hungarian Reformed missionary activities we must make a distinction between his direct and indirect influence. Possible direct influence could be exerted in the following ways: (i.) encounter in person, (ii.) correspondence, (iii.) lectures held by J.C. Hoekendijk in Hungary or to a (partially) Hungarian audience, (iv.) publications of his works in Hungarian. Other evidence of his impact would be (v.) references to and quotations of his works in the Hungarian theological literature. An indirect impact can be recognized when we can prove that a certain theological (in this case: missiological) insight (theologoumenon) is a characteristic of Hoekendijkian thought and we can determine that this very idea was influential in Hungarian (mission) theology. This latter case may also occur through the circulation of ecumenical documents which bear the theological fingerprints of Hoekendijk. In what follows we attempt to identify these aspects of influence when describing his contacts to Hungary during his activities in Bossey (1946-47).

Bossey 1946-1947

After J.C. Hoekendijk was forced to return to Europe from the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), because of the ill health of his wife, a temporary job was offered to him by W.A. Visser 't Hooft, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (then still in the process of formation). He was invited to lead two courses as a study director of the recently established Ecumenical Institute which was situated in the Chateau de Bossey, Céligny, near Geneva, Switzerland. Actually it was Dr. Hendrik Kraemer, who was invited to fill this position but he could not start his activities before July 1947 due to other obligations. So it was Hoekendijk's task to "bridge the gap" in 1946-1947.

The Ecumenical Institute³ was established on 1 April 1946 by the World Council of Churches (in the process of formation) in order to train church members (and theologians) to be "ambassadors" of the church in the world.⁴ The first course which was lead by Hoekendijk was for lay members of different European and American churches (starting on 5 October 1946.), and the second course under his leadership was attended by theological students and ministers (15 January – 29 March 1947). The participants came from about 15 different countries, including Hungary. The theme of both courses was "The Renewal of the Church". Hoekendijk considered these courses very important in the process of the renewal of the churches. In a letter of 1947 in Dutch (the addressee of which is unknown)⁵ he writes the following:

That is why, in the first years we do not need great speakers; much more some people who are willing to struggle with the others to get a new vision [...] More pastors than professors or strategists [...]. This is not a change from theology to psychology, but it is because of the fact, that the renewal of the church must start with the renewal of the minister.⁶

There were several Hungarian participants at the courses (Éva Szabó, Reformed minister, László Benczúr, Lutheran minister) and Dr. László Makkai,⁷ a lay member of the

³cf. Weber, Hans-Ruedi: *A Laboratory for Ecumenical Life. The Story of Bossey 1946-1996*, WCC, Geneva, 1996.

⁴Gurp, Pieter van. *Kerk en Zending in de theologie van J. C. Hoekendijk. Een plaatsbepaling (1912-1975)*, AcaMedia, Haarlem, 1989. p.59.

⁵We suppose that the addressee must have been either H. Kraemer or W. A. Visser 't Hooft.

⁶Hoekendijk, Johannes C. *Indrukken uit Bossey* (unpublished), 1947, JCH-A-C.12, p.3 (translation GL).

⁷Kool 1993: 670.

Reformed Church in Hungary. We will focus our attention on the latter because he played an important role in the development of Hoekendijk's relationship to Hungary.⁸

Dr. László Makkai (1914-1989) was a historian and sociologist, son of Dr. Sándor Makkai⁹ (1890-1951), the head of the Department of Mission of the Reformed Church in Hungary (1947-1951). As a young lay member of the RCH he was involved in the revival movement within the church and he played an important role building the ecumenical contacts of this church after the war.¹⁰

László Makkai participated in both courses, although the second course was designed for theologians. In a circular letter to the participants of the courses, the word "co-worker" was even used when referring to him:

A mentionner enfin qua notre ami Makkai a été un lien entre le premier et le second cours, et qu'il y a été un précieux collaborateur, comme aussi à la conférence suivante, après Paques.¹¹

He met J.C. Hoekendijk there¹² and, as László Benczúr, L. Makkai's room-mate in Bossey recalls it, they soon became friends.¹³ He "mediated" between Hoekendijk and his father about the issue of sending Hungarian Reformed missionaries to Indonesia in cooperation with the Dutch Reformed churches and he translated several lectures of Hoekendijk into Hungarian.¹⁴

Hoekendijk's Lectures in Bossey

Some of Hoekendijk's lectures held during the course of 1946-1947 in Bossey can be found in the Archives of J.C. Hoekendijk, deposited in the Library of the University of

⁸Kool 1993: 669-671.

⁹Dr. Sándor Makkai was Reformed bishop of Transsylvania, Romania (1926-1936), then a professor of Practical Theology at the Reformed Theological Faculty of the István Tisza University of Debrecen (1936-1951), writer of several novels, one of the outstanding theologians of the Reformed Church in Hungary. cf. Fekete, Károly: *Makkai Sándor gyakorlati teológiai munkássága* [The Practical Theology of Sándor Makkai], Debrecen, 1997.

¹⁰ Later he became a renowned church historian and a professor of the Debrecen Reformed Theological University (from 1971).

¹¹"Finally we should mention that our friend Makkai was a link between the first and second course, and that he was a valuable collaborator, as he was also at the conference following, after Easter." [translated by editor] *Lettre circulaire de Bossey*, Juillet 1947. (unpublished), HK-UA-628.7 , p. 2.

¹²Kool 1993: 669.

¹³Kool 1993: 670.

¹⁴*Zweiter Rundbrief aus Bossey*, Dezember 1947,(unpublished), HK-UA-628.7., p.9.

Utrecht, The Netherlands.¹⁵ These lectures are of importance for our topic for the following reasons: (1) The Hungarian participants of the courses listened to these lectures. (2) Some of these lectures were translated into Hungarian (maybe by L. Makkai and his wife)¹⁶ and were published in Hungary.¹⁷ (3) These lectures give a good picture of the theological/missiological thinking of Hoekendijk in the years when he had the most personal contacts with Hungary.

Mission and Nationalism¹⁸

The copy of this lecture is to be found in the J.C. Hoekendijk Archives (B.10.) in Dutch. On the first page of the type-written manuscript there is a note in the hand of J.C. Hoekendijk, which is very difficult to read, saying that this lecture was held in Bossey in 1947 and was published in Hungarian in September 1947. The title of the Hungarian periodical is not identifiable.¹⁹

In this lecture J.C. Hoekendijk speaks about the danger of nationalism as a substitute for religion. He exerts strong criticism on the “colonial nationalism” of the West but he refers to the danger of nationalism among the younger churches, too. He demonstrates these dangers with examples from Indonesia, India and Japan. He speaks about the perils of a “double homogenisation (*gelijkschakeling*): the church identified with a specific nation (p.6.) and the church identified with a specific caste or social group. In this way the church loses her relevance, she is not “revolutionary” enough: “In her heart the church had been so non-revolutionary for centuries that she must encounter the revolution everywhere on the streets.”²⁰ He sees the solution in the concept of the “serving church”. He refers to Luther

¹⁵Universiteitsbibliotheek Utrecht, Handschriften, Archief J.C. Hoekendijk (JCH-A), B10, B11, B.12. cf. Horst, K. van der – Hoedemaker, Lisbertus A.: *Inventaris van het archief van Johannes Christiaan Hoekendijk (1912-1975)*, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Utrecht, 1983.

¹⁶“Makkai...übersetzt mit seiner Frau die von Hoekendijk gehaltene Lektionen” p. 9. *Zweiter Rundbrief aus Bossey*, Dezember 1947, (unpublished), HK-A-628.7., p.9.

¹⁷“Die Vorlesungen von [...] Hoekendijk (ung. und dt.) werden jetzt einzeln veröffentlicht”, Hoekendijk, Johannes C.: *Bericht anlaesslich des Ersten Theologen Kurses im Ökumenischen Institut 15. Januar – 27. Maerz 1947*. (unpublished), JCH-A-C.13. p. 9.

¹⁸Hoekendijk, Johannes C.: *Zending en nationalisme* (unpublished), 1947, JCH-A-B.10

¹⁹Gedeeltelijk [?] lezing Bossey, 25. III [?], 1947. uitgegeven hongaars, [unreadable title], Sept. 1947., op. cit. p.1.

²⁰op.cit. p.1. (translation GL)

(without an exact reference), saying: “Whoever wants to serve God must stay among the people and serve them with whatever he can.”²¹

The fact that J.C. Hoekendijk speaks so negatively about the association of the church with nationalism and that he points to a way out of this danger using the concept of the “serving church” has paramount relevance for our research, because these two problems (the church vs. national thought, and the servant nature of the church) were central themes of the theological discourse in the Reformed and Lutheran Churches of Hungary after the Second World War.²² A.M Kool directs our attention to the problem, saying:

Hoekendijk’s experiences in Indonesia with nationalism which had become an ideology, seems to have some parallels to the Hungarian situation before World War II. According to Van Gurp he sharply rejected such an attitude of the churches. Hoekendijk’s rejection of nationalism and his sympathies to socialism might have attracted the Hungarians who were finding their way in the new political system.²³

Although it is doubtful whether we can prove that Hoekendijk had socialist sympathies,²⁴ it is more than remarkable indeed that it was Hoekendijk who was so welcomed by the more “leftist” wing of the Reformed Church in Hungary later that same year (see below). On the other hand it is interesting to note, that Hoekendijk made no references to the Eastern European situation in his lecture.

The Serving Church²⁵

During the courses in Bossey J.C. Hoekendijk presented a series of lectures about the younger churches. The text of the lectures can be found in the J.C. Hoekendijk Archives (B.12) in German. The series consists of six parts:

1. Die junge Kirche heute! [the new churches today]
2. Die Frage nach der Kirche [the question of ecclesiology]
3. Die Kirche im Volk [Church among the people]
4. Religionsfreiheit. Kirche und Islam²⁶ [Religious freedom. Church and Islam]

²¹op.cit. p.8. (translation GL)

²²cf. Bogárdi Szabó 1995: 66-167.

²³Kool 1993:670.

²⁴cf. van Gurp 1989:42-44.

²⁵Hoekendijk, Johannes C. *Dienende Kirche*, 1947, JCH-A-B12 (5).

²⁶It is interesting to remark that on the manuscript of this lecture there are some notes by the hand of Hoekendijk, written with a pencil which are hardly readable, but the words “*Brief*” (German/Dutch: letter) and “*Szabo*” are very clear. Was there maybe an exchange of letters between Hoekendijk and Rev. Éva Szabó, a Hungarian

5. Dienende Kirche [the servant Church]

6. Lehrende Kirche [the teaching Church]

It seems that Hoekendijk considered the fifth lecture as the most important, because only that one was later published in the *Evangelische Missions Zeitschrift*, under the title: “Junge Kirche als dienende Kirche”.²⁷ These lectures are especially interesting for us, because a summary of them was published in Hungarian also.²⁸ (*Missziói Útmutató*, 1948, *Református Gyülekezet* 1949.)

We focus our attention on the lecture “The Serving Church”. In this lecture Hoekendijk intends to demonstrate the importance of a “comprehensive approach” in Christian mission. In order to do that he highlights the servant nature of the church. He argues that service belongs to the very existence of the church. He speaks against the practice of using service as a way of attraction to mission as if service would be a means to prepare the way for the “real” ministry (i.e. the preaching of the gospel) of the church. Service may create a sphere of positive response from the state and from public opinion, but the church should be careful not to misuse it:

“Und es ist jetzt viele Missionen und jungen Kirchen eine fortduerende Versuchung um diesen Wohlgefallen des Staates (und der öffentlichen Meinung) nicht zu missbrauchen für eine Rechtfertigung der Missionsarbeit überhaupt. Es ist nicht ungefährlich, wenn eine Kirche über viel soziale Prestige verfügt und sich mit einer Arbeit die als einfacher Zeugendienst gemeint war, für die Augen der Welt rechtfertigen kann.”²⁹

The other extreme is criticised, too: when service becomes totally independent of the church and of its mission. He gives positive examples of service from the lives of the younger churches: complex rural development projects in India and educational projects in Africa. When defining the legitimate goal of service he describes it as demonstrating the reality of

Reformed participant of the course? cf. JCH-A-B12(4).

²⁷Hoekendijk, Johannes C: “Junge Kirche als dienende Kirche” in: *Evangelische Missions Zeitschrift*, VI/6. (1949), pp. 1-6.

²⁸“Currently it is for many missionaries and younger churches a continuous temptation not to misuse the goodwill of the state (and public opinion) for justifying mission work in general. There is a danger, when a church enjoying great social prestige, can justify itself before the world with work that was actually intended as a simple service of witness.” (Tr. By editor) Hoekendijk, Johannes C. “A fiatal egyházak ma. A pogánymisszió időszerű problémái [The Younger Churches Today. Contemporary Problems of Heathen Mission]” in: *Református Gyülekezet*, I/1.(1949), pp. 56-67.

²⁹op.cit. p.2.

the Kingdom of God, showing examples of *shalom*.³⁰ He underlines the importance of a theological reflection on the question of *diakonia*, as well: “In der praktischen Arbeit hat man in die jungen Kirchen eine Lehre des Diakonats entwickelt.”³¹ His conclusion is that service belongs to the very nature of the church and that the churches should put it into practice through offering service to the whole people:

“...die Kirche [handelt] als eine totale Gemeinschaft. Kirchenglied sein heisst sich in einem Dienstverhaeltnis zur ganzen Volksgemeinschaft stellen.”³² Although Hoekendijk himself warns against the danger of an “independent” concept of service, he tends to define the nature of the church exclusively in terms of *diakonia*.

In the Protestant churches of Hungary the “theology of the serving church” (Reformed) or the “theology of *diakonia*” (Lutheran) became the “official” theologies after 1948.³³ It is very interesting to discover that J.C. Hoekendijk used this theological concept already in 1947 in Bossey and there were Hungarian participants (among them the influential Dr. László Makkai and László Benczúr) who surely interpreted this concept to the Hungarian Reformed and Lutheran public both informally and by translating and publishing J.C. Hoekendijk’s lectures in Hungary. A.M. Kool calls for a deeper study here:

“More research is needed into the meaning of “service” (*szolgálat*) and serving church (*Dienende Kirche*) and its relation to the theology of *diakonia* which was later developed as a leading theology in the Hungarian Protestant Churches.”³⁴

We may suppose that Hoekendijk’s ideas could have been a source of inspiration for the Hungarian Protestant theologians when developing the theology of the serving church/*diakonia*, or, at least, they could see it as support and as a frame of reference for their theological orientation.

³⁰Shalom becomes a key concept in Hoekendijk’s theology later, but he develops this concept first in his doctoral dissertation, published in 1948. It is interesting to remark, that he already used this concept in a public speech in 1947! (Although we know that the text of his dissertation was ready in 1942 already). Cf. van Gurp 1989: 130.

³¹“Through its practical work the younger churches have developed a theology of service” (tr. - editor) op.cit. p.9.

³²“...the Church functions as a total community. The be a church member means to put onself into a service relationship to the entire civil society” (tr. - editor) op.cit. p 5.

³³Bogárdi Szabó 1995: 90-107.

³⁴Kool 1993: 670.

The Universal Church³⁵

Another lecture is preserved from the year 1947,³⁶ where it is not certain whether it was held in Bossey (on the manuscript we find the date 4 July 1947 by the hand of Hoekendijk), however it represents Hoekendijk's way of thinking in that period. The lecture itself would not be relevant for our topic because it is more a general overview of the situation of the universal church all over the world, presented in geographical order. There are two things which are remarkable, nevertheless. The first is that in this lecture the author totally omits references to Central and Eastern Europe. It is curious that Hoekendijk, who is apparently having friendly contacts with a Hungarian historian, and who will be so deeply involved in "Second World issues" some months later, does not even pay attention to this region in a lecture held in the same year. For our topic it is more important that in this lecture Hoekendijk speaks very critically about Communism as an ideology, describing it as hostile to the church and to Christianity (p.4.). In this light we must disagree with the allegations that Hoekendijk was thinking positively about Communism or that he had been a pro-Communist.³⁷

An Interim Conclusion

J.C. Hoekendijk's appointment as Study Director of Bossey was only temporary because the position was already offered to Hendrik Kraemer, who occupied it in January 1948. Although Hoekendijk's activities in Bossey lasted less than one year, he was remembered as a good leader of the courses, who built very good relations to the participants.³⁸ As far as his contacts with Hungary are concerned, the Bossey period was very important, because it was there where his first personal relationships to the Hungarian Reformed and Lutheran church representatives were built and it was through his Bossey lectures that he gained respect in those circles of the Protestant Churches in Hungary which were striving for a radical renewal of the church. The key person in building these relationships was Dr. László Makkai. In the lectures that Hoekendijk held in Bossey we can

³⁵ Hoekendijk, Johannes C. *Wereldkerk* (unpublished), 1947, JCH-A-B.11.

³⁶ Actually, the series of lectures under the title "Mission im Neubau" are also dated from 1947 in the catalogue of the Hoekendijk Archives (Horst, K. van der – Hoedemaker, Lisbertus A.: *Inventaris van het archief van Johannes Christiaan Hoekendijk (1912-1975)*, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Utrecht, 1983, B.14) but we agree with van Gurp when he says that these lectures must have been written in 1948, cf. van Gurp 1989: 114.

³⁷ e.g. A.M. Kool speaks about "his sympathies to Socialism", Kool 1993:670.

³⁸ van Gurp 1989: 60.

identify certain elements (*diakonia*, the concept of the “serving church”) which became central theological concepts for the new orientation of Protestant thinking in Hungary after 1948. It is known that Hoekendijk, in his new office as the general secretary of the Netherlands Missionary Council (NZR) visited Hungary twice (1947 and 1948). He held lectures and published articles in Hungary and the church public in the RCH (and in the Lutheran Church, too) paid much attention to his views. With A.M. Kool we must ask the question whether his theological concept of the serving character of the church was used (and misused) by the circles in the churches which sought a theological ideology for cooperation with the Communist authorities, or whether it was Hoekendijk’s theological input which initiated a more or less systematic theological work in Hungarian Protestantism which resulted later in the “theology of the serving church”. A more detailed analysis of Hoekendijk’s further Hungarian contacts and of his impact may shed light on these questions.