

**Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Faculty of Humanities**

**Doctoral School of History**

**Doctoral Program for the History of Ideology**

**Dr. Ida Fröhlich DSc.**

**Szilvia Sziráki**

**National identity and biblical interpretation**

**in Transylvania at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century**

**[Nemzeti identitás és biblikus látásmód a XVII. század végi  
Erdélyben]**

**Theses of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation**

**Supervisor: Dr. Sándor Őze CSc. Habil.**

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## **I. The Theme and Objectives of the Dissertation**

The significant wars in the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries can be traced back – directly or indirectly – to religious matters. Of course, not only to religious matters, but it is hard to draw a borderline between religion and politics as well as religious or everyday life, or one can say that it is impossible. Religion greatly filters into the perception of life and attitude to the world of the man of that era, who can define the world around him only within the frames of religion, which is why he can see and live the events of that age through that filter.

The Wittenberg attitude to history, evolving after Luther, attributed apocalyptic significance to the events, recognizing the Turks as the Antichrist, the evil of the last times, destroying God's people. This perception was intensified by the success of Counter-Reformation starting at that time and the biblical attitude to life and to history, gathering ground with the Reformation.

According to the ancient history of the Jewish people and their perception of history, people found an answer to the questions arising due to the Turkish demolition and wars of religion in the context of sin, punishment and grace.

Preachers were advocates and stimuli of this, seeing God's deserved punishment for our sins and at the same time, the struggles of the last times, in the events of their era. They dissolved this seeming contradiction by rushing conversion and putting life pleasing God in the centre. This way, our preachers warned people about the nearing end of the world as well as the need to convert at the same time, following the footsteps of the prophets of the Old Testament.

Hungary's situation in the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries was an especially unique phenomenon in history, since the internal and external crisis of the country and its division almost became chronic, and for nearly two centuries, the borderline between the Islam and the Christian world ran along here.

Transylvania played a special role in the "apocalyptic wars" of the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Its situation is unique, even extraordinary. It is situated in the region where paganism and Christianity meet, in the "apocalyptic borderland". However, wars did not take place in its land most of the time, but it was eager to play a part, thus completing an important task, based on divine assignment. It was in its last decades, when its unique situation and role became especially significant.

In my dissertation I am looking for the answer to the question, as to how the political and church historic events of the second half of the 17th century influenced the perception of life and that of the world of the religious people of the era. I examined this period of the protestant perception of history more extensively, and I attempted to spot its manifestation in the period of 1661-1690 of the Transylvanian (Erdély) Principality, on the basis of the remaining prints of Calvinist preachers' sermons and prayer books as well as exiles' correspondence.

Out of the rich bibliography available I tried to select and examine those more thoroughly, about which I assumed that because of the author's situation, they explicitly and clearly consist of a protestant view of history.

I put emphasis on the demonstration of the theological content and that of the message of this view and its manifestation, and on the role of the biblical piety and view of history in the development of national self-identity and

collective identity, which I considered especially important, since in my opinion it has not obtained any or at least enough importance in research projects so far.

## **II. The Method of the Research and the Composition of the Dissertation**

In my essay I examined the characteristics and elements of the protestant attitude to history in the Apafi Era in Transylvania, primarily on the basis of remaining prints of Calvinist sermons. My main objective was the analysis and demonstration of the theological interpretation of historic events.

In the course of reviewing the bibliography, I tried to put the latest research projects forward and I strived to mention and use the results of other disciplines. While demonstrating the church historic bases and ideology historic backgrounds of my theme, I recited the significant people and theories, trends and ideas, which influenced the Transylvanian intellectuals' – particularly preachers' – way of thinking.

In my introduction of church history, I outlined the development and importance of collective identity and cultural recollection, demonstrating the religious development of Jewish people, which with its monotheism and unique interpretation of and view of history, has an establishing importance for Christianity and Christian culture. Moreover, actualizing the deuteronomical view of history in the early modern times, protestant intellectuals all over Europe, establish the ideological grounds to events, and at the same time, they live their own era in apocalyptical grounds.

Following this, I outlined the theological development of the Middle Ages and Reformation, and also its ideological trends – e.g. Puritanism, Coccejanism and encyclopaedical aspirations – as well as its representatives, influencing Hungarian Protestantism. In connection with that, I dealt also with the Transylvanian Calvinist school issue and peregrination. The reason why I found the latter important was that preachers' views to history are rooted in the eclectic theological system of ideology, which, fusing and mixing with intellectual movements and trends in the 17th century, approached and interpreted the events from an apocalyptical- eschatological aspect and also lived them on a biblical basis.

After demonstrating the background of history of church and ideology, I examined the characteristics of the protestant view of history in the Transylvanian Principality in the second half of the 17th century, which can be clearly demonstrated through the printed and widespread Calvinist preachers and prayers, as well as through the exiles' correspondence.

I started the main chapter "The Manifestation of the Protestant View of History" with a short review of the idea of homeland, that of the nation and that of the national sense of vocation, referring to the topics being significant from the point of view of my theme and occurring in the bibliography studied.

I examined the exiled preacher, Mihály Szöllősi's prayer book, the famous court preachers Mihály Tofeus' and József Nagyari's very impressive sermon collection, and furthermore the exiles' correspondence, because as far as I see, the elements, playing a role in the development of the protestant attitude to history, concentrated in the exiles' situation.

I chose Mihály Cserei's *História*, so that with its help I could support my notion, as to the protestant view of history being not only the preachers' "own", but also a determining idea and typical of the way of thinking at that time.

### **III. The Main Results of the Essay**

In my opinion, preachers', exiles', history writers' or the political élite's views to history are rooted in the biblical view evolving in Hungary in the 16th century, which saw the realization of God's plan in the events of the era and looked upon their own era as apocalyptic. Their present distress was seen as God's punishment for our sins, as we had gone astray, which is why the only way to liberation is repentance, conversion, proper worship of God and obedience, in other words: piety.

Historic events were interpreted as God's judgement or grace, and explanation as well as examples were looked for and found in the history of the Jewish. Conversion, piety, solidarity with the suffering nation, self-examination, building community and persistence in hard situations are emphasized.

The ideological trends of the era – Puritanism, Coccejanism and pietism – can be easily noticed in sermons and the mentality and attitude of the people living at that time. In the second half of the 17th century, as a result of the historic events, the apocalyptic feature of the view of history was even more intensified.

As a result of my research I came to the following:

- In Mihály Szöllősi's prayer book – *Az Úrért s hazájokért elszéledett és számkivettetett bujdosó magyarok füstölgő csepüje [The Fuming Abuse of the Hungarians in Exile Scattered and Banished for their Lord and Homeland]* – the identification of the Jewish and the Hungarian people, such as Hungarian Israel, Hungarian Sion, can be seen, and other biblical parallelism can be found: historic events, people and stories are associated with the events of the Hungarian or protestant people's lives. Furthermore, the conception, that God must help his people, not only for the sake of Hungarians but also for his own glory, can be observed.

In common prayers he refers mainly to Old Testament stories and people, and in the personal prayers there are several quotations from the New Testament and Psalms as well as parallels. He especially often uses the stories of the Exodus from Egypt and years in the wilderness as analogies, and his favourite parallel is Moses' asking God that He go with the people. The current political interpretation of the Bible's message is not typical of him and his aim is to preach repentance and conversion, using allegories, symbolic conceptions and the method of analogical-typological exegesis.

- Mihály Tofeus and József Nagyari, the two very effective preachers in Transylvania in the Apafi-era. Their works – Mihály Tofeus: *A szent Soltarok resolutioja [The Resolution of the Holy Psalms]*; József Nagyari's *Tábori prédikációi [Camp sermons]* – are basic sources of the era and the attitude as well. Both of them put the main emphasis on repentance and conversion, however, specific elements of the Old Testament way of thinking can be observed, like emphasising God's punishment on sinners, or the Coccejanic covenant theology, the puritan piety and the manifestation of orthodox

Calvinism. At the same time, they distanced themselves from the radical conception of state and society of the puritans.

The easiest way to show Coccejus' influence on Tofeus is Tofeus' image of Moses, but Voetius and Comenius also had a great impact on him. He rejects Coccejus' certain theories, but is inclined to use the covenant theology and the typological exegeses a lot.

His orthodox position is mirrored in his insistence to the doctrine of predestination and he can see the realization of the covenant between man and God, too. Typologies can be noticed and the deuteronomic view of history is typical for Nagyari's commentaries as well, but theological argumentations cannot be found.

Moses, Gideon, David and Abraham are all preferred with the three of them and they are the Old Testament characters that are most often set as examples. For Tofeus, Moses does not only play a significant role in his sermons, but also regards him as his role model.

Nagyari draws a parallel between Saul, the successful leader, not supported by people, but chosen by God, and Apafi's character and situation.

- In the exiles' view of history, disappointment and turning to the past can be observed more than the encouragement to persistency, but the emphasis on repentance and conversion remains there, too. They were not preachers, consequently they did not establish and develop the approach, but took over and applied them. The reason why I found the analysis of the exiles' correspondence important was that this group, due to their situation, in their everyday lives, lived what preachers preached. The protestant view of

history concentrated and crystallized in their lives and left us its clear-out summary in their correspondence.

- *Mihály Cserei's História [History]* also supports my opinion as to the protestant view of history being the defining ideology typical for the way of thinking of that era. On one hand, since Cserei was not a preacher and his work was neither theological, nor written for that purpose, but on the other hand, he usually applied the elements of this special attitude subconsciously. Deeply rooted and widely and generally spread elements of thoughts and expressions can be found in his writings.

- Furthermore, the notion of the Hungarian national sense of vocation – the mission of a bastion defending Christianity – and the reformers' theology, especially the doctrine of grace represented an important component.

- According to the approach in the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the sins leading to God's punishment are the deadly sins – especially pride, gluttony and lust out of the seven deadly sins - or the social sins, that is the trespasses of the community's leaders against the community, as well as the “protestant deadly sins”, sins committed against God – e.g. idolatry, swearing, heresy, enchantment, superstition, adultery, stinginess, usury and profaning a feast/ not keeping a feast – which are the violation of God's covenant. Discord, dissension and the lack of unity – emphasized by all preachers – are often treated as not (only) sins but also punishments.

- Of course, the approach and its development did not lack influence from Western Europe – e.g. the questions of secular primacy and war and peace and speculations to calculate the date of the end of the world. Drawing a parallel with certain parts of texts, I tried to demonstrate these.

- The national self-observation and interpretation of community based on the same fates of the Jewish and the Hungarian, which, coupling with a religious belief of being chosen by God and thus of a sense of vocation, could give hope, strength and aim in the most critical period of the history of the Hungarian nation. It meant a basis and sense of togetherness, rising above the limits of time and space, and established a way of thinking, consciously turning against reality and interpreting homeland and nation on an idealistic and conceptual level and not within historical-political frames.

From the point of view of practical application of further analyses and results, on the basis of my examinations, I recommend the following:

- The research of the ideological history of the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries can bring new results mainly within interdisciplinary – furthermore, international - frames.

- I found it remarkably important, that theology will be drawn – and not only oscurrary – into the exploration of all issues relating to Protestantism, sermon literature and generally church/ religion.

- The analysis of Hungarian Protestantism in the 17<sup>th</sup> century demands further knowledge of the European background and that of the bibliography not available in Hungarian – or in Hungary.

- In this context, the publishing of the results of Hungarian research in foreign languages and abroad.

- First of all, from a practical point of view, I would like to emphasize the examination, the recognition and application of research results of different denominations in Theological Faculties. The establishment of ecumenical work teams would be useful.

- I also find it important – mainly referring to the history of piety – the drawing of sermon literature of the early modern times into church life, or at least the ensuring of its availability and the chance to get acquainted with it.

#### **IV. Publications Relating to the Theme**

##### **Studies:**

A bujdosók történelemszemlélete [The Exiles' View of History] In: *Református Egyház* LVIII./2006/4. pp. 89-91

A Magyar puritánok történelemszemlélete [The Hungarian Puritans' View of History] In: *Református Egyház* LVIII./2006/5. p. 108.

Vallástörténeti bevezetés [Introduction to the History of Religion] In: Óze, Sándor – Szelke, László: *Apokaliptika és posztmodernitás* [Apocalypse and Postmodernism]. Szent Vince College, Piliscsaba, 2009. pp. 7-40.

##### **Reviews:**

Győri, L. János: Nagyari József Tábori prédikációi 1681-1683. [Nagyari József's Camp Sermons]. In: *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 2007. pp. 4-5., 541-542.

Csorba, Dávid: A' sovány lelket meg-szépíteni [Improving The Weak Soul] Debreceni prédikátorok [Preachers from Debrecen] (1657-1711). In: *Egyháztörténeti Szemle* IX/ 4. pp. 161-163.

Imre, Mihály: A Vizsolyi Biblia egyik forrása [A Source of the Vizsoly Bible] Petrus Martyr. In: *Egyháztörténeti Szemle* X/ 4. pp. 108-109.

**Conference lecture in the theme of the essay:**

25<sup>th</sup> May, 2007. Tér a történelemben konferencia [Space in History Conference], PPKE BTK: *A haza és a nemzet fogalma a XVI-XVII: századi Magyarországon [The idea of homeland and nation in Hungary in the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries]*