

Gábor LÁNYI<sup>1</sup> 

## **“The Harmony of Faith and Knowledge” *Science as an Instrument of Religious Emancipation in Hungary in the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries***

### ***Abstract.***

The experience of Hungarian Protestants during the Counter-Reformation was that their influential aristocratic supporters played a key role in their survival. Therefore, especially after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, which ensured their equality of rights with Catholics, their churches instinctively sought to place their lay leaders to higher political and public offices, or vice versa, to recruit their lay and even church leaders from the ruling political elite, which created a close interdependence between the Reformed Church and the political establishment of the national liberal dualist era. Gaining positions in the political arena was also linked to gains in other areas of social life such as education, culture, and science. And vice versa: gaining influence in the fields of education, culture, and science also carried political weight and recognition and unconsciously reinforced the sense of social and legal security of the Hungarian Reformed. In our study, we present three mosaic pieces of the Hungarian Reformed connections to the academic world. The first one is an analysis of the growth of Reformed university professors between 1848 and 1945. The second is a presentation of the

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<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor, Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary, Faculty of Theology, Department of Church History, Budapest; e-mail: lanyi.gabor@kre.hu.



thought of a Reformed scholar, church leader, and public figure, István Bernát, on the relationship between religion and science. Lastly, the third one is a discourse of confessionalist church reformers following the First World War, on the founding of their own Reformed academy of sciences.

**Keywords:** history of the Reformed Church in Hungary, István Bernát, Jenő Sebestyén, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, religious minorities

## I.

Until 1871, the only Hungarian university was the one founded by the Jesuit Péter Pázmány in Nagyszombat in the year 1635. Consequently, this institute was run by the Jesuit order and, by definition, had a Catholic ethos and could employ only Catholic teachers.<sup>2</sup> After the dissolution of the Jesuit order in 1773, Maria Theresa moved the University of Nagyszombat to Buda in 1777 and transformed it into a Royal University of Science in 1780, thus officially ending its Catholic character.

Joseph II's Decree of Toleration (1781) exempted non-Catholics from reciting parts of the doctoral oath that were incompatible with their creed, thus allowing non-Catholics to obtain doctorates at the Royal Hungarian University. In 1782, Joseph II also decreed that departments could employ teachers regardless of denomination (and nationality).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the enlightened absolutist monarch appointed two Lutherans and a Reformed, József Pap Fogarasi (1744–1784), as professors to the Philosophy Department of the University, which had by then been moved to Pest. Even if Fogarasi died before taking up his post, he was the first Reformed to be appointed professor at the country's state university.

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<sup>2</sup> From 1769, it was known as the Royal Hungarian University, after its move to Pest as the Royal University of Pest, from 1873 to 1921 as the University of Budapest, from 1921 as the Royal Hungarian Pázmány Péter University, and from 1950 as Eötvös Loránd University (abbreviation: ELTE). To this day, it is one of the largest and most renowned universities in Hungary.

<sup>3</sup> GYÖRY, Tibor (1936): *A Királyi Magyar Pázmány Péter Tudományegyetem Története 3.* Budapest. 126–127.

After Joseph II's death (1790), Lipót II continued his brother's tolerant religious policy. Article 26 of the 1791 Law granted Protestants established denominational status, guaranteed their freedom of worship and the right to found schools, and stated that no distinction should be made in public employment on the basis of denominational affiliation.

However, the Catholic restoration that dominated the reign of the conservative Francis I prevented the appointment of new Protestants to the university for the next 50 years, arguing that the endowments established for the maintenance of the university when Maria Theresa transformed the university in 1780 came from Catholic church funds, and therefore Catholic endowments still defines the denominational character of the university.

In 1796, it was also rumoured that the royal university would be moved to Esztergom, the seat of the prince-primate, therefore the political capital of Hungarian Catholicism, where Protestant worship was not welcome. Since Joseph II had already made the appointment to public office conditional on a degree in philosophy or law, there was concern among Protestants that, although the Decree of Toleration had opened the door to Protestants to higher public office, it might now close again if Protestants refused to study in the prince-primate's seat to obtain the qualifications required by the decree, or if they were converted in the course of their studies.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, the Protestants found a solution in the establishment of their own university in Pest; the Greek Orthodox Church also supported the idea. The "Projectum" of the university was developed by József Vay, Councillor of the Habsburg Governorate and Chief Elder of the Cis-Tibiscan Reformed Church District in 1796.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, the project was connected with Freemasonry's intentions to found a 'Hungarian Academic Society', and it clearly fitted into the optimistic mood of those enlightened Protestants who aimed for an organizational union between their denominations, a union that would have been symbolically preceded by a jointly founded and maintained

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<sup>4</sup> CSEKEY, Sándor (2005): Az alapítás kora (1855–1870). In: LADÁNYI, Sándor (ed.): *A Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Hittudományi Karának története 1855–2005*. Budapest, Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem. 21.

<sup>5</sup> VAY, József (1796): *Primae Linæ Projecta*. Ráday Archives of the Danubian Reformed Church District (RL), A/1a, vol. 6, 1796–1914. 48–56.

university. Mostly, the Reformed were those who embraced the cause, but the financial burdens of the escalating war with revolutionary France, the dithering of the Greek Orthodox Church, and, finally, the fact that the relocation of the Royal University of Pest to Esztergom was eventually dropped from the agenda made the establishment of a Protestant university in Pest at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century pointless, though it did not render its desire obsolete.

In the Hungarian Reform Era of the 1830s, the plan for a joint Reformed–Lutheran theological seminary in Pest was again brought up along the lines of the unionist ideas between the two Protestant churches. Through Lajos Kossuth's (1802–1894) media campaign, it became an issue of national importance, crossing denominational boundaries from 1839 to the Hungarian Revolution of 1848. The challenging period after the suppression of the 1849 War of Independence did not deter the Reformed Congregation of Pest and its pastor, Pál Török (1808–1883), from realizing the opening of the Theological Academy of Pest – the predecessor of today's Károli Gáspár University – on 10 October 1855. It is also worth mentioning that the establishment of a university had been a long-standing desire of the Hungarian Reformed for many centuries and was first formulated in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the Principality of Transylvania. In 1622, at the initiative of Prince Gábor Bethlen, the Transylvanian Diet decreed that the Gyulafehérvár College, founded two years earlier, should be developed into an *academicum collegium*, i.e. a university. However, this ambitious plan could not be realized, as several of Bethlen's successors, especially Prince George Rákóczi I, decided to found several colleges in parallel (Gyulafehérvár, Sárospatak, Nagyvárád), rather than supporting a central university.<sup>6</sup>

The idea of founding a university in Transylvania was raised again by János Apáczai Csere (1625–1659) in 1658 in his proposal to Prince Ákos Barcsai. The proposal outlines for us a picture of a modern university that combines the example of contemporary Western universities with the realities of the domestic situation. It was intended to be a true university in the European sense, with four faculties (theology, liberal arts, medicine, law), the right to award academic degrees, headed by a senate of professors, with a rector elected annually, and the requirement that students of serf origin

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<sup>6</sup> SZÖGI, László (n. d.): *A magyar felsőoktatás kezdetei 2*. Available at: <https://www.kfki.hu/~cheminfo/hun/olvaso/histchem/legenda/egyetem/felso2.html> (last accessed: 05.06.2024).

should receive a noble status in addition to their university diploma. A year after the submission of his petition, Apáczai died of lung disease, and the plan to found a Hungarian Reformed university was lost in the political turmoil of Transylvania of that time.<sup>7</sup>

In the matter of allowing non-Catholics to be appointed professors at the Royal University of Pest, only the law of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 (Article 20 of Law 1848) – which declared equality of rights between the religions – returned to the principles of Joseph II, but due to the suppression of the Revolution, it was short-lived. It was not until after the Compromise of 1867 that József Eötvös, Minister of Religion and Public Education, relying on the liberal majority in Parliament, was able to declare the university a non-denominational state institution.

For 25 years – between 1843 and the Compromise (1867) –, only five Protestant teachers were appointed, while in the harsh authoritarian period (1849–1867) following the defeat of the War of Independence, Catholics were able to prevent even the habilitation of teachers of other denominations.<sup>8</sup> In fact, the Catholic Church leadership, referring to the Catholic origin of the university's endowments, tried to exert political pressure on Hungarian governments even after the Compromise in order to prevent Protestant appointments.

Even if in their case they only achieved limited success, they were able to block the Israelites completely until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is why several Israelite scholars chose to convert to Protestantism (e.g. Mór Ballagi,<sup>9</sup> Ármin

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<sup>7</sup> SZÖGI, László (1995): *A magyar felsőoktatás a középkori kezdetektől a nagyszombati egyetem Budára költözéséig*. Available at: <https://www.mek.oszk.hu/01800/01882/01882.htm#3> (last accessed: 05.06.2024).

<sup>8</sup> SASHEGYI, Oszkár (1974): *Iratok a felsőoktatás történetéből 1849–1867*. Budapest, Felsőoktatási Pedagógiai Kutatóközpont. 351–352.

<sup>9</sup> KOVÁCS, I. Gábor (2022): Ballagi Aladár (1853–1928). Egy zsidó származású református történészprofesszor és lelkes hazafi életrajzi adatai és életútleírása. In: Kiss, Réka – Lányi, Gábor (eds.): *Hagyomány, Identitás, Történelem 2021*. Budapest, KRE. 153–154; KOVÁCS, Ábrahám (2007): Ballagi Mór és a Skót Misszió: megtérés, áttérés vagy kitérés. Egy liberális protestáns zsidó életútjának kezdete. In: *Confessio*. 31, 3. 109–125; KOVÁCS Ábrahám (2016): Egy református unitárius? Dogmatikai reflexió Ballagi Mór teológiai gondolkodásáról. In: *Credo*. 22, 1. 7–14; WAKTOR, Andrea (2006): A Ballagi család három nemzedéke. In: Kósa, László (ed.): *Reformátusok Budapesten 1*. Budapest, Argumentum – ELTE BTK. 709–720.

Vámbéry<sup>10</sup>) because they still had more chances of getting a university degree as a Protestant than as an Israelite.<sup>11</sup>

Attempts to assert denominational interests were not limited to the Budapest University but were also extended to other newly founded state universities (Koložsvár 1871, Debrecen 1912, Bratislava 1914). In response, the Reformed Synod – referring to the fact that the Debrecen Royal University was founded on the basis of the almost 400-year-old Reformed college – was highly critical of the Catholic appointments to the Debrecen Royal University and tried to keep their numbers in check by means of political lobbying.<sup>12</sup>

The period was also the era of the establishment of the unified Hungarian Reformed Church. In 1881, the five traditional Hungarian Reformed church districts were formed into a unified, national church in Debrecen, not least in order to represent their interests in secular politics by an even greater, united effort. Article 20 of the 1848 Law, which became a reference point again after the Compromise, aimed not only to promote equality between the denominations but also to obtain state financial support on a par with that of the Catholics. The Reformed entered into a natural alliance with the political liberals, who wanted to weaken the conservative Catholic positions, as demonstrated by Bishop Károly Szász (1829–1905; acted as bishop from 1884 to 1903), who was State Secretary at the Ministry of Religion and Education and considered to be a potential successor of the ministerial title before his election to be a bishop:

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<sup>10</sup> KOVÁCS, I. Gábor (2014): *Hit – Tudomány – Közélet*. Budapest, ELTE Eötvös Kiadó. 13; VÁMBÉRY, Ármin (1905): *Küzdelmeim*. Budapest, Franklin-társulat.

<sup>11</sup> KONRÁD, Miklós (2014): *Zsidóságon innen és túl. Zsidók vallásváltása Magyarországon a reformkortól az első világháborúig*. Budapest, MTA BTK; KOVÁCS, I. Gábor – TAKÁCS, Árpád (2021): Az akkulturációtól az asszimilációig – az összeilleszkedés változatai. Zsidó származású református egyetemi tanárok családfái a polgári korszakban és a református felekezeti-művelődési alakzat. Dunamellék és Dunántúl. In: Kiss, Réka – Lányi, Gábor (eds.): *Hagyomány, Identitás, Történelem 2020*. Budapest, KRE. 69–110.

<sup>12</sup> LADÁNYI, Andor (2004): Az egyházak és a felsőoktatás a dualizmus korában. In: *Századok*. 138, 1. 3–38; BOLYKI, János – LADÁNYI, Sándor (1987): A református egyház. In: Lendvai, L. Ferenc (ed.): *A magyar protestantizmus 1918–1948*. Budapest, Kossuth. 88.

During my 18 years of service to the State, I have always sought to bring our Protestant Church and its interests into harmony with those of the State in order to protect the church's interest by this alliance. This is what I will continue to strive for because I am firmly convinced that the interests of the constitutional Hungarian state and the Hungarian nation are identical with those of the Protestant churches. The Protestant Church would misrecognize its own interest if it sought to protect its rights in anything other than an alliance with the constitutional Hungarian state. This is my conviction, and, if you like, this is my church-political creed.<sup>13</sup>

This "church-political creed" of Bishop Szász was the product of that three-hundred-year-old survival mode, which became an unconscious element of the Hungarian Reformed identity in response to the destructive efforts of Catholic Habsburg Counter-Reformation, and which coincides with the basic ideas of liberalism, namely that the extension of political freedoms, the creation of a free market, the solidification of public education, and the cultivation of high standards of science will lead to a better and more just life, nation, and society.

The emancipation of the Reformed in academic life took place step by step, appointment by appointment. According to the data of Gábor I. Kovács,<sup>14</sup> while the number of Catholics among the professors appointed before 1867 was fifteen times higher than the number of Protestants, by 1894 this multiplier had fallen to 1.89, and by 1919 (the fall of the monarchy) it had fallen to 1.83.

Between the two world wars, the Catholic surplus fell to 1.73 by 1931; between 1932 and 1944, it was only 1.43.

Of course, the new appointments are interesting indicators, as they show the continuing emancipation of Reformed people in academia, but since a professor can remain in a position for several decades, the proportion of Reformed people in the total number of professors has increased only slowly, even with the many new appointments. In 1918, for example, the proportion of all active Reformed professors was 20%.<sup>15</sup> This also means that in the period of 1867–1944 Catholics were slightly under-represented

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<sup>13</sup> [author missing] (1884): Szász Károly püspöki beiktatása. In: *Protestáns Egyházi és Iskolai Lap*. 27, 44. 1415–1416.

<sup>14</sup> KOVÁCS, I. Gábor (2016): *Sárospatak erőterében. Magyarországi egyetemi tanárok életrajzi adattára 3*. Budapest, ELTE. 15. Chart no. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Op. cit. 14.

in professorial appointments, while the Reformed were slightly over-represented in relation to the denominational distribution of Hungary's population.<sup>16</sup>

In terms of the different universities in Hungary<sup>17</sup> between 1848 and 1944, despite the Protestant liberal emancipation efforts, the University of Budapest was the one that retained the most Catholic character: between 1848 and 1944, only 7.5 percent of its professors were Reformed, meanwhile in Hungary the ratio of Catholics to Reformed was 45–50 / 12–15 percent of the population between 1850 and 1910, and 65 / 21 percent from 1920 to 1944 (due to the territorial loss of the 1920 Trianon Peace Treaty).<sup>18</sup>

The predecessors of the Budapest University of Technology and Economics (*Műegyetem*) was more open to the Reformed, with a Reformed proportion of almost 10% (9.8), which is, of course, below the national average. The royal university of Kolozsvár, founded in 1872 in Transylvania, which became part of the Kingdom of Hungary after the 1867 Compromise again, is the most representative example of the success of liberal efforts to emancipate non-Catholics in university life: until 1920 (Trianon), 54% of the professors there were Roman Catholics, 24% Reformed, and the highest proportion of Israelites (around 6%) as well as the vast majority of Unitarian and Greek Catholic professors were also appointed here.

The Reformed orientation of the University of Debrecen (founded in 1912) has already been mentioned. This, however, only meant that the proportion of Roman Catholic professors was 35%, with 47% Reformed and 16% Lutherans. (In 1914, a university was also founded in Pozsony. Here the denominational distribution of professors was as

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<sup>16</sup> It is interesting to note that the representation of Lutherans in professorial appointments is twice as high as their national representation (while the representation of Unitarians is three times higher). The Israelites are strongly (0.5%), the Greek Catholics and the Greek Orthodox are extremely under-represented (0.14% and 0.02%). While the under-representation of Israelites was the result of political discrimination, the Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic denominations were associated with such ethnic groups who, unfortunately, were still poorly educated in this era. See: KOVÁCS, I. Gábor (2012): *Diszkrimináció – emancipáció – asszimiláció – diszkrimináció. Magyarországi egyetemi tanárok életrajzi adattára 1848–1944. I. Zsidó és zsidó származású egyetemi tanárok*. Budapest, ELTE.

<sup>17</sup> KOVÁCS 2016, 19. Chart no. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Magyarország vallási megoszlása [Religious Distribution in Hungary]. Available at: <https://lexikon.katolikus.hu/M/Magyarorsz%C3%A1g%20vall%C3%A1si%20megoszl%C3%A1sa.html> (last accessed: 05.06.2024).



follows: Catholics 54.3%; Reformed 14.3%; Lutherans 28.6% – since the university had a Lutheran faculty of theology).<sup>19</sup>

Finally, it may also be of interest to ask whether the denominational distribution can be related to the different scientific disciplines. Is the higher proportion of Reformed in the universities of applied sciences due to the popular belief that Calvinism was a stimulus for those working in the natural sciences? Does the Hungarian example support Max Weber's paradigm that Protestants, and especially Calvinists, are over-represented in economic fields?

The Hungarian figures<sup>20</sup> confirm these two statements, but not to a very convincing extent. What makes it difficult to judge is that during the period in question there was no sharp distinction between veterinary and agricultural training in Hungary. In any case, the faculty affiliations of professors show that in the period of 1848–1944, when the national average percentage of Reformed professors was around 15–17%, the percentage of professors in the faculties of natural sciences was 19.2 (Catholics: 59.6%; Lutherans: 12.3%), 18.6% in the faculties of medicine (Catholics: 61.5%; Lutherans: 15.5%), 10% in the faculties of engineering (Catholics: 69.3%; Lutherans: 16.7%), and 16.8% in the faculties of economics (and veterinary/agriculture). This is either equal to or slightly higher than their denominational share in the population.

Therefore, the Reformed were over-represented in natural sciences and economics, though not by a large margin. However, they were clearly over-represented in the humanities (20.4%) and law (19.2%). This highlights Hungarian Reformed academics' receptivity to the study of literature and law. As regards jurisprudence, we can recall what was already mentioned in the introduction, namely that since the Counter-Reformation the pursuit of higher political office had become an unconscious survival strategy of the Hungarian Reformed, and the cultivation of jurisprudence was a useful tool in this regard. On the other hand, in the context of literary studies, we can refer back to the formative humanistic traditions of the Hungarian Reformation, its

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<sup>19</sup> The proportion of Lutherans is high due to their traditional availability to high-level education. While they accounted for only 6–7% of the population, their share of professors was 14.8% between 1844 and 1944.

<sup>20</sup> KOVÁCS 2016, 22–23, Chart no. 4.

mission to preserve the Hungarian language and culture alongside the struggle for national self-government and independence.

Although the figures support the Weberian paradigm or the affinity of Calvinists for natural sciences experienced in other European countries only to a slight extent, they clearly show the interest of Hungarian Reformed people in law, politics, public life,<sup>21</sup> and, in parallel and complementarily, in the cultivation of Hungarian language, literature, and culture.

## II.

The subtle interactions between academic life, religious emancipation, and political engagement in late Dualist Hungary are well illustrated by the life and personality of István Bernát (1854–1942) and by an examination of one of his speeches more closely related to our topic.

Bernát as a Reformed Professor of Economics at the State University of Budapest, the founder of the neo-Calvinist core organization Hungarian Calvin Alliance (1908), and full member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (1929) was a well-known, prominent, and influential person of the Hungarian academic, secular, and church public life.

He was born in Rimaszombat in 1854,<sup>22</sup> studied in Vienna and Budapest, and obtained a doctorate in law in 1877. He worked for ten years in the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry, and Trade, ultimately as a ministerial secretary. He made extended study trips to Western Europe and to the United States. In the 1890s, he deepened his connections with the so-called agricultural cooperative movement, playing a role in the establishment

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<sup>21</sup> This was also confirmed by the law academies maintained by the Reformed denomination. See: FINKEY, Ferenc (2019): *A sárospataki református jogakadémia története 1793–1923*. Sárospatak, Sárospataki Református Kollégium; HOMICSKÓ, Árpád – NÁNÁSI, László – STIPTA, István – TÖRÖ, Csaba (2019): *A Kecskeméti Református Jogakadémia Története 1875–1949*. Budapest, KRE.

<sup>22</sup> For Bernát's life, see: BÉRES, László Attila (2018): Korláti Bernát István. In: *Protestáns hősök. Fél száz portré az elmúlt fél évezred magyar történelméből*. Budapest, Press-Pannonica-Media – Euro Press Media. 181–184; KOVÁCS 2016, 111–126; SZÁSZ, Lajos (2023): Konzervatív kálvinizmus a 20. század első harmadában. Bernát István pályája. In: Kiss, Réka – Lányi, Gábor (eds.): *Hagyomány, Identitás, Történelem 2022*. Budapest, KRE. 185–196.

of the important Hangya ("Ant") Cooperative and the Hungarian Farmers' Association, of which he became director and president for several decades. Between 1906 and 1910, he was also Member of Parliament for his hometown.

From 1919, he was the first Professor of Agricultural Policy at the University of Budapest and the first Dean of the newly founded Faculty of Economics. Between 1925 and 1927, he was Vice-President of the Hungarian National Bank, and between 1927 and 1932 he acted as a member of the Upper House of Parliament.

He also created press publicity for the cooperative movement, founded and edited newspapers, and published extensively. In his writings and public articles, he analysed various aspects of the cooperative movement, agricultural policy, and the agricultural economy. He published shorter studies on the history and characteristics of the American, French, British, Austrian, and Russian economies and societies, universal suffrage, economic imperialism, the need for the eight-hour workday, various demographic issues (divorce and suicide rates, wealth distribution), and the general crisis of democracy in the 1930s. He translated several works on economics from English into Hungarian. He was elected a corresponding member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1906 and a full member in 1927.

He was actively involved in Reformed public life. He was a frequent speaker at the events of the Danubian Reformed Church District, a founding member, and from 1908 until his death President of the Hungarian Calvin Alliance and member of the Hungarian Protestant Literary Society.<sup>23</sup>

Bernát, both as a leading academic and a faithful member of his Reformed Church, tried to build a bridge between representatives of faith and science. While he commended the finite and fragmentary nature of the scientific method idealizers of science, he also commended the recognition of science and its faithful Christian cultivation to the Church. A fine example of his thinking is his speech entitled *The Harmony of Faith and Knowledge*, delivered at a meeting of the Danubian Reformed Church District on 18 October 1913, which was later published in print.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Bernát put his memoirs on paper in the 1930s: BERNÁT, István (1936): *Életem és törekvéseim*. In: Bernát, István (ed.): *Küzdelmek és eredmények. Életrajz és emlékbeszédek*. Budapest, Bethlen. 5–150.

<sup>24</sup> BERNÁT, István (1914): *Hit és tudás harmóniája*. Budapest, Hornyánszky Viktor.

At the beginning of his speech, Bernát refers to the French writer Ferdinand Brunetière (1849–1906), who was a major influence in the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and who coined the phrase “the bankruptcy of science”. Following Brunetière, Bernát says that science has failed to live up to its hopes: “It has failed to enlighten us either as to the origin or as to the ultimate goal or as to the questions of ‘whence’ or the ‘whither’.” He then goes on to say that “Combe’s reform”,<sup>25</sup> that is to say, secularism in France, has not created a more cultured, a spiritually healthier, more moral, and, above all, happier France. Science is fragmented, and secularism has not made people’s lives better.

According to Bernát, in Hungary and within the Reformed Church, the “weakening of religious feelings” was growing stronger, stemming from the conviction that the time of religions was over and that the future belonged to free thinking, which, “by putting ourselves in the seat of the legislature, encourages its followers with the hope of a peaceful and happy life, free of obligations”.<sup>26</sup> For those who cherished the ideal of the omnipotence of science, he recalled the speech given by Oliver Lodge (1851–1940), President of the University of Birmingham, to a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science a month before Bernát’s speech.<sup>27</sup>

Lodge was a British physicist and writer involved in the development of, and holder of key patents for, radio. Lodge cautions those who dogmatically believe in the infallibility of science. With 30 years of distinguished and fruitful research behind him, he believes that followers of science and faith must “meet and unite at some distant stage of development”.<sup>28</sup>

The laws of science cannot be dogma because they are subject to evolution and change. There are certain limits to reason and knowledge that cannot be ignored without repercussions. Scientists see the manifestations of life, but not life itself. The natural sciences cannot give direction on moral and aesthetic questions and cannot reveal the original causes and ultimate purposes of phenomena.

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<sup>25</sup> Referring to Émile Combes (1835–1921), Prime Minister of France (1902–1905), whose secularist ideologies and movement led to the 1905 law of separation of church and state in France.

<sup>26</sup> BERNÁT 1914, 6.

<sup>27</sup> LODGE, Oliver J. (1913): *Presidential Address*. Birmingham, British Association for the Advancement of Science.

<sup>28</sup> BERNÁT 1914, 8.

After Lodge, Bernát includes the French doctor Jean-Martin Charcot (1825–1893), known as the father of modern neurology, in his argument. Charcot was a major influence on the young Freud and also came up with the term Tourette's syndrome – named after one of his students who suffered from it –, among many other insights that have shaped modern psychology. Charcot argued that a life of faith had an impact not only on mental health but also on the body – *la foi qui guérit* 'the faith that heals'.<sup>29</sup>

Following the example of Lodge and Charcot, Bernát argues that the universe is greater than can be known by any single method or approach. Therefore, philosophy, aesthetics, poetry, and religious studies are necessary in addition to science for a more complete knowledge of the world. In the conclusion of this section, Bernát reaches the heights of a sermon: "True religiosity is deeply rooted in the heart of humanity and in the reality of things."<sup>30</sup>

Concluding his speech, Bernát returns to the ground of reality. His conclusion nicely exemplifies our earlier findings about how the Reformed Church, in alliance with the liberal state, worked for emancipation from the Catholics in both politics and science. He refers back to Article 20 of the 1848 Law, which made Reformed Christians legally equal to Catholics and entitled them to receive proportional state support from the dualist state. Because of this support, we owe it to the nation to strengthen religious feeling, faith and morals:

The millions are given to us so that our Church can more freely and more fully fulfil its duty to strengthen religious feeling, faith, and public morals. The purpose of my presentation was to put material and entirely modern tools in the hands of those who are willing and able to fight. I sought to establish a closer link between us and the spiritual movements of a nation [Britain] that, at the forefront of economic civilization, has not for a moment forgotten that matter, economy, is not a sufficient or even a precious part of the fullness of life.<sup>31</sup>

Bernát's lecture also exemplifies that the intellectual elite of the Reformed Church of the era closely followed Western trends, took their inspiration from and

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<sup>29</sup> Op. cit. 12.

<sup>30</sup> Op. cit. 13.

<sup>31</sup> Op. cit. 14.

tried to apply them to the ecclesiastical and social situation in Hungary. Noteworthy is that Bernát uses Lodge's speech only a month after it had been delivered in Birmingham.<sup>32</sup>

### III.

Less than a decade after Bernát's speech, the Hungarian nation, society, and politics went through one of the most rapid and radical periods of change in its one-thousand-year-long history, which placed the Reformed in a completely different political, social, denominational, and academic context. The loss of the First World War, the political changes that followed, the disintegration of the 900-year-old kingdom, the chaos of the radical liberal revolution, and the communist coup d'état that overthrew it also changed the Reformed Church's view of itself and the world, and the role of the Church in the world. The shock of the Treaty of Trianon, which ended the lost Great War, likewise contributed to this.

On 4 June 1920, Hungary lost 72% of its territory, while three and a half million ethnic Hungarians found themselves separated from their motherland. The loss of the Reformed Church was also extensive. She lost around 1,100 congregations, almost one million (916,906) members,<sup>33</sup> half of her pastors, and hundreds of schools and teachers. The entire Transylvanian Church District and the Seminary of Kolozsvár was lost to Romania, and all the other church districts were torn up by the new state borders, and they had to form new church bodies in their new countries.

Illustrating the "Trianon-shock", let us refer to the remarks of Pál Hatos: "While during the celebrations of the 1909 Calvin Anniversary the Hungarian Reformed Church represented the largest, unified Calvinist Church in Europe, ten years after this church became the largest Protestant diaspora on the Continent."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Bernát's speech is also interesting because, contrary to the Germanic cultural orientation common in the Hungarian milieu of the era, he favours French and English examples instead.

<sup>33</sup> RÉVÉSZ, Imre (1956): *History of the Hungarian Reformed Church*. Washington, Hungarian Reformed Federation in America. 151.

<sup>34</sup> HATOS, Pál (2006): Az 1909-es Kálvin-jubileum. In: Kósa, László (ed.): *Reformátusok Budapesten I.* Budapest, Argumentum – ELTE BTK. 1163–1178.

The time of Bishop Szász's "political confession" – the alliance between the liberal constitutional state and the Hungarian Reformed – was over. The Reformed Church's loyalty to the dualist establishment and their initial insensitivity and belated response pushed the emerging working class towards the influence of the atheist ideologies of socialism and communism. The Hungarian Reformed Church found itself in an increasingly secularized society. The decline of traditional patterns of religious practice, the empty formalities of church life, and the decay in church attendance made it clear that the church needs urgent changes. In the observations of István Bogárdi Szabó: "By the time the centuries-long sought freedom of religion had been completed, the practice of religion itself had become uninteresting."<sup>35</sup>

Finally, an often underestimated but important factor was the sudden change in the proportion of Hungary's religious population. After Trianon, the percentage of the Reformed within Hungary rose from 14 to 21, whereas the percentage of Roman Catholics rose from 49 to 67. It means that while the number of the Reformed rose by 6, the number of Catholics rose by three-fold, i.e. 18 percent. In the new neo-baroque Christian course of the Horthy Era, a renewed and surprisingly innovative political Catholicism emerged and thrived. Their extensive estate system put the Roman Catholic Church in an advantageous position, while they used the press and the radio and involved lay people in their service in a strikingly modern way.<sup>36</sup> Catholicism clearly desired an exclusive state-church status, which could have diminished the Reformed Church's political, economic, and cultural impact on the society or even led to her disintegration – at least the fear of this possibility defined the mindset of Reformed leaders of this era. The Jesuits returned.

Two main trends emerged in the 1920s in the Reformed Church's responses to problems and its search for a way forward. One was the revivalist Christianity, which

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<sup>35</sup> BOGÁRDISZABÓ, István (2009): Kálvin hagyománya Dunamelléken. In: Farbak, Péter – Kiss, Réka (eds.): *Kálvin hagyománya – Református kulturális örökség a Duna mentén. A Budapesti Történeti Múzeum kiállítási katalógusa*. Budapest, Budapesti Történeti Múzeum. 20.

<sup>36</sup> GICZI, Zsolt (2010): Felekezeti viták a katolikusok és a protestánsok érvényesülési lehetőségeiről a Horthy-korszakban. In: *Aetas* 15, 1. 24–42; RÉBAY, Magdolna (2003): A felekezeti kérdés az 1920-as, 1930-as évek fordulóján a *Református Figyelő* és a *Magyar Kultúra* írásaiban. In: *Kút*. 2, 3–4. 165–175.

had already arrived in Hungary at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They put emphasis on individual conversion, and they intended the renewal of traditional churches by the impact of their converted members.<sup>37</sup> The Movement, due to the coldness and occasional countermeasures of the official church, spread in the form of civic associations, societies, or student organizations. Home Mission was inter-confessional, placing more importance on personal faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God than on denominational affiliation. They were the first who called themselves “general Christians”, a term that was then used as a term of derision by their critics.

Therefore, as early as 1908, a more confessional church renewal group was formed, the Calvin Alliance (Kálvin Szövetség) of which István Bernát was one of the founders.<sup>38</sup> The Alliance and the concurrently unfolding Calvin-renaissance around the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the great reformer’s birth was the starting point of a new confessional Reformed identity politics,<sup>39</sup> which later was named by its advocates “Historic Calvinism”.

After the lost world war, this confessional movement centred on the Budapest Seminary’s Head of the Department of Systematic Theology, Professor Jenő Sebestyén (1884–1950).<sup>40</sup> Although they defined themselves as “Historic” Calvinists, their

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<sup>37</sup> BOLYKI, János – LADÁNYI, Sándor (1999): A Magyarországi Református Egyház története 1918–1948 között. In: Barcza, József – Dienes, Dénes (eds.): *A Magyarországi Református Egyház története 1918–1990*. Sárospatak. 36–37; SIPOS, Álmos Ete (2008): „Kérjétek az aratásnak Urát!”. Budapest, KRE-KMTI – Harmat. 35–41; KISS, Réka (2006): Református ébredés Budapesten. In: Kósa, László (ed.): *Reformátusok Budapesten 2*. Budapest, Argumentum – ELTE BTK. 1343–1368.

<sup>38</sup> For more information about the Hungarian Calvin Society, see: KÓSA, László (2006): Az egyesületek a budapesti reformátusság életében. In: Kósa, László (ed.): *Reformátusok Budapesten 1*. Budapest, Argumentum – ELTE BTK. 1089; KÁDÁR, Péter (1994): Adalékok a Kálvin Szövetség történetéhez 1–2. In: *Református Egyház*. 46, 7–8. 168–169; 11. 256–258; TÓTH, Krisztina (1994): A történelmi kálvinizmus és a Kálvin Szövetség első évei. In: *Református Egyház*. 46, 7–8. 165–167; RÁCZ, Lajos (1995): 75 éve indult a Kálvinista Szemle. In: *Theológiai Szemle*. 6. 331.

<sup>39</sup> HATOS, Pál (2016): *Szabadkőművesből református püspök. Ravasz László élete*. Budapest, Jaffa. 80.

<sup>40</sup> For his life and work, see: LÁNYI, Gábor (2021): Sebestyén Jenő (1884–1950) és a történelmi kálvinizmus. In: Petrás, Éva (ed.): *A 20. századi magyar protestáns közéletiség arcképcsarnoka*. Budapest, Barankovics István Alapítvány – Gondolat Kiadó. 13–32; LÁNYI, Gábor (2022): Sebestyén Jenő, a történelmi kálvinizmus és a Soli Deo Gloria Református Diákszövetség. In: *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai, Theologia Reformata Transylvanica*. 67, 1. 226–240.



programme aimed not at the past but at the future. Sebestyén tried to introduce the political theology, methods, and practices of Abraham Kuyper's neo-Calvinism to Hungary. Following the Kuyperian thought, Sebestyén considered Calvinism not as a mere confession but as a worldview, or even a way of life. Accordingly, Calvin's scriptural understandings can be applied to all areas – "every square inch" (Kuyper) – of human individual and common life: not only to the church but to politics, society, economy, culture, art, and science.

Sebestyén was convinced that in the current situation only the "spirit of the Christian Reformed" tradition can preserve the church and the country itself, as it once saved it during the Ottoman occupation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Sebestyén did not want to start a new movement and did not wish to create a new theology neither. In his understanding, he just aimed to rediscover that "pure Reformed theology" that was not defiled by the spirit of rationalist and liberal theology.

In order to spread his thoughts, on 4 April 1920, Sebestyén founded a weekly newspaper named *Kálvinista Szemle* (The Calvinist Review). In his first editorial, he stated, "Our programme is nothing else than pure Calvinism itself, what we need to translate into the language of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Our goal cannot be else than to proclaim Calvinism as a worldview and adopt its theological, ethical, church-organizational, church-political principles to every field of the Hungarian Reformed Church and Hungarian national and social life."<sup>41</sup>

Many ideas and movements of church reform were initiated by Sebestyén's *Kálvinista Szemle*. At one of the Review's conferences (26–27 May 1920), Gyula Forgács, the pastor of a small town (Pécel) near Budapest, delivered his lecture titled *The New Responsibilities of the Hungarian Reformed Pastors*. This was the symbolic starting point of Péceli Kör (Pécel Circle), a think tank of pastors and relevant lay people. Péceli Kör held a conference in the small village of Kunhegyes in August 1921 and declared their programme under the name *Kunhegyesi Memorandum* (The Memorandum of Kunhegyes). The social and church-political considerations of this Memorandum proved to be

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<sup>41</sup> SEBESTYÉN, Jenő: *Magyar kálvinizmus* – cited in: NAGY, Barna (2005): A történelmi kálvinizmus korszaka (1918–1944). In: Ladányi, Sándor (ed.): *A Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Hittudományi Karának története*. Budapest, KRE. 130.

inspirational after the end of the next world war, and it still serves as a point of reference today.

The conference at Kunhegyes is important for us because Andor Kováts (1884–1942), Professor of Law at and then Director of the Kecskemét Reformed Law Academy, proposed the formation of a Calvinist Academy of Sciences. Kováts submitted his suggestion was, but it did not receive much attention. The conference itself was more concerned with the church's empty spiritual life, church membership, and self-sustainability. There were many other proposals for reform, the establishment of a Calvinist academy of sciences being just one of them. However, Kováts's proposal is the starting point of a discussion on this kind of institution in the pages of *Kálvinista Szemle*. The idea was further embraced by Gyula Muraközy (1892–1861), who wrote several articles about it in the newspaper. Muraközy's interest in the subject is noteworthy. He was only 29 years old at the time and had been a pastor in Kecskemét for only 3 years. A decade later, he was already the assistant pastor of Bishop László Ravasz on Budapest-Kálvin Square and would become one of the most important pastors of the interwar period.<sup>42</sup>

The idea's original author, Kováts, also reflected on Muraközy. In his article of 14 January 1922, he wrote, "The concentration of our Calvinist scientists, their finding one another, the creation of a Reformed scientific centre is now the order of the times. (...) It is not a question of denominational aspects but of ideological aspects, which have also been pulsating in scientific works up to now."<sup>43</sup>

These exchanges of thoughts were followed by three years of silence. It was only in 1925 that the topic resurfaced in a report of *Kálvinista Szemle*,<sup>44</sup> which presented an interview of a secular political newspaper (*A mai nap*) with Pál Hegymegi Kiss (1885–1950), member of the National Assembly. Pál Hegymegi Kiss, son of a former bishop of the Tibiscan Church District (Kiss Áron), advocated the establishment of a Calvinist academy.

The report also refers to founder of the Bethlen Printing and Publishing Company, Béla Gonda (1851–1933), who two years before developed a detailed plan for the establishment of the academy and also negotiated with Reformed leaders, but so

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<sup>42</sup> MURAKÖZY, Gyula (1921): Kálvinista tudós társaság. In: *Kálvinista Szemle*. 2, 48. 393–394.

<sup>43</sup> KOVÁTS, Andor (1922): Református tudós társaság. In: *Kálvinista Szemle*. 3. 18–19.

<sup>44</sup> [missing author] (1923): A Kálvinista Tudományos Akadémia kérdése. In: *Kálvinista Szemle*. 6. 3.

far has not been able to gather enough supporters. All this shows that the matter of founding the academy was not forgotten but was raised again and again by various circles.

Finally, Jenő Sebestyén himself also spoke out in the matter on 7 November 1925.<sup>45</sup> Sebestyén did not reflect on the dialogue between Kováts and Muraközy or on the plan of Hegymegi Kiss and Gonda, but wrote on the occasion of the centenary of founding the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, under the title *The Academy and the Reformed*. His article may be of interest to us in the sense that it echoes Kuyperian, neo-Calvinist ideas about the cultivation of science.

He starts by pointing out that the Academy has always had a large proportion of Reformed members. "This love of science in Calvinism is not a Hungarian specialty and is no accident" – says Sebestyén and alludes to the idea that the scientist who investigates the laws of the created world should gain a deeper and wider knowledge of the greatness of God. But the article no longer mentions the founding of a Calvinist academy of sciences. Nor is there any mention of the idea or plan of such an academy. Rather, Sebestyén urges, "our academics with a Reformed baptismal certificate should concern themselves more with the spirit and worldview of Calvinism and strive to serve the special Calvinist culture in all disciplines..."

Thus, Sebestyén's conclusion and programme was that instead of founding his own Academy, it was necessary to strengthen the denominational identity of the Reformed, who had been already part of Hungarian academic life and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, by which denominational identity he certainly meant his own Historic Calvinist thought. "Because the situation today is that we still have, thank God, many academics with a Reformed baptismal certificate but very few academics who are specifically serving and even building on Calvinist culture."

*Kálvinista Szemle* went bankrupt in 1932 as a result of the Great Depression. After Sebestyén's article in 1925, there is no other substantive discussion of the foundation of the Calvinist academy or the relationship between Hungarian Calvinism and science. This is not surprising. The main topics of *Kálvinista Szemle* were spiritual, theological, and public church life topics aimed at the renewal of the Reformed Church. In addition to internal church affairs, Sebestyén offered even more space to Calvinist reflections on secular political and social issues in his newspaper. This is not surprising either since this

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<sup>45</sup> SEBESTYÉN, Jenő (1925): Az Akadémia és a reformátusok. In: *Kálvinista Szemle*. 6. 1.

was rather dominant in Kuyper's example as well: Kuyper did not reach the top as a hobby scientist but as prime minister. Although, as we have seen, Kuyper invested significant effort into the development of his theological thinking about the scientific world, this had almost no reflection in Hungarian neo-Calvinism. We can also assume that the plan of the Calvinist academy was not aimed at cultivating science but at political validation.

### **Summary**

The aim of our study was to present certain details about the nature of the relationship between the Hungarian Reformed denomination and science in the first half of the twentieth century. In the first third of our study, through analysing the data at hand, we gave an illustrative example of the progress how the Hungarian Reformed professors became represented at Hungarian state universities in proportion to their numbers in the population.<sup>46</sup>

The second relevant detail presented the life of a Hungarian Reformed scholar who was both outstanding and modern in his academic achievements, active in secular and ecclesiastical public life and in social and economic reform movements, and who did all this while promoting the interests of his nation and his Reformed denomination.

Lastly, the third element of insight highlighted the attitude of a distinct Hungarian neo-Calvinist group towards science, in the form of founding a Calvinist academy of science aimed to replace the "Catholic- and secularist-dominated" Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

The historical determination of the Hungarian Reformed to achieve emancipation in close cooperation with the national liberal state<sup>47</sup> is a common thread running through all these examples and eras. Another common element was the opposition to the Catholics who constituted the conservative power elite. The Hungarian Reformed fought the same battle in the field of science as they did in the fields of public education, culture, and politics, seeking emancipation and equality with the prevalent Catholics.

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<sup>46</sup> And, as we have seen, even slightly above it.

<sup>47</sup> Like the Israelites, it is no coincidence that the two religious groups became natural allies during this era.

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