

NÉMETH László¹:

Hagyomány–Identitás–Történelem–2018

[*From Church Founders to the Prohibited and Tolerated Pastoral Care Church History Volume on the Legacy of the Reformation*],
Réka Kiss–Gábor Lányi (Eds.), L'Harmattan, Budapest, 2019,
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“The process through which we assimilate our past contributes to and shapes our identity: it is a burdensome heritage that determines, sets tasks and sets a direction, but it is also a treasure we can be proud of.” – said András Gér at the opening of the *Tradition, Identity and History (HIT2018)* conference held on 25–26 October 2018. According to the coverage of the www.reformatus.hu portal, the synod advisor of the Reformed Church in Hungary (MRE) also emphasized that: “We must face what is behind us and understand why we have become what we are! As a result, we proudly but humbly assume our identity among our fellow human beings.”



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The first edition of the conference series on Reformed Church history was organized in Budapest by the Department of Church History of the Faculty of Theology at the Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary, the Faculty of Reformed Theology of Babeş–Bolyai University, and the *Református Közéleti és Kulturális Központ Alapítvány* [Reformed Public Life and Cultural Centre Foundation]. According to the introduction of the volume, “the organizers of the scientific meeting wish to provide a scientific forum for workshops, collections, and especially young researchers in the Carpathian Basin studying Reformed church history and cultural history, ensuring room for informal exchanges, exchanging of research results and raising questions as well as having collective reflections”. The second conference was held a year later, in October 2019, at the Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary. On that occasion, the volume containing the lectures of the first meeting was presented. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, we still have to wait for the third edition; so, the organizers are counting on those interested to engage in online conversations on the topic.

On behalf of the organizers of the 2018 edition, Réka Földváryné Kiss, Head of the Department of Church History of Károli Gáspár University, stated that: “Our denominational identity determines the issues we raise and the perspectives as well as paradigms in which we think. However, not only the parallel narratives of denominations are present: a more serious challenge is that those who view church history from within know that Reformation began with a faith-deepening approach, but the external approach tended to focus on culture and mentality-shaping effects.” The coverage on the website of the Reformed Church in Hungary also revealed that according to the President of the Committee of National Remembrance “today’s question is how we could reinterpret our Reformed identity and its role of cultural mediator so that it becomes worthy of its place”.

At the 2018 conference, just as at the second meeting a year later, an attempt was made to answer the latter question, which, by courtesy of Károli Gáspár University and L’Harmattan Publishing House, appeared in the volume as the first piece of the Legacy of the Reformation Series. There will certainly be more volumes as there are still plenty of topics – as it was confirmed at the 2019 conference by Gábor Lányi, church historian at Károli Gáspár University.

The nearly half a thousand pages long collection compiled from lectures spanning five hundred years since the beginning of the Reformation includes the studies grouped by century, which come after the introduction written by former rector József Zsengellér.

Dávid Csorba, Péter Komlósi, Balázs Dávid Magyar, Sándor Előd Ősz, András Szabó, and Anikó Szilágyi-Kósa speak about the 16th and the 17th centuries. In the chapter, we can find out what new sources there are in the history of galley slaves, where the Reformed ministers were trained, and how adultery was punished; we can get to know Albert Szenci Molnár's correspondence collection, the leading personalities of the Hungarian Reformed Church, and the family names of religious and ecclesiastical origin.

In the chapter on the 18th and 19th centuries, Ádám Hegyi, Gábor I. Kovács, Béla Makkai, and Zsolt Szabó tell us about “the role of the inventories in shaping cultural memory”; we also get acquainted with the knowledge élites, the organization of the mission presbytery in the Romanian Old Kingdom as well as the relationship between the Protestant thinking and the constitutional principles.

The largest unit of the volume is that of the studies presenting the 20th century, the articles being divided into three parts. Zoltán Boér, Zalán Bognár, Kristóf Erdős, Réka Kiss, Károly Zsolt Nagy, and Róbert Rigó write about the resistance. The topics of the studies include the careers of the professional officers of the counterintelligence, the fate of the prisoners of war, the life of the Reformed congregation in Pasarét during the dictatorship, “the prohibited and tolerated pastoral care in the Reformed church in the 60s” (cultural resistance) as well as the church and collectivization. From the part on institutional history, we can learn about the pastoral trade union in Somogy in 1919, school life, the situation of the Reformed schools in Transylvania, the Reformed assemblies of the Horthy era as well as what the box under the Christmas tree hides and how faith and politics got along in Transylvania. The authors of this part were: András Csűrös, Sándor Czeglédi, Olga Lukács, Sándor Károly Molnár, János Kristóf Murádin, and Lajos Szász. The third and closing chapter of the volume presents human destinies and contains writings by Eleonóra Géra, Gergely Isó, Áron Kovács, Gábor Lányi, Katalin Mirák, and Tamás Stark. This part presents the notes and letters of paediatrician Sándor Merétey, the role of János Kardos in the Ordass Trial, the workshop secrets of a samizdat editor, Sándor Fekete's fate, Vilmos Vajta's correspondence, and Bishop Dezső Baltazár.

The *HIT2018* conference volume marks the beginning of a gap filler series. However, not only the series but the volume itself fills a gap. In recent years, no similar comprehensive collection has been published on the history of the last centuries of the Hungarian Reformed faithful or the assessment of history through a Reformed perspective. As in the conference, not only lecturers and authors with denominational institutional affiliation appeared in the volume. As Mrs Réka Földváryné Kiss emphasized in an interview:

rather the choice of topic can be considered denomination-related, and not the interpretation proper.

The great value of the volume is that it covers several centuries and presents the problems, various research aspects and results of at least a dozen related disciplines. The authors include both professors and young researchers, some from the motherland and some from the detached areas, who attended the conference and submitted their papers. There are authors who are staff members of ecclesiastical institutions, and there are others who have no connection with the topic on a denominational basis. What characterizes all the authors equally, however, is their commitment to research: all of them have tried to enrich the science with new results.

One editor of the *Legacy of the Reformation* put it this way during the book launch:

“The study volume is a diverse piece of work in a good sense because it is not incomprehensibly diverse, but it is not only for a narrow group dealing with the given field either.” Bálint Ablonczy also drew attention to the fact that the history of the Hungarian Reformed Church is not inward-looking, and without it the last five hundred years of the Hungarians could not be understood either.”