

*NAGY Károly Zsolt*¹:

Changes in the Idea of Progress in the Processes of Change in the Hungarian Reformed Identity during the Past Century²

Abstract.

Democracy and the idea of progress became one of the most important attributes of Hungarian Reformation in the 19th century, both as its self-image and society's image of Calvinists (and, more broadly, of Protestants). These indicators are very important because, to this day, they are essential elements of Calvinist identity, but they also illustrate well the way heritage forged into identity. The part of the past reflected and "used" in community memory loosely relates to the actual legacy of the past. Different authors have defined in different ways which exact identity elements are representative of these attributes, and it also varies how long such an element retains its representative quality, if it retains it at all. Without being exhaustive, the study outlines the ways the specific content of these attributes changes over the 20th century: that is, in the context of changes in the relationship between church and society, in what situations and what factors these attributes are identified by individual opinion formers. The author first examines the historical context of the emergence of these topoi and then looks at some cases of their use, with particular emphasis on the period of communist dictatorship.

Keywords: *democracy, Calvinism, heritage transformation, community memory, communism.*

¹ Associate professor, Reformed Theological Academy of Sárospatak, Email: carolusmagnusmeister@gmail.com

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

“Calvinism (...) has been the first and the most outstanding root of democratic changes across Europe.”

Ferenc Gombos, former Reformed theologian who later became a journalist in Losonc/ Lučenec, published a high-impact article under the pseudonym Pál Simándy in 1927, titled *A magyar kálvinizmus útja* [The Path of Hungarian Calvinism], in which he emphasized that:

“...Hungarian Calvinism is the medium of the national and racial ideology with its most distinctive historical consciousness; in opposition with Catholicism, which is mainly internationalist; and Lutheranism, which is particularly the ideology of foreign racial formulae. The idea of social renewal is also closer to the soul of Hungarian Calvinism. Calvinism is also in general the first and the most **outstanding root of democratic changes** in Europe. At a closer look across centuries, Hungarian Calvinism has always heralded the idea of progress; Calvinism was the guardian of the freedom of thought and constitutionality: the flagship of the expansion of human rights.”³

Simándy’s text triggered many responses; many argued against his social-democratic-centred Calvinist⁴ vision that he outlined;⁵ however, his critics did not argue at all against that Calvinism clearly bears the features the author had listed. What is more, associating these features with Calvinism did not come from Simándy, but it was crystallized and established in the 19th century, when it became indeed one of the most important elements of the Hungarian Reformed community’s self-image as well as of

³ SIMÁNDY, Pál (1927): *A magyar kálvinizmus útja*. Losonc, Kultúra. 25.

⁴ Given that this practice is widely used in the concerned community, we will use the terms “Calvinist” and “Reformed” as synonyms. We would also like to note that several theologians (e.g.: TAVASZY, Sándor (1997): *A kálvinista világnézet alapkérdései*. In: Németh, Pál (ed.): *Magyar református önismereti olvasókönyv. Válogatás a XX. század első felének református teológiai irodalmából*. Budapest, Kálvin. 60–68; SEBESTYÉN, Jenő (1997): *A kálvinistaéletstíluskérdése*. In: Németh, Pál (ed.): *Magyar református önismereti olvasókönyv. Válogatás a XX. század első felének református teológiai irodalmából*. Budapest, Kálvin. 90–94) still make a distinction between the two terms, considering Calvinism as a broader ideology embracing the entire social life, whilst the term Reformed would mean the narrower religious and theological feature of Calvinism. However, apart from some authors, the usage is not consistent at all.

⁵ See, for instance: FÁBRY, Zoltán (1929): *Kálvinista anachronizmus*. In: *Korunk* 10. 762–764.

the image that society formed about the Reformed (in a broader sense about Protestants). This topos is also very important since it is a key element of Reformed identity to this very day, and it also exceptionally demonstrates the extent to which the heritage shaped into an identity as the part of the past reflected and “used” in the collective memory is in a loose relationship with the true heritage of the past. These features can be traced back and represented in certain manners, and various authors in different times highlighted theming the various elements of ecclesiastical history, organization, operation, and theological principles. Furthermore, the duration of such an element’s representative feature – if ever kept – also varies.

We shall analyse non-exhaustively and rather schematically the changes mainly in the idea of democracy⁶ and progressivism, as the attributes of Calvinism focused upon by Simándy, among others, in the context of the changes in the relationship between church and society. First, we shall analyse the historical context in which these topoi appeared, and then we shall briefly examine some cases of their use.

1. Protestantism and Democracy – Reformed Historical Reflections before 1945

The second half of the 19th century was defined by the second confessionalization both for the Hungarian and the many European Protestant churches. In Olaf Blaschke’s approach based on the German and European social history of the 19th century:

⁶ International research studies on Calvinism have a considerable tradition and literature on the analysis of the relationship between the Swiss branch of the Reformation and modern democracy. Nevertheless, we shall not dwell upon this wider scientific context in this text not only because of its limitation in length but also because we would rather wish to focus on the processes of the Hungarian Reformed identity construction on the one hand and not deal with it because the “international character” of Calvinism in the Hungarian context prevails much less than its “national feature” on the other hand. Thus, although it would clearly not be a useless endeavour to compare the various national incorporations of Calvinism and the conclusions of the studies on the relationship between the interpretations of democracy in the respective areas with the Hungarian context, this issue goes beyond the focal point of this study, requiring a separate article.

“the religious system was less able to manage the changes occurring in other social sub-systems mainly because, as religion and religious observance became increasingly one of the individual’s role, the concepts of denominational identity were less able to close up the individual roles in various areas of life. A kind of possible response to this challenge was to provide religion with a national-political content (and vice versa: provide the national ideology with religious symbols). According to the dominant standpoint in social sciences and historiography, the situation was identical in Hungary, too.”⁷

Thereupon, the denominations and the identity patterns they suggested became the institutional reserves for the conflicts among the different social groups. Albeit this tendency is clearly traceable both in the theological and the public discourses of the Reformed thinking in Hungary – and broadly the Hungarian Reformed thinking – of those times, it would still be unfortunate to presume that the second confessionalization was merely limited to such a “secondary confessionalization”. Its reason, nevertheless, should be sought for in the historical context and the particular situation the Reformed Church in Hungary was facing. Indeed, this process was not independent from its ecclesiastical policy struggles that the Protestants fought with Roman Catholicism as the self-proclaimed dominant church – and the Ruler supporting it as such – on the various arenas of politics, public life, and culture. Behind these ambitions,

“the interpretation of history rooted in Romanticism and freethinking liberalism had one of the biggest impacts on shaping the Hungarian Reformed identity. On the one hand, it linked the source of liberal and democratic traditions to the Reformation, and, on the other hand, it stressed the relationship between the anti-Habsburg and class independence movements and the freedom of religion, defining Protestantism as the repository of the fights for freedom and the national fight for independence.”⁸

⁷ HATOS, Pál (2007): Világ keresztényei, egyesüljetek. In: *Kommentár* 2, 2. 60; the same phrasing in: BRANDT, Julianne (2003): Felekezeti és nemzeti identitás a 19. századi Magyarországon: a protestáns egyházak. In: *Századvég* 29, 3. 28.

⁸ MILLISITS, Máté – SZÁSZ, Lajos (2009): Kálvin-émlékünnepségek a Dunamelléki Református Egyházkerületben. In: Farbak, Péter – Kiss, Réka (eds.): *Kálvin hagyománya. Református kulturális örökség a Duna mentén. Kiállítási katalógus*. Budapest, Budapesti Történelmi Múzeum – Dunamelléki Református Egyházkerület. 71. It is instructive how ImreRévész, among

Two further reform movements entered later on stage and in dialogue with this particular Reformed self-interpretation: domestic mission and historic Calvinism. Both missions pointed to liberal theology as the prime cause for the crisis of religious life and the emptiness of churches, while the latter suggested a historical reconstruction invoking Calvin as a solution for the problems.

The reference to Calvin and the specific development of “Calvinism” are the results of a special evolution in the history of the Hungarian Reformed Church. “Calvinist” was initially a sobriquet given to the Reformed faithful by Roman Catholicism, which the Protestants of Helvetic confession started to accept only in the 19th century trying to render a positive connotation to the term precisely through the strong focus on and the reference to Calvin.⁹ It was not fully self-evident at the time either as the polity of the local Reformed church, its dogmatic theology expressed in its confessions mainly took shape based on the Zürich and German model and not Calvin’s Genevan confession, while the ecclesiastical organization featured a very particular, hybrid characteristic whose episcopal system, for instance, was in complete opposition with Calvin’s principles. The case of the theological reference to Calvin is more or less similar. Although the translation of Calvin’s Geneva Catechism was published in Hungarian during the author’s lifetime, in 1563, being translated by Péter Méliusz Juhász,¹⁰ and his works and teachings were known and renowned, he still was not the main reference point of the Helvetic Reformation in Hungary. Imre Révész, the most important Reformed church historian between the two World Wars, outlined in several studies

the first who dealt with the topic in 1934, interpreted this tradition as something whose “perfect counterpart on the other side was *the shaping of the religious idea of the ‘Regnum Marianum’ into a historical doctrine and a historical policy system*” (see: RÉVÉSZ, Imre (1934): Szempontok a magyar kálvinizmus eredetéhez. In: *Századok* 67. 271–272; RÉVÉSZ, Imre (1923): *Mai magyarkálvinizmus*. Budapest, Bethlen Gábor Irodalmi és Nyomdai Részvénytársaság. 8). This connection was later omitted from the interpretations.

⁹ See: RAVASZ, László (1924): Kálvin és a kálvinizmus. In: Ravasz, László: *Látások könyve*. Budapest, n.p. 3–28; RÉVÉSZ 1934; RÉVÉSZ, Imre (1936): Református vagy kálvinista? In: *Igazság és Élet*. 89–93.

¹⁰ His main work, *Institutio*, was published only in 1624, translated by Albert Szenci Molnár, as the audience of this piece of work knew Latin relatively well as opposed to the readers of the Catechism, and the Latin version of both works is proven to have circulated in Hungary quite early; the later date of the translation did not really influence Calvin’s credit.

that “it seems that Hungarian theologians started to consider Calvin the representative par excellence and, most of all, the decisive representative of the Reformed spirit only starting from the second half of the 17th century”.¹¹ Thus, the Calvinist debate between the two World Wars did not draw the attention upon Calvin himself but rather upon the social context of the reference to Calvin: upon the discussion of the issue, which was basically important mainly because it provided a historical and theological support to the concept of the “particularly Hungarian” Reformed theology and religion, which tried, on the one hand, to hold together the Reformed Church split after the Treaty of Trianon ending WWI along a certain ideology, and, on the other, it helped integrate this church or the churches as the most Eastern Bloc of the churches in the large community of international Calvinism. This can ensure both the uniqueness and specificity of the Hungarian Reformed community, and, at the same time, it can provide the reassuring feeling of belonging to a large family even if they experience a manifold minority condition.

Although Hungarian Calvinism proved to be a complex ideology with significant historical significance by the 1930s, its actual formulation started only at the turn of the 20th century, in the more or less peaceful environment after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise, the Council of Debrecen of 1881, and the results of the ecclesiastical struggles of the last few years of the 19th century aimed at achieving true equality of religions.¹² Its most important trend, namely historic Calvinism, unfolded after 1910, pursuant to one of Jenő Sebestyén’s accomplishments, who had just returned from his Dutch scholarship programme.¹³ For Sebestyén and his followers, it had become important to highlight the significance of Calvinism going beyond religion because of the Netherlands where the movement was rooted, Kuyper’s political-public Calvinism¹⁴ and

¹¹ RÉVÉSZ, Imre (1933): Kálvin legelső magyar támadója Draskovich Györgyés Confutatioja. In: *Theológiai szemle* 9, 1–2. 5.

¹² See: RÉVÉSZ 1934; RAVASZ 1924; SEBESTYÉN 1997; TAVASZY 1997; for a more in-depth study, see: BUCSAY, Mihály (1979): Kálvin jelenléte Magyarországon 1544–1944. In: *Theológiai Szemle* 22, 5. 275–281.

¹³ 1884–1950. Theologian, professor of theology in Budapest. Studied in Utrecht with scholarship between 1907 and 1910, where he got acquainted with the theory and practice of Dutch Calvinism.

¹⁴ Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), Dutch Reformed minister, politician and journalist. Formerly Prime Minister of the Netherlands several times.

its successes, and thus, the clarification of the relationship between democracy and church was also an important part of their programme. Sebestyén basically followed in it, Abraham Kuyper's argumentation in reference to Calvin. Kuyper summarizes Calvin's views on power and, in this connection, democracy in three points:

“1. no creature can ever have control over the peoples but God as the peoples were created by God alone, they are sustained by his almighty power, and they are governed by his decrees; 2. sin has broken God's direct rule in the political realm, so He introduced the exercise of supreme authority among men as a mechanical aid; 3. no matter the approach of the ruling power, one man will never have power over others unless that power has come down onto him from God almighty.”¹⁵

Therefore, in terms of exercising authority, he considers “shared authority among many others, i.e. the republic” as the best solution due to the abuses, where the individuals on power should be elected by the people. He also notes that the source of the right, headship does not come from the people (“popular sovereignty”) in this case either but rather from God's grace. Kuyper, referring to the constitution of the USA, deems necessary to acknowledge that we should be thankful to God almighty if he empowered us to elect our headship ourselves.¹⁶ According to Sebestyén, the political and public responsibility of the Calvinist individual derives from this as the individual must try to validate God's glory in all the areas of public life: in the state, in society, and in the church. Thus, the people being granted such freedom must be cautious not to render themselves unworthy of God's grace by electing God's enemies and unworthy people into high offices.

In his work *Kálvin és demokrácia* (1913), Sebestyén points out that Calvin has never stated that the godless, destructive, and perverse individuals are just as entitled to rule in God's glory as the defenders of the godly and moral world order, the pure thinkers. Calvinist democracy is the rule of the ideal faithful people. As a result, although Sebestyén strongly emphasizes that all men are equal in Calvinism, this is only applicable in relation to God: equal in their sinfulness and that God in His graceful selection does not

¹⁵ KUYPER, Ábrahám (1922): *A kálvinizmuslényege*. Budapest, Bethlen Gábor Irodalmi és Nyomdai Részvénytársaság. 81.

¹⁶ Op. cit. 82–84.

take into account the person proper. However, this equality does not result in any kind of democracy within the church itself, for instance, in the consistories. For the consistories, it is nothing but the “aristocracy of faith”.

Sebestyén’s interpretation of Calvin had an important impact on the ecclesiastical discourse of his time. The “Calvinism debate” between the two World Wars, i.e. the vivid discourse shaking the broad layers of the church –which was a decisive part in the initiatives of Reformed renewal of the time –,unfolded to a significant extent thanks to Sebestyén’s accomplishments. His interpretation of Calvin is one of the decisive trends in the Hungarian Reformed theological thinking up to this very day and is important as such for two reasons. On the one hand, Sebestyén is rather sceptical and critical vis-à-vis the civil, secular democracy. Although he first worded his viewpoint in 1913, the post-Trianon spiritual movements played a significant role in the fact that his critical approach to democracy became stronger and that this crucial standpoint would be later embraced by important Reformed theologians. At that time, “in the eyes of broad sections of society, the liberal system of ideas and democracy itself were synonymous with the peace treaties that were concluded after losing the war and the national catastrophe they fulfilled. This, in turn, had led to the rejection of modernity and the complete decline of the intellectual tendencies representing it (such as liberalism and neo-Kantian thinking).”¹⁷ On the other hand, Sebestyén did not discuss Calvin’s right of resistance at all or very rarely –namely, the possibility adopted by Calvin, according to which, although power and authority as a structural element, comes from God and man’s primary obligation is obedience, the people still have the right to resist and oppose the openly godless authority that does not perform its God-given tasks in the service of the people, and thus does not accomplish the work in the glory and power of God. However, in several key points in Hungarian history, e.g.in relation to Bocskai’s freedom fight(1604–1606) in the Reformed interpretation of history,¹⁸ this was not a “current” part of Calvinism

¹⁷ TÓTH-MATOLCSI, László (2005): Ravasz László és Bibó István nemzetértelmezései. In: *Beszélő* 10, 6–7. 158.

¹⁸ It is one of the rare, successful fights for freedom in Hungarian history, after which Bocskai remained in the national and especially in the Reformed collective memory as “The Hungarian Moses”. Nonetheless, historians’ opinions are divided as to whether Bocskai was motivated by the right to resistance as explained by Calvin and taken further by Béza or as was put down in the Golden Bull of 1222. On this topic, see: BENDA, Kálmán (1971): *A kálvini*

during the time when Sebestyén's theology sprang just as in Kuyper's Netherlands. The reason may have been that in the respective period, i.e. during the lost war, the revolutions and the regimes after Trianon, just as the previous systems, did not establish the concept of "godless" for the contemporary Reformed community.

But the situation shortly changed, and the Reformed Church had to rethink its democratic traditions and the manner in which it would refer to it within the framework of the people's democracy. It is impossible to analyse the situation comprehensively in this case, so we will present only one discourse that outlines the social framework in which the representatives of the Reformed Church discussed the problem of democratic traditions and progress on the one hand and that highlights the change in the content of this discourse on the other.

2. Protestantism and Democracy— Reformed Historical Reflections after 1945

In 1948, as the political life in the country headed towards the increasingly strengthening communist dictatorship, the churches had to face more intense attacks, which influenced and changed the situation of the Reformed Church as well as its internal relations. Catechism classes became elective starting the spring of 1947, affecting the most important socialization instrument of the church, and in 1948 the church schools were nationalized. In preparation for this process, the high-ranked church officials, including Bishop László Ravasz, were dismissed from their offices. The very first impulse coming from the political authority was given by Ernő Mihályfi¹⁹ at the episcopal investiture of József Szabó, Evangelical Bishop of Dunáninnen, in his speech delivered on 18 March 1948. In Mihályfi's opinion:

tanok hatása a magyar rendi ellenállás ideológiájára. In: *Helikon* 17, 3–4. 322–330; BENDA, Kálmán (1986): A kálvinizmus és a magyarságtudat kölcsönhatása történelmünkben. In: *Confessio* 10, 2. 4–8.

¹⁹ 1898–1972: son of an Evangelical minister, journalist, and politician, starting off from the left-wing of the Smallholders' Party, Vice-President of Parliament at the time, who became the universal superintendent of the Evangelical Church starting from 1952.

“Protestantism has the opportunity to join the national front of democratic forces. But there is still one issue to be sorted out inside the church, namely that of secular governance. The church has never officially been engaged in politics, but its political flavour has always been added by the secular leaders who emerged from the prominent representatives of the ruling class. The revolution has altered the picture of the entire Hungarian society, but the guards have still not been changed in one place: among the lay supervisors of the Protestant churches. And this is what has given rise to justified mistrust in the church.”²⁰

After this speech, László Ravasz resigned from his offices in the ecclesiastical bodies, and his successor, Albert Bereczky – also trusted by the communists –, had the managing body, the Council, accept the Agreement concluded with the state, on 14–15 June, after a brief process of conciliation, and then signed it in person.²¹ The Agreement laid down the mutilation and subjugation of the church on the one hand, and, at the same time, it had a particular “outcome” as well since the communist power managed to conclude such an agreement first with the Reformed Church from among all the so-called “historic” churches. Thus, the Reformed Church, whose role assigned by the communist power was that of a “battering ram” in enforcing the churches, consequently became both a positive example and a reference base.²²

²⁰ Quoted in: LADÁNYI, Sándor: Vázlatos történelmi áttekintés a Magyarországi Református Egyház közelebbi múltjának alakulásáról. In: Barcza, József – Dienes, Dénes (eds.) (1999): *A Magyarországi Református Egyház története, 1918–1990. Tanulmányok*. Sárospatak, Sárospataki Református Teológiai Akadémia. 110–111.

²¹ An important reason for the acceptance of the Agreement was safeguarding the church schools, but the very day after the Council adopted a resolution, on 16 June, the Parliament voted right away Law 33/1948 concerning the nationalization of the schools that were not owned by the state.

²² More on the topic in: HORVÁTH, Erzsébet (2014): *A református iskolák államosítása Magyarországon (1945–1948)*. Budapest, A Magyarországi Református Egyház Zsinati Levéltára; ERDŐS, Kristóf (2011): A Magyar Köztársaság és a Magyarországi Református Egyház 1948-as egyezményének vizsgálata. In: J. ÚJVÁRY, Zsuzsanna (ed.): *Összekörnek az évezredek*. Budapest–Piliscsaba, Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kar Történettudományi Intézet–Szent István Társulat – *Pázmány Történelmi Műhely: Történelmi Tanulmányok*, vol. 3. 310–331.

This situation was then sought to be transformed into a positive identity programme by the church leadership in the following years. The churches of the Western Protestant world mostly did not welcome the compromise of the Hungarian Reformed Church with the communist power, and this was frequently given voice to at consecutive international meetings. These meetings –and the visits of the delegations of international organizations to Hungary –, the questions asked about the Hungarian situation there, and the answers given to them by the Hungarians play an important role in strengthening the international legitimacy not only of the Hungarian Reformed Church but also of the Hungarian state as they could prove that there was no religious and church persecution in Hungary despite all malicious rumours. The interest in the situation in Hungary and the positive statement of some internationally recognized theologians in good relations with the Hungarians were then framed in a special way by the church leaders in the Hungarian ecclesiastical press: by the beginning of the 1950s, the narrative according to which the Hungarian Reformed Church became the “spectacle of the world”²³ became dominant as well as the narrative that the Reformed Church being the first to conclude an agreement with the communist state was actually a sign of divine choice because God wanted to give an example to the other churches through the hardships, the problems of the Hungarian Reformed community no matter whether these churches lived in a socialist or a capitalist regime, and this gave answers to the question of how Christianity could find its way in the post-Constantine age.

This identity programme was barely germinal at the beginning of 1948; moreover, reframing the negative situations of the time as a “survival strategy” was already visible. During that year, several important people in national politics would visit Sárospatak, including Mátyás Rákosi twice, and the local events were closely related to the national events. On 9 March, there was a semi-official meeting in Sárospatak between Minister of Religious Affairs Máté Kovács and Enyedy Andor,²⁴ Reformed Bishop of Tiszáninnen

²³ The phrase is a biblical quotation from Apostle Paul: “For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings.” (1Cor 4:9).

²⁴ (1888–1966): he studied theology in Sárospatak and obtained a doctoral degree in theology in 1928. He was a minister in Sátoraljaújhely between 1911 and 1922, in Miskolc until 1955 and Bishop of the Church District of Tiszáninnen between 1942 and 1952. As a response to his resistance against the nationalization of ecclesiastical schools in 1952 and the closing of the Reformed Theology in Sárospatak, the leaders of the church had him resign, and the independence of the church district was also abolished after his resignation.

District. The pretext for the meeting was that “the secretaries of the Hungarian Communist Party and the National Peasant Party in Zemplén County repeatedly raised objections against the Reformed educational institutions in Sárospatak”.²⁵ The previous day, the delegation had also met with teachers and leaders of the institutions, emphasizing before them that “the debate between the people’s democracy and civic democracy is over, and now all responsible factors can only think about and work on perfecting people’s democracy as fully as possible”. The delegation outlined the school’s flaws, outdated approach, and elitist aspirations in several points, and then explained: “The school policy of the last 400 years, followed in the past and considered democratic at the time, is no longer satisfactory today. Therefore, in the interest of the future of the school, it deems important that all institutions be systematically integrated into the cultural policy of the Hungarian people’s democracy.”²⁶ The delegation expressed its criticism of the school in several points, three of which now seem particularly important to our topic:

“2. It kept the old leadership and public spirit. The school’s curator-in-chief is Géza Farkasfalvi Farkas, imperial and royal chamberlain, and the curator is Count Dr Pál Bethlen. They are the aristocrats of the old system. Although being Reformed, the teaching staff and the pupils sympathize with Cardinal Mindszenty’s reactionary and anti-popular policy, and they exclude and isolate the progressist teachers.

3. History and social views are outdated. They speak reluctantly and in formal terms about the revolutions, the workers’ movement, 1848, Marx, Engels, or the Soviet Union. They praise the remote past in history, they are nationalistic and reactionary against progress. They generally sympathize with the Western capitalist states and the civil democracies. They underestimate the present; they feel nostalgic for the past. Although only people’s democracy exists, they approve of civic democracy. They are the followers of the anti-grass root “Third Way” movement.

4. The intellectual development of Patak stopped somewhere back in 1944 although there has been an enormous political, social, and economic development after the liberation. They are enthusiastic about the people’s writers, especially about Péter Veres, praising his writings about secession and passivity. However, they refuse to acknowledge the values of socialist writers, poets, and Soviet literature. The teaching staff and youth are prone to compromise, are compliant and often discreet.

²⁵ LADÁNYI, Sándor 1999, 113.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 113.

They do not stand out boldly for their democratic convictions. They are not politically educated. They do not know our real situation and place among the socialist nations. They condemn popular, social progress, the people's democracies. And they have a chauvinistic view of the neighbouring peoples. Retraining is formal and arises from official compulsion. Neither the teaching staff nor the youth have a realistic political sense. They emphasize empty phrases without any conviction."²⁷

In his speech opening the school year on 7 September 1947, Director General Barnabás Urbán summarized this now-out-of-date legacy of the four hundred years history as follows:

“... our secondary school has been the advocate, protector, and enforcer of human rights for four centuries. The freedom of conscience brought it to life, and its founders erected an altar to religious freedom. It was the flagship of freedom movements nourished by a national feeling even in the darkest times of repression. Its faithful sons wore the shackles of the galleys with a defiant spirit, their convictions did not waver for a moment, and they kept their allegiance until their dying day. Teachers and students ate together the bitter bread of escape and persecution rather than surrender to foreign power so alien to their soul, and in their hiding their love of freedom flared with an even higher flame. The famous red-hat heroes of Patak of the 1848–49 Revolution, who learnt history from the heritage of the past among these walls, wrote history themselves with their deeds on the bloody battlefields. Kossuth's spirit of flame heated here the feelings of the youth into a glowing patriotism. Like the warming rays of the sun over the great nature, the pure air of freedom flowed here in the spiritual life. Freedom was no formality in our school but meant life itself. (...)

Freedom can provide a peaceful atmosphere in which the process of development can begin. However, progress is not to be taken for the path of revolution; for progress means the service of peace of souls, spiritual reconstruction, spiritual enrichment, and general material well-being.(...) Progress can only begin at the touch of the soul of freedom.(...)

Our school has always followed the path of progress. Understanding the words of the times, it has kept pace with the ideology, and even preceded them many

²⁷ The report of Dr István Orbán, former history teacher in Sárospatak, who was present at the meeting, is quoted in: FEKETE, Gyula (2006): Közéleti naplórészletek. In: *Zempléni Múzsza* 6, 3 http://zemplenimuzsa.hu/06_3/fekete.htm (last accessed: 3.12.2019).

times. It has become a forerunner of reforms within the education system. The custom and social spirit of several of its old institutions still prove their efficiency in various student organizations.”²⁸

Urbán’s text is important not only because it clearly echoes the ideas in Simándy’s text quoted at the beginning of the article, but it also indicates that the concepts in it have already matured to be rethought as these are precisely the concepts which mark the areas of the Reformed identity in the broader sense, and the identity of Sárospatak, the “spirit of Patak”, at a closer look, in relation to which the state authority speaks about flaws and obsolescence. Urbán did not speak directly about the concept of democracy, but he gave the content and local interpretation of the school’s social programme and student organization while he presented them (not quoted herein).

The following episode in the course of events was Gyula Ortutay’s visitation of 30 March in Végardó, which had practically merged with the city of Sárospatak, where he inaugurated a reconstructed school. In his speech, Ortutay pointed out that:

“Democracy has proven countless times that it wants to support the church. Democracy built the churches that were demolished by the fascists. I must also point this out, and I say this as a minister and representative of the Smallholder Party, that the communist village brigades took a major share in this work. However, when democracy made great sacrifices for the church in all areas, it expects the church to also support democracy in its great constructive work. Social truths can be read and must be read from the gospel. Negotiations have already begun between the church and democracy.– Democracy is not to be blamed that there are still frictions and misunderstandings.–So, I now turn to the church with the request to finally give the Hungarian people peace of mind and not to contrast the democratic convictions of the Hungarian people with their religious feelings.”²⁹

In his editorial titled *Egyház és demokrácia* [Church and Democracy] and published in the daily paper *Kis Újság* on the following day, Bishop Andor Enyedy responded to Ortutay’s speech fitting into the party’s directives and attempting to thematize the conflict between the church and the state that refers to itself as “democracy”. Enyedy

²⁸ URBÁN, Barnabás (1948): Évnyitó beszéd. In: A Sárospataki Ref. Főiskola évkönyve (értesítője) az 1947–48-ik iskolai évről 92, 3–7. 4–5.

²⁹ [Author Missing] Az egyház adja meg végre a magyar népnek a lelki nyugalmat. In: *Kis Újság* 2/1948, 75. 1.

reflects on the escalating situation and discusses the relationship between the church and democracy on a theoretical, emotional, and practical basis. In the first point, he discusses the theoretical identity of the two actors, citing as an example the democratic system of the church, the council-consistorial principle, and the long tradition of consistories, and then he states that: “Because of the democratic structure and spirit of our church, it does not only sympathize with the political and economic democracy, but as an intellectual and spiritual mother, as an older brother, it is ready to support, help, unfold, and promote it with all its might.” In the second point, he agrees with Ortutay’s statement about state subsidies, but he immediately adds that these subsidies are not the only reason for the church’s support of the aspirations of the state, but there is also their common goal that “Hungarian democracy becomes a form of government and a way of life for the people working together in freedom, equality, brotherhood, and peace.” Eventually, he notes that in order to achieve this goal, the church and the state work in separate ways and complete different objectives, yet “the same goal must be served: the liberation of the created man on earth from sin, from the dark powers that oppress him, the most perfect way of life possible of the most perfect man possible.”³⁰

Enyedý consistently avoids taking over Ortutay’s narrative and does not identify the state with democracy. Enyedý’s article was reviewed by the newspaper *Szabad Nép* on the same day, 2 April, but it turned the bishop’s tone and phrasing – that could be perceived as distant under the circumstances – into a narrative completely identifying with “democracy”. Two days later, on Sunday, 4 April, Enyedý paid another visit to Sárosbata and participated on behalf of the church in the peasant-worker general assembly, where – as reported – Rákosi spoke about the current situation of the democracy in front of 150,000 people:

“...it is now clear to everyone that the Hungarian people stand for democracy. This insight – he continued – is starting to make its way more and more into even into ecclesiastical circles which have been hostile to popular democracy almost until recently. Most believers have been on our side, the side of democracy, so far, but now more and more of the leaders start to realize that their position so far has been wrong, harmful, and that the wheel of history cannot be reversed. They need to find ways to coexist peacefully and constructively with democracy.”³¹

³⁰ ENYEDY, Andor (1948): Egyház és demokrácia. In: *Kis Újság* 2, 76. 1.

³¹ [Author Missing] A Nemzeti Függetlenségi Front új jelentősége. In: *Szabad Nép* 6/1948, 79. 1.

After the meeting, Rákosi also visited the Reformed College, where he met with the school board and the teachers. *Magyar Értésítő*, the Protestant ecclesiastical lithograph, reported the event in detail. The article in the newspaper was also reviewed by *Szabad Nép*. According to the latter media, Rákosi also criticized the Reformed Church during the meeting, saying that “since 1867, Hungarian Calvinism has ceased to be a progressive factor in Hungarian life. Our Reformed Church must once again become an advocate and a benevolent worker of the great popular movements.”³²

Again, in the coverage of *Szabad Nép*, Barna Urbán reflected upon Rákosi’s remarks and said that:

“We are happy to see that a new world is being born from the ruins almost overnight. We would also like to take an even greater share from this vast and self-sacrificing effort in the field of our respective vocations. Our school has taken the initiative proving that we work together with our worker brethren for our nation. We want to be not only the advocates of the pure ideals of popular democracy but also the implementers in the spirit of the noble traditions of our ancestors, in the spirit of the greatest alumnus of Sárospatak, Lajos Kossuth.”³³

Finally, as part of the discourse, we must mention a later event and the texts mentioning it. On 6 November 1948, the Reformed College of Sárospatak organized a festivity on the centenary of János Erdélyi, the eponym of the school’s literary society, where the speakers were Gyula Ortutay, Secretary of State László Bóka, and Andor Enyedy. The note in the school’s yearbook referring to this event expresses gratitude to “Minister of Religious Affairs Dr Gyula Ortutay and Secretary of State Dr László Bóka, who not only honoured us with their visit and not only discussed with us about our problems but also delivered highly valuable speeches at the centenary celebrations organized in János Erdélyi’s honour: heralding the new ideology, teaching us about the truly valuable traditions and about when and how can, as a rule, traditions be at the service of progress.”³⁴

³² [Author Missing] Egyházunk kész minden erejével támogatni a magyar demokráciát. In: *Szabad Nép* 6/1948, 92. 3.

³³ [Author Missing] A református vezetők nemcsak hirdetői, hanem megvalósítói akarnak lenni a népi demokrácia tiszta eszméinek. In: *Szabad Nép* 6/1948, 80. 2.

³⁴ *** Feljegyzések. In: Nagy, Barna (ed.): A Sárospataki Ref. Főiskola évkönyve (értésítője) az 1948–49-ik iskolai évről. 92. 27.

A detailed report about the event was given again by the official Barna Urbán. As he put it:

“This was a privileged opportunity for us as we were able to testify before the first servant and chief guardian of the culture of the Hungarian people’s democracy, the great historical and social justice of the democratic policy: in addition to the real cultural development of the working Hungarians. It is a particularly great honour for us to thank the Minister for appreciating the historical service and special tasks of our long-standing Reformed secondary schools on such a festive occasion and making it possible for the Alma Mater of Patak, as a Reformed ecclesiastical education institution, to continue the cultural development and construction of our democracy. We are certain that this remarkable occasion also contributed to the establishment of a fair, mutually understanding and mutually respectful relationship between church and state-guided education.”³⁵

The quoted texts allow us to get an insight into a particularly complex process in which one of the important factors was the alteration of the concept of democracy along with the changes in the Hungarian political system. There were several concepts of democracy in the Hungarian political life after 1945 along with the constant changes in it until the end of the coalition period. One of the determinants was the concept represented by the Smallholders’ Party, the core of which was a social system based on rights that was based on its turn on the civic model.

“In addition to freedom, the independence of individuals, general equality of rights, the political culture of constitutionality, the institutional right of free debate, and the ability to control power were also strong elements of the concept of the smallholder democracy. The observance of the majority principle, the regulations (the rules of the game), and the institutional structures were also central factors in the smallholder democracy after 1945. (...) the very essence of the concept of the smallholder-civil democracy was that the civil liberties pertained equally to ‘all’.”³⁶

³⁵ URBÁN, Barnabás: Beszámoló a sárospataki főiskola 1948–49. évi életéről. In: Nagy, Barna (ed.): *A Sárospataki Ref. Főiskola évkönyve (értésítője) az 1948–49-ik iskolai évről*. 92. 6–7.

³⁶ MEDGYESI, Konstantin (2017 [unpubl.]): *Demokrácia-diskurzus(ok) Magyarországon az 1945 és 1949 közötti időszakban és időszakról*. PhD dissertation. University of Szeged, Doctoral School of History. 222. <http://doktori.bibl.u-szeged.hu/4133/19/medgyesidokt.pdf> (last accessed: 13.12.2019).

On the other hand, although in the first days the concept of communist democracy appeared in a more covert form, representing a radically different position in respect to the liberties, its defining motive was the search for an enemy.

“The essence of the interpretation of communist democracy during the time of the coalition was that ‘democracy’ was to bring something totally new in the life of the country, and this ‘novel phenomenon’ facilitates social mobility and the breakthrough of the existing structures. The partisans of the left-wing democracy interpretation taking shape at the time did not see democracy as a system and a lifestyle built on rights but rather as a society-shaping framework able to tear down centuries of obsessions. The ‘civil’ approach totally opposed this view, preventing the liberties from being seriously damaged in the best interest of radical changes.”³⁷

In the communist approach of democracy, the liberties did not benefit everyone, especially not the enemy whom they must fight –wherefrom the communists’ combative approach of democracy –, and in this war one can go beyond the classic rules of civil democracy in the interest of the emerging novel situation. And this novelty is nothing else but the people’s democracy, a term which the Communist Party used relatively consistently after 1946 and which practically meant the dictatorship of the proletariat as rather clearly formulated in 1949 after the elimination of the political enemies.

On the one hand, it is clear from the quoted texts that the communist wording is characterized by an understandable, but probably intentional, uncertainty based on the process described above as the terms democracy and people’s democracy are constantly used synonymously to disclose other agents in the communication process. On the other hand, it is obvious that they monopolized and used exclusively the concept of democracy (= “we”), which was clearly opposed by the representatives of the church: Enyedy all along and Urbán at the beginning. Enyedy definitely explains the concept of civil democracy especially in the editorial published in *Kis Újság*, speaking constantly about the dialogue between peers, conviction and persuasion. This concept is also clearly referred to in the way he refers to the functioning of the consistories and the church

³⁷ Medgyesi 2017, 221.

governance. However, Urbán's statements are strongly influenced by the powerful discourse of the emerging dictatorship, and, although the text speaking about Ortutay's visit in autumn 1948 contains a peculiar and probably also intentional inconsistency in the use of the terms "democracy" and "people's democracy", the text as a whole convinces us that the speaker starts to use the strategy of adaptive reframing.

The concept of tradition is very important throughout the discourse. The appearance of Kossuth's figure, a reference to him, which is very specific and perhaps symbolic, is a motive pointed out in the local press, the *Zemplén Népiújság's* report on the National Assembly held on 4 April, which has little connection to the discourse: "A whole forest of national and red flags, big photos of Mátyás Rákosi, thousands of placards featuring slogans make the areas unforgettably beautiful. The board of a colourful group of villagers reads: 'Lajos Kossuth in 1848, –Mátyás Rákosi in 1948!'"³⁸ However, the difference between Rákosi's and Urbán's reference to Kossuth is important. Rákosi does not expressly mention Kossuth, but his statement according to which the Reformed Church stopped being a progressive element in Hungarian life after 1867 –i.e. the year of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise, after leaving off Kossuth's legacy –clearly suggests that he does not consider the Reformed Protestants the successors of the legendary red-hat student heroes of the school in Sárospatak driven by Kossuth's flame. Behind Rákosi's manifestation, there is probably the combative and exclusivist democracy concept, but it also introduces a new term in the discourse in relation to it, whose importance appears later on, in the texts discussing Ortutay's speech delivered on the Erdélyi centenary in November – namely, the concept of "progressive tradition".

Progressive tradition is one of the central concepts in the relationship of communist ideology to the past, traced back to Marx. Marx "points out how many times the fighters put on the mask of tradition in the times of revolutions, 'so that they can act out the new scene of world history in this costume consecrated by tradition...' (...) the emerging novelty appears on the stage of history, sometimes putting on the costume of the past..."³⁹, but this does not mean a real return into the past but rather a starting-point that progress will later supersede and discard.

³⁸ [Author Missing] *Zempléni Népiújság* 4/1948, 15. 1.

³⁹ BÓKA, László (1953): Marx tanítása a haladó hagyomány felhasználásáról. In: *Irodalomtörténet* 41, 1–2. 2–3.

“We must return to tradition so that we do not lose our security in our first, uncertain steps on the new path, so that the bold novelty does not explode formlessly in our attempt to translate it into the literary vernacular which we are familiar with. However, the return to tradition is only justified if there is something new in the traditional form, and it is only justified until it evolves to a level where it can already create its own specific, completely new forms. It is necessary to return to tradition in order to draw strength from the great analogies of the past for the new so that by recalling the analogy we can imagine that which has never existed before, gain inspiration for the new heat of new words by recalling the hot words of the past.”⁴⁰

The quotation is an interpretation of Marx, which appeared a few years later than the period of concern and refers to the literary historical application of the concept of progressive tradition, but it can clearly be answered in the same key as the writer of the school report on Ortutay’s speech did, and it can also be found in the manner in which Urbán tries to divert Kossuth’s revolutionary enthusiasm to the transition to the new world of people’s democracy, an area so alien to the centuries-old traditions of the College.

And this will mean a very significant change in Reformed identity. Simándy, in his above quoted work, considers democratic thinking, the “ardent love of the race”, religious tolerance, and anti-Habsburg attitude as the key features of Calvinism besides the service of Western progress by which he means mostly the transfer of social rather than technological and economic patterns. It is clear that the term “progress” also makes sense in this new area, but it will be a shift in a completely different sense, in a different direction: the service of popular democracy on the path of socialism.

The internalization of the concept of progressive tradition into Reformed thinking will become extremely important in this context as the concept actually covers a specific work of remembrance insofar as it refers to updating and transferring the past aspirations considered for some reason, defined by the current political goals, the forerunner of socialist culture and a kind of legitimacy of the present.⁴¹ In this sense, the concept, along with many other elements of communist terminology, also enters the theological language of the Reformed Church. Both the term and the concept appear

⁴⁰ BÓKA 1953, 4.

⁴¹ REICHERT Gábor (2018): „Szétnézett a Hadikban, de nem látott senkit”. Karinthy Frigyes életművének de- és rekanonizációja a Rákosi-korszakban. In: *2000 Irodalmi és Társadalmi havilap* 30, 9. 55.

quite unequivocally in the Reformed weekly newspaper *Az Út*, dated 16 March 1952, in which the writer addresses patriotism in the spirit of the upcoming national holiday and closes his message as follows:

“If we try to learn patriotism from the Bible without the help of the Holy Ghost, we are going nowhere. If the Holy Ghost helps: we will find our way. It is obvious that István Bocskai, Gabriel Bethlen, and the other important figures of our church’s progressive tradition were just as familiar with the places in the Bible about the love of our enemy, for instance, as we are. And still: the Holy Ghost made the words of the Bible glow for our biblical ancestors, exactly the ones that had actuality, that is to say: it made the Bible the Word. It guided them in the dense forest of the Bible and drew their devout attention to those messages that inspired them to brave resistance, loyalty to the people, and opposition to the inner and outer enemies of the people.”⁴²

The text is very difficult to understand without knowing the specific circumstances, whose detailed presentation will be omitted here. The most important hint may have been the one to the inner and outer enemies. 1952 was the year of the elimination of the “inner enemies” in the Reformed Church, of those who opposed the agreement with the communists. And these expressions mainly refer to the earlier dissolved Bethánia Society, the last remains of the old awakening domestic mission movement. The newspaper dedicated quite a few articles to Bethánia, presented its history, spread, creating inner enemy within, “bethanism”, from these data and gave the key to the readers for how, by what features or customs, expressions and behavioural patterns *bethanists* can be recognized. On the other hand – by the analogy between the communist warrior and the concept of exclusive democracy –, the text states that they cannot benefit from the love to be shown to all “brethren” and neither from the love towards enemies, as per the Christian teaching.

Thus, in the Sárospatak discourse, we can notice a key turning-point with regard to the long-term change of the Reformed denominational identity – namely, the way in which the meanings of basic concepts of identity are transformed in the process of social communication that reflects radically changing circumstances. And the long-lasting effect

⁴² [Author Missing] A haza szeretete. In: *Az Út* 5/1952, 11. 1.

of this change is visible not only in the new meanings that, getting incorporated in the identity patterns, significantly influence the way in which the Reformed community relates to dictatorship⁴³ but also in that the new meanings do not replace the old meanings but rather coexist with them, and thus a considerable uncertainty arises regarding their effective meaning.

3. Protestantism and Democracy – Reformed Historical Reflections after 1989

The discourses related to the nature and redefinition of the Reformed sense of identity came to life relatively late following the 1989 political change, only after the unsuccessful 2004 referendum on double citizenship for Hungarians living beyond the current borders. In the previous years, the leadership of the Reformed Church mostly considered the settlement of the church's infrastructure to be its primary task, and the confrontation with the past and the changed circumstances was largely lagging behind. The referendum was sobering in many respects, drawing the attention of the church leaders and the very small group of opinion leaders, among others, to the fact that the assumption that the Reformed community practically preserved and saved its identity during the decades of communism was incorrect. Following the referendum, there was an effort to unite the Hungarian Reformed faithful in the Carpathian Basin, which reached its symbolic goal on 22 May 2009 when the Constituting Synod in Debrecen declared the constitution of the Hungarian Reformed Church uniting all the Hungarian Reformed faithful. In the last part of our study, we will examine the manner in which the basic elements of the Reformed identity awareness, previously identified by Simándy, appear and change in connection with this event.

⁴³ More on it in: NAGY, Károly Zsolt (2017): „Amit az evangélium ígér, azt váltsa valóra a demokrácia.” A társadalmi változások teológiai reflexiói és a belső nyilvánosság nyelvének átalakulása a Magyarországi Református Egyházban 1945 és 1948 között. In: Csikós, Gábor – Kiss, Réka – Ö. Kovács, József (eds.): *Váltóállítás. Diktatúrák a vidéki Magyarországon 1945-ben*. Budapest, Nemzeti Emlékezet Bizottsága – Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont. 425–476.

The basic information about the synod held on 22 May 2009 was summarized by the church leaders in a “catechism”. The use of the word proper is remarkable since by catechism we mean the beliefs of the church, the summary of basic teachings in the form of questions and answers, so the use of this name and form suggested that what happens is not something purely formal or superficial, it is not only that— as otherwise stated by Bishop Gusztáv Bölcseki “conducting” the unification— “...if this disgraceful act has already taken place anyway, at least the Hungarian Reformed Church should unite”,⁴⁴ but that this event has a spiritual and sacral significance.

An important feature of the text is that it seeks to establish the historical roots of the mediated identity model – marking out the “progressive traditions” – as the earlier discussed model creators did, but the role of the democracy concept in this model is significantly devalued; what is more, the 2004 referendum acquires a negative connotation and becomes part of a past that we must refuse. Democracy is being replaced by a new element, the “European idea”, “integration”, and the editors of the Catechism see this as something happening in the establishment of the Reformed unity. This is the element of the current political context as the government was already preparing for the presidency of the European Union in 2011, which, using Simándy’s concept, clearly meant “Western progress”, i.e. a higher, more developed society. The same trend of actualization can be grasped in the fact that the text’s reference to the Reformed historical past is intended to establish the elements of tolerance, acceptance, religious and ethnic peace. We also meet this principle in Simándy, but he is much less emphatic, rather referring to the Edict of Turda/Torda in 1568⁴⁵ as a complement to democracy. A reference to the right to “universal freedom of religion and conscience” appears in the text, a “re-emerging element” of the Reformed identity consciousness. It refers to a common narrative of the 19th-century liberal Protestantism fighting for religious equality in relation to which László Kósa in his writing on the Reformed identity awareness published at the turn of the millennium points out that the issue raised in it has been solved, it has already been incorporated in the legal order of democracy by now, and

⁴⁴ BÖLCSKEI, Gusztáv (2009): Szívvel és értelemmel. In: *A Magyarországi Református Egyház éves jelentése 2009*. Budapest, Magyarországi Református Egyház Zsinati Hivatala. 1. <http://evesjelentés2009.reformatus.hu/document.pdf> (last accessed: 23.01.2020).

⁴⁵ This was the first assembly in Europe proclaiming religious freedom that guaranteed free religious practice and proselytism for the accepted religions: Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, and Unitarian.

thus mentioning it has become devoid of purpose (at least as much as the case of the anti-Habsburg approach).⁴⁶ However, in my presumption, the repeated re-emergence of this narrative does not signal any kind of anachronism, but it rather confirms that the opinion leader elite of the Reformed Church has grown disappointed with democracy, which degraded its important national concern into a political instrument in the 2004 referendum, and searches and finds a point of reference in this natural law reasoning that would be independent of political struggles.

An important element of the discourse around the event of 22 May 2009 was one of the ideas in President László Sólyom's message to the Reformed proclaiming their union, which was stressed a few days later in his post-agenda speech by MP Richárd Hörcsik, Reformed minister and theology professor. Hörcsik described the events and underlined their significance, quoting the words of the President: "I share the joy of the Hungarian Reformed. The unity for which the Hungarian Reformation is grateful today also strengthens the unity of the Hungarian nation. Therefore, it is not only the case of Protestants, not only of religious people but also of all of us, all Hungarians, and is aimed to strengthen us. Therefore, they have my high appreciation and gratitude."⁴⁷ By attaching national significance to the Reformed cause, Sólyom brought a new element into the discourse, which then became the pivotal motive for thinking and speaking about unity in the following years and repeatedly emerged in the context of the new holiday, the Day of Reformed Unity, which has been held since 2010 in all Hungarian Reformed communities on the Sunday closest to 22 May.

This leitmotif was officially articulated in 2010, when, on the initiative of the election winner right-wing parties, the Parliament declared 4 June the Day of National Unity on the occasion of the jubilee of the Peace Treaty of Trianon on 31 May 2010. In reaction to it, on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the Treaty of Trianon, the Synod of the Reformed Church in Hungary and the General Convent⁴⁸ responded to

⁴⁶ KÓSA, László (2009): A református azonosságtudat mai kérdései. In: Kósa, László (ed.): *Tartozni valahová. Cikkék, előadások a protestantizmusról és a református azonosságtudatról*. Cluj-Napoca, Koinónia. 172–194.

⁴⁷ HÖRCSIK, Richárd: Napirend utáni felszólalás. 214. ülésnap (2009.05.26.), 80. felszólalás. http://www.mkogy.hu/internet/plsql/ogy_naplo.naplo_fadat?p_ckl=38&p_uln=214&p_felsz=80&p_szoveg=&p_felszig=80 (last accessed: 23.01.2020).

⁴⁸ The governing body of the Reformed Church in Hungary, i.e. of the united church districts in the Carpathian Basin.

the establishment of the new Day of National Unity and the publication of the law on double citizenship, issuing three statements at the same time, in which it formulated the new interpretation of the events woven in subtle hints. In these statements, the aforementioned bodies did nothing more than emphasize the temporal relationship between the declarations of the Day of Reformed Unity and the Day of National Unity, referring to the ideas of the Catechism already discussed.

Summarizing these statements in 2011, Synodal Councillor Zoltán Tarr explained in an interview conducted by myself:

“The most successful achievement of the response of the Hungarians and the Hungarian Reformed to Trianon is the Hungarian Reformed Church established with a constitution solemnly adopted on 22 May 2009. The creation of the Reformed unity in the Carpathian Basin, its process, and the celebration were an occasion where, in my opinion, we settled the whole issue in an exemplary way for society. Rendering it unambiguous is not about irredentism or the heating up of any territorial claims but rather about experiencing a spiritual cohesion that has not disappeared in 92 years, which is the indisputable merit of both the Reformed and the nation.”

The example set by Tarr and reflected in the declarations would become one of the most important identity programmes related to the unity of the Reformed in the following years. This is not a moral example but a redefinition of the old element of the Reformed identity, which has also undergone many transformations, which, as we have seen, connects the Reformed with the idea of social progress and progression in the context of modernity. Basically, Rákosi explores this connection in his criticism of the Reformed Church quoted above and, addressing this connection, seeks to use the church for his own purposes. The question of progress, that is, whether the Reformed Church can provide forward-looking answers to the questions of Hungarian society, was raised much earlier. One of its most important wordings is given by Dezső Szabó in his 1913 article on the problem of Hungarian Protestantism in the periodical *Nyugat*.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the root of the idea of progress is to be found in Reformed theology and the resulting life-management practice. According to Reformed theology, the individuals’

⁴⁹ SZABÓ, Dezső (1913): A magyar protestantizmus problémája. In: *Nyugat* 6, 14. 118–121.

task is to live in the glory of God in this world, which means that in all their activities they must promote God's will, that is, His laws, in the world. This idea entails the world- and society-shaping activity of the post-Calvinist Protestants since, for example, the enforcement of divine laws means using the forces and processes of nature in accordance with their divine purpose and actively contributing to the fulfilment of those purposes. This theological idea is important not only because it can provide a basis for the natural law argument above but also because it can be used to "rehabilitate" an element of progress that was devalued during the communist period.

Considering this redefinition, the aim of progress is not to serve "Western progress" or any political force, that is – in contrast to the processes of the 19th century –, not to sacralize a non-religious goal and introduce it into the religious realm but to create a society, a people, a nation that can achieve the purpose defined by the divine order, which in this case is nothing else but the service of peace and reconciliation.⁵⁰ That is why, later, just as the jubilee of the Reformation was imminent, the chosen motto of the church became the formulation of Apostle Paul's own mission: "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God." (2Cor 5:20), and for the very same reason, in the years following 2009, one of the most important programmes of the Reformed Church was the series of social initiatives called *Szeretethíd* [Bridge of Love].

This is how we finally reach the ten-year anniversary celebration of the Reformed Unity, whose speaker, Gergely Gulyás, the Minister in charge of the Prime Minister's Office, confirms and legitimates this new Reformed identity programme with a positive feedback in his speech delivered at the Great Church of Debrecen:

"If we consider that 10 years ago the Reformed Church was the first to mark the way, we can be especially proud that the Hungarian state followed its example. One year later, an amendment to the Citizenship Law was made, which made it possible for Hungarians living outside our borders to acquire citizenship. Thus, the unity that was established in the Reformed Church a decade ago could be established for the Hungarian nation in the sense of public law by acquiring citizenship.

⁵⁰ We cannot enter into details regarding this issue, but it is still important to mention that this pacifier narrative is in a close connection with the role of the mediating and conciliating "bridge" of the Hungarians in connection with the post-Trianon discourse, too.

The way and direction were thus marked by the Reformed Church, and the state followed the church.”⁵¹

I am hopeful that the examples above provided a clear picture of how the history of a community’s identity has evolved, how the content and interpretation of its basic identity elements have changed in the last century, and how the community was still trying to preserve continuity in its reflective process of change in the communication between the community and society. To summarize, the very roughly outlined story is a good example of Assman’s idea inspired by Halbwachs, according to which only those past events are relevant which have a referential context in the present.⁵² In this case, however, the peculiarity is that, for example, the reference to democracy, democratic tradition, primarily for the purpose of legitimacy, points to an “empty set” that needs to be filled with concrete content either if we examine the interpretation of the concept of democracy or what exactly the agents refer to from the Reformed historical legacy, but providing it with content depends on the specific social environment and the current discourse in which the legitimacy value of the reference to democracy is constituted. That is, these communication scenes are frameworks that allow the past and the present to be framed at the same time, as Halbwachs writes: these are “tools with which collective memory produces an image of the past that is in line with the dominant ideas of society throughout the ages”,⁵³ rightly paralleled by Assmann with Erving Goffman’s idea.

But these “empty sets” may be important in other contexts as well. As basic elements of community identity, they are actually symbolic. The signifier is the one visible, perceptible –although in a variable manner from scene to scene – and which essentially ensures the continuity of identity, creating it. On the other hand, the signified is shaped by the community using the symbol as well as its members authorized in this respect, being drawn from the material of community memory, in the process of discourses in which they reflect the current situation, legitimacy, etc. of the community. The symbol thus reshaped then functions as a specific competence for members of the community in resolving everyday problems. Thus, for example, elements of the Reformed

⁵¹ GULYÁS, Gergely: *A Magyarországi Református Egyház újra egyesülésének 10. évfordulóján.* <https://gulyasgergely.hu/aktualis/post/68> (last accessed: 24.01z.2020)-

⁵² ASSMANN, Jan (1999): *A kulturális emlékezet.* Budapest, Atlantisz. 37.

⁵³ HALBWACHS, Maurice (2018): *Az emlékezet társadalmi keretei.* Budapest, Atlantisz. 10.

denominational identity that appear to have undergone centuries of change, or at least changes during several historical ages, such as democratic thinking, may emerge, and this may provide excellent evidence that the church has preserved its identity in the storms of history. More specifically, however, these elements often bear little resemblance to their previous or future “selves”.

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