

THE DUTCH CHURCHES AND TRIANON

The end of the First World War

Towards the end of the First World War, the kingdom of Hungary fell apart.¹ Years of tension between the different ethnic groups finally came to a head. Serbs, Slovaks and others seized their chance and revolted, with or without the support of the Entente. On October 17, 1918, the Prime Minister of Hungary, Count István Tisza (1861–1918), conceded defeat in the war. The Czech National Council proclaimed the Czechoslovak Republic on October 28, and on October 29 the Croatian parliament in Zagreb declared that Croatia would sever all constitutional ties with Austria and Hungary and form an independent Slavic state with Serbia and Slovenia. On October 30, the Slovakian National Council agreed to join the Czech Republic and in Vienna a new state was proclaimed, the Republic of German-Austria, separate from all the other countries of the former Habsburg monarchy. All of this happened within a few days. Events quickly unfolded and colorful chaos reigned everywhere in this once mighty empire; pre-war Hungary was in danger of being destroyed.

In Budapest, where there had been turbulence for months, the revolution reached its decisive phase at the end of October. On the night of October 23, 1918, the National Hungarian Council was formed under the leadership of Count Mihály Károlyi (1875–1955). One week later, on October 31, King Charles IV (1887–1922), the successor of King Franz Joseph (1830–1916), appointed Károlyi as Prime Minister. The former Prime Minister, Count István Tisza, was murdered that same day in his own house by a group of soldiers. Rightly or wrongly, many held him responsible for this fateful war. Soon afterwards, the king lost his crown, but not his life. He abdicated on November 13, and on November 16, 1918, Hungary became an independent republic.

Prime Minister Károlyi wanted to exclude Austria from negotiations with the victors of the war hoping for a more favorable outcome, but on 13 November 1918, the French commander-in-chief, general Franchet d'Esperey, imposed very onerous conditions on Hungary: the army had to be largely disbanded, with

¹ Romsics, Ignác, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century*. Budapest 2010. Second edition. London, 2009. Mihály Károlyi and István Bethlen. MacMillan, Margaret, *Paris 1919. Six Months that changed the World*. London 2019. 265–278. Older versions of this article were published previously. See Aalders, Maarten J. “Útban Trianon felé. A holland egyházak magatartása [On the way to Trianon. The conduct of the Dutch Churches]”, = *Református Szemle. Az Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület, a Királyhágómelléki Református Egyházkerület és az Evangélikus–Lutheránus Egyház hivatalos lapja* 111, 2018, 2, 203–219. Idem, “De Nederlandse protestantse kerken onderweg naar het Verdrag van Trianon (1920)”, = *Documentatieblad voor de Nederlandse Kerkgeschiedenis na 1800* 42, 2019, 90, 61–77. The version here presented is a chapter of my book *Dutch and Hungarian Protestants*, that will be published in 2021.

French, Serbian and Romanian troops occupying large parts of Hungary and Czechoslovakia taking over the remaining Slovakian territories. The combination of 1.4 million returning (injured) soldiers, many war widows, orphans and a growing stream of refugees had dramatic consequences. Also, many ex-prisoners of war, mainly returning from the Soviet Union, sought refuge in Budapest. One of them was Béla Kun (1886-1938), who converted to communism during his imprisonment.

In this chaotic situation Hungary sought protection wherever it could.² The proposal was to integrate Hungary into the British Empire. The Hungarian Academy of Sciences appealed to leading scholars in the Western world not to allow Hungary to be torn apart. Prime Minister Károlyi sent a prominent feminist to Switzerland to contact the Entente as a sign of his progressive attitude. They also turned to the Netherlands. A telegram was sent to Queen Wilhelmina and numerous other prominent Dutch people. A delegation of fourteen people of different denominations was sent to the Netherlands. The connection between the telegram and the delegation is unclear. Hungarian press reports indicate that the plan for the delegation was first suggested by János Victor Jr. (1888–1954). My guess is that the plan was embraced by the churches.³

Not everything is clear, but both telegram and delegation fit perfectly into the picture sketched by Margaret MacMillan: the Hungarian government tried to put pressure on the Entente to protect Hungary against the territorial wishes of its enemies.⁴ The French, in particular, were extremely hostile. They wanted to create a counterweight to Germany, and this did not fit with a strong Danube monarchy, because both the German Empire and the Austro-Hungarian monarchy had worked together during the war. The French allowed the Serbs to move north into Hungarian territory, the Czechs to take over Slovakia and the Romanians to move westwards, beyond Transylvania. The main concern for the Hungarians was Transylvania, which was coveted by the Romanians. Transylvania, which made up more than a third of the kingdom of Hungary, was closely intertwined with Hungarian history and was rich in raw materials.

The Netherlands as an ally?

On November 28, 1918, Dutch newspapers reported that the Protestant churches of Hungary had made an urgent appeal to Queen Wilhelmina.⁵ They implored her, by telegram, to do everything in her power to prevent an impending disaster in Hungary. A similar telegram was sent to churches, church leaders and influential politicians in the Netherlands and several European countries. The

² MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 2019. 267–268.

³ See for instance *8Orai Újság*, December 4, 1918 and other newspapers. I thank Orsolya Réthelyi (ELTE) for her help.

⁴ MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 2019. 267–268.

⁵ For instance, “De Hongaarsche Protestanten aan de Koningin”, = *Algemeen Handelsblad* November 28, 1918.

Hungarian churches worked closely together with the Hungarian government.⁶ The telegram read as follows:

“S. Budapest. Külügyminisztérium,

The Protestant churches of the republic of Hungary numbering four million of adherents implore the protection of their brethren in Holland against threatening danger of dismemberment; the eventual disruption of the country, especially the loss of south-eastern Hungary with her twelve hundred thousand protestants, would strike a death blow to the vitality of these churches and thereby would rob the newly forming democracies of the most valuable moral and spiritual forces. For four centuries these churches served and suffered as the farthest bulwark of western Protestantism in the East of Europe. Now it is the turn of the western churches to rescue the future vitality of these churches for the great tasks awaiting them.

Protestant churches in Hungary.”

Shortly after this telegram the delegation of the Hungarian churches came to Holland. Strangely enough, there was little mention of this in the Dutch press.⁷ Neither the arrival of the delegation in the Netherlands, nor the members of the delegation, were reported.⁸ However, both Jenő Sebestyén and Géza Antal kept notes of the visit.⁹ And in November 1919 Antal wrote an official report, I as-

⁶ The telegram was sent by the Foreign Office and signed by the Protestant Churches in Hungary.

⁷ See the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, December 6, 1919, about the departure of the delegation from Budapest.

⁸ See Sípos, Almos Ete, “*Bittet den Herrn der Ernte*”. *Gyula Forgács (1879–1941). Pionier der ungarischen reformierten Inneren Mission*. Zoetermeer, 2007. 70–71. See also Pont, Johannes Wilhelm, “De Wereldbond. Overzicht”, = *Internationaal Christendom. Orgaan van de Nederlandsche Afdeling van den Wereldbond tot het bevorderen van een goede Verstandhouding tusschen de Volken door de Kerken* 4, 1919, [hereinafter *Internationaal Christendom*] 69–79. On behalf of the Hungarian Calvinist Church: G. Antal, Pápa; G. Forgács, Péczel; A. György, Tiszapéterfalva; E. Miklós, Pápa; J. Pongrácz, Pápa; E. Sebestyén, Boedapest; G. Takaró, Boedapest; J. Victor sr, Boedapest; J. Victor jr., Boedapest. On behalf of the Lutheran Church J. Pelényi, Boedapest; on behalf of the Unitarian Church G. Boross en St. Györffy, Kolozsvár; on behalf of the Baptist Church A. Csopják, Boedapest, and R. Scheffer, Boedapest. Often Hungarian names are “translated”: for instance: E. Miklós is Ödön Miklos, E. Sebestyén is Jenő Sebestyén. I use the names as written in the Dutch article.

⁹ Ráday Levéltár Budapest, C/68, Archive of J. Sebestyén, box 1. The handwritten version contains notes from 14 December 1918–10 January 1919. A typed version stops at December 30, 1918. The handwriting of Sebestyén in these notes is difficult to read. The notes of Antal are in the Dunántúli Református Egyházkerület Levéltára (Pápa), Coll. Antal Géza, box 5, *Letters and writings*. The first and the last page are missing. The report starts at December 13, 1918 and ends

sume it was sent to the General Konvent [Egyetemes Konvent] of the Hungarian Reformed Church.¹⁰

The delegation stayed in the famous hotel *De Twee Steden* in The Hague, which functioned as their base. They had meetings with, among others, former Prime Minister A. Kuyper and his daughters; professor H. Bavinck (Free University Amsterdam), the politicians W.F. Idenburg, H. Colijn, Th. Heemskerck, A.F. de Savornin Lohman and H.A. van Karnebeek; professor S.D. van Veen (University Utrecht) and Hugo Visscher (University Utrecht), and with J. A. Cramer and J.W. Pont, who at that time were very active in the ecumenical movement. In short, they met with numerous well-known Protestant Christian leaders. It seems that the members of the delegation did not constantly work together, but used their own network, meeting up with each other intermittently. Antal and Sebestyén made several visits together.

The Queen

But who could help the Hungarians? Certainly not the Queen. It is noteworthy that Antal made several attempts to have a meeting with the Dutch queen. In this context it is important to realize that the position of the Dutch queen cannot be compared to that of the (former) Hungarian king. In 1848 the situation in the Netherlands had changed, as can be summarized in the words: the king is inviolable, the ministers are responsible. From a constitutional point of view, the queen had no political power; how much influence she exerted behind the scenes during these years is unknown. But the Hungarians, then and later, saw Queen Wilhelmina as the highest authority in the Netherlands and may have been mistaken about the extent of her power. Antal's hope for a meeting was unsuccessful anyway. Queen Wilhelmina did send court preacher W.L. Welter though, who listened to Antal for three quarters of an hour and promised to convey his words to the queen.¹¹ Later that year he would meet the queen, when he was in the Netherlands to participate in a conference of the World Alliance for promoting International Friendship through the Churches.¹²

on January 8, 1920. Sometimes there are differences between the notes of Antal and of Sebestyén concerning the dates. [hereinafter *Notes*]

¹⁰ An official report of Antal is dated November 13, 1919, Dunántúli Református Egyházkerület Levéltára (Pápa), Coll. Antal Géza, box 5, *Letters and writings*. [hereinafter *Report*]

¹¹ Antal, *Notes*, January 7, 1919, 11 and 12.

¹² See later.

The politicians

If the queen was in effect a lame duck, politicians could not do much either. The Netherlands was in a difficult and vulnerable position.

The attitude of Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), Minister of State, must have been frustrating for Sebestyén and Antal. Shortly after their arrival they visited him, but they realized he was poorly informed about the situation in Eastern Europe and the Hungarian tragedy. A few days later his daughter Johanna Kuyper came to apologize for his behavior.¹³ They could not count on his support for the Hungarian cause as they had hoped. Kuyper was not as healthy and bright as he used to be, she told them. This was confirmed when they read Kuyper's column the next day in *De Standaard*, his own newspaper.¹⁴ He expressed the hope that the delegation would be warmly received in the Netherlands, but he doubted whether it would achieve its goal. He also felt that the almost three million Romanians then living in Transylvania could not ultimately be separated from Romania. Maybe a part of Transsylvania would be preserved for Hungary, he wrote.

While Kuyper was fairly pessimistic, the Minister of Foreign Affairs H.A. van Karnebeek (1874–1942), who had also received the telegram, felt powerless, as is apparent from the Acts of the Dutch Senate. The members H.H. van Kol, H. Polak and D. van Embden had asked him to do something about the fate of the Jews in Galicia.¹⁵ It was not a question of understanding, a question of courage, or a lack of diligence, according to his reply. It was more that the need to be careful compelled the government to refrain from “interfering in the internal affairs of other countries.”¹⁶ Moreover, there were countless others who had complaints, he said. Telegrams and letters came to him from several groups who felt they were the victims of injustice. In this context, Van Karnebeek mentioned the Armenians and the Protestant churches in Hungary. And while he could express solidarity with Van Kol as a human being, he felt that the Senate should not encourage the Dutch government to do anything which could get the Netherlands into trouble. He reiterated this stance during a subsequent meeting with Sebestyén and Antal.¹⁷

In this context it is important to consider the precarious situation of the Netherlands after the armistice.¹⁸ On November 10, 1918, the day before the armistice, the German Emperor Wilhelm II had fled to the Netherlands, where he was granted political asylum. Two days later, without notifying the Entente

¹³ Sebestyén, *Notes* (typed version), December, 12 or 13 1918 (not dated, page 2) and December 17, 1918, 3.

¹⁴ Kuyper, Abraham “De Hongaarsche deputatie”, = *De Standaard* December 18, 1918.

¹⁵ *Acts of the Senate [Handelingen Eerste Kamer]*, December 19, 1918.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Antal, *Report*, January 2 or 3, 1919, 10; Sebestyén, *Report* (typed), 11, mentions the date of this visit 30 December 1918.

¹⁸ See de Waele, Maarten, “Nasleep”, In. Bossenbroek, Martin Philip; Kruisooop, J.B.C (eds.), *Vluchten voor de groote oorlog. Belgen in Nederland 1914–1918*. Amsterdam, 1988. 69–76.

in advance, the government granted permission for the retreat of approximately 70,000 German soldiers who wanted to return home from Belgium via the Netherlands. Thus, they escaped captivity. These developments led to fierce protests from the Allies, not least because the Germans had returned to their homeland laden with the spoils of war. Belgium was furious, French newspapers pointed to numerous other controversial Dutch decisions since 1914. For Belgium, this was reason to exploit as much as possible the annexationist sentiments which had been dormant for years. Belgium for instance wanted a military occupation of Limburg. When this demand was not met by the important Allied partners, England and the United States, Belgium agreed with a formal protest against the Dutch government. In other words: the request of the Hungarian Protestant churches came at a time when the Netherlands needed all its diplomatic talents to keep the Belgians at bay.

The churches

A. Kuyper was not only editor-in-chief of *De Standaard*, but also of the ecclesiastical weekly publication *De Heraut*. More than a week after the afore mentioned telegram was published in the press, on December 8, 1918, he used *De Heraut* to draw attention to the state of emergency in Hungary. “The process of dissolution of nationalities, through which the most Calvinistic parts of Hungary will be torn apart, threatens the Reformed Churches of Hungary with the most serious loss”, he stated.¹⁹ But he also wanted to know what could be done about it, because the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands did not have any political influence. US President Woodrow Wilson’s proclamation of the principle of nationality, turned out to be a disaster for states and Churches. For the Dutch Reformed Church [de Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk], this was a serious warning. Should the Netherlands ever experience a revolution like the one in Austria-Hungary, this church in particular could be painfully impacted as it was still dependent on the state.

A few weeks later, Kuyper was even more skeptical, not about Wilson’s politics, but about the telegram that had received.²⁰ It was not clear to him why the fragmentation of Hungary would lead to the deterioration of church life. He wished to be enlightened about this, perhaps by one of the delegates. He then would also have the chance to indicate what support might be available to the Hungarian brothers.

Completely different was the reaction of Free University-professor H. Bavinck, in his capacity as a member of the reformed committee for contact with the government [Deputaatschap voor Correspondentie met de Hooge Overheid]. He had also received the telegram from the Hungarian Churches and forwarded it to his fellow delegates H. Colijn and the Kamper professor H. Bouwman.

¹⁹ Kuyper, Abraham, “Een waarschuwend voorbeeld”, = *De Heraut* December 8, 1918.

²⁰ Kuyper, Abraham, “De noodkreet uit Hongarije”, = *De Heraut* January 12, 1919. Idem, “De Protestantsche kerken in Hongarije”, = *De Heraut* January 19, 1919.

They concluded that all lawful means should be used to prevent the Hungarian churches from being torn apart, and in 1920 they conveyed this to the Synod of Leeuwarden in their report.²¹ They did two things, both of which had been suggested by Bavinck in his accompanying letter of December 5, 1918 to his fellow delegates. First, they invited the interdenominational Committee for Restoration of World Peace [Commissie voor Gemeenschappelijk Getuigenis tot Herstel van de Wereldvrede], which had previously expressed a critical opinion on the First World War, to a meeting to discuss this important matter. Then they sent the telegram to the reformed committee for contact with the foreign churches [Deputaatschap voor correspondentie met buitenlandse kerken]. In doing so, they suggested that this committee should contact befriended churches in England, Belgium and America, hoping “that the imminent danger [that threatened the Hungarian protestant churches] could be averted with the help of the coming Peace Conference.”²²



Figure 1. *The Times: History of the War, Vol. XXI*

²¹ *Acta der generale synode van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland gehouden te Leeuwarden van 24 augustus tot 9 september 1920*, Bijlage XLI [hereinafter *Acta generale synode van Leeuwarden 1920*].

²² See *Het Utrechts Archief* (hereinafter HUA), Coll.nr. 1490, Archief Deputaten Oecumene, *Notulen vergaderingen 1892-1923*, May 27, 1920, and *Acta generale synode van Leeuwarden 1920*, Bijlage XLI.

Preliminary result

The committee's request to the interdenominational Committee for Restoration of World Peace [Commissie voor Gemeenschappelijk Getuigenis tot Herstel van de Wereldvrede] was apparently well received by the other participating parties, because on December 27 of that year a meeting was held in Utrecht, attended by Géza Antal.²³ This meeting drew up a "manifesto" for the Hungarian delegation to use on behalf of the churches.²⁴ Of course the Dutch churches did not want to interfere in political matters, but they did want to recommend the interests of the Hungarian churches to the parties involved. The document was signed by ten Dutch protestant churches.

The manifesto contained the following content.²⁵

The Protestant Churches in the Netherlands, having noted with interest the appeal she and churches in other countries have received from sister churches in Hungary and Transylvania, gladly and wholeheartedly embrace it.

It is not their job to interfere in the political debate, which relates to the question of the freedom and unity of the Protestant Churches in these countries. But they consider that they have the right and the duty to represent the interests of the Protestant Churches in Hungary to all parties concerned for serious consideration.

In their four centuries of existence, these Churches have spread rich blessings. Desiring freedom for themselves, they have also granted it to others in an exemplary manner. They have contributed greatly to civilization and the progress of their peoples. While they had fellowship with the Churches of the West, especially in times of suffering and pressure, they formed a fortress in the east of Europe, which was of the greatest significance alongside and against other confessions and religions. And they have remained such a center of spiritual and intellectual life to this day.

It would be a great loss and cause incalculable damage to Protestantism if these churches were deprived of their independence and freedom; if they saw their unity broken by the politics of division and imperialism; if they were exposed to the oppression of other peoples and governments; if they lost their strength, or saw their existence endangered.

²³ Antal, *Report*, december 22, 1918, 7.

²⁴ See *Bijlagen van de Handelingen der Algemeene Synode der Nederlandsche Hervormde Kerk ten jare 1919*, Bijlage B, 242–243 (hereinafter *Bijlagen Handelingen Algemeene Synode*.) See Antal, *Notes*, December 27, 1918, 8, who mentions H. Bavinck and J. Schokking as writers.

²⁵ See for the Dutch text *Weekblad der Nederlandsche Hervormde Kerk* January 25, 1919.

The Protestant Churches in the Netherlands, in association with those in other countries, therefore make an earnest appeal for the cooperation of all those who, directly or indirectly, can avert these dangers and prevent any such disaster.

May the coming Peace Conference, by the grace of God, lead to the unhindered spiritual development of the Protestant Churches in Hungary and Transylvania, so that even more than in the past, they can be a blessing for their own people and for the peoples around them!

The Protestant Churches in The Netherlands:

The Dutch Reformed Church
The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands
The Baptist Society
The Evangelical Lutheran Church
The Christian Reformed Church
The Remonstrant Brotherhood
The Union of Baptist Churches in the Netherlands
The Union of Free Christian Churches in the Netherlands
The Restored Evangelical Lutheran Church

The foregoing belongs to the category of administrative influence, partly through personal contacts, partly through ecclesiastical contacts. Of a different order was the influencing of public opinion. A brochure was published by the Hungarian delegates. János Tantó, who studied in Utrecht, published two articles on Hungary. Lectures were also delivered by Sebestyén and others.

Memorandum

At the instigation of Cramer and Pont, the delegation wrote a memorandum, summarizing their main concerns and grievances.²⁶ It was written by Géza Antal and József Pongrácz and prepared for the press by János Pelényi and János Victor.²⁷ The piece was also translated into English; after all, the delegation was planning to travel on to England and the United States.²⁸ When it became apparent that Pelényi and Victor had added some politically sensitive remarks in the first edition, this whole edition was destroyed.²⁹ It is not clear whether the first edition of the English text, which is identical to the Dutch edition, has been preserved:

²⁶ Antal, *Notes*, December 13, 1919, 3.

²⁷ It is not clear who wrote it, father or son Victor. My guess is that the younger Victor is meant here. The idea of sending a delegation was his.

²⁸ It is not clear in which language the first draw was written.

²⁹ Antal, *Notes*, December 19, 1919, 6.

at least two different versions of the English edition exist.³⁰ I follow the Dutch version here.

The article starts with a reminder of the close ties that had previously existed between the Protestant churches in Hungary and the other countries in Europe. In the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), for example, they worked together with the Danes and the Swedes, and Hungarians still remember what the Dutch did for Hungary and Transylvania in times of oppression. Now, Hungary was in need again, its existence threatened by the expansion drives of neighboring peoples – Germans, Czechs, Serbs, Ukrainians and Romanians. But these peoples could not claim old rights to the land; it was not a conquered territory. In the distant past they had settled there as foreigners. They had never been oppressed but had always been treated “generously”. The Romanians were even favored at times, for example by the Habsburgs.

The greatest fear and pain were caused by the claims of Romania. Of the four million Hungarian Protestants, one and a half million lived in the most disputed part of the country, Transylvania. There were also some influential Protestant colleges of the Protestant churches. Apart from that, there was another problem. Romania recognized the Greek Orthodox Church as the State Church, the only legitimate church in the country. Other churches were systematically suppressed. It was feared that the Romanian State would forbid all contact with the churches in Hungary, in the context of Romanization and “proselytism”. The “degenerating” influence of the Romanians was also highlighted. Generally speaking, they were thought to have a “relatively low level of development”.

In summary, Protestantism in Hungary felt itself to be on the brink of collapse and was begging for help.

The intention was that (some of) the delegates would travel on to England and the United States. Soon after their arrival in the Netherlands though, it became clear that they would be welcome neither in England nor in the States.³¹

³⁰ Antal Géza et al., *Een ernstige roepstem van de protestantsche kerken in Hongarije tot hunne geloofsgenooten in andere landen*. Utrecht, 1919. Also published in *Internationaal Christendom* 4, 1919, 80–94; translated as *An Earnest Appeal of the Protestant Churches of Hungary to their Brethren in other lands* (s.l.s.d.), an exact copy of the Dutch version. In the spring of 1919 a second, revised edition of the English version appeared, with a subtitle: *Published by the Delegation of the Hungarian Protestant Churches for Great Britain and for the United States of America*. The Hague, 1919. Furthermore, an introduction has been added, the text has been shortened here and there, and it ends with a paragraph about specific wishes. It also includes statistical data. This version was published in The Hague (the Dutch version was published in Utrecht). The document is dated February 1919. The delegates who planned to travel to the United States, according to this 2nd English version (page 21), were G. Forgács, A. György, G. Pongrácz, G. Takaró, J. Victor Sr., J. Victor Jr. J. Pelényi, G. Boross, St. Györffy, A. Csopjak and R. Scheffler. NB, I follow the spelling of the names as used in the brochure. Two more brochures were published in 1919. Part II is: *Our connections with Britain and America*, part III is *Backgrounds of our church crisis*. Both published The Hague, 1919.

³¹ See Böhl, Franz Marius Theodor, “Het protestantisme in Hongarije en Roemenië. Een reisverslag”, = *Stemmen des Tijds* 13, 1924, 1, 29–57. 29–30.

Colijn advised Antal and Sebestyén to turn directly to the influential politicians Thomas Woodrow Wilson (United States), Jan Christiaan Smuts (South Africa, Great Britain) and David Lloyd George (England, Great Britain), and send them the memorandum, accompanied by a petition. He also promised to raise the Hungarian case in England when he would visit London in January 1919. According to the *Official Report* Antal indeed sent a note (the memorandum?) to Smuts, which would have been very effective, also because Colijn had spoken with Smuts about the Hungarian wishes. Smuts made sure that the interests of (religious) minorities ended up on the agenda. Antal therefore concludes this paragraph with the remark that Smuts should be officially thanked for this.³²

He then points out the role that Cramer and Pont have played in their capacity as chairman and secretary of the Dutch section of the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. According to some remarks about their journey to England in the annual report of 1918-1919, it had not been very successful. They ended up in an atmosphere that was “poisoned by the press and in many ways very ignorant”. It would have been difficult at that time to achieve some results.³³ When this report was read at the annual meeting on September 22, 1919, Antal was present, together with the Hungarian lawyer Elek Boér. Antal thanked the Dutch section of the World Federation for what they had done for Hungary.

The International Committee of the World Federation, at its meeting of September 30 till October 3, 1919 in The Hague, again considered the churches in Hungary and the conquered areas.³⁴ Three motions were adopted, in which the situation in the conquered areas were brought to the attention of the League of Nations. At stake were the link with the mother church, freedom of conscience, and the safety of ministers and church dignitaries.

Because of his efforts the Protestant Theological Institute [Protestáns Teológiai Intézet] in Cluj in Romania [formerly Kolozsvár in Hungary] appointed Cramer in 1921 professor honoris causa.

The delegation was not welcome in England, nor in the United States, as Antal's report shows.³⁵ Nevertheless, on January 17, 1920, the *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant*, which discussed the memorandum in detail, reported that the group was on its way to England and the United States.³⁶ Had the journalist relied on what the memorandum said about the delegation travelling to England and the United States?

³² Antal, *Report*, 1.

³³ Pont, Johannes Wilhelm, “Jaarvergadering van de afdeling Nederland van de Wereldbond, gehouden maandag 22 september 1919 te Den Haag”, = *Internationaal Christendom* 5 1920–1921, 2.

³⁴ Cramer, J. A., “Conferentie van het internationaal comité van den Wereldbond, 1-3 oktober 1919, op Oud-Wassenaer”, = *Internationaal Christendom* 5, 1920–1921, 7–32.

³⁵ Antal, *Report*, 28 December 1918, 9.

³⁶ See “Protestantisme te Hongarije”, = *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant* January 17, 1919.

Magazine-articles

At the beginning of January 1919, the Hungarian student János Tantó published an article about Hungary.³⁷ It is dated “December 1918”. That same year he published an article on the issue of nationalities in Hungary. Sebestyén’s *Notes* show that there had been a meeting to discuss possible publicity. These articles could very well be the result of that meeting. In “A look at Hungary”, Tantó addressed largely the same themes as in *An earnest appeal*, mainly focusing on the threat of the loss of Transylvania. He also pointed out the difference in levels of education between Hungarians and Romanians. Apparently, this was a very important theme for the Hungarians, because in the last phase before a treaty was definitively imposed, this theme was mentioned again. It is also a well-known theme in warfare.³⁸

For Rev. A. Winckel, who gave a summary of the first article in *De Heraut*, this was not convincing. For him it proved that a church which depends on State revenues (as was the case in Hungary), would be endangered in the long term. Moreover, even if political separation was a fact, why would it be impossible to remain ecclesiastically united and still support each other? He agreed with Kuyper’s comment on the telegram. But that was not what Tantó and his kindred spirits were aiming for. Their intention was not so much ecclesiastical, but rather nationalistic. Moreover, neither Kuyper nor Winckel had any idea how difficult the life of an oppressed church could be. Géza Antal would formulate an adequate answer to this naivety in 1921.³⁹ At that time, it was clear that the concerns of 1918 were more than justified.

As mentioned before, Tantó later that year devoted a separate article to the “nationality issue” in Hungary, in which he noted that Hungarians, Ruthenes, Germans and Jews – who together accounted for more than two-thirds of the population – wanted the integrity of Hungary to be maintained.⁴⁰ With the Slovaks and Romanians, however, things were different. The former had been coexisting with the Hungarians for 1,000 years without any problems. For a long time, there were no national aspirations, but by the 19th century the climate had changed and a Czech-Slovakian movement came into being, though that was more of an issue for the Czechs than for the Slovaks. As for the Romanians in Transylvania, Tantó argued that they had come there as settlers after the Turkish occupation. Later on, Germans also settled there. They were a minority but wanted to annex the area to Romania. And again, it was mentioned that a high per-

³⁷ Tantó, János, “Een blik op Hongarije” = *Stemmen voor Waarheid en Vrede* 56, 1919, 42–52.

³⁸ Bucsay, Mihály, *Der Protestantismus in Ungarn 1521–1978. Ungarns Reformationskirchen in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Vol. I–II. Wien–Köln–Graz, 1977–1979. Vol. II. 137–138.

³⁹ Antal, Géza, “Het protestantisme in Hongarije”, = *Stemmen des Tijds*, 2, 171–189 and 10, 1921, 3, 276–290.

⁴⁰ Tantó, János, “De nationaliteitenkwestie in Hongarije”, = *Stemmen des Tijds* 8, 1919, 346. See MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 2019. 268–269., who writes that more than 50% of Transylvania inhabitants were Romanians.

centage of the Romanians were illiterate. At the end of his article, Tantó suggested four justifications for maintaining the integrity of Hungary:

- political (otherwise Europe would be overrun by a “Slavic sea of nations”),
- geographical (the Carpathian Mountains formed a natural border)
- economic (the fertile land fed the inhabitants of the mountainous areas)
- historical (Hungary had always had political unity)

Lectures

In addition to their personal efforts, members of the delegation (At least Sebestyén, Victor jr. and Forgács) would deliver lectures to church members. At least, that was the intention. Apart from a lecture in the Nieuwe Zuiderkerk in The Hague on Boxing Day 1918, Sebestyén was also invited to give lectures in Groningen and Amsterdam, but the latter two were cancelled.⁴¹ Johanna Kuyper wrote later that Sebestyén was called back to Hungary by an urgent telegram. Sebestyén himself described the turn of events as follows: “Because of the approaching Bolshevik threat, I had to hurry home.”⁴² Who had sent the telegram and how serious the situation was at that time is not clear.⁴³ It seems that Sebestyén and a colleague left on 15 or 16 January 1919. It was also intended that some other members of the delegation would leave for the United States a few days later, but, as mentioned before, they were not welcome. It is likely that they too returned home.

Shortly after his return, Sebestyén was invited by President Károlyi to report on his trip to the Netherlands.⁴⁴ He was certainly not impressed by Károlyi, he wrote years later. More could be expected of the Dutch churches, he thought.⁴⁵ That is why on January 25, 1919, he wrote a letter to the Committee for Contact with Foreign Churches [Deputaten voor de correspondentie met de buitenlandse kerken] of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands [Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland]. A Hungarian delegation had come to the Netherlands, but couldn't a Dutch delegation visit Hungary to see the situation for themselves? He had already raised this question when he was in the Netherlands. A letter from Reverend Js. van der Linden confirmed the committee's negative response.⁴⁶ At that busy time of the year, the churches could not do without their preachers

⁴¹ When Sebestyén left unexpected for Hungary the speech in Amsterdam was held by J. Victor and G. Forgács. See Raday Levéltár, C/68, Archive J. Sebestyén, from Elly Hoekstra to J. Sebestyén, March 2, 1919.

⁴² See Kuyper, Johanna, “De toestand in Hongarije”, = *De Standaard* April 15, 1921, with a part of a letter of Sebestyén.

⁴³ In the archive of Sebestyén, I did not find such a telegram.

⁴⁴ See Sebestyén, Jenő, *Het communisme in zijn ware gedaante. Herinneringen aan het communistisch schrikbewind in Hongarije*. Kampen, 1925. 20–21.

⁴⁵ Sebestyén's contacts always were with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands [Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland]. Antal had a good relation with the Dutch Reformed Church [Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk].

⁴⁶ See *Acta generale synode van Leeuwarden 1920*, Bijlage XL, 261. See also Ráday Levéltár, C/68, from Js. van der Linden to J. Sebestyén, March 17, 1919.

and the universities could not do without their professors, he said. Apart from that it was doubtful that the desired result could be achieved, he said, noting: The “social and civil situations seem too complicated and difficult for the present to investigate with good results”. As far as ecclesiastical matters were concerned, especially those in Transylvania, the American and English churches were aware of the situation, due to the manifest that the Dutch churches had written. As far as the “pressing power of Romania” was concerned, help could only be expected from the Entente, negotiating in Paris.⁴⁷ The question for a closer relationship between the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands [Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland] and the Hungarian Reformed Church, was to be brought up by the committee at the next Synod, i.e. at the Synod of Leeuwarden in 1920. To this end it was necessary for Sebestyén to collect a lot of data that would help them to make a sound decision.⁴⁸ The committee could not promise him more. In 1920, in preparation for the Synod of Leeuwarden, the matter was raised again. But the meaning of the committee on this matter remained unchanged.⁴⁹

It is possible that here too, as with the telegram to the queen, there was a misunderstanding. Unlike the Hungarian churches, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands [Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland] kept a sound distance from politics; there was a clear separation between church and state and the church did not get involved in matters of state. That task was entrusted to the (confessional) political parties. Was that what Sebestyén hoped for from the Reformed Churches when he insisted on closer ties? That the churches would use their power to influence the government, either directly or indirectly?

The Committee for Contact with Foreign Churches [Deputaten voor de correspondentie met de buitenlandse kerken] thus referred him to the peace negotiations that had begun in Paris on January 19, 1919. But Hungary did not have high hopes for the talks. It did not help that people from the West had some awareness of the almost medieval conditions in rural Hungary. British Prime Minister Lloyd George remarked that few countries needed a revolution as badly as Hungary did. MacMillan confirmed Lloyd George’s opinion that many among the Hungarian elite believed it was best to keep the non-Magyars, Croats, Slovaks and Romanians – probably more than half of the population – firmly under control.⁵⁰ Generally, the mood in the West towards Hungary was quite negative.

On March 20, 1919, the peacemakers decided that a neutral zone should be established between Hungary and Romania. The Hungarians were asked to withdraw behind the border claimed by the Romanians. This would allow the Romanians to advance another 100 kilometers. Károlyi asked the French negotiator what would prevent them from going even further into Hungary.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ See HUA, Coll. 1490, Archief Deputaten Oecumene, *Minutes Deputaten Buitenland*, May 27, 1920.

⁵⁰ MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 2019. 265–266.

The next day Károlyi's government fell after refusing to accept the Allies' ultimatum. One day later, the social democrats sought contact with Béla Kun, founder of the Hungarian communist party, who was imprisoned at that time, but was released that same day. On March 22, 1919, together with the social democrats, he proclaimed Hungary a Soviet Republic. Kun raged like a whirlwind through the chaotic political scene in Hungary.⁵¹ Suddenly, according to MacMillan, it seemed as if Bolshevism had taken a great step forward.⁵²

This revolution was a disaster in many ways. First of all, for the people of Hungary themselves. Sebestyén, who experienced it all at first hand, would give lectures about it in the Netherlands in the winter of 1920-1921 and later, in 1925, he wrote a book about those years.⁵³ Moral and cultural life collapsed; the clergy, like the insane, was deprived of civil rights, and so on. The Hungarian Catholics soon published an extensive study on the consequences of this Bolshevism, which was translated in Dutch and adapted for the Dutch market in 1921.⁵⁴

But there were also political consequences. Hungary, which was distrusted by the Entente anyway, was now, under Béla Kun, in a very bad situation. The French advocated a strengthening of Romania, which would allow them to challenge Hungarian and Russian Bolsheviks. According to the French, Romania had to play a key role in the region. England and the United States were more moderate and were open to negotiations with Hungary, but the talks came to nothing, partly due to the stubbornness of the Allied negotiator J.C. Smuts and partly due to the attitude of Béla Kun, who wanted the Romanians to withdraw to the east.

The Entente allowed the Romanians to move forward and they got closer and closer to Budapest, entering the city on August 3, 1919. For Kun this meant the end of his leadership, and he departed for Austria. This was the signal for the Czechoslovakians and the Yugoslavs to further advance along Hungary's borders. In the meantime, the Romanians plundered everything Kun and his friends had left behind: telephones, shoes, carpets, fire engines, cattle, and the railway wagons to transport all those things. Finally, the Entente took the situation seriously and forced Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania to withdraw their troops. They did not withdraw to the borders of 1914 though, but to the borders which had been reached by the end of 1918.

In November 1919, under the leadership of admiral Miklós Horthy (1860–1957), a new, stable government came to power in Hungary, and the Hungarians were finally invited to sign the peace treaty. This happened on June 4, 1920, in Versailles, at the Palace of Trianon. In Hungary, the flags hung at half-mast on public buildings. To this day, Trianon is synonymous with injustice and suffering. Even an outsider like Bryan Cartledge paints a bleak picture of the blind vin-

⁵¹ Ibid. 265.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Sebestyén, *Het communisme*, 1925.

⁵⁴ Huszár, Károly et al., *De dictatuur van het proletariaat in Hongarije. Authentieke beschrijving van het bolchewistisch schrikbewind, met medewerking van vakspecialisten samengesteld door Karl Huszár, oud-minister-president van Hongarije*. Roermond, 1921.

dictiveness of the Entente. During the interwar period, Hungarian politics were shaped to a large extent by this treaty.

In conclusion, it can be said that it was Bavinck's initiative that, despite royal and political impotence, ensured there was some Dutch protest to the fragmentation of the kingdom of Hungary. It was a remarkable moment of ecumenical cooperation in the Netherlands. Moreover, it was an initiative of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands [Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland], which were generally very reluctant to accept ecumenism. The Hungarians were very happy with this expression of support. Dutch Protestantism was the first to raise its voice and draw the attention of Protestants all over the world to the great dangers facing Hungarian Protestantism, Antal said a few years later.⁵⁵ For him this support had been unforgettable. It had also been effective, according to the same Antal. Because of this he succeeded in having 'the guarantee of minority rights, also in the religious field, included in the peace treaties and sufficiently described'. However, he also realized that such provisions are of little value if there is no power to act against the violation of those treaties.

⁵⁵ Antal, Géza, "Het protestantisme in Hongarije", = *Stemmen des Tijds* 10, 1921, 285–287.