

Activating the Latent Angels: WSCF and the Magyar SCM (1895-1930)

"We make possible the more effective release of spiritual resources latent in the various movements as a result of sharing together our experiences and our faith." ¹

Henri-Louis HENRIOD

During my years as a student of ecumenical theology in the Bossey Ecumenical Institute in Switzerland, I made a research in the Genève archives of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), where I was looking for all the Hungarica (documents written by, to or about Magyars) embracing first the decades between 1895 till 1930. As a result, I found more than one hundred and thirty documents, mostly in English, but also in German, French and Magyar. They provide us with an invaluable source of knowledge and inspiration in a time when ecumenically minded Magyar and Central European students are looking for ancestors to learn from and roots to be nurtured by. We have to activate the latent angels, the spiritual resources in ourselves and in our history.

WSCF is considered the first ecumenical organisation of the world; some count the beginning of the ecumenical movement from 1895, the establishment of the Federation in Vadstena in Sweden. She has also been an important organisation in the academic field: WSCF is one of the first international student organisations as well. The founding Student Christian Movements (SCMs) were from North America (USA) and from Northern and Western Europe (United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden and Norway). The first general secretary of WSCF, John R. MOTT is among the leading evangelists and missionaries in the history of Western Christianity. He made extensive journeys around the globe, preaching in universities and organising SCMs. Surprising or not, in his first world tour in 1895 he immediately visited Central Europe, Wien and Budapest ².

¹ Letter of Henri-Louis HENRIOD to OLT Károly on 1 October, 1926 (1926/3)

² POTTER Philip – WIESER Thomas, *Seeking and Serving the Truth. The First Hundred Years of*

A Growing SCM

The first initiatives for interdenominational student work in Hungary were the *Bethlen Gábor Körök* (Bethlen Gábor Circles), established in 1901 by MEGYERCSY Béla and MIKLÓS Elemér³. Their members gathered for Bible Study Groups, social and cultural activities. When MACLEAN from the WSCF staff visited Hungary in 1904, he found such Bible Study Groups in many university cities. His visit inspired these groups to establish the Magyar SCM on 23 October 1904, her first chairperson being SZILASSY Aladár. This was, however, still only a movement at that time, and not a legal body. A further impetus was given to legally establish the Magyar SCM when MOTT visited Hungary again in 1909. VICTOR János, a young Reformed pastor, became the first travelling secretary of the new movement. The constitution of the Magyar SCM was approved a year later, when FORGÁCS Gyula was elected to be the first general secretary.

In 1908 WSCF started to publish *The Student World*, the first ecumenical journal of the world. The Magyar SCM took up the initiative, and started to publish her own ecumenical journal, *Diákvilág* (Student World) already in 1909, edited by VICTOR. The first important period of the Magyar SCM came to an end in 1914, with the outbreak of the First World War. Their last pre-war conference was in *Losonc* (today Lučenec in Slovakia) in 1914. During the war, they published the *Háborús Diákvilág* (Wartime Student World); and since the student generation was at war, they started to concentrate more on pupils, publishing *Az Erő* (The Power or The Strength) from 1917 on. Four years later, this magazine had a subscription list of more than three thousand people.

After the war, the movement showed signs of growth again. In the Summer Conference in 1921, three hundred participants were present, one third of them being women⁴. In 1924, the Magyar SCM was

³ For some data about the Magyar SCM, I also used a Master's paper: GYÓRFFY Eszter, *A budapesti egyetemi gyülekezetek története a XX. században* (The History of the University Chaplaincies in Budapest in the XXth Century). Budapest, 2003.

⁴ The SCM even had a women's secretary, BACHMANN Lili, who made sure that the WSCF women's magazine *Challenge* would be received in Hungary regularly.

⁵ "Jede Ungarische Universität hat ihre CSV Gruppe" (every Magyar university has its own SCM group), says MOJISOVICH Margit in her letter to Margit WRONG on 1 May, 1924 (1924/10).



already present in all the universities⁵, having twenty branches and a *Senior Friends Network* helping and supporting her work.

During these difficult years, WSCF helped the Magyar SCM to find its strength. The Magyar leaders put together an illustrated booklet⁶ about the economic conditions in Hungary in 1920. The publication did not fail to point out one of the core causes of the sufferings: the trauma of the Versailles Treaties, and its tragic consequences on the movement among which the significant increase in the number of refugee students from former Magyar territories. The booklet reached its aim: in 1920 WSCF paid the whole budget of the Magyar SCM, and they paid half of it in 1921. The sum was spent on employing a Budapest, a travelling and a women's secretary. WSCF also

⁶ *Some Facts about the Students of Budapest, the Capital of Hungary, Illustrating their Economic Conditions in 1920.* Budapest, 1920.; *A Survey of the Economic Conditions of the Students of Budapest.* Budapest, 1920.; *Housing and Food Conditions among Students in Budapest.* *The Student World* 1921/1. 24–26.

supported the publications of the Magyar SCM in 1920–21. All these served as emergency support for the movement dealing with a lost war and a major national tragedy.

A longer-term project of the Federation in Central Europe was the opening of three *Student Hostels* in three capitals. In 1921 WSCF and the American YMCA appointed C. H. LAW as Business Administrator for the Student Hostels at Praha, Wien and Budapest. He helped the Magyar SCM to open a hostel, *Diákok Háza* (Student House, at the address: Hársfa utca 59/b.) in 1921, for 110 male students. In 1923 the WSCF Women's Secretary, Margit WRONG, sent a considerable support for maintaining the *Women Students' Hostel* (established in 1921) with ten places for accommodation⁷. Later on, as the Magyar economy strengthened, some Senior Friends were even in the position to donate to WSCF, in that way changing the direction of support to a mutual exchange⁸.

Hungary was at the crossroads of the Federation's attention from the beginning. In the archives, several traces of movement visits can be found. There were three kinds of movement visits: lectures, participation in local events and exchange. On lecturing tours or *evangelistic campaigns*⁹ renowned and respected WSCF leaders and senior friends came to Hungary, to speak to the local Student Christian Movements, keeping their motivation and commitment high.

The second type of movement visit was the *participation*¹⁰ in the events and conferences of the national SCM. These provided opportunities for WSCF leaders to have an insight into the life and activi-

⁷ Interestingly enough, in 1928 the offices of the Magyar SCM moved to the same street (Üllői út 19.) where the official headquarters is situated now as well, be it in another building (Üllői út 24.).

⁸ HOLLÓS Pál supported the Federation with fifteen Pengős (currency) in 1927 and with the same amount also in 1928. See the letters between HOLLÓS Pál and Conrad HOFFMANN on 3 and 21 October, 16 and 21 December, 1927; and 16 and 29 August, 1928 (1927/17–18, 1927/25–26, 1928/15 and 17).

⁹ Movement visits to Hungary: MOTT (1895 and 1924), WILDER (1921), HENRIOD (1921 and 1922), WRONG (1921 and 1923), BIDGRAIN (1923 and 1924), RUTGERS (1923), GRAY (1924), HOFFMANN (1927) and KULLMANN (1928).

¹⁰ International participants in Magyar SCM events: GAY (appointed to the Summer Conference in 1921 but prevented by ill-health and financial reasons), ROUGEMONT (Staff Meeting in 1921), LEGATE and CHENG (Leader's Conference at Pápa in 1921). The Leader's Conference at Sárospatak in 1922 had also international guests.

ties of, in this case, the Magyar movement. The experience with international guests was so good that the Magyar SCM decided not to have a Summer Conference without foreign delegates.

Finally, the third type of movement visits were the *student exchanges*¹¹ among different SCMs. The evangelistic campaigns, the participation in national events and the student exchanges served as sources of first-hand information on the vivacity of the Magyar movement. Generally, these exchanges among SCMs also ensured the intellectual and spiritual blood-circulation within the constituencies of the Federation.

Magyar Participation in the Life of WSCF

Parallel to the movement visits, members of the Magyar SCM were actively involved in the life of the Federation even before the First World War. MAJOR László was one of the first Magyars to take part in a WSCF event, namely in the Liverpool Conference in 1912. VICTOR published the first Magyar article¹² in *The Student World* in 1913 on the various aspects of Magyar student life. The war years meant a major setback in the international activities of the Federation¹³, but after the war, the relations and the involvement got strengthened again¹⁴. The *Universal Day of Prayer for Students* (UDPS, started in 1898 as the first regular ecumenical prayer event) was celebrated in Hungary during the whole of the 1920s. In 1929, for example, the Magyar SCM sent a letter of greetings to the Genève office on that occasion¹⁵.

Soon, some leaders of the Magyar SCM gained a good reputation

¹¹ In 1928, WSCF facilitated the visit of four American students to Hungary, who were obviously Magyar émigrés: BÁRDOSY Matilda, FEHÉR Milton, KONTZ Emil and VARGA Zsigmond. See the Letter of Conrad HOFFMANN to HIRSCHLER Zoltán on 5 November, 1928 (1928/22).

¹² VICTOR János, *Aspects of Hungarian Student Life*. *The Student World* 1913/2. 58–67.

¹³ See VICTOR János, *The Hungarian Christian Student Movement and the War*. *The Student World* 1920/2. 45–51.

¹⁴ Magyar participants in WSCF events: VICTOR (Glasgow in 1920, *World Alliance to Promote International Friendship through the Churches* in Genève in 1921, *Life and Work* in Stockholm in 1925, *Faith and Order* in Lausanne in 1927, a visit to the WSCF Headquarters in Genève in 1927), MIKECZ Ödön (Elmau in 1922), OLT Károly (Leaders' Conference in Hardenbroek in 1927), SCHULEK Tibor (Hardenbroek in 1928), HOLLÓS Pál (a visit to the WSCF Headquarters in Genève in 1928), HILSCHER Zoltán (Swanwick in 1928), SZABÓ Irén and TÖRÖK István (Genève in 1929).

¹⁵ Letters of OLT Károly and the Bethlen Gábor Kör to WSCF on 17 February, 1929 (1929/3–4, answer: 1929/6–7)

in the Federation. VICTOR János, the “Magyar John R. MOTT”, together with BJÖRKQUIST, G. G. KULLMANN, LEO, Hanns LILJE and Tissington TATLOW, was appointed by the Executive Committee in Lake Mohonk in 1927 to be in the Preparatory Committee of the *European Senior Conference* in 1928. SCHULEK Tibor was invited to be a representative of the Federation in a pilgrimage and movement visit to the United States of America in the summer of 1929, which he had to refuse because of financial reasons.

In 1926, WSCF organised a *Forum de Genève*, which brought a huge profit to the Federation. SZÖRÉNYI L. Sándor and others took part in the event with their artwork in an art exhibition in the Rath Museum, while BARANYAI and SZÁNTÓ Dénes gave a concert¹⁶.

In the growing shade of racism, the *International Missionary Council* (IMC) and WSCF organised a meeting in Budapest in 1927, where a resolution against anti-semitism was passed: “We urge Christians everywhere to repentance for prejudice and persecution. We believe that all un-Christian treatment of the Jews and all race prejudice are great stumbling blocks to the acceptance of the Christian message.”¹⁷

VICTOR was asked to contribute to the issue of *The Student World* on the Jews in 1927. Indeed, an article was published in this issue on the Jewish question, but as author was only mentioned “a Hungarian University Student.”¹⁸ From the documents and WSCF publications it is obvious that the Federation was not silent in this testing case for Christian witness¹⁹.

The fifth *European Christian Endeavour Convention* was held in Budapest in August 1927, and WSCF was represented by posters and publications in the exhibition (for instance, issues of *The Student*

¹⁶ When SZÁNTÓ got ill in Switzerland, he was visited and supported by WSCF leaders in the hospital. BARANYAI offered to have a concert tour with his trio in the Netherlands and in Denmark a year later, but he was refused by HENRIOD, saying that financially it could turn out to be hazardous for the Federation.

¹⁷ *Resolution on Anti-semitism*. *The Student World* 1927/2. 192–193.

¹⁸ It may well have been VICTOR who wrote the article but was uneasy to give his name to it, or he asked another member of the Magyar SCM to analyse and interpret this highly sensitive and important issue. A Hungarian University Student, *Some of the Causes of Anti-Jewish Sentiment in Eastern Europe*. *The Student World* 1927/3. 284–286.

¹⁹ The Jewish question was tackled from time to time in *The Student World*. Another example: PARKES James, *The Jewish Problem in Eastern Europe*. *The Student World* 1930/4. 391–401.

World and Cantate Domino, the first ecumenical hymnal, published in 1924 by the Federation). Leaders of the Magyar SCM were among the organisers.

The Magyar SCM was asked to assist the *World Federation of Educational Associations* (WFEA) in preparing a Student Day in May 1928 in Budapest. They refused to help, and one of their main reasons was the following: “After the Romanian atrocities committed recently in Transylvania, public opinion would consider lectures on international good-will as mockery,”²⁰ as HIRSCHLER phrased it. A year later, however, the *International Student Confederation* (ISC) had its conference in Budapest, where PADÁNYI GULYÁS Béla was among the organisers.

It is clear from the archives that in the twenties the Magyar SCM was so actively participating in the life of WSCF, as only very few other movements. The Magyar student leaders were not only welcome in the conferences, but they were asked to represent the Federation in various events as official delegates and organisers. The value of the Magyar SCM originated not only from her activism, but also from her structures and organisational principles.

Ecumenical Character

From an ecumenical point of view, the Magyar SCM was a pioneer on the Magyar church scene, as well as in the European and global scene. Although originally she had been established as a Protestant interdenominational revival movement, she soon became a flagship of ecumenically open student work, especially in the years following the First World War. It might not be surprising, that Central Europe has been a pioneer in including Roman Catholics into the Federation. Apart from France, it was only in Austria, Czechoslovakia and Hungary that Roman Catholics were accepted as members in the SCMs in the 1920s²¹. Interconfessional encounter and dialogue was part of the daily routine of the organisation.

Not everyone was happy with such a setting, though. The first ecumenical crisis came when the *Budapest Reformed College*, finding the SCM too open towards Roman Catholics, deliberately broke con-

²⁰ Letter of HIRSCHLER Zoltán to Conrad HOFFMANN on 4 January, 1928 (1928/1)

²¹ POTTER Phillip – WIESER Thomas, *Seeking and Serving the Truth. The First Hundred Years of the World Student Christian Federation*. Genève, 1997. 87.

tact with the leadership, and became a spiritual movement on its own, organising a separate conference in 1921 in *Siófok* only for Calvinist-Reformed theology students. The crisis was solved in the end, thanks to the untiring efforts of the SCM leaders, by incorporating the group as a separate denominational branch of the Magyar SCM.

But most of the students considered the full involvement of all denominations natural and desirable²². In 1928, every second week confessional meetings were organised. Among the topics for the public discussion evenings we find explicitly ecumenical themes, like “The Confessional Question from the Christian Point of View” or “What are we Primarily: Hungarians or Christians?”²³

The second serious ecumenical crisis, however, came in 1928, when the *Magyar Református Diákok Soli Deo Gloria Szövetsége* (SDG, Soli Deo Gloria Reformed Student Federation, established in 1924) asked for affiliated membership in the *Young Men’s Christian Association* (YMCA). The YMCA immediately contacted her sister organisation, WSCF, and asked the opinion of the Federation and of her Magyar member movement, the ecumenically organised Magyar SCM, about the inquiry. The response of the Magyar SCM was very clear: “The admission of the Soli Deo Gloria Federation to the YMCA would not further the friendly relations between us and the Soli Deo Gloria,”²⁴ as HIRSCHLER, the general secretary, put it.

The opinion of WSCF was equally clear-cut, and went along the same line: “It is most desirable for the cause of the Kingdom of God that there should not be a number of different Christian organisations among students and young people, and I hope very much that there will not be a new National Federation of Protestant Students

²² In the Winter Conference of the Magyar SCM in 1928, apart from the common plenaries, there were separate confessional meetings for the three major denominations, with three different topics, taking into account the supposed different interests of the three student groups. On Sunday the three confessions went to their churches separately to celebrate the Eucharist.

²³ Sometimes humorous and self-critical attitudes were present, too, among the students. The Magyar SCM Winter Conference in 1928 had the title: “Hungarian Heathenism versus Hungarian Resurrection”. The three days had three different emphases: “On the Track of the Miraculous Deer”, “Iran and Turan” and “The Blood of the Lamb”. Two discussion circles were especially interesting in the event: “Heathen Elements in our Religious Life, Inborn Christianity in the Hungarian Soul” and “Debit and Credit of Irredentism”. Letter of SCHULEK Tibor to Francis P. MILLER on 12 February, 1928 (1928/3)

²⁴ Letter of HIRSCHLER Zoltán to Francis P. MILLER on 24 July, 1928 (1928/12)

but that our World's Student Christian Federation will be able to gather round its ideal most of the National Student Christian Movements as affiliated members, or create and maintain close contact with such organisations which do not feel they can subscribe to our aim and purpose. The interdenominational principles of the Federation must be safeguarded: the sole growth of our World Fellowship through decades and its present position and attitude, which have been respect and cooperation in growing constituencies of non-Protestant students, cannot be jeopardised.”²⁵ Henri-Louis HENRIOD (the second general secretary of WSCF, 1920–32) summarised with these words the ecumenical Credo of the international student Christian movement. The request of SDG for membership was rejected by the YMCA.

Membership in WSCF

But how and when did the Magyar SCM become a member of WSCF? In the course of history, WSCF has had three types of relations with national SCMs. Some of them were considered growing movements (today their name is *contact* movement), others were already in an official contact with the Federation, being corresponding movements (nowadays they are called *associated* members), while after a period they could become *affiliated* (full) members, following a decision made by the Federation's authorities. We have seen that the foundation of the Magyar SCM was inspired by WSCF²⁶. Henceforth, since its origins in 1904, the SCM Hungary had been a contact movement for the Federation. It is unclear, when it became an associated member, but it had this status in 1921 for sure, maybe even before the First World War. The affiliation for full membership came in several stages.

“I feel assured that in the course of half a year our movement will have arrived at such a stage as to correspond to the requirements of Federation membership,”²⁷ VICTOR wrote in 1921. He had to review his opinion, however, three months later: “Only by artificial haste

²⁵ Letter of Henri-Louis HENRIOD to HIRSCHLER Zoltán on 8 September, 1928 (1928/18)

²⁶ “We owe the very existence of our movement to the Federation.” VICTOR János, *Past Services and Future Tasks of the Federation: an Hungarian View*. The Student World 1925/4. 177.

²⁷ Letter of VICTOR János to Henri-Louis HENRIOD on 18 August, 1921 (1921/5)

²⁸ Letter of VICTOR János to Henri-Louis HENRIOD on 28 November, 1921 (1921/7)

might our Movement be in the right shape for admission within a few months,”²⁸ and he enlisted financial reasons, difficulties with the headquarters and the mentioned crisis with the Budapest Reformed College as reasons for postponement. HENRIOD personally came to check the situation and attended a Magyar SCM conference in 1922. He reported his experiences on the admission to the WSCF General Committee (today’s General Assembly or GA) in *Peking* (Beijing) in China which he deemed too early as well.

The second General Committee Meeting after the war was held in *High Leigh*²⁹ in the United Kingdom in 1924. On that occasion the Magyar SCM (represented by VICTOR) was accepted into affiliated membership in WSCF, being the seventeenth affiliated movement in the history of WSCF; and for long occupying a unique place in the European scene. “It will be a very real weakness in the (General Committee) meeting (in Mysore in India in 1928) if the General Secretary of the Hungarian Movement is not among the delegates since you represent the only Movement of any strength affiliated with the Federation in Central or Eastern Europe,”³⁰ as HENRIOD emphasized in 1927.

Cooperation in Central Europe

Surprisingly enough, already in the first half of the XXth century the Central European youth gatherings played a very important role in large-scale ecumenism (including Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant denominations) and in the ministry of post-war reconciliation. The greatest problem and challenge after the First World War was the stream of refugees all over Central Europe³¹, many of them being students. The *European Student Relief*, founded in 1920 by

²⁸ Apart from the sixteen affiliated member movements, from Central Europe two corresponding movements were represented: Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Among the participants from growing movements we also find Poland and Austria. Thus, it was the first official meeting of the Federation where four Central European countries were present. POTTER Philip – WIESER Thomas, *Seeking and Serving the Truth. The First Hundred Years of the World Student Christian Federation*. Genève, 1997. 75.

³⁰ Letter of Henri-Louis HENRIOD to OLT Károly on 15 December, 1927 (1927/24)

³¹ POTTER Philip – WIESER Thomas, *Seeking and Serving the Truth. The First Hundred Years of the World Student Christian Federation*. Genève, 1997. 63.

³² The delegation of the Magyar SCM was led by MIKECZ Ödön and HOLLÓS Pál.

WSCF, organised an important conference in 1921 in *Turnov* in Czechoslovakia³². A year later it was repeated in *Hungary*, in which Polish, Czech, Slovak, Magyar, Romanian, Yugoslav and even German students participated. There were not only Protestant, Orthodox and Roman Catholic participants, but also Jewish, Muslim and non-affiliated students. These were the first conferences which brought together students from Central and South Eastern Europe.

The other miraculous adventures at that time were the so-called *South-Eastern Europe Conferences (SEE)*, organised by WSCF. In the twenties they brought together young Poles, Czechs, Magyars, Austrians, Slovaks, and also Romanians and students from Yugoslavia and other Balkan States³³. The lecturers came in an equal number from the Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions. They were characterised by a well-balanced structure, but there were hot issues at stake, following the vicissitudes of the war that had seriously unbalanced the political situation in Central Europe.

In the first *SEE* Conference in *Sonntagsberg* in Austria in 1921, for example, following the request of the Magyar delegation, the conference could not express itself on the question of war. Hungary was in a delicate situation after the Versailles Treaties: two-thirds of the country got annexed to the newly formed neighbouring states. Consequently, millions of Magyars became citizens of others states, thus constituting one of the largest nations in Europe of which a large part was living as a minority. Hungary was in an uneasy, if not inimical relationship with all the neighbouring states. Speaking about international reconciliation under the banner of Christianity was rather scandalous from the point of view of the protagonists of the national case. The Magyar SCM was dancing on a cutting edge. The five Magyar participants in the conference had to justify themselves before the their fellow-students: "The new arrangement of frontiers

³³ The core countries included Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary and the Balkan States. One of the aims of the events was "to bring together representatives of the less developed movements in Eastern and South Eastern Europe and meet their special needs, not excluding of course a few representatives of the more advanced movements." This goal was in a sharp contrast with the Student Discussion Conferences to which only movements affiliated to the Federation were invited. See the Letter of Henri-Louis HENRIOD to VICTOR János on 5 January, 1923 (1923/1)

³⁴ Letter of DEME László, MAJOR László, MOJSISOVICH Margit, VICTOR János and VICTOR Zsófia to Henri-Louis HENRIOD on 21 May, 1921 (1921/2)

as imposed upon Hungary by her neighbours is irreconcilable with the demands of international justice and goodwill,”³⁴ DEME László, MAJOR László, MOJSISOVICH Margit, VICTOR János and VICTOR Zsófia stated in their declaration to the officers of the Federation.

The presence of the Magyar delegation at this conference, as they explained, was due to an appreciation of the power of Christ, transcending all these difficulties, and capable of uniting women and men of very different and even conflicting national points of view in loyalty and devotion to His Kingdom. They expressed their hope that the participants would be used by God Almighty to render the most valuable contribution towards the solution of the existing problems. The outcome was expected to be the growth of a general atmosphere of goodwill amongst all people of Central Europe.

As a possible solution, HENRIOD had the plan to divide the SEE Conferences into two: one for the Balkan States and another one for “Eastern and South Eastern Europe”³⁵. The Magyar SCM, on the contrary, requested that the boundaries of the conference would be drawn as wide as possible. “If only South Eastern Europe would be represented in a strict sense, half or even more than that of the delegates might come from countries the political relations of which to Hungary are constantly very bad.” The suggested countries to be invited were not only the Baltic States, Switzerland and Germany, but also Italy, the Netherlands, Denmark and Finland, in that way “widening the conference into a Central European affair”³⁶. Another important point which they made was that the problem of war and international relations be excluded from these conferences, because the movements in the region were not strong enough to feel competent and responsible to tackle questions relating to the political life in their countries.

It shows the graveness of the situation that in the second *SEE* Conference in *Česká Kubice* in Czechoslovakia in 1922 there were no official delegates from Hungary. The Federation had to react in order to safeguard her vocation in the international field: “We should do everything we can for preventing the formulating of any declaration on war or international relationship (we had too many of such reso-

³⁵ Letter of Henri-Louis HENRIOD to VICTOR János on 5 January, 1923 (1923/1)

³⁶ Letter of VICTOR János to Henri-Louis HENRIOD on 12 December, 1922 (1922/3)

lutions lately), unless it is unanimously requested by the conference,” HENRIOD promised in his above-mentioned letter when trying to involve the Magyar SCM again in the work of the subregion.

For the third SEE Conference in *Visegrád* in Hungary in 1923, the Magyar SCM, quite surprising considering the antecedents, suggested the topic “The International Sin”, dealing with the application of Christian principles to international problems. “There are several bitter international problems, but none so complicated as the problem of Hungary versus her neighbours. In the other problems either one nation is involved versus another or one state versus a group of its citizens. In this problem a whole group of nations is involved,”³⁷ was the opinion of VICTOR. Ecumenical sensitivity prevailed: the date of the event (the Easter holidays) was planned in such a way that Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox denominations would have an equal chance to be represented. An open and considering atmosphere towards the Greek Catholic Church was felt, too³⁸.

Similar SEE conferences were held in *Zakopane*³⁹ in Poland in 1924, in *Austria*⁴⁰ in 1927 and in *Luhačovice*⁴¹ in Moravia in Czechoslovakia in 1928. At the end of the decade the SEE Conferences were so prestigious that in the ninth SEE Conference in *Balatonfüred* in Hungary in 1929 we find even the famous Russian theologian and philosopher, Nikolai BERDIAEFF (Nicolas BERDYAEV) among the lecturers.

At a certain moment the Central European question came up even at the global level. In the General Committee Meeting in Mysore in India in 1928, two lectures were planned on Central and Eastern Europe: KULLMANN was to speak about the “Orthodox Countries” and Josef HROMÁDKA from Czechoslovakia about the “New Countries in Eastern Europe”. When they saw the program, the Magyar SCM immediately protested.

³⁷ Letter of VICTOR János to Henri-Louis HENRIOD on 14 February, 1923 (1923/3)

³⁸ Letter of BACHMANN Lili to Suzanne BIDGRAIN on 13 November, 1923 (1923/7)

³⁹ MAJOR László led the delegation of the Magyar SCM. The venue of the sixth and seventh conferences was not included in my sources.

⁴⁰ It also had an explicit and balanced interconfessional nature: equally one third of the delegates were Roman Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants, and the same was the rate among the lecturers. POTTER Philip – WIESER Thomas, *Seeking and Serving the Truth. The First Hundred Years of the World Student Christian Federation*. Genève, 1997. 85.

⁴¹ There were seven Magyar participants, OLT Károly leading the group.

The Magyar delegation had basically two problems with the formulation, a historical and a political one. The great historical error, according to them, was that “Hungary is not a new country, but the oldest of the present European states. Since 896 Hungary has existed in the Carpathian Basin as a state.” The political reason, on the other hand, was that “there is a very deep chasm between Hungary and Czechoslovakia,”⁴² and furthermore, HROMÁDKA had never been to Hungary, as HIRSCHLER pointed out in his letter. The Magyar SCM felt that HROMÁDKA was definitely not the person to speak about the student situation in Hungary.

The reactions of both HROMÁDKA and HENRIOD were generous: they mentioned the possibility to change the title of the lecture to “Old and New Countries in Eastern Europe.”⁴³ They also took seriously the mentioned reservations, so they offered VICTOR a possibility to speak about Hungary in the General Committee Meeting himself.

The Central European cooperation and its organs, the *South-Eastern Europe Conferences (SEE)* continued until well into the thirties, even in the shadow of the coming war. Albeit sometimes marked by tensions, they provided a meaningful model and a befit-

⁴² Letter of HIRSCHLER Zoltán to Francis P. MILLER on 24 July, 1928 (1928/12)

⁴³ Letter of Henri-Louis HENRIOD to HIRSCHLER Zoltán on 8 September, 1928 (1928/18)

⁴⁴ LEHTONEN Risto, *Story of a Storm. The Ecumenical Student Movement in the Turmoil of Revolution*. Helsinki, 1998. 17.

⁴⁵ The name of the Magyar Student Christian Movement changed twice during the decades. She was established as *Magyar Evangéliumi Keresztény Diákszövetség* (Magyar Evangelical Student Christian Federation, MEKDSz) in 1904. The Magyar SCM adopted a new name in 1925: *Magyar Diákok Pro Christo Szövetsége* (Magyar Student Pro Christo Federation), but they continued to use both names even in official papers. As all the Christian and student organisations, they were banned in 1948, during the Communist takeover in Hungary. After 1989 when freedom and democracy were re-instituted in Central Europe, MEKDSz got re-established as well. They sought contact with WSCF, but the ecumenical scene had changed in the meantime, because in 1947 the evangelical line of the students left WSCF and started the *International Fellowship of Evangelical Students* (IFES). The new MEKDSz felt closer to this group, maintaining an evangelical, non-denominational line herself, and joined IFES in the early nineties. The ecumenically minded students, on the other hand, again inspired by WSCF, re-established and re-affiliated the Magyar SCM to the Federation in 1995, under the name *Keresztény Ökumenikus Diákegyesület* (KÖD, Magyar Ecumenical Student Christian Movement). The relationship between the two organisations is occasional but friendly, and both of them look to the previous MEKDSz as their ancestor, from the time when evangelicals and ecumenicals, although not always without conflicts, could still be in the same student movement.

ting methodology for international and ecumenical dialogue in the subregion and in the continent. And last but not least, they “mobilized the best minds for ecumenical discussions on critical issues.”⁴⁴

A Handful of Pioneers

As has been shown above, the Magyar SCM⁴⁵ is one of the first movements of the Federation. She was among the first ten SCMs that were contact movements for WSCF (since 1904), and she was one of the first twenty SCMs to become affiliated with the Federation (since 1924). The Magyar SCM was among the first two affiliated movements, if not the first one, where not only open-minded but deliberately *full-scale ecumenism* was an everyday praxis.

The cooperation of the countries of Central Europe also has a long tradition, dating back to 1921. Since then, in spite of the political differences, a strong tradition has been created to build and maintain friendship, dialogue and appreciation between the nations living side by side in this part of the world. Although interrupted by the Second World War and the decades of Socialist dictatorship, the cooperation got revived in the form of a subregion (WSCF *Central Europe Subregion*, CESR) in 2001.

To understand the role of WSCF and the SCMs in activating the latent angels of their time, let me finish with the words of VICTOR János, the founding father of the Magyar SCM: “All of us are far yet from being able definitely to mould the mind and the attitude of our respective peoples. We represent just a handful of pioneers, who will have to work hard and patiently, before they can really represent a large and influential element in their country’s life.”⁴⁶ The result is to come generations later.

Suggested Reading

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⁴⁶ Letter of VICTOR János to Henri-Louis HENRIOD on 21 May, 1921 (1921/2)

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