

László Gonda, *The Service of Evangelism, the Evangelism of Service: The influence of John R. Mott, Hendrik Kraemer, Willem A. Visser 't Hooft and Johannes C. Hoekendijk on the Development of the Understanding of Mission in the Reformed Church in Hungary (1910-1968)*, Mission 48, Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum 2008, 245 p., ISBN 978-90-239-2384-8, price € 23,90.

It is an interesting enterprise to investigate the meaning of 'mission' in Hungary in the first half of the 20th century (1910-1968) and to find out what could have been the influence of the ecumenical movement here. The understanding of 'mission' was changing during that period of time. When several European countries were involved in worldwide colonisation, Hungary was part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. The Reformed Church of Hungary had no opportunity to send missionary workers abroad then. Therefore at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century 'mission' in the Reformed Church of Hungary was understood as a service to the Reformed within and outside the borders of the country (*Diaspora*), in order to build up new Reformed communities, to support their own Protestant culture, and to strengthen Reformed Confession and Hungarian national identity.

In the first three decades of 20th century a new understanding of 'mission' was growing, mainly due to the work of the revivalists Aladár Szabó and Gyula Forgács and the very influential bishop László Ravasz. The influence of the radically theocentric Barthian Sándor Virágh and of Jenő Sebestyén, who was an adherent of the current that sought inspiration in historical Calvinism, was less. Now the meaning of mission was defined as 'proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and promoting the Kingdom of God' (Evangelization). This was the first major change in the understanding of 'mission'. The second alteration was that mission was described as having two branches: 'Belmisszió' (inner mission) and 'Külmisszió' (foreign mission to the heathen and to the Jews). The latter form of mission was scarcely present in the life of the Reformed Church of Hungary, and it had little importance.

After the Second World War the situation changed again. Hungary now belonged to the European states aligned with the USSR, and again a paradigm shift took place. The new situation was theologically interpreted as God's judgement against the sins of the church. In this view communism was the instrument in God's hand to correct the church. Mission was seen now as a form of social and political diaconate. *Diakonia* (Service) was made criterion of Christian mission and its aim was described as service to the world in order to create a just society and a peaceful life.

The Hungarian revolution of 1956 made it clear however, that this ideal of building up a just and peaceful society was an illusion. The membership of the church experienced the developments between 1948 and 1956 as a growing ecclesial dictatorship and one could say, that the concept of the 'serving church' supported in a way the new political regime. An important question is, in what way the ecumenical movement contributed to all these developments of the understanding of mission in the Hungarian Reformed Church.

The Hungarian theologian László Gonda (b. 1971) wrote his dissertation on this subject and defended it in Utrecht in 2008. He takes his starting point in 1910, the year of the famous World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh [the '*fons et origo*' of the modern

Missionary Movement] and he ends his study in the year 1968, when the 4th Assembly of the World Council of Churches took place in Uppsala.

Gonda investigated successively the influence of four selected theologians: John R. Mott (1865-1955), Hendrik Kraemer (1888-1965), Willem A. Visser 't Hooft (1900-1985) and J.C. Hoekendijk (1912-1975). It is not so clear to me why he choose precisely these four men. Was it because they are all exponents of the rising ecumenical movement? The conclusion of his extensive investigation is that he gives John R. Mott a powerful, but not decisive, influence on the first paradigm shift. His books and articles were partly translated in the Hungarian language, he visited Hungary various times and he had many personal contacts, (especially between 1909 and 1930). He can be seen as a theologian who played an important role in the first reorientation on the theology of mission in Hungary, whereas J.C. Hoekendijk influenced the second paradigm shift, as the Hungarian Church leadership used (and misused) his secular vision on mission in its developing a new missionary concept of the serving church.

Hoekendijk's influence after 1950 was not a direct one. The issue of how Hoekendijk saw mission was no longer on the Hungarian agenda and we don't have any evidence or documented material after 1948. But Hoekendijk's influence on the Uppsala 1968 wcc Conference, which defined the church as a function of the apostolate, was very important and influential. This conference was much publicised in Hungarian church magazines and theological periodicals: through these the ideas of Hoekendijk were known in Hungary.

The investigation furthermore reveals that the two other theologians exerted less influence. Although Willem A. Visser 't Hooft, as the first General Secretary of the wcc held a central position in the ecumenical field, he did not have any direct influence on the development of the understanding of mission. After the Second World War he first supported, with his authority, the mainstream of the Hungarian Reformed Church under the communist dictatorship, which accepted the ecclesio-political context of the ruling regime. Later, however, he changed his mind and put himself on the side of the opponents of the ruling system.

Hendrik Kraemer, the author of *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, was very influential indeed as a missionary theologian in the first part of the 20th century. Therefore Gonda wanted to find out what his impact in Hungarian theology would have been. The outcome was rather disappointing. Although a drawing [by Gábor Kustár] of Kraemer is shown to us on page 109, Gonda concludes that apparently Kraemer was not at all influential or even interested in Hungary. As a director of the Ecumenical Institute Bossey he met representatives of the Hungarian Reformed Church at several meetings, but he did not pay much attention to their backgrounds. And the other way round: his work was also seen as not so relevant for the Hungarian situation.

Gonda has been thorough in his research. The chapter on mission in the ecumenical movement gives an impression of its history and provides a summary of all important ecumenical conferences on mission, but it has to be admitted that no Hungarians were present there, except from the Edinburgh 1910 Conference. The Reformed Church of Hungary was for the first time present at the New Delhi 1961 Conference and also at the Uppsala 1968 Assembly. Both times bishop Tibor Bartha was one of the representatives. But Hungary was under communist dictatorship in those years and the Hungarian church

leadership could in fact only represent what was in accordance with the ruling system. Tibor Bartha was one of the founders of the new 'theology of the serving church', unfortunately meaning that serving God's will happens to be service to the neighbour (i.e. the building up of the Socialist order).

He gave this view especially in a so-called '*Fraternal Message*'. But many of the pastors and church members at the grassroots did not agree with this official view at all, and choose a *modus vivendi* of ignoring the official guidelines and theology, sometimes to the extent of not even reading them. I can affirm this from my own experience. I attended the 1984 Zwingli Congress in Debrecen, where Tibor Bartha was still the chairman. Times were changing. It was remarkable, that nobody even listened to him. While Bartha was speaking people were talking to each other about other more interesting things. It was obvious that the man had lost his authority.

In my view the chapter describing the paradigm shifts in the understanding of mission in the Reformed Church in Hungary is very interesting. It shows the development of the key concepts of *Diaspora*, Evangelization and Service. Although the three concepts fundamentally differ from each other, all three represent a way of theologizing that is very deeply influenced by the actual situation of the church. It seems to me, that it is also a bit painful to look back at your own difficult history. Gonda does so honestly, accurately and in a balanced way. — MARGRIET GOSKER, Venlo, The Netherlands