

*HOLLÓ László*¹:

The Situation of Catholic Instruction in Transylvania during the Communist Takeover²

Summary.

In less than one year, the Catholic Church, just like the other denominations, lost its school network built along the centuries. This was the moment when the bishop wrote: “No one can resent if we shed tears over the loss of our schools and educational institutions”.³ Moreover, he stated that he would do everything to restore the injustice since they could not resent if we used all the legal possibilities and instruments to retrieve our schools that we were illegally dispossessed of.

Furthermore, he evaluated the situation realistically and warned the families to be more responsible. He emphasized the parents’ responsibility. First and foremost, the mother was the child’s first teacher of religion. She taught him the first prayers; he heard about God, Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and the angels from his mother for the first time. He asked for the mothers’ and the parents’ support also in mastering the teachings of the faith. Earlier, he already instructed the priests to organize extramural biblical classes for the children and youth. At this point, he asked the families to cooperate effectively, especially to lead an ardent, exemplary religious life, so that the children would grow up in a religious and moral life according to God’s will, learning from the parents’ examples.

¹ University Professor, Babeş–Bolyai University, Faculty of Roman Catholic Theology, Department of Didactic Roman Catholic Theology, Email: hollo_laszlo@yahoo.com

² This article was subsidized by the Committee of National Remembrance.

³ MÁRTON, Áron (2015): 4708–1948. Szeptember 15. Körlevél a katolikus iskolák államosításáról és a szülők kötelességéről. In: Marton, József (ed.): *Márton Áron: Körlevelek – 2.* 49. The translations of all non-English quotations are my own throughout the article.

And just as on many other occasions throughout history, the Catholic Church started building again. It did not build spectacular-looking churches and schools but rather modest catechism halls to bring communities together. These were the places where the priests of the dioceses led by the bishop's example and assuming all the persecutions, incessantly educated the school children to the love of God and of their brethren, and the children even more zealously attended the catechism classes, ignoring their teachers' prohibitions.

Keywords: Márton Áron, Diocese of Transylvania, confessional religious education, communism, nationalization of catholic schools, Catholic Church in Romania in 1948.

Introduction

Bishop Áron Márton issued two connected, consistent letters, both as no. 4708, on 8 August and 15 September 1948. The first one was titled *A hitoktatás megszervezéséről* [On the Organization of Religious Education]⁴ and the latter *A katolikus iskolák államosításáról és a szülők kötelességéről* [On the Nationalization of Catholic Schools and the Parents' Responsibilities].⁵ The reason for both circulars was the nationalization of religious schools. He emphasized his pain over the loss of the schools, being at the same time firmly determined and hopeful for the future.

“No one can resent if we shed tears over the loss of our schools and educational institutions. – said the bishop. These schools and institutions were built and fostered by the zeal, thrift, selfless work, faith, and love of several generations, preserving them under the hardest circumstances for centuries up to this very day. The official bodies who carried out the takeover also had the possibility to get ascertained that the Catholic schools and institutions represent a truly significant value. No one can resent either if we resort to the legal possibilities and instruments in order to regain our schools. ...

⁴ MÁRTON, Áron (2015): 4708–1948. Augusztus 8. A hitoktatás megszervezéséről. In: Marton, József (ed.): *Márton Áron: Körlevelek – 2* (Márton Áron hagyatéka – 12). Miercurea Ciuc, Pro-Print. 43–46.

⁵ MÁRTON, Áron: 4708–1948. Szeptember 15. Körlevél a katolikus iskolák államosításáról és a szülők kötelességéről. In: Marton, József (ed.): *Márton Áron: Körlevelek – 2*. 49–51.

We cannot give up on the hope that the government will acknowledge the social education activity, value, and utility of Catholic schools and will reinstate the rights of the Church.”⁶

For this very reason, the bishop provided instructions for the organization of extramural Catechism classes. After giving practical instructions regarding the prerequisites of Catechism classes and the proper preparation of their content, he warned his priests that: “I truly trust that my reverend brethren being fully aware of their holy calling and the resourcefulness of their loyalty in the service of the sacred cause will find the effective instruments, and, by the grace of God, will perform their duties properly, duties that are expected from Christ’s priests in the current circumstances in the interest of the immortal spirits.”⁷

He was completely aware of the importance of religious instruction. He programatically worded it in his article published in *Erdélyi Iskola* as early as 1939:

“the Church, in its dogmatic definition, is the religious establishment that sanctifies the people till the end of times by the powers conferred upon it by Jesus Christ; its members, as Christ’s mystic body are in communion with each other and God through faith, the instruments of grace and reverence towards legal supremacy. By education, we understand the planned work by which the adults, people with an established personality, help the yet uncultivated human child to form his personality as perfectly as possible. Comparing the two notions at first sight we feel that there is an inseparable connection between them. The duty of the church is to sanctify the people, while the duty of instruction is to educate them.”⁸

The Situation of the Catholic Church in Romania in 1948

1948 started intensely in the Diocese of Gyulafehérvár/Alba Iulia (formerly the Diocese of Transylvania), torn by the storms of history and potentially facing repression in the new situation that arose after the communists had come to power. The new year was

⁶ Op. cit. 49–50.

⁷ MÁRTON, Áron (2015): 4708–1948: A hitoktatás megszervezéséről. In: Marton, József (ed.): *Márton Áron: Körlevelek – 2.* 43–46, here: 46.

⁸ MÁRTON, Áron (1939/40): Az Egyház és a nevelés. In: *Erdélyi Iskola* 7, 1–2. 1–5.

dedicated to Virgin Mary in the circular mail that Bishop Áron Márton sent on the day of Epiphany, 6 January, in observance of Pope Pius XII's intentions.⁹ The aim was “the dogmatic foundation, expression, awareness of the Marian devotion deeply rooted in our nation's soul as well as of the popularization of the practical Marian devotion in all the strata of the faithful, especially among male youth and men, thus cleansing the morals of our nation and gaining the patronage of the Holy Virgin”. The Bishop foreshadowed the difficult future to come with a clear acknowledgement of the situation for which one had to become considerably stronger as “crossing the threshold of the new year we are going to find ourselves again in an impenetrable fog. We are facing uncertain times, events, tasks, and fate. We cannot know what the days of the misty future bring along.” He intended to strengthen the Marian devotion among the faithful during the preparation period, and that is why he asks that “we should foster the ideal desires, our people's characteristic sense of decency and the power of the soul over the instincts in our youth's soul by becoming acquainted and following with Mary's life and virtues. ... We expect the revival of the old family morals from the deepening Marian devotion... may it help rebuild the hearths shattered during and after the war.”¹⁰

At the same time, the gradually settling communist authority intended to annihilate all the elements that would not participate in the heralded class struggle in the name of “peace and democracy”. And it was successful: the year 1948 brought about the complete settling of communism in Romania.¹¹ After King Michael I was forced to sign his resignation in Elisabeth Palace in Bucharest on 30 December 1947 under Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej's and Prime Minister Petru Groza's pressure and the Board of Representatives proclaimed the People's Republic of Romania, a Romanian Government delegation paid a visit to Moscow, where they concluded the Soviet–Romanian contract of friendship on 4 February.¹² After the Social Democratic and the Communist parties

⁹ Cf. MÁRTON, Áron: 50–1947: Újévi körlevél, 1948. január 6. In: Marton, József (ed.): *Márton Áron: Körlevelek – 2.* 18–28.

¹⁰ Op. cit. 20–23.

¹¹ MARTON, József (2008): *Az erdélyi katolicizmus 90 éve (1900–1990)*. Cluj-Napoca, Kolozsvári Egyetemi Kiadó. 152.

¹² PĂIUȘAN, Cristina – ION, Narcis Dorin – RETEGAN, Mihai (2002): *Regimul comunist din România. O cronologie politică (1945–1989)*. Bucharest, Tritonic. 43–45. It is an interesting fact that the delegation was led by Prime Minister Petru Groza, and its members were Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party, as well as one Hungarian and one Jewish

held a joint congress between 21 and 23 February, merging and creating the single-party system under the name of Romanian Workers' Party, this gave even more courage to the communists in strengthening their already launched anticlerical discourse.

The congress re-elected Gheorghe Gheorgiu-Dej General Secretary of the party, who outlined openly the party's viewpoint on the Catholic Church in his programmatic speech, declaring that the Catholic Church was the only organized obstacle in the way of the ultimate implementation of the people's democracy in Romania.¹³ For better effectiveness, he also worded certain guidelines for action against the Catholic Church, inferring the latter's disengagement and separation from Rome: "A part of the country's population belongs to the Catholic faith. We must declare the Catholic clergy the enemy of democracy. It undermines the interests of the Romanian nation that this clergy is part of the world-renowned imperialist agent, the Vatican. We cannot tolerate that the Vatican uses its spiritual power to harm and turn the believers against democracy with its false propaganda."¹⁴

After impressively annihilating the political opposition removing the National Peasants' Party led by Iuliu Maniu and the National Liberal Party from the political life, the government mainly focused on the "decisive resolution" of the religious matter. They deemed that the prestige of religions hindered the spread of Bolshevik doctrines, and, by heralding afterlife, it prevented the working class from accessing the illusion of the Soviet heaven on earth. Moscow's plan regarding the Catholics was to separate the Roman Catholic and the Romanian Greek Catholic Church from Rome and then rule over the churches deprived from their foreign support. The Romanian government also strived to implement this very same plan.¹⁵

communist activist: László Luka (in Romanian: Vasile Luca), Minister of Finances in Romania, and Ana Pauker (née Hanna Rabinsohn), Minister of Foreign Affairs in Romania, who travelled to Moscow to sign the convention of friendship, cooperation, and mutual aid.

¹³ MIRCEA, Alexandru – CĂRNAȚIU, Pamfil – TODERICIU, Mircea (1998): *Calvarul Bisericii Unite*. In: *Biserica Română Unită două sute cincizeci de ani de istorie*. Cluj-Napoca: Casa de Editură Viața Creștină (published online). 135–177, here: 138. <http://www.bru.ro/wp-content/uploads/file/pdf/Madrid1.pdf>; <http://www.bru.ro/wp-content/uploads/file/pdf/Madrid2.pdf>; <http://www.bru.ro/wp-content/uploads/file/pdf/Madrid3.pdf> (last accessed: 15.04.2020).

¹⁴ DELETANT, Dennis (2001): *Teroarea comunistă în România. Gheorghiu-Dej și statul polițienesc, 1948–1965*. Iași, Polirom. 73.

¹⁵ Cf. TEMPFLI, Imre (2002): *Sárból és napsugárból. Pakocs Károly püspöki helynök élete és kora 1892–1966*. Budapest, Metem Kiadó. 104–105.

On 2 March, the Government granted the denominations a 3-month deadline for the elaboration of their *Rules of Procedure*. At this point, it was not yet clear that this would be highly impractical for the Catholic Church, ensuring the legal grounds for undermining and oppressing it.¹⁶

Catholic Religious Instruction after World War II

After “the survival and introspection strategy”¹⁷ became generalized in the life of minority churches during the national oppression between the two world wars, the same continued during the gradual expansion of communism. Becoming aware of the moral, spiritual, and material ruin caused by World War II, the important representatives of the Catholic Church, the members of the former Transylvanian Roman Catholic Status, at the time called the Roman Catholic Diocesan Council of Latin Rite in Gyulafehérvár/Alba Iulia,¹⁸ led by the bishop were clearly aware of the historic challenge and drafted

¹⁶ The bishops prepared several drafts of the *Rules of Procedure* of the Catholic Church. However, since the authorities required the omission of fundamental articles that the Catholic bishops could not accept, the Catholic Church had no *Rules of Procedure* during communism, thus functioning outside the law as a tolerated community.

¹⁷ LUKÁCS, Olga (2017): Erdélyi felekezeti viszonyok a kommunista rendszer első évtizedében. In: LÖNHÁRT, Tamás – NAGY, Róbert Miklós – HUNYADI, Attila-Gábor (eds.): *Modernizare economică, socială și spirituală în Europa Est-Centrală. Gazdasági, társadalmi és szellemi modernizáció Kelet-Közép-Európában. In honorem Prof. Univ. Dr. Csucsujá István*. Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca, Argonaut. 226–235.

¹⁸ The Transylvanian Roman Catholic Status was the particular joint institution of the Transylvanian bishopric, made up of lay people and clergymen (the former constituting two-thirds and the latter one third), rooted in the times following the Reformation. At the time, as the Catholic Church lost its bishop and the clerical leaders after the Reformation and the decisions of the Transylvanian Diet, the lay keeping the Catholic faith tried to enforce the interests of the shattered Catholic Church, and they gradually established the Transylvanian Roman Catholic Status together with the few clergymen who held on to their believers. The institution of the Status launched in the second half of the 19th century, led by the bishop as the chairman, an executive council counting 24 members, and an assembly counting 200 members, served the cause and interests of the financial and educational affairs of the Transylvanian bishopric. Between the two world wars, due to the attacks of Romanian nationalism against the Status, it was forced to change its name into the Council of the Roman Catholic Bishopric of Latin

the action plans for themselves: “we must line up around the church and the schools in order to be able to heal the spiritual wounds that were inflicted upon us and recover from the gaping material deficits, and thus be able to sustain our institutions, reorganizing and managing them according to the requirements of the times.”¹⁹ Reading the so-called *Annual Statement* drafted on the occasion of the 1946 annual session of the Diocesan Council comprising the activity of the Executive Board over three years (1943–1946), it becomes clear that in the times of limited possibilities the church still managed to fulfil its duties in the organization of the Catholic instruction.

Catholic instruction was traditionally organized in a particular form in the Diocese of Gyulafehérvár/Alba Iulia. On the one hand, the kindergartens as well as primary schools were managed by the parishes, and the middle schools were under the authority of the Diocese and the religious orders, while, on the other hand, the Diocesan Council managed the so-called secondary schools of the status. Moreover, the Diocesan Council organized and monitored the educational matters of all Catholic religious educational institutions. Below, we shall present the 1945–46 statistical data of the religious education institutions for a better understanding of the situation and extent of the Catholic instruction.

The annual statement mentions the loss of the building of the Catholic school in Tökés/Groșii Țibleșului as an “unfortunate event”, being appropriated by the competent state authorities without any objective investigation and disregarding the ecclesiastical representative’s opinion, depriving 65 children from the possibility to participate in education in their mother tongue.²⁰ Both the parish and the diocesan authority

Rite in Gyulafehérvár/Alba Iulia in 1932. Cf. HOLLÓ, László (2009): *A világiak által „vezetett” egyházmegye*, vol. I. Cluj-Napoca, Kolozsvári Egyetemi Kiadó. 15–34; HOLLÓ, László (2016): Az Erdélyi Római Katolikus Státus tegnap, ma és holnap. In: Holló, László (ed.): *Gyárfás Elemér a „civil püspök”. A Gyárfás Elemér halálának 70. évfordulója alkalmából tartott emlékkonferencia előadásai*. Budapest–Cluj-Napoca, Szent István Társulat–Verbum. 26–62.

¹⁹ Jelentés a Gyulafehérvári Latin Szertartású Róm[ai] Kat[holikus] Egyházmegyei Tanács 1946. november hó 28-ikára összehívott közgyűlésére (a továbbiakban *Jelentés 1946*) [Statement for the General Assembly of the Council of the Roman Catholic Bishopric of Latin Rite in Gyulafehérvár/Alba Iulia called for 28 November 1946 (hereinafter referred to as *Jelentés 1946*)]. Kolozsvár/ Cluj: Lengyel Albert Könyvnyomdája, 1946. 4.

²⁰ *Jelentés 1946*, 26.

Table 1. Report on the Roman Catholic primary schools and kindergartens in the 1945/46 school year²¹

No.	Name of the deanery	No. of kindergartens	No. of schools	No. of teachers	No. of Roman Catholic children of school age	
					In state schools	In Catholic schools
1.	Hegyalja – Alba	1	6	8	43	285
2.	Bányavidék – Maramureş	Missing data				
3.	Barcaság – Țara Bârsei Sepsi-Miklósvár	2	12	30	1,125	727
4.	Szeben-Fogaras – Sibiu-Făgăraş	3	5	15	717	427
5.	Alcsík-Kászon – Ciucul de Jos– Plăieşii	-	12	39	2,121	1,086
6.	Felcsík – Ciucul de Sus	3	11	32	4,517	1,086
7.	Erzsébetváros – Dumbrăveni	-	4	8	91	241
8.	Gyergyó – Gheorgheni	1	13	83	3,591	3,154
9.	Hunyad – Hunedoara	-	8	16	658	631
10.	Kézdi-orbai –Kézdi-orbai Seats	1	12	26	3,745	1,092
11.	Kolozs-Doboka – Cluj-Dăbâca	2	11	34	2,061	1,190
12.	Küküllő – Târnave	-	13	23	231	1,035
13.	Maros – Mureş	2	25	70	1,300	2,807
14.	Belső-Szolnok – Solnocul de Mijloc	1	7	17	1,075	603
15.	Torda – Turda	-	4	7	443	210
16.	Udvarhely – Odorhei	1	29	80	3,996	3,391
	Total	17	172	488	25,714	17,965²²

²¹ *Jelentés 1946, 24–25.*

²² The aggregated data presented in the summary are the correct total of the figures displayed in the table. The original table displays incorrect total numbers, different from the figures indicated for each deanery under several items. The number of schools amount only to 160, while the number of Catholic children attending state schools is 25,703, and the number of Roman Catholic children of mandatory school-going age attending Catholic education is 18,244. The difference is a slip of the pen in the first case since the text of the *Statement* mentions number 172 as the total number of schools, while in the other cases, in all likelihood, the mistakes are due to the table compilers' mistake, whose work was generally accurate.

objected to the “unlawful decision”, starting the necessary proceedings. A similar prejudice was caused by the proceedings launched against the school in Óradna/Rodna, and consequently the pupils and their teachers were expelled from the building, being dispossessed of the school equipment.

The same statement mentions that the parishes managing the education asked a proportional share from the budgeted educational contribution for the coverage of the material needs of the primary schools as laid down by law. The legal provision was not recalled; however, the Legal Department with the Ministry of Internal Affairs decided that the religious schools were not entitled to this kind of aid. The diocesan authority took the necessary measure against this prejudicial decision. The Ministry of Nationalities took a stand in the matter in favour of the religious schools, but the Ministry of Internal Affairs did not repeal the decree.²³

Table 2. *Report on the lower and upper secondary schools under the direct management of the Roman Catholic Diocesan Authority in the 1945/46 school year*²⁴

	Type of the establishment	No. of teachers	No. of pupils
1.	Brassó/Braşov, girls' gymnasium	17	259
2.	Csíksomlyó/Şumuleu Ciuc, paedagogium	9	154
3.	Csíksomlyó/Şumuleu Ciuc, paedagogium	13	164
4.	Ditró/Ditrău, co-educational gymnasium	16	288
5.	Gyergyószentmiklós / Gheorgheni, girls' gymnasium	13	412
6.	Gyulafehérvár/Alba Iulia, girls' gymnasium	5	68
7.	Karcfalva/ Cârţa, co-educational gymnasium	8	226
8.	Kolozsvár/Cluj, Mariánum – girls' lower and upper secondary school	22	275
9.	Kolozsvár/Cluj, Mariánum – girls' gymnasium	10	217
10.	Kolozsvár/Cluj, Mariánum – secondary school of commerce	10	143
11.	Marosvásárhely/Târgu-Mureş, girls' gymnasium	12	278
12.	Nagyszeben/Sibiu, Franciscan girls' gymnasium	13	103

²³ *Jelentés 1946*, 26.

²⁴ Unnumbered insert between pages 28 and 29 of the *Jelentés 1946*.

	Type of the establishment	No. of teachers	No. of pupils
13.	Nagyszeben/Sibiu, Franciscan paedagogium	14	48
14.	Nagyszeben/Sibiu, Franciscan secondary school of commerce	17	28
15.	Nagyszeben/Sibiu, Ursulines' girls' gymnasium ²⁵	12	120
16.	Nagyszeben/Sibiu, integrated gymnasium	9	44
17.	Petrozsény/Petroșani, girls' gymnasium ²⁶	5	199
18.	Sepsiszentgyörgy/Sfântu Gheorghe, girls' gymnasium	5	171
19.	Szászrégen/Reghin, co-educational gymnasium	13	403
20.	Szováta/Sovata, co-educational gymnasium ²⁷	8	190
Total		231	3,790

The seven lower and upper secondary schools (gymnasiums) of the Status listed in the third table were the oldest schools of the Transylvanian Diocese, mostly dating back to the times after the Reformation, and thus operating mainly as all-boys schools. The missing educational institutions for girls were compensated for by the religious orders as well as the girls' and co-educational schools and schools of commerce sustained by the larger parishes and the diocesan authority.

In relation to the report above, the annual statement also describes the situation of the economic schools of Kézdivásárhely/Târgu Secuiesc and Radnót/Iernut. Based on the account, both institutions suffered great damages in terms of school equipment and livestock during the war. In the school year 1945/46, in the economic school of Kézdivásárhely/Târgu Secuiesc, the economics-related subjects were taught by the headmaster and two specialist teachers, while the general subjects by the teachers of the lower and upper secondary schools [gymnasium] of the Status located in Kézdivásárhely/Târgu Secuiesc. The headmaster, one specialist teacher, one primary school teacher, and several part-time teachers taught in the economic school in Radnót/Iernut.²⁸

²⁵ The statistics for 1945/46 is missing, which is why the table contains the data for 1944/45.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ *Jelentés 1946*, 27–28.

Table 3. *Report of the Roman Catholic diocesan boys' gymnasiums in the school year 1945/46²⁹*

	Location of the institution	No. of teachers	No. of pupils
1.	Brassó/Braşov	12	319
2.	Csíksereda/Miercurea Ciuc	21	584
3.	Gyulafehérvár/Alba Iulia	12	110
4.	Kézdivásárhely/Târgu Secuiesc	18	584
5.	Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca	29	479
6.	Marosvásárhely/Târgu-Mureş	18	387
7.	Székelyudvarhely/Odorheiu Secuiesc	30	671
Total		140	3,134

For the communist regime, the historic churches and the religious schools managed by them were the biggest obstacle in the way of the country's intended Sovietization. Regarding the Catholic Church, the statistical data compiled by the executive council and presented above – taken from the annual reports sent by the schools to the Diocesan Council – reveal the importance of the respective educational institutions. According to the reports, the children were provided with Roman Catholic education in 17 kindergartens around the Diocese of Gyulafehérvár/Alba Iulia. 25,714 Roman Catholic pupils of mandatory school age attended state schools, while 17,965 children attended 172 Roman Catholic schools, being taught and raised with the help of 488 Catholic teachers. In the seven long-standing lower and upper secondary schools (gymnasiums) (Brassó/Braşov, Csíksereda/Miercurea Ciuc, Gyulafehérvár/Alba Iulia, Kézdivásárhely/Târgu Secuiesc, Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca, Marosvásárhely/Târgu-Mureş, and Székelyudvarhely/Odorheiu Secuiesc), there were 140 teachers teaching 3,134 students, while around the diocese in further 20 paedagogiums, girls' schools and co-educational schools, schools of commerce and integrated schools, 231 teachers educated 3,790 high-school-aged male and female students.

²⁹ Unnumbered insert between pages 16 and 17 of *Jelentés 1946*.

Attacks on Religious Education

After World War II, when the Communists did not feel strong enough, they showed ostentatious goodwill towards religious schools. Primary and secondary school teachers benefited from state aid; then, starting from April 1946, they received wages identical to the wages of their Romanian peers.³⁰ But things changed rapidly. At the beginning of 1947, the Romanian government summoned the Latin bishops to hand over their schools to the Romanian state, as the Greek Catholics and the Orthodox had done, because otherwise they would deprive them of the state aid, which Romania took upon itself when signing the Peace Treaty of Paris and solemnly promised on the occasion of the Land Reform in 1945 in exchange for the nationalized church estates. But the bishops rejected it vehemently.³¹ The state power did not tolerate it for long. During the aforementioned interparty congress held on 21–23 February 1948, they elaborated the draft of the new constitution of the People’s Republic of Romania. In its final form, Article 27, Section 3 provided that: “no religious body or denomination had any right to open or manage any kind of academic education schools, being only entitled to own the special schools for the training of their respective clergy under state supervision”.³² In the evaluation of the sections of the constitution on education, completely opposite viewpoints were born on the part of the enthusiastic leftist supporters on the one hand and on the part of the leaders of the Catholic Church owning the schools on the other.

The left in power aiming at the “democratic development of the country” could not possibly approve, and, indeed, did not approve the existence of religious schools – as Sándor Kacsó, President of the Hungarian People’s Alliance said in his article titled *Egységes népoktatást követel a népi demokrácia* [People’s Democracy Requires Consistent, Homogeneous Education for the People], published in Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca on 23 March 1948 in *Világosság*. He reveals that the nationalization of religious schools means the restoration of the “straight line in historical evolution”, underlining that “in

³⁰ BÁNYAI, László (1951): Népi demokráciánk vívmányai az együttlakó nemzetiségek anyanyelvű iskoláztatása terén. In: *Romániai Magyar Szó* V, 1313 (29 December). 2.

³¹ Cf. TEMPFLI 2002. 127.

³² Constituția Republicii Populare Române din 1948. In: *Monitorul Oficial* nr. 87 bis/ 13 April 1948.

the western states this debate was decided long ago in favour of nationalization marking in general the direction of human evolution”. “[T]he religious schools clinging to the past with so many material and spiritual hooks” cannot ensure the new public education necessary for the republic of the working class, although at times giving evidence of all their best intentions ...³³

Although Bishop Áron Márton was not able to reply to it in the newspaper, he expressed his strong objection in a private letter. He pointed out in painful cynicism that if “nationalization truly pointed into the direction of human evolution, then, in the totalitarian state scheme that Hitler’s fascism heralded and built with fire and sword, humanity should have welcomed the top performance of human evolution”.³⁴ Referring to each of Kacsó’s statements on the case-law of the Western countries, he proved item-by-item that, after the end of the impatient nationalization ambitions during the strongly anti-religious and anti-clerical phase of liberalism, the thesis of natural law made its way according to which the state is for the people and not the people are for the state. Thus, in the nationalization of Western public education, he saw a kind of limitation of the citizens’ rights that could be attuned neither with the freedom of thought nor with the democratic freedoms. He asked the president to amend the standpoint of the Hungarian People’s Alliance and defend the rights of religious schools before the competent bodies during the discussions on the constitution.

Extensive public campaigns were launched to dissuade the Hungarian public opinion from supporting the religious schools and turn the believers against the respective churches. Gábor Gaál adopted the same approach in his article *A felekezeti iskolák államosításáról* [On the Nationalization of Religious Schools] published both in *Utunk* and *Világosság*. He deemed that in the people’s state reborn in terms of its organization and institutions the working people claimed “democratic public schools and democratic education for the people”. He did not consider the nationalization of religious schools as an interference in the specifically composed public educational organ-

³³ KACSÓ, Sándor: Egységes népoktatást követel a népi demokrácia. In: *Világosság*, 23 March 1948. See also: BALOGH, Edgár (1986): *Férfimunka. Emlékirat 1945–1955*. Budapest, Magvető. 289–290.

³⁴ MÁRTON, Áron (2016): 4192/1948. március 24.: Levél Kacsó Sándornak, a Magyar Népi Szövetség elnökének. In: Marton, József (ed.): *Márton Áron: Egyház – Állam* (Márton Áron hagyatéka – 13). Miercurea Ciuc, Pro-Print. 104–109, here: 105.

ization of the Hungarian nationality but rather as “the direct deduction of the logical conclusions, which naturally matured in the material and organizational life of the democratic schools”. What is more, they also tried to explain their charges against the religious schools. In Gábor Gaál’s opinion, the religious schools had not been able to fulfil their duties for a long time as “the irrational view of life logically deriving from religious affiliation” could hardly be reconciled with science. “We know from our historical experience that this world of education is a false world that consciously alienates its students from actual reality. Religious schools were long ago rendered phoney and ambivalent by the evolution of life and sciences. ... Religious schools failed to achieve the correct acknowledgement of reality long ago. Though this knowledge is the prerequisite of evolution.”³⁵

Religious schools were accused that even if the state had granted the denominations the opportunity to be involved in education and shape the youth’s spiritual cultivation in accordance with their own objectives for their integration into the life of the state, “being guided by different principles and being brought up in the educational systems of different interests ... they managed to understand each other in certain areas such as the exploitation of the people, the dispossession of rights, and upholding social and economic disparities”. Consequently, they also reached the conclusion that “the state is the only competent authority to educate its citizens”.³⁶ The quoted school district superintendent, Sándor Hadházy, also felt entitled to speak on behalf of the Hungarian school staff, expressly including the staff in the religious schools, and claimed that he had been fostering this opinion for a long while, and there were hardly any primary or secondary school teachers in the religious schools who “would not feel the need for a homogeneous educational system under state control”.³⁷

Lajos Csögör, Rector of Bolyai University, also urged others to consider that “religious schools educated the nation’s sons to abnegation, forbearance, and resignation to their fate, thus serving the interest of the antipopular ruling classes”, while they, i.e. the left-wing, “intended to educate a self-conscious, combative youth trusting its own power that would not only construe and understand the world but that can and is willing to also change it”. Furthermore, he euphorically praised the marvellous change in the

³⁵ GAÁL, Gábor (1948): A felekezeti iskolák államosításáról. In: *Utunk* III. 6, 46 (31 March). 1.

³⁶ HADHÁZY, Sándor (1948): *Bizalommal és megértéssel*. In: *Világosság* 28 March.

³⁷ Ibid.

relationship between the ethnic groups living together, which was achieved within three years after the rise of the Romanian Workers' Party to power.³⁸

There were also attempts to explain the measures taken towards “the changes in the types of schools” by the modernization of the educational system. Thus, Pál Fejér, school district general manager, drew the attention towards the deficiencies in vocational instruction that he wanted to render widely acceptable by such an argument that secondary school graduates had earning possibilities only after graduating from university, which actually took away many young people from the field of production or rendered some unsatisfied if they could not complete their studies for any reason. He stated that, due to the educational reform, vocational education was just as valuable as general education in terms of general knowledge and professional training.³⁹

As astonishing as it may sound, not only our leftist Hungarians but also certain reverends saw only the benefits of the nationalization of religious schools. Thus, the central daily newspaper of the Hungarian People's Alliance, *Világosság*, published a brief article about “the ministers of the Reformed presbytery of Görgény/Gurghiu taking a unanimous stand in favour of the nationalization of religious schools”, and presbyter József Papp also explained the sense of the nationalization of education: “We wholeheartedly welcome the nationalization of religious schools because it only brings relief to the churches”.⁴⁰ When referring to the nationalization of religious schools, Unitarian minister Béla Bende only spoke about its advantages. The churches no longer kept troops, did not have court jurisdiction or right of interrogation; they were neither document authentication nor conservation bodies and were no longer civil registrars. They were forced earlier to give up on these competences and official activities, which were not in the disadvantage of the churches but rather favoured their pastoral activity. He also listed education among others as an area that the church could get rid of to the advantage of its own mission owing to “democracy”. In his opinion, by the nationalization of the religious schools, the church had to give up on an area to its own benefit since “upkeeping and managing the schools required many financial and managerial resources that could be now given up

³⁸ CSÖGÖR, Lajos (1948): *Haladó szellemű nevelés!* In: *Romániai Magyar Szó* II, 150 (4 April). 3.

³⁹ FEJÉR, Pál (1948): *A tanügyi reform.* In: *Romániai Magyar Szó* II, 154 (9 April). 4.

⁴⁰ Egyhangúlag állást foglaltak a felekezeti iskolák államosítása mellett a görgényi egyházmegye papjai [The Priests of the Görgény/Gurghiu Presbytery Unanimously Took a Stand in Favour of the Nationalization of Religious Schools]. In: *Világosság* 10 April 1948.

and placed to the service of serious and sound ecclesiastical life”. He expected the “fight for the people’s democracy” to warrant that “our nationalized schools would serve the people even more”. That is why he recommended the churches that, in their best interest, they should offer support in relieving the tension among their believers and be understanding with regard to the nationalization of the schools. They should ensure the preservation of the schools by fostering the sound development of education so that the schools as religious institutions would not become again oppressors of consciousness and religious freedom.⁴¹ The teaching staff of the Székely Mikó co-educational lower and upper secondary school in Sepsiszentgyörgy/Sfântu Gheorghe, “considering the guarantees for the best evolution of our Hungarian nation as set forth in the draft of the constitution ... as a group of progressive intellectuals ... wholeheartedly welcomes the draft of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Romania”.⁴²

The daily newspapers of the time mostly published about the reactionary resistance of the Catholic priests and monks who proceeded according to Bishop Áron Márton’s firm and clear guidelines.⁴³ Nevertheless, we can read in the December issue of *Romániai Magyar Szó* that several monks⁴⁴ turned against the Bishop’s orders, “Bishop Áron Márton betraying his flock, the head of the Catholic reaction ... in spite of his firm prohibitive order... from their own clean consciousness and to the best interest of the people ... rather proved their loyalty towards their nation ... than be assimilated to the antipopular behaviour of the reactionary bishop’s circle”.⁴⁵

⁴¹ BENDE, Béla (1948): *A felekezeti iskolák államosításának előnyei*. In: *Romániai Magyar Szó* II, 150 (4 April). 4.

⁴² A sepsiszentgyörgyi Székely Mikó Kollégium tanári kara a Népi Demokrácia Frontjáért és az alkotmánytervezetért. In: *Népújság* 14 March 1948.

⁴³ Cf. (csíki) (1948): A tanügyi reform nyomán dolgozók gyermekei készülnek az életre a brassói volt katolikus főgimnáziumban. In: *Igazság* 22 August; (p.i.) (1948): *A „pásztor” ismét elárulta nyáját*. In: *Romániai Magyar Szó* II, 381 (4 December). 5.

⁴⁴ It refers to four Premonstratensian monks in Nagyvárad/Oradea who accepted jobs in a state-owned school despite the episcopal prohibition. Two of them left the educational system later, following Bishop Áron Márton’s verbal instructions, because the new curriculum and the new handbooks did no longer contain the same spirit that they could spread. Cf. TEMPFLI 2002, 132.

⁴⁵ (p.i.) (1948): *A „pásztor” ismét elárulta nyáját*. In: *Romániai Magyar Szó* II, 381 (4 December). 5.

The Nationalization of Religious Schools

Events speeded up in Romania starting the spring of 1948. Gerald Patrick O'Hara, Regent of the Nunciature in Bucharest, already took a stand regarding the constitution drafted in a *note verbale* on 10 March, more precisely concerning Article 28, Section 3 of the draft, which heralded the freedom of consciousness and religion but also hindered parents' right to enrol their children in religious schools.⁴⁶ They deigned to reply.

The Romanian Catholic Episcopate gathered in Bucharest on 17 March 1948 to draft the *Rules of Procedure* required by the government.⁴⁷ On this occasion, the members of the episcopate challenged the adversities in the constitution draft by a Memorandum. Although paragraph 17, section 1 protected free religious observance and paragraph 28 warranted the freedom of consciousness and religion, the very same paragraph, section 3 rendered it impossible to achieve. That is why the bishops requested paragraph 28, section 1 to be amended: "The state equally ensures freedom and protection to all denominations". In opposition to section 3, on behalf of several hundreds of thousands of parents who would gladly send their children to religious schools, they request permission for the denominations and religious orders to found and maintain their own educational institutions according to their centuries-old practice. Moreover, in the light of the religious freedom and democratic rights set forth in the draft of the constitution, they requested maintaining the religion classes in schools, pastoral care in the military, in hospitals, orphanages, and prisons. They asked for the observance of the concordat with the Holy See in terms of the state's control over the special schools for the training of the clergy.

Regent O'Hara's next *note verbale* on 27 March and his note of protest sent regarding the observance of the concordat by the Romanian government⁴⁸ did not lead to any result either. To no avail did Bishop Áron Márton write further letters to point out the contradictions in the constitution, proving the rationale of the religious schools both on historical evidence and the believers' attachment.⁴⁹ The Bishop's letter was left

⁴⁶ Cf. TEMPFLI 2002, 125.

⁴⁷ *Monitorul Oficial* nr. 62, 2 March 1948.

⁴⁸ Cf. TEMPFLI 2002, 125.

⁴⁹ *Márton Áron püspök levele a kultuszminiszternek, 4347–1948. március 30.* In: Marton, József (ed.): *Márton Áron: Egyház–Állam* (Márton Áron hagyatéka – 13). Miercurea Ciuc, Pro-Print. 2016. 109–112.

unanswered, and the Great National Assembly passed the constitution on 13 April 1948, becoming effective as of 17 April.⁵⁰ The die had been cast.

On 27 July 1948, one week prior to the publication of the law dissolving the religious schools, the nationalization of religious schools and institutions started in some place without further official ministerial notice.⁵¹ Thus, any attempt for the protection of ownership and the freedom of consciousness proved to be futile. In reference to articles 44 and 45 of the Constitution and its decision dated 2 August 1948, correlated to Cabinet Resolution no. 1175 of 31 July 1948, the Great National Assembly of the People's Republic of Romania regulated public education in the country by a new piece of legislation, which set forth that "public instruction was organized exclusively by the state on national and scientific grounds".⁵² For this purpose, all religious schools were nationalized through Resolution no. 176.⁵³

Following nationalization, in his circular mail titled *A katolikus iskolák állapotáról és a szülők kötelességéről* [On the Condition of Catholic Schools and the Parents' Obligations], dated 15 September 1948, Bishop Áron Márton informed the faithful that the new law on public education came into force, 236 educational institutions being nationalized in the Diocese of Gyulafehérvár/Alba Iulia: 12 kindergartens, 173 primary schools, 10 lower and upper secondary schools, 12 gymnasiums, 2 paedagogiums, 1 paedagogium for nursery school teachers, 1 vocational school and 1 school of commerce, 17 boarding schools and 2 Roman Catholic orphanages. The state bodies took over the buildings and equipment of the institutions as well as all their tangible and intangible assets.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Constituția Republicii Populare Române din 1948. In: *Monitorul Oficial* 87 bis/13 April 1948.

⁵¹ TEMPFLI 2002, 128.

⁵² *Monitorul Oficial* nr. 175, 3 August 1948.

⁵³ *Monitorul Oficial* nr. 176, 3 August 1948.

⁵⁴ MÁRTON, Áron (2015): 4708–1948. szeptember 15. Körlevél a katolikus iskolák államosításáról és a szülők kötelességéről. In: Marton, József (ed.): *Márton Áron: Körlevelek – 2.* 49–51.

Bibliography

- *** A sepsiszentgyörgyi Székely Mikó Kollégium tanári kara a Népi Demokrácia Frontjáért és az alkotmánytervezetért. In: *Népújság* 14 March 1948.
- *** Constituția Republicii Populare Române din 1948. In: *Monitorul Oficial* 87 bis/ 13 aprilie 1948.
- *** Egyhangúlag állást foglaltak a felekezeti iskolák államosítása mellett a görgényi egyházmegye papjai. In: *Világosság*, 10 April 1948.
- *** Jelentés a Gyulafehérvári Latin Szerartású Róm[ai] Kat[holikus] Egyházmegyei Tanács 1946. november hó 28-ikára összehívott közgyűlésére (a továbbiakban *Jelentés 1946*). Kolozsvár, Lengyel Albert Könyvnyomdája, 1946.
- *** Márton Áron püspök levele a kultuszminiszternek, 4347– 30 March 1948. In: Marton, József (ed.): *Márton Áron: Egyház–Állam* (Márton Áron hagyatéka – 13). Miercurea Ciuc, Pro-Print. 2016. 109–112.
- BALOGH, Edgár (1986): *Férfimunka. Emlékirat 1945–1955*. Budapest, Magvető.
- BÁNYAI, László (1951): Népi demokráciánk vívmányai az együttlakó nemzetiségek anyanyelvű iskoláztatása terén. In: *Romániai Magyar Szó* V, 1313 (29 December). 2.
- BENDE, Béla (1948): A felekezeti iskolák államosításának előnyei. In: *Romániai Magyar Szó* II, 150 (4 April). 4.
- (csíki) (1948): A tanügyi reform nyomán dolgozók gyermekei készülnek az életre a brassói volt katolikus főgimnáziumban. In: *Igazság* 22 August.
- CSÖGÖR, Lajos (1948): Haladó szellemű nevelést! In: *Romániai Magyar Szó* II, 150 (4 April). 3.
- DELETANT, Dennis (2001): Teroarea comunistă în România. Gherghiu-Dej și statul polițienesc, 1948–1965. Iași, Polirom.
- FEJÉR Pál (1948): *A tanügyi reform*. In: *Romániai Magyar Szó* II, 154 (9 April). 4.
- GAÁL, Gábor (1948): A felekezeti iskolák államosításáról. In: *Utunk* III, 6 (46 – 31 March). 1.
- HADHÁZY, Sándor (1948): *Bizalommal és megértéssel*. In: *Világosság* 28 March.
- HOLLÓ, László (2009): *A világiak által „vezetett” egyházmegye*. vol. I. Cluj-Napoca: Kolozsvári Egyetemi Kiadó.
- (2016): Az Erdélyi Római Katolikus Státus tegnap, ma és holnap. In: Holló, László (ed.): *Gyárfás Elemér a „civil püspök”. A Gyárfás Elemér halálának 70. évfordulója alkalmából tartott emlékkonferencia előadásai*. Budapest–Cluj-Napoca, Szent István Társulat–Verbum.

- KACSÓ, Sándor (1948): Egységes népoktatást követel a népi demokrácia. In: *Világosság* 23 March.
- LUKÁCS, Olga (2017): Erdélyi felekezeti viszonyok a kommunista rendszer első évtizedében. In: Lönhárt, Tamás – Nagy, Róbert Miklós – Hunyadi, Attila-Gábor (eds.): *Modernizare economică, socială și spirituală în Europa Est-Centrală. Gazdasági, társadalmi és szellemi modernizáció Kelet-Közép-Európában. In honorem Prof. Univ. Dr. Csucsujá István*. Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca, Argonaut. 226–235.
- MARTON, József (2008): *Az erdélyi katolicizmus 90 éve (1900–1990)*. Cluj-Napoca, Kolozsvári Egyetemi Kiadó.
- MÁRTON, Áron (1939/40): Az Egyház és a nevelés. In: *Erdélyi Iskola* 7, 1–2. 1–5.
- (2015a): 50–1947: Újévi körlevél, 6 January 1948. In: Marton, József (ed.): *Márton Áron: Körlevelek – 2*. 18–28.
- (2015b): 4708–8 August 1948. A hitoktatás megszervezéséről. In: Marton, József (ed.): *Márton Áron: Körlevelek – 2* (Márton Áron hagyatéka – 12), Miercurea Ciuc, Pro-Print. 43–46.
- (2015c): 4708–15 September 1948. Körlevél a katolikus iskolák államosításáról és a szülők köteleességéről. In: Marton, József (ed.): *Márton Áron: Körlevelek – 2*. 49–51.
- (2016): 4192/24 March 1948: Levél Kacsó Sándornak, a Magyar Népi Szövetség elnökének. In: Marton, József (ed.): *Márton Áron: Egyház – Állam*, (Márton Áron hagyatéka – 13). Miercurea Ciuc, Pro-Print. 104–109.
- MIRCEA, Alexandru – CÂRNAȚIU, Pamfil – TODERICIU, Mircea (1998): Calvarul Bisericii Unite. In: *Biserica Română Unită două sute cincizeci de ani de istorie*. Cluj-Napoca, Casa de Editură Viața Creștină (published online).
- <http://www.bru.ro/wp-content/uploads/file/pdf/Madrid1.pdf>;
- <http://www.bru.ro/wp-content/uploads/file/pdf/Madrid2.pdf>;
- <http://www.bru.ro/wp-content/uploads/file/pdf/Madrid3.pdf> (last accessed: 15.04.2020).
- Monitorul Oficial* nr. 62, 2 March 1948.
- Monitorul Oficial* nr. 175, 3 August 1948.
- Monitorul Oficial* nr. 176, 3 August 1948.
- Păiușan, Cristina – Ion, Narcis Dorin – Retegan, Mihai (2002): *Regimul comunist din România. O cronologie politică (1945–1989)*. Bucharest, Tritonic.
- (p.i.) (1948): A „pásztor” ismét elárulta nyáját. In: *Romániai Magyar Szó* II, 381 (4 December). 5.
- TEMPFLI, Imre (2002): *Sárból és napsugárból. Pakocs Károly püspöki helynök élete és kora 1892–1966*. Budapest, Metem.