

Doctoral theses

“Warriors of the fighting Mother Church” -
The Reformed Diocese of Abaúj during World War I

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1. Background, objectives and delimitation of the topic of the doctoral dissertation

The centenary of World War I gave new impetus to the ethnographic and historical research of the topic. In addition to the macro-connections of the war, the micro-historical elements come to the fore, including the exploration of the role of the hinterland. Because of the distance in time and the inaccessibility of oral sources, written, physical and visual sources became the primary sources of the Great War. My research topic is the life of the congregations and pastors of the Reformed Diocese of Abaúj in the hinterland during the World War.

The novelty of the topic is that church history research did not cover the first decades of the 20th century, but rather focused on the period between the two world wars and after the Second World War. So far, no summary work has been published on the history of the Reformed Diocese of Abaúj. Exploring the history of the diocese is also interesting because of the consequences of the Trianon decision - since the territory of the diocese was halved with the drawing of the border, the effect of which can also be observed in the culture of memory. Both the researched region and the topic proved to be suitable for examining the hinterland phenomenon. This is most evident in the dynamics of the relationship between the state and the church: the hinterland - and the church within it - serves the military needs of the state. However, the ideas of the state military leadership were often overridden by the local decisions of the church communities. As an organizational unit, the diocese played an intermediary role between the church district and the congregations, just as the church district was in constant contact with the state leadership.

According to my hypothesis, the perception of war does not take place on a national level, but is always interpreted by a community, in our case, parishes, through specific local forced situations.

2. Outline of the methods used

I am reconstructing the events that took place in the Reformed Diocese of Abaúj during the years of World War I primarily based on archival sources. The source groups used for this are the following: episcopal documents and general assembly minutes of the Cistibiscan Church District; the minutes of the meetings of the Reformed Diocese of Abaúj; the Presbyterian minutes and other fibrous documents of the churches of the diocese, as well as the issues of the *Sárospatak Református Lapok* and the *Protestáns Egyházi és Iskolai Lap* during the war. One of the places where the sources can be found is the Archives of the Scientific Collections of the Reformed College in Sárospatak. You can find information about these sources in the Fund and Inventory List of the Scientific Collections Archives of the Reformed College of Sárospatak. The availability of the presbyterian minutes of the Diocese of Abaúj is contingent. I use the term "eventually" because, from the 1960s, church materials previously kept in the parishes have been continuously added to the Archives of the Scientific Collections of the Reformed College of Sárospatak. At the same time, a significant proportion of the minutes are still found in the parish files of each church, which posed a challenge from

the point of view of research methodology and required field work. Due to the regionalization of the congregations, the materials are usually found in the parish of the settlement where the pastor of the district lives. The picture is further colored by the fact that after the First World War and the Trianon decision, approximately thirty of the 102 congregations in Abaúj moved across the border. The Hungarian-language documents of the former Abaúj churches belonging to today's Slovakia were systematically liquidated during the Second World War, after the Second World War, so we can only rarely find them in archives. You can get information about the church materials preserved in the parishes from the volumes of the *Hungarian Reformed Church's Treasures of the Diocese of Abaúj-Torna* series.

My method of analysis is basically a chronological approach, which is based on arranging the individual source types next to each other. I carried out a top-down, three-level analysis, as follows: I first reviewed the episcopal documents broken down by year, since as the head of the church district, the bishop at the time received the various state and ministerial decrees and circulars, which were often strictly confidential. After that, I associated the minutes of the general assembly of the Cistibiscan Church District with the episcopal documents in the same annual breakdown. This is the first, highest level: the level of the church district. The middle, second level was the comparison of the data from the minutes of the meetings of the Reformed Diocese of Abaúj with the parish level. As the third, lowest level, I compared the presbyterian minutes and some documents of the churches of the diocese with the decisions of the High Church. This method proved to be suitable for showing how the decisions of the state influenced the decisions of the church district and the bishop on the one hand, how all this was conveyed to the dioceses and what effect it had on the congregations of Abaúj.

3. A thesis-like listing of the new scientific results of the dissertation

- At the end of the 19th century, the settlements belonging to the Reformed Diocese of Abaúj were essentially rural communities. The livelihood of the majority of the population was logging, growing vegetables and fruits, and farming. The activities of the industrialists settled in the market towns, as well as the industries related to mining in the northern areas of the diocese, show a different pattern. At the end of the 19th century, because of the scarce livelihood opportunities and the regional decline of mining, the laboring members of the local communities turned to a new livelihood strategy: they emigrated to America. During the sometimes stronger and sometimes weaker waves of emigration that threatened the depopulation of the congregations in Abaúj, the more sophisticated, hard-working members of the congregations immigrated to America. This process transformed the internal social structure of churches and settlements. With the departure of the more modest and work-oriented church members, more and more physical and financial burdens fell on the believers who remained at home, which mainly the smaller churches were unable to handle or solve on their own. The picture was further colored by the fact that the male members of the church emigrated, who held the church offices, thus they had a more active role in the organization of the church life than the women in the age. At the outbreak of World War I, the majority of the

congregations of the Reformed Diocese of Abaúj had paid off the debts of previous constructions and renovations, or had applied for aid for the renovations - so they were exhausted from an economic point of view. In most places, the church members were poor people without property, servants, day laborers, who paid state taxes in addition to church taxes. The economic condition of the faithful was accompanied by the number of congregations often below 100, which was also weakened by emigration. In these circumstances, the many forced situations of World War I befell the Reformed Diocese of Abaúj.

- The life of the congregations and pastors of the Reformed Diocese of Abaúj during World War I can be defined along the lines of two questions. The first question has a rational, economic motive: the economic difficulties of pastors and congregations. During the years of World War II, the payment arrangement for pastors was constantly the subject of district, diocesan and congregational decisions. They tried to compensate for the low salary of the pastors with the couple's salary paid to the pastors and the wartime dearness allowance urged by the diocese. However, this was a complex issue, as the presbyteries insisted on the salary items specified in the pastor's fee letter, so we often find court cases related to the pastor's salary in the diocesan general assembly minutes. As the war progressed, churches and pastors could count on less and less state support. State subsidies were social benefits, so pastors with large families received clothing allowances and family allowances, and elderly pastors received pension allowances from the state. The leadership of the diocese tried to make the financial situation of the churches independent of both church and state aid, and therefore urged the creation of a church maintenance fund. With the creation of the church maintenance fund, the congregations prepared for the uncertain times after the Second World War. Most of the congregations created their own church maintenance fund in 1917, to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the Reformation.

The other issue that preoccupied the leadership of the diocese of Abaúj during the World War was a loftier goal: the question of the internal mission. During the First World War, the members of the local communities were faced with phenomena that had never been experienced before: after the mobilization of men, the roles of men and women were transformed, with the mobilization of folk school teachers, education was suspended in most places, as a result of the economy caused by the war and the subsequent inflation, farming became unpredictable. The religious zeal of teenagers declined to the greatest extent, which was tried to be remedied in the 1920s with the establishment of church youth associations. For most church members, only religious occasions meant permanence, which is why we come across data on the number and nature of worship occasions in the annual reports of the diocese and church district minutes, and because they also showed the orderly situation of the pastors and congregations. In addition to religious services, religious readings and the distribution of documents were the means by which the church tried to keep its followers in the congregation. Due to the American emigration, the number of congregations in Abaúj decreased before the World War, but defections did not occur en masse during the war years. In addition to practicing their profession, the pastors were also available to their followers for questions that arose during everyday life, primarily in contact with relatives at the front or

prisoners of war. However, the diocesan internal mission efforts were not successful: readings were held in only a few churches, and the formation of various associations also encountered difficulties. Added to this, local conflicts arose between the pastors and the congregations due to the economic life of the congregation and the pastor's salary.

- The World War I mobilization broke up the internal organizational structure of church communities. With the mobilization of religious folk school teachers, 80-100 school children in several settlements were often left without education. In 1914, there were 54 Reformed denominational folk schools in the territory of the diocese, in which a total of 64 teachers taught. The number of students was between 27 and 70 people. In 1914, there were only 9 public schools in the Reformed Diocese of Abaúj. Since most schools had one teacher, with the mobilization of religious folk school teachers, only one teacher in the settlements dropped out of education. From 1915, the school boards of the congregations continuously tried to find ways to exempt the only teacher in the settlements, but this was less and less successful. Due to the mobilization of religious folk school teachers, by 1916, five schools in Abaúj had already suspended education completely. In the other settlements, the pastors replaced the teachers, but this led to conflicts, mainly because of their remuneration. At the state level, in 1916, provision was made to replace the conscripted teaching staff. The possible substitute teacher could be a certified teacher, a teacher candidate who has completed at least 2 years of teacher training, a certified kindergarten teacher, or in the absence of these, a retired teacher. However, the state-appointed teachers did not want to participate in religious education, nor did they want to cultivate the land belonging to the teachers' remuneration. The replacement of teachers was not a resolved issue even in 1919, so the state tried to remedy the teacher shortage with teachers fleeing the "occupied territories". After the Trianon decision, in 1922, a report on the Reformed elementary schools of the Cistibiscan Church District was prepared. This was necessary because, following a state decree, state aid was withdrawn from schools with less than 30 students if they did not cooperate with local Roman Catholic or state schools. This marked the beginning of the amalgamation and nationalization of the Reformed denominational folk schools with other schools. It is clear from the data of the examined records that instead of men in the war, only women applied for the teaching position, or at most retired teachers or wounded soldiers. This is a constraint in the first place, so it is possible that this is the reason why the problem cannot be solved until the end of the war. Local traditions and norms became more flexible as a result of the pressure of the war, since, following the decrees, the congregations were forced to elect female teachers or to accept state-appointed female teachers. At the same time, this provoked conflicts within the community, which is why it was not possible to settle the issue. During the war, there are improvisations, momentary solutions, and order is restored only at the end of the war, when a man is again chosen as a regular teacher.

- The shortage of raw materials generated by the war and the demand for various metals from the military leadership created emergency situations on both the macro and micro levels. The supply of various metals, that is, requisitioning, was a problem at both levels for the military commands. In the year of the outbreak of the war, requisitioning was not yet justified, but in the spring of 1915, the state and church began to organize it. We can

reconstruct this process on a macro level from the often confidential correspondence of the bishop of the Cistibiscan Church District and the Minister of Religion and Public Education. The requisitions used the bells at the church level. By the end of 1915, a report on the bells of the church district was completed, which was called the bell list. Based on the list of bells, a bell was classified as requisitionable or to be kept. The bells that were condemned to be kept could avoid being melted down due to their historical or artistic value. The bell requisitioning campaigns of 1915 and 1916 were carried out in the spirit of patriotic propaganda and the churches often sacrificed their bells for the sake of the noble cause on the altar of the homeland without compensation. From 1917, this trend changed and the requisitioning of bells turned into an organized munitions supply. The increasing shortage of raw materials is also indicated by the fact that in 1917, in addition to the bells, the copper elements of the buildings, the organs, and even the school bells were requisitioned. The process ended in December 1917, when further requisitions were stopped. From 1918, the replacement of requisitioned bells appeared as a new challenge, which could only be started slowly due to the war economy in force until 1921. During World War I, 80 bells were requisitioned from the Reformed Diocese of Abaúj. The requisitioning actions were accompanied by tensions and conflicts, on the one hand, between the military leadership and the congregations, and on the other hand, among the members of the congregation at the local level. Based on the presbyterian minutes of the churches in Abaúj, it is clear what strategies the churches used in order to keep their bells, and what methods they later wanted to use to replace them. Replacing the bells was a complex challenge, primarily from an economic point of view, so churches often remained without bells until the 1930s. The bell requisitions during World War I affected 50-60% of the country's bell stock at the time; bells from practically every Reformed church were melted down. Although World War I was fatal for the bells of the Cistibiscan Church District and the Reformed Diocese of Abaúj, the bell stock regenerated by the 1930s was destroyed by the Second World War was less affected by World War II.

- Hungary's military and war expenditure during World War I totaled 32.7 billion crowns. The Hungarian state provided 53% of this from the income of war loans, 30% from central bank loans, 7% from loans taken from commercial banks, 5% from foreign loans, and barely 5% from tax revenues. The war loans were met with sharp criticism in posterity, according to which the issues did not solve the inflationary problems, and the loans covered only a part of the war expenses, since the war loan bonds did not constitute an independent source of money. The amount of money in circulation increased more than thirteenfold during the war. The war loans were for paper koruna, and since the value of the paper koruna fell dramatically in the meantime compared to the gold koruna, the bonds were worth less than the face value of the issued war loan notes. In 1920, the financial administration nostrified and overprinted the devalued war loan bonds. The purpose of this was to record who the "original notaries" were, the original notaries of the loans. Between March 1923 and March 1924, the rate of inflation reached the hyperinflation threshold: 1 gold crown was worth 17,866 paper crowns. The congregations, pastors and denominational folk school teachers of the Reformed Diocese of Abaúj, as well as the members of the congregations, spent most of the money they saved during the first few war loan subscriptions. As a result, by the second half of the Second World War, the data on subscriptions is getting rarer, and finally they

almost completely disappear from the sources. The underwriting of war loan bonds also indicates the dynamics and relationship between the micro and macro levels. Signing the war loan was a form of behavior expected from local communities and individuals (sacrifice), a symbol of identification with the national community. Due to the loss of the war, the war loans could not be repaid. The population was particularly offended by abuses, frauds, and financial scandals surrounding subscriptions, deposits and withdrawals. Just like the population, the churches did not receive compensation, so they tried to get out of the situation as favorably as possible by exchanging the bonds for money. However, most churches did not succeed in this, so from a financial point of view, a kind of stabilization can only be observed in the 1930s.

- The organization of the institution of the Reformed field chaplain bishopric began during World War I. The battlefield trips of Dezső Baltázár and Samu Barabás were intended to inform the Convention. During the war, the battlefield reports were shaped into legislative proposals, the central issues of which were the independence of the Reformed field chaplains from the Roman Catholic field bishopric, and the employment of a Reformed field chaplain corresponding to the number of Reformed soldiers. Due to the war, the implementation of the submitted requests progressed with difficulty, despite the fact that István Tisza, Ignác Darányi, Elek Boér and Aladár Szilassy also got involved in the settlement of the case. The camp chaplains' conference held in November 1917 gave new impetus to the institutionalization, where Sándor Csikesz's proposal was also presented. On behalf of the Convention, Sándor Csikesz managed the affairs of the field ministry from autumn 1917 to May 1918. The Reformed Church Constitution Committee wanted to present Csikesz's motion to the Synod in October 1918, but this did not take place due to the events following the war. After the fall of the Soviet Republic, the Minister of War restored the office of the field chaplain, which could operate within the framework established until the Second World War. According to the 1918 list of Reformed field chaplains, a total of 174 chaplains were called to serve as field chaplains. However, due to the continuous changes in personnel, the compilation of the list was difficult, so it does not include the names of all the pastors who served as camp chaplains, and the place of service of many others is listed as unknown. At the same time, we are informed about the release of 47 chaplains and the death of two Reformed camp chaplains, Henrik Hettesheimer and Sándor Vincze. In Abaúj, since there were not only conscriptions and war hospitals in the territory of the diocese, but also war events, it is difficult to determine the total number of priests who served as military chaplains during the years of World War I. In 1915, only Dezső Kovács, assistant pastor of Szepis, who undertook service as a reserve chaplain of the National Guard, moved outside the diocese to Munkács. Bertalan Hubay, jr., served as a military chaplain in Kassa. Lajos Novák, pastor of Taktaszada and István Fekete, of Mezőcsát, as well as Kálmán Makay, chaplain of the correctional institution in Kassa, were also involved in the hospital's pastoral care. In 1917, József Páhy, a priest from Kiskiniz, served from the diocese as a field priest in Marburg. In 1918, Dezső Csorba Csenyétéi, József Kiss, pastor of Tornyosnémeti and later of Hejce, and jr. Assistant chaplain Lajos Kiss of Garbócbogdány served as a field chaplain in World War I. The appointment of Reformed camp chaplains was a lengthy process, so their number slowly increased during the war years. Appointments were made more difficult by the fact that the

replacement of pastors applying for service was sought to be solved at the congregational level. Since during the war more and more assistant pastors without independent congregations were appointed as camp pastors, the replacement functioned with difficulty. The congregations without pastors, teachers, and cantors applied for the release of their pastors, and in some cases the pastors themselves wanted to stop their military activities. Military chaplaincy caught the chaplains unprepared: they were not ready for the horrors of war, so during the war the training of Reformed field chaplains became an important issue. Also, the freedom of the pastors became an important issue, which mainly the younger pastors experienced as an embarrassing privilege. The Reformed Church adopted and applied the rhetorical elements of the state war in its war texts, and tried to use the war to spread and deepen religious faith. This phenomenon was also behind the intensification of conflicts between denominations: the churches subordinated the war to the mission, the conversion. Based on the reports about Roman Catholic and Protestant camp chaplains who acted regardless of denominational and national differences, we can assume that the personality of the camp chaplain strongly determined religious and ethnic tolerance in intense situations. At the same time, religious beliefs and the activities of the field chaplains alleviated the deepening sectarian and ethnic conflicts during the war. They tried to compensate for the low number of Reformed camp chaplains by distributing religious documents. However, the majority of the documents can be considered war memorials rather than texts aimed at strengthening the soldiers spiritually.

- World War I brought many new ways of commemorating those who died on the battlefield. The cult of the heroic dead, which also appears in state propaganda, has an impact on today's culture of memory. Already during the war years, both the state and the church tried to limit the commemoration of the heroic dead to an organized framework. The first step in commemorating heroes was the registration of the deceased, where the cause of death was indicated: died a heroic death. Bringing the dead home often encountered difficulties, so church communities held mourning services without burial. The beliefs of the various denominations regarding mourning were mixed, which resulted in restrictions on the commemoration of the dead on the part of the church. The World War I memorials fit into the national framework, and within that, the revisionist spirit. Monuments and speeches given at inaugurations and other ceremonies were characterized by the mythicization of the past, which also played an important role in the socialization of young people. The war memorial of the Reformed Church would have been the construction of the Reformed church in Mezőlaborc, which was never realized. In the territory of the Reformed Diocese of Abaúj, the war commemoration did not start until 1920. As a result, between 1920 and 1938, the largest number of heroic memorials, a total of 39, were produced. The appearance of irredentist elements intertwined with the idea of revision is characteristic of the era both at the memorials and at their inauguration ceremonies. In the time interval between 1939 and 1945, 29 monuments were made in the territory of the Reformed Diocese of Abaúj, of which 11 were from World War I. Between 1946 and 1988, three World War II memorials were made in the territory of the diocese. The low number of monuments can be traced back to the political system of the era. After the change of regime, therefore, the upswing in the construction of memorials can be observed again. Between 1989 and 2020, 40 new monuments were

inaugurated in Abaúj, which also reflect current anniversaries and events, such as the millennium or the 100th anniversary of the Trianon decision. The latter can also be observed in the culture of memory: in Abaúj, the commemoration of World War I is linked to Trianon, the consequences of which overrode the trauma of the war.



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