

Álmos Ete Sípós, *'Bittet den Herrn der Ernte'*. Gyula Forgács (1879-1941). *Pionier der ungarischen reformierten Inneren Mission*, Mission 41, Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum 2007. 324 p., ISBN 978-90-2392-2220-9, price € 27.50.

On June 12, 2007 Álmos Ete Sípós got his PhD at the Utrecht University. Prof. dr. J.A.B. Jongeneel acted as his promotor. His thesis will be discussed in the following review.

During the 19th century there were strong influences of theological rationalism and liberalism on the Hungarian Reformed Church, its theological faculties and its local churches. One of the pioneers of the Hungarian renewal movement, who wanted to resist liberalism and to build up the Reformed Church again in a biblical and confessional way was Gyula Forgács (1879-1941). Thanks to the studies of the Hungarian Pastor Álmos Ete Sípós, who defended his thesis at Utrecht University, we now know a lot more of this interesting man, who was responsible for the new Hungarian Mission Law in 1933.

The author starts his study with some historical background information on Hungary to begin with the revolutionary year 1848, the rebellion against the Habsburg sovereignty, which was not successful. The First World War also ended with a disaster, for Hungary lost a great deal of its inhabitants, including one million members of the Hungarian Reformed Church, because of the fact that the Trianon Treaty took away two-thirds of the country's territory. These dark times were followed by not only the Second World War but also by the Communist dictatorship, which ended in 1989. In those difficult times theological investigations and publications were hardly possible nor allowed. It is therefore quite understandable that most of Sípós' research is quite new for us Western-Europeans.

In the first part of his study he offers us an interesting historical, political and also theological description of the years 1848-1945, followed by a sketch of the life and work of Gyula Forgács. In the second part Sípós tells us about his theology, his spirituality, his theological development and his influence on Hungarian theology. What does he mean with the terms 'Mission', 'Inner Mission', 'Mission Abroad' and 'Comprehensive Approach'? And why is he so focussed on the mission among the Jews? It is clear that Forgács does not want to make a sharp distinction between the inner mission and the mission abroad. They are both components of the one and the same mission, ordered by Jesus Christ, who said: 'Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest' (Luke 10:2). So he considers both sides of the mission as complementary, while prayer was in his view one of the most important tools of Christian life. The international awakening movements of the 19th Century were great influences on the thought of Forgács, fed by the inspiring views of the German Pietist Johann Wichern, the Dutch Pietist Ottho Heldring, the Dutch Neo-Calvinist Abraham Kuyper, the Scottish Professor Alexander Duff, the German theologian Gustav Warneck and the famous American evangelist John Mott. Forgács in his life tried to build up a bridge between the living Missionary Organisations, the traditional Reformed Church of Hungary and the local churches of his time, which were weakened by liberalism and rationalism. In the third part of his book Sípós offers us a critical analysis and a final evaluation, followed by a summary in Dutch and in Hungarian.

As a child Gyula was baptised in the Roman Catholic Church (1879). His father Mihály Firtusz became Reformed (1881) in order to divorce more easily from his wife Julianna Czirók. Young Gyula was raised by his father, who changed his name into Forgács in 1899.

Gyula started his studies in theology at the Reformed Theological Academy in Budapest, where he was strongly influenced by Aladár Szabó and some other members of the staff, who supported the new Movement of the Inner Mission, which had its roots in Scottish Puritanism and in pietistic Germany (J.H. Wichern). As a student Forgács showed great interest in several international youth movements. In 1898 he attended the Word Conference of the YMCA in Basel and in 1902 (not 1901 as said on p. 2) he met John Mott at the Sorø-Meeting in Denmark of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF). With a scholarship of the Free Church of Scotland he studied in 1901-1902 at New College in Edinburgh. Back in Hungary Forgács started many missionary activities and published many articles in several papers supporting the new movements of the Inner Mission. He was in the Board of seven or more Youth and Missionary Organisations, and especially the missionary activities among the Jews had his heart.

When he came into his thirties he changed his aims. He would no longer only support the independent activities of the Inner Mission Movement outside the Church, but he decided also to work for the renewal of the Church itself and to build up bridges between the Church and the Missionary Organisations. He became a pastor, at first in Péczel (near Budapest, 1910-1924) and later on in Sárospatak in the North of Hungary (1924-1933), with his beloved wife Piroska Pongrácz on his side. She was not only his wife, but also his colleague and she did a lot of work in both communities. In my opinion Sípos underestimates the work of his wife and of the other women (Irén Kunst, Mária Molnár and Irma Pauer) by giving the impression, that Forgács did everything himself, which was not the case. Here you see the problem of pastor-centered ideology, which is still a problem in Reformed Hungary nowadays.

In both communities Forgács and his staff realised an Inner Missionary Program, which was very special in those times. In 1920 he organised in Péczel a Conference for a group of 51 persons (among them 34 pastors), who wanted to reform the traditional Church by the means of prayer, praise and social support of the poor. He supported his wife who focussed on the work for children, youth and women and those who were socially and mentally in need of help. He founded the *Péczeli Kör* inspired as he was by the Dutch initiative of O.G. Heldring, who founded the Society of the Christian Friends, *het Genootschap der Christelijke Vrienden*. In the same year the *Péczeli Kör* started also a new newspaper called: *Reformáció*. He wrote not only a lot of articles but also his standard work for inner mission and pastoral care: *A belmisszió és a cura pastoralis kézikönyve*, which was published in 1925. The book became very famous and was surprisingly passed to all the local churches that belonged to the Reformed Church of Hungary. How Forgács made this possible is one of my questions, because — as Sípos tells us — there was also a lot of opposition against him and his work. JenÅ Sebestyen for example blamed him firmly, saying that the result of his efforts would finally cause a loss of church identity or even a schism (p. 46). Forgács' life and work draw certainly the attention of the General Synod, but he did not succeed in his attempt to reform the whole Reformed Church in Hungary, because of this sort of opposition, lack of interest and bureaucracy. But Forgács still was given an important task, as the General Synod asked him to prepare a new Mission Law, which was finally accepted in 1933. This was a big change in Hungarian Church life. From now on the missionary task was no longer related to organisations outside the church, but it was now accepted as a task of the church as a whole.

I am very grateful for this fine and interesting study that Álmos Ete Sípos has offered us on Hungarian missiology, which enriches our knowledge after the earlier study of Anne-Marie Kool, *God moves in a mysterious way* (Zoetermeer 1993). Some questions however are still bothering me. Did his little son die at the age of eight (p. 73) or at the age of nine (p. 136)? He was born as Gyula Firtusz. His name was changed by his father in 1899 because of opportunistic reasons, when Gyula was already 20 years old. How is that possible at that age? Was his sister Margit also Roman Catholic? Was the name of his sister Janka, who stayed with her mother after the separation also Forgács (p. 135)? That would be very strange. And I still have another question. Although Forgács worked in a period of flourishing ecumenical activity, he was no pioneer of the ecumenical movement (p. 143). Did he or did he not follow the activities of the ecumenical movement, was he at least a bit interested in Faith and Order and Life and Work (Edinburgh 1920, Lausanne 1927) and how did he think about it? Or was the Hungarian Reformed Church his only focus?

Finally I have to be a bit critical. This Study needs a finishing touch, for there is a lot of redoubling in it. Two times it is written that Forgács died during his prayers, on p. 91 and again on p. 132. Three times it is mentioned that Forgács attended the World Student Conference in Sorø, on p. 2, p. 57 and again on p. 182. Sípos quotes the same sentence of Sándor Bíró on p. 28 and again on p. 89 in a different way. That *A belmisszió* is the standard work of Forgács has been mentioned at least seven times. The foundation of *Keresztény Ifjúsági Egyesület* we find on p. 36 and again on p. 40. I am aware of the great disappointment that the Trianon Treaty caused for the Hungarian people, but is it really necessary to mention it more than ten times? The index of names is far from complete. There is neither an index of subjects nor an index of scripture references. A number of small mistakes can be corrected in the Hungarian Edition. On p. 9 footnote 38 the name of Stephen Neill is incorrectly spelled. On page 40 the correct name of the Journal should appear, which is: *De Reformatie*. On p. 195 footnote 127 the word '*Zendingswetenschap*' should be corrected. On p. 274 the correct title is: *Lelki próba. Imák, elmélkedések és tanácsok az ur asztalához*. Sípos explains on p. 67 footnote 84 that he will use the spelling Péczel for good reasons, but he writes Pécel on pp. 180, 186, 228, 264. All this can be easily corrected and it does not spoil my gratitude for his work. — MARGRIET GOSKER, Venlo, The Netherlands.