

# NOVUM

## Lehel Tunyogi Has Taken His Doctor's Degree

Lehel Tunyogi, reformed minister in the community of Magyarfodorháza (RO) has taken his doctor's degree in Kampen, the Netherlands (Theologische Universiteit Kampen – ThUK, Oudestraat 6) on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 2008. His thesis entitled “The Life and Work of István Kecskeméthy Csapó” has been elaborated under the guidance of Dr. C. Houtman (ThUK)<sup>1</sup> as main promoter and of D. Dr. Zsolt Geréb (Protestant Theological Institute Cluj – RO). His opponents were Dr. János Hermán Mostert (Church History, RO), Dr. Sándor Enghy (Prof. of OT, Reformed Theological Academy in Sárospatak), Dr. Ferenc Postma (Prof. of OT, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam), Riemer Roukema (Prof. of NT, ThUK), Jan-Wim Wesselius, (lecturer in Semitics, ThUK), Gert van Klinken (Prof. of Church History, ThUK), Klaas Spronk (Prof. of OT, ThUK).

### Propositions added to the dissertation *The Life and Work of István Kecskeméthy Csapó.*

#### A Hungarian Theologian and Biblical Scholar in Transsylvania

by Lehel Tunyogi

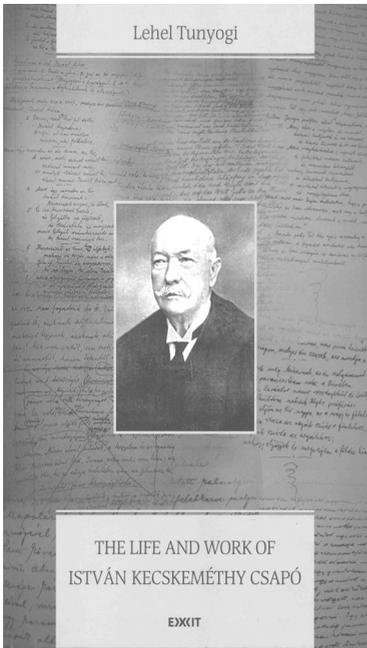
1. A review of the reputation of Kecskeméthy is in progress within the public opinion of the Transylvanian Reformed Church. While the intention is appreciable, the final result may well prove to be problematical. Such a review can simply become a post mortem glorification of the man. It is to be hoped, however, that the result will be an acceptable place for Kecskeméthy in the annals of an often fickle Transylvanian Reformed Church.

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<sup>1</sup> Dear Lehel Tunyogi, you wrote an interesting book on a prominent Transylvanian scholar and minister, whose life and work give westerners an insight into the world of the Hungarians in Transylvania at the end of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century in very turbulent times. Moreover you confront the Transylvanian Hungarians of the post communist era with one of the great men of their history, and so you present a valuable contribution to a neglected discipline in communist times, the description of the scholarly life and academic study, Bible interpretation etc. in the Reformed Church of Transylvania in the recent past. Hopefully your book will stimulate others as well as yourself to go further in the study of the subjects raised by you. Your book is a stimulating study, but in several respects it is also an invitation to further investigations into the social, political and ecclesiastical situation of Kecskeméthy's time. It is your merit to have explored this field in a challenging way.

Your description of the life and work of Prof. Kecskeméthy is closed by the remark ‘He will always remain an unknowable and unapproachable secret.’ After more than 200 pages you seem to have had the aim to leave your readers in bewilderment. We are, however, fortunate in having on the pages before page 220 many remarks by which of the secret may be unveiled to a certain extent.

From the cover of your book Prof. Kecskeméthy himself looks at us. One would like to know his view on your portrait of him. Would he agree with your picture of him as a man living in two worlds, and with your characterisation of him as Hungarian in exile in Transylvania, a lonely man, or would we see a smile on his face, when he could be confronted with your observations? His view on them will at any event remain an unknowable and unapproachable secret.



2. Kecskeméthy's pure intellectual scholarly work was not as influential as his 'spiritual' work, his preaching and publications for a broad forum; this is probably due to the fact that while the former one is the product of his human efforts, the latter one is the result of what is beyond his achievements and what we all have in common: the impulse to fulfil our missionary calling.

3. Kecskeméthy was not a legendary figure. His destiny, and especially the destiny of his legacy, is parable-like. It exemplifies the never changing providential power of God, which in hidden ways protects from definitive disappearance the values entrusted to His chosen ones.

4. The sum total of Kecskeméthy's work remains unfinished, but is not incomplete.

5. According to the Transylvanian ecclesiastical standard of values, the value of the Holy Scripture's exegesis lies in the usefulness of its homilies. Likewise the value of the preaching depends on how deeply it is rooted in the field of exegesis.

6. Each period of church history raised a special issue (for example, the Christological quest in the early times or the emphasis upon the importance of faith in the Reformation); the hermeneutical debate with the discussion concerning the role of biblical interpretation seems to be the main quest in the Transylvanian Reformed Church of our day.

7. There are many things about which the Bible remains silent. These silences are not symptoms of ignorance and deficiency, (they do not mean that there is nothing to say about a specific subject, but rather that there are no relevant words available). The silences are also part of the Logos.

8. "... for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen 3,19) – in between is the history of the first Adam; "... for Logos thou art, and unto Logos shalt thou return" – in between is the passion of the second Adam.

9. Compendium: unnumbered questions with innumerable interrogation marks.

10. After the creation, the declaration **וְהָיָה טוֹב מְאֹד** (Gen 1,31) stands like a divine signature; the human signature after completing a work cannot be more (or else) than what Bach used to write at the end of his scores: "Soli Deo Gloria!"

## Retrospection and Evaluation

### *Introduction*

The depiction and characterisation of Kecskeméthy's scholarly activity until this stage of the study has been mostly based on the inner witness of his writings. But in order to outline an approximate contour of his portrait, we have to consider the outer witnesses, the characterisation given by his contemporaries, his fellow theologians, colleagues and the evaluation of those who much later dealt with his life and work.

Three standpoints or criteria will follow here, from or according to which I will conclude this study. One is the viewpoint of those who knew Professor Kecskeméthy personally, the second is the viewpoint of posterity and the third is the viewpoint of the scholarly relationship with the wider context of (Western) European history of biblical interpretation.

The contemporary view of those who knew him is sometimes polite, sometimes critical, but always aware of his great value as theologian, minister and biblical scholar. The view of posterity is rather respectful, aware of the fact that Kecskeméthy became an almost legendary figure of the Transylvanian Reformed Church, and thus inclined to rehabilitate his worthy place and memory in the history of the Transylvanian Reformed Church and biblical interpretation. Kecskeméthy's scholarly relationship within the context of (Western) European history of biblical interpretation is unidirectional: Kecskeméthy was acquainted with the work of the European scholars, but for (Western) European exegetes he was unknown. Thus the "dialogue" between Kecskeméthy and the (Western) European interpretation of the Bible is also unidirectional, it is a rather virtual, or fictitious dialogue.

### *Kecskeméthy in the Appraisal of His Contemporaries*

In 1936, in the year of his retirement, his colleagues and the leaders of the contemporary Transylvanian Reformed Church published a volume in Kecskeméthy's honour.<sup>2</sup>

Seventy years in the great school of life and forty years in the life of a great school: to this rare divine gift this book is a willing memorial.

So wrote Sándor Makkai, professor and bishop, in the *Preface*.

This volume is a tribute made by witnesses, colleagues and former students of the great professor. Their testimony paints a portrait in very polite terms due to the character of the volume. The following characterisations will draw a sketch of this well-respected man, the believer and scholar Kecskeméthy, who dedicated his life to teaching via living speech, written words, interpretations, translations, in a word: by example – of life. But reading these characterisations, we have to take into consideration the fact that we are reading passages from a "festschrift" where words of praise are required by the genre. The actual portrait is behind the verbal adornments, which do not mean that the writers were not sincere, but they were mannerists in their way of depiction.

A non-Transylvanian man, who consecrated his life-long work to Transylvania: – wrote the same Sándor Makkai – this matter of fact explains his unavoidable inner sufferings, but also his undeniable intellectual and spiritual successes. The one who ordered and sent him here, as his young prophet, indeed succeeded in doing with him what he wished to do. Even if that spiritual renewal, that evangelical deepening and that more and more positive and practical church-life, which we witness [...] in our days in the Reformed Church of Transylvania, arose perceptibly from other roots, even so, the personality and work of István Kecskeméthy is totally built forever and for

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<sup>2</sup> *Emlékkönyv Dr. Kecskeméthy István, theologiai professzor életének 70-ik, theologiai tanári szolgálatának 40-ik évfordulójára*. Theológiai Tanulmányok (Theological Studies series). Kolozsvár 1936.

certain into the Church, without the possibility of being deleted or denied. Because during the last forty years the Church has not had one worker whose activities were not influenced by him. The Reformed Church of Transylvania has no spiritual treasure and has no institution or charity which does not contain a major component of the intellectual and spiritual life-style represented by him.

László Ravasz, himself a great theologian and bishop wrote another article in Kecskeméthy's honour: "He thought and learned all his life, because he was a professor of theology."

As a former student of Kecskeméthy, Ravasz gives a wonderful, even poetical characterisation of his master, using some beautifully relevant metaphors:

Deep in István Kecskeméthy's soul was a latent sense of solitude and feeling of being abandoned. His spirituality was joyful, opened, and of a radiantly wise sense of humour, but he always possessed something mimosa-like. Sometimes the melancholy of an unspoken pain breezed through this light. The most open, most direct, childishly open-hearted, deep, Hungarian soul felt abandoned and orphaned in a foreign world, like a beech tree in the midst of fir trees, or like an acacia within the birch trees. He did not belong to any of the political parties, a scholarly movement did not arise around him and because he did not belong to anybody, he was close to all good-willing people. Because if a human being is not attached to someone else but through love, theoretically and definitely nothing can divide that one from the others. Maybe in these times every Transylvanian Reformed person feels how István Kecskeméthy belongs to everyone and consequently belongs completely to Transylvania.

Beside such laudatory words, there were also many critical opinions. Behind the scenes the considerations were different. Anecdotes are still circulating about his style of teaching, about his relationship with the church authorities, about his ambitions to become the bishop of the Transylvanian Reformed Church. These anecdotes show that in reality, Kecskeméthy was never fully accepted as a Transylvanian and that he was considered rather a foreigner. It is also true that Kecskeméthy's feelings were probably mixed about whether he belonged and as his contemporaries observed, he never felt really at home, although he considered that his mission and his call had to be fulfilled at the place where he was sent, in Transylvania.

László Nagy has a book of collected anecdotes<sup>3</sup> about several Transylvanian personalities of the Reformed Church, including Kecskeméthy. I will mention four stories about Kecskeméthy. One is about his relationship with the bishop Károly Nagy (1867–1926) whom he was in disagreement with. Once both of them had to participate at an examination, i.e. the basic test at the end of the first year (if students passed the exam they could continue their studies, if not, they were advised to forget the intention of becoming a minister). Kecskeméthy was an examining professor; the bishop was an invited honorary member of the examining committee. When it was time to examine the candidates concerning their Old Testament theological skills and knowledge of the Hebrew language, one candidate's Hebrew knowledge was insufficient (but otherwise he seemed to be

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<sup>3</sup> László Nagy: „... és vidámságot meg az én szívemet” (Péld 27, 11). *Anekdoták – életképek* [“... and make my heart glad” (Prov 27, 11). *Anecdotes – Pictures from Ljé*]. Kolozsvár 1996.

suitable for the ministry). It was also well known that Bishop Károly Nagy did not know very much Hebrew. During the examination, Kecskeméthy encouraged the student by saying: “Dear colleague, don’t panic, because no one knows Hebrew in this room, save for the two of us.”

In the end, when Kecskeméthy had to give his appraisal, he said to the candidate (in front of the whole committee), that in the Reformed Church in Transylvania someone can become a bishop if he does not know Hebrew at all, but cannot become a student in the second year; and so he gave his qualification as “insufficient”. The bishop, who remained silent when facing the ire of Kecskeméthy, decided differently and admitted the student to continue his studies, because even if his Hebrew was insufficient, he had been deemed suitable for the ministry. László Nagy declared that the bishop was right, because the following years confirmed his opinion.<sup>4</sup>

Another story tells about Kecskeméthy’s involvement in a local conflict between the minister and a descendant of the old noble family Báthory. What is more interesting in this insignificant story is its background: Kecskeméthy wanted to become a bishop in Transylvania in the middle of the 1920s (supported also by the Báthory family). Yet his rival, Sándor Makkai (supported by the majority of the ministers), finally became the leader of the Transylvanian Reformed Church (in 1926). The opinion about Kecskeméthy’s ambitions was formulated at the end of the anecdote: “Kecskeméthy will never be a bishop in Transylvania. He is not for us and he is not one of us.”<sup>5</sup>

A third story relates the memories of a former student of Kecskeméthy. According to the anecdote, Kecskeméthy dealt during his courses only with the students who occupied the first line of benches. The rest of the students could do anything they wanted (read, play chess, write letters etc.) only on condition that they did not disturb the lecture. This memory also included a characterisation of Kecskeméthy:

Two sorts of men dwelt in Kecskeméthy. As a scholar, we did not like him because of his liberalism, it was also hard to follow his ideas and arguments, but we liked him very much as a preacher. In his sermons he was able to lead his congregation to great spiritual depths and heights.<sup>6</sup>

A fourth anecdote is about a speech given by Kecskeméthy at the time when he was a deputy (he held a seat in the Parliament between 1907 and 1911)<sup>7</sup>. According to the story, there was a debate in the Parliament in Budapest about the question of teaching the mother tongue in the schools. Kecskeméthy pointed out the importance of teaching Hungarian language and literature in the schools and he thought it very curious that the schools devoted more hours to Latin than to the national language. In response, a Roman Catholic abbot, who did not know Kecskeméthy, accused him of ignorance, saying that he probably didn’t know any Latin and that’s the reason why he didn’t appreciate properly the necessity of teaching Latin as much as possible in the schools. He also eulogised the “majestic language of Virgil and Cicero”, the qualities of which were probably inaccessible to the deputy who had just spoken. Kecskeméthy

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<sup>4</sup> László Nagy: “... and make my heart glad” (*Prov 27, 11*). 8–9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 132–134.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* (*Prov 27, 11*). 184–185.

<sup>7</sup> Information taken from: <http://www.ogyk.hu/e-konyvt/pdf-konyv/konyv09.pdf>.

asked again for permission to give an answer and for several minutes, in fluent Latin, he presented the apology of the Hungarian national language.<sup>8</sup>

László Nagy, who otherwise highly respected and appreciated the person and activity of Kecskeméthy, summarised in his collection of anecdotes:

He carried great contrasts and tensions in his heart. Extreme theological liberalism and pietistic spirituality characterised him. That is why he remained a foreigner in Transylvania and Transylvania also remained a foreign land to him.<sup>9</sup>

*Kecskeméthy in Transylvanian Reformed Church History and the History of Biblical Interpretation*

Kecskeméthy was a member of the first generation of professors in the Kolozsvárian period (after 1895) of the history of the Theological Faculty of the Reformed Church in Transylvania.

The recently moved institute inherited the spirituality of the previous period (the Nagyenyedian). The first twenty years (1895–1915) are considered the years of the “liberal” period. Prof. Zsolt Kozma argued in his essay on the spiritual and intellectual profile of the Theological Institute<sup>10</sup> at its centenary that the attribute “liberal” is not exact enough. He proposed the term “constructive criticism” instead. The “constructive criticism” had three elements: the rationalism inherited from the previous period when the Institute was in Nagyenyed, the liberalism (and also rationalism) imported from Budapest and the biblical criticism imported from Western Europe.<sup>11</sup>

This was the time when Professor Kecskeméthy was active at the Theological Faculty. He was also influenced by the rationalism, liberalism and biblical criticism, but was also aware of the necessity of renewal, of a shift from the intellectual to the spiritual. Therefore he also propagated pietism, got involved in the inner mission and thus he helped to open the spiritual ground to receive (in the middle of the 1920s) the new Reformation tendency, although Kecskeméthy never became a Barthian<sup>12</sup> even in the time when the Transylvanian Reformed Church was fully conquered by Barthianism.

He was an adept of criticism, but not in the negative sense of the term, i.e. by disdaining the biblical text and regarding it as a pure object of scholarly research, and nothing more. He did not make an “art for art’s sake” of the critical attitude, but always tried to find the constructive reason for a critical analysis. The criticism meant for him a daily involvement in the reading and understanding of the Bible, a most detailed lecture possible of the text, the comparison of different versions, translations and interpretations for the best commentary possible. His attitude is expressed in the way he actually used the Bible: his so-called “work–Bible”. After each page of the Bible he inserted a sheet of paper. He did not want to “add” or “omit” anything from the body of the text, not even to make comments “out of context”, as marginal, or as any kind of note. But he placed in

<sup>8</sup> László Nagy: “... and make my heart glad” (*Prov 27, 11*). 50–51.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Zsolt Kozma: A kolozsvári református teológia lelki-szellemi arcéle. In: *Önazonosság és küldetés* [The Spiritual-Intellectual Profile of Reformed Theology in Kolozsvár, in *Identity and Mission*.] Kolozsvár 2002, 115–130.

<sup>11</sup> Zsolt Kozma: *The Spiritual-Intellectual Profile of Reformed Theology*, 116.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 120.

between the biblical pages his own pages where he wrote all his remarks, abbreviated notes, brief allusions. From these notes he compiled his commentaries, gave his lectures, prepared his sermons. His intention in criticising was not to destroy faith, but to select the constructive findings in order to help build up his people's belief.

To be able to portray Kecskeméthy, the exegete, it is important to see the spiritual background of the scholar. We therefore have to mention strong and deep pietism, which he expressed mainly in his activity as a missionary within the church.

Another essay of Professor Zsolt Kozma has to be quoted here. He wrote about the internal movements which constituted the (back)ground of Old Testament didaxis in the history of the Theological Academy of Kolozsvár:<sup>13</sup> the historical Calvinism represented by Károly Nagy, Sándor Makkai, Sándor Tavaszy (systematic theologians) and by the church historian Géza Nagy.

In parallel with this movement, there was also the inner missionary, constructive tendency, represented by Béla Kenessey, Sándor Makkai and Lajos Imre.

The third aspect is an "attitude" (Zsolt Kozma deliberately avoids the term "tendency"), the pietistic attitude (or standpoint), which had as its leader István Kecskeméthy, and was also represented by Béla Kenessey and continued by András Nagy (who was not pietistic but a Puritan, remarks Prof. Kozma, a former student of his). This (back)ground – Kozma insists – made possible the acceptance of the new Reformed tendency in Transylvania.<sup>14</sup> Thus the line of evolution of the Old Testament didaxis went from the religio-historical foundation to the new Reformation theology, and the work of István Kecskeméthy was part of this development.

Regarding the scholar and the believer, the personality of Kecskeméthy was very ambiguous and sometimes even contradictory. On the one hand he critically "dissected" the biblical textual corpus and on the other hand he was very traditional in interpreting the Bible. His commentaries show an objective, rational, even liberal interpreter, while his sermons, meditations, devotional writings and popular articles present a deep, traditional believer, a subjective (even romantic and sentimentalist, or pathetic) confessor. His scholarly arguments profoundly shake the fundamentals of religious belief, while his writings dedicated to the larger public focus on the fortification of the Protestant confession, emphasising the urgent necessity of repentance and spiritual renewal, the total consecration to Christ, who brought salvation to everyone. His thoughts are rather elitist, catering to a select group of readers, while in his articles he argued for the universal priesthood. In his public life he was an active militant for the cause of the inner mission, while in his private life remained a solitary, introverted person. The contradictions can be continued, but these examples demonstrate enough the inner contrast of his complex character.

Professor Kozma proposed a "solution" to this contradiction when he wrote about Kecskeméthy:

Of the Hungarian scholars of Old Testament studies, Kecskeméthy is undoubtedly the most interesting personality. Those who are dealing with his work of a lifetime can hardly understand how it fits into the thinking of a man with deep,

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<sup>13</sup> Zsolt Kozma: Ószövetségi tudományok a Kolozsvári Teológiai Akadémián [Old Testament Studies at the Theological Academy in Kolozsvár]. In: *Másképpen van megírva [It Is Differently Written]*. Kolozsvár 2007, 44–49.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 44–45.

even extreme piety and the pragmatic, text-anatomising historian. Our schematic way of thinking is culpable, because we think that the Pietists are fundamentalists in their interpretation and that those who approach the Scriptures as scholars are far away from Pietism. But a man's spiritual and intellectual world is more complex than we may consider.<sup>15</sup>

The contradictions became well-balanced in Kecskeméthy's most important work: in his Bible translation. There is the most visible result of his search for the meaning of the Word of God, but also his wish of handing over for as wide a public as possible the message of the Word, which he always considered his most important mission. His empathy and passion for the biblical languages and for his own mother tongue is at its most abundant in this translation, which filled up all his life as active minister and theological scholar.

Because of his political background and his adherence to the Hungarian Popular Party after World War II, when Transylvania definitely became part of Romania, the writings of Kecskeméthy (including his Bible translation) became, together with his memory, "non grata" for the Romanian authorities. Therefore his writings could not be published any more and most of them were hidden in the library of the Theological Faculty, or in the Central Collection of Archives of the Transylvanian Reformed Church, or in some private libraries. The publication of Kecskeméthy's work only became possible after the 1990s, when the political situation seemed to be changing in the Romania of our day.

Something has to be said also about Kecskeméthy's position in Transylvanian political and church-political public life. As already mentioned, he was for a short period of time a representative in the Hungarian parliament (between 1907 and 1911). Not too much is known about that activity. In his youth he learned from his teachers (with revolutionary conviction) the ideals of the revolution of 1848, the ideal of national independence and social justice. These ideals are reflected also by some of his novels. Later, after World War I, when for a shorter period Transylvania was attached to Romania, he was a member of the Hungarian Popular Party, a political party militant for the rights of the Transylvanian Hungarian people, for its national autonomy, a defender of the cause of the Hungarian identity in Romanian dominated Transylvania. Although he was never accepted and regarded as a Transylvanian, Kecskeméthy expressed, even by the non-ecclesial mode of his political tendencies, his affection for the Transylvanian Hungarian nation, for the cause of the preservation of its identity and for the ideal of its autonomy. His political involvement is regarded as unworthy of his theological activity. In the Transylvanian Reformed Church, the ministers are not encouraged to be involved in political activities.

Kecskeméthy did not avoid his inclination for politics even in some applications of the biblical text to the actual situation of his nation. For example, there is a particular application of the biblical text to the contemporary political events in the middle of the 1910s through the interpretation and application of Nah 3, 4:

זוֹנָה שׁוֹבֵת חַן בְּעֵלַת כְּשָׁפִים הַמְכַרֶת גּוֹיִם בְּזוֹנוֹתֶיהָ  
 ("the well-favoured harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms" (KJV), "a harlot, alluring, the mistress of sorceries, who enslaved nations by her prostitution".  
 Kecskeméthy's comment:

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<sup>15</sup> Zsolt Kozma: *Old Testament Studies at the Theological Academy in Kolozsvár*, 46.

As the European world-powers sold Turkey first to Italy, then to the Balkan states, or Bulgaria to its own allies, or as they are about to sell Transylvania to Valahia [old name for Romania].<sup>16</sup>

Before 1915 Kecskeméthy foresaw the future of Transylvania, the event that actually was imminent and happened in 1919 and then again after the Second World War. This and such other remarks of Kecskeméthy were considered so dangerous by the later censorship that for decades his books were not published and his tomb was profaned in the 1980s.

Kecskeméthy's aspiration to become a bishop in the Reformed Church of Transylvania at the elections of 1926 was not successful. The reasons have been mentioned already: he was not considered to be rooted in the Transylvanian tradition, he was regarded as a non-Transylvanian Hungarian, although he dedicated most of his life to the Transylvanian Reformed Church and Transylvanian Hungarian nation. But despite his failure in church-political public life, he left his indelible print on the spiritual-intellectual profile of the church in and to which he consecrated his ministry.

### *Kecskeméthy in Dialogue with the (Western) European Scholars of His Time*

Kecskeméthy's relationship with (Western) European scholars can be summarised as a relationship of dialogue and intermediary transmission. As he was a constant reader of the Bible, he was also a constant reader of the theological scientific current affairs of his time. He was well acquainted with the theological literature to which he referred in his commentaries. As a member of the reading and revising committee of the Hungarian Revised Bible in the early 1900s, he was in touch also with the British and Foreign Bible Society, namely with Michael M. Morrison, who was the secretary of the Middle-European Agency of the Society, with Tivadar Duka and Elek Petri on the Hungarian side. Some of these letters (about details of translation, matters of manuscript) are preserved at the library of the Theological Faculty in Kolozsvár.

Tivadar Duka<sup>17</sup> (1825–1908), medical doctor, officer of the British army, member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Magyar Tudományos Akadémia). As a participant of the revolution in 1848, he became a war-prisoner in Russia after the defeat of the cause of the revolution. He managed to escape and then emigrated to London.

He studied in Budapest (juridical studies) and later in London (medical studies), where he became a medical doctor and as such joined the army and went to India, where he did important research about the country.

T. Duka was a member of the Society of Asia and also of the British and Foreign Bible Society. As member and later as vice-president of the British and Foreign Bible Society (1904) he corresponded with Kecskeméthy about the revision of Károli's Bible translation.

Having a chance to go to Israel, he there improved his knowledge of Hebrew and Arabic. In his translations and commentaries he used all the linguistic apparatus that he had access to with his language skills. Knowing not only classical languages, but also modern ones, he read a lot of German and English theological literature. But he

<sup>16</sup> *Kommentár Nábum, Haggai és Zekarijah próféták könyveibez* (*Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Nabum, Haggai and Zechariah*), 36.

<sup>17</sup> Information taken from: [http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duka\\_Tivadar](http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duka_Tivadar).

did not read only for himself, but also with the intention to make the fruits known to the Transylvanian and Hungarian public. A list of books returned to the library was preserved in his personal archive, where we can read the names and titles<sup>18</sup> of several books to which he referred to a greater or lesser extent in his works.

Kecskeméthy's references were not exact from a bibliographical point of view, but this was not due to negligence, but rather to the fact that he was so familiar with the literature in question, that he just mentioned names (often abbreviated), presuming that the reader was also as well acquainted with them as he was. The manner of allusion also demonstrates that he did not compile the different opinions, but was in dialogue with them. He very rarely inserted quotations or exact references in his texts. Sometimes he agreed with these views, but often rejected them.

While he was in constant touch with the latest exegetical theories and findings, the ideas which he tried to introduce to the Transylvanian Hungarian public were not received with the enthusiasm and open-minded attitude he intended to generate. Together with his own thoughts, the latest achievements of biblical interpretation among the noted European biblical scholars did not find acceptance in the traditionalist Transylvanian Reformed Church. As we already mentioned, his critical exegesis was not popular, but the same cannot be said about his popularising Bible explanations, sermons and meditations. His intellectual legacy was not as efficient as his spiritual legacy was.

The exegetes most frequently alluded to were: E. Reuss, C. Orelli, Franz Delitzsch, B. Duhm, I. Benzinger, C. Baur, A. Bertholet, K. Budde, T. K. Cheyne, G. H. A. Ewald, J. Gemoll, H. Grätz, H. Gunkel, C. F. Keil, K. Marti, W. Nowack, B. Stade, W. Staerk, C. Steuernagel, J. Wellhausen, G. Wildeboer, H. Winckler etc. As a matter of fact it has to be mentioned that while he transmitted the ideas of (Western) European scholars with the same missionary zeal as he practiced his ministry, professorship and literary art, Kecskeméthy's name and works are not mentioned at all in any of the prominent non-Hungarian lexicons or biblical commentaries, but this is mostly due to the fact that he wrote and published in an inaccessible language for European theological scholarship.

The need to write an overview of biblical interpretation in the Reformed Church of Transylvania is not merely a recent one. It was formulated in the past too. For example, Professor István Tóké, alluding to the fact ascertained by Bishop Sándor Makkai,<sup>19</sup> wrote:

Nearly half a century ago Sándor Makkai wrote the phantomatic sentence: "There is no written history of church literature." Apart from the fact that this mode of expression contains the remnants of liberalism, this statement is painfully true.

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<sup>18</sup> It is a list of two pages from 29th of December 1917, when he returned to the library the books that he borrowed, with the signature of the librarian, who confirmed that the library got back the listed books. The names and titles include: Weiss Joh.: *Das älteste evangelium*; Hamack; Wernle: *Die synopt. Frage*, Nowack: *Handkommentar*; Meyer: *Krit.-ex. Commentar*; Staerk: *Die dichtungungen Jesaias; Amos, Nabum, Habakuk*; Marti: *Gesch. Isr. Religion*; *Kurzer Hand-Kommentar*; Winckler; Duhm: *Die 12 Propheten; Anmerkungen zu den 12 Propheten*; Gemoll: *Grundsteine zur Geschichte Israels*; Jeremias; Baumann; Kautzsch: *Bibl. Theologie*; Winckler: *Alttest. Untersuchungen*; Smend: *Die Erzählung d. Hexateuch*; Löhr: *Untersuchungen zum Buch Amos*. Also a grammar-book of the Syriac language is on the list, Brockelmann's *Syrische Grammatik*.

<sup>19</sup> Sándor Makkai: *Az erdélyi református egyházi irodalom 1850-től napjainkéig* [Transylvanian Church Literature From 1850 Till Our Days]. Kolozsvár 1925, 3.

The name “history of church literature” – we have to repeat – is no longer of this time. But its real meaning is equal with the presently used notion of *history of theology* and with the history of all the theological special subjects. The words of Makkai might be reformulated as: *we have no written history of theology.* (...) In our present context, it means that *we do not have even a written history of hermeneutics.* Until now (from the Reformation until our days) we were not engaged in the study and in the elaboration of how our ancestors thought about the theory of interpretation of Holy Scripture. All this does not mean that we don’t have sporadic studies about some details. But it unconditionally means that the description and evaluation of our own theory of interpretation of Holy Scripture is one our tasks which are yet to be fulfilled.<sup>20</sup>

The demands formulated above show that (at least) the summarised description of the history of biblical interpretation in the Reformed Church of Transylvania is an urgent task of/for local theologians. The present monograph is intended to be a contribution to the enormous work that has to be done. It ends with an invitation to continue this work.

After reading the words of Lajos Gönczy at the funeral ceremony of Professor Kecskeméthy, we realise that they are still valid after almost seventy years:

He is leaving now this place in the same manner as he arrived here forty-three years ago [...] Generation after generation sat at his feet [...] made an effort to be connected with him, to get to know him and to approach his soul, but he remained the same lonely man who he always and for everybody was in his personality. He will always remain an unknowable and unapproachable secret.<sup>21</sup>

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#### Abbreviations

DBI:	<i>Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation</i> , vols. I–II. (A–J; K–Z) general editor John H. Hayes; Abingdon Press. Nashville 1999.
ESV:	<i>English Standard Version</i> , 2001.
KJV:	<i>King James Version</i> , 1611/1769.
KT:	<i>Kis Tükör</i> = LM: <i>Little Mirror</i>
LThFBp:	library of the Theological Faculty in Budapest (Hungary).
LThFKv:	library of the Theological Faculty in Kolozsvár (Transylvania, Romania).
LXX:	Septuagint.
NIV:	<i>New International Version</i> , 1984, USA.
PEIL:	<i>Protestáns Egyházi és Iskolai Lap</i> = PCSP: <i>Protestant Church and School Paper</i> .
PK:	<i>Protestáns Közöny</i> = PP: Protestant Publication.

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<sup>20</sup> István Tóké: Hazai írásmagyarázatunk elmélete a reformáció korában, 1520–1608 [The Theory of Our Autochthonous Biblical Interpretation in the Time of Reformation, 1520–1608]. In: *Református Szemle* 1973/1, 3–4.

<sup>21</sup> A hit embere. Dr. Kecskeméthyi István koporsójánál, 1938. V. 12. Zsid 11,8–10. 13–16 [“The Men of Belief. At the Coffin of Dr. István Kecskeméthy, on 12<sup>th</sup> of May 1938. Heb 11, 8–10. 13–16]. In: *A Református Teológiai Fakultás értesítője az 1937–38-as tanévről* [The Informational Announcement of the Reformed Theological Faculty in the Academic Year of 1937–1938], 6.

- PSZ: *Protestáns Szemle* = PR: Protestant Review.  
 RSZ: *Református Szemle* = RR: Reformed Review.  
 ThSZ: *Theológiai Szaklap* = SPT: *Scholarly Paper of Theology*.  
 TRE: *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, ed. M. Glockner and A. Döhnert; 1977–2004. 2006–.

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