

# **Liberal bishops at the head of Transylvanian Reformed Church**

## **PhD-thesis in protestant church history - Summary**

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In this paper we take a look at a not so well known era of Transylvanian protestant church history. Even today, there is no synthetic writing about liberal theology and its representatives. This era – the so-called long 19th century – it's quite easy to write about: it was the print media's heyday, we can say that it was a "blast" of information between the churches history, too. There were many textbooks, sermon collections, essays and articles released to the public, written by liberal theologians. They made possible for the researchers to have source material after them. But there was no processing and critical analysis. Why? There are lots of factors which can explain this situation: the 1st World War, the Hungarian Reformed Church's falling into pieces (which was integrated in 1881), the new life situations of minority, the presence of neo-orthodoxy (dialectical theology) in Transylvania which, beginning from 1920's was growing bigger and bigger, etc. The role of liberal theology is controversial until today, it divides the pastoral society. But in several situations we only judge it by stereotypes. The truth is that we did not sufficiently know the liberal theologians works, thoughts and teachings. In fact, exploring and acquainting the sources is necessary to adjudge detachedly, to evaluate this period, to come to terms with the past and to close the past.

In the first part of my paper I want to give a comprehensive definition about liberalism. I will write about its historical roots and its meanings (1.1-1.3.1.), we will have a look at how it comes forward in lutheran, calvinist and unitarian denominations, how it influenced the theological thinking (1.3.2. A-C). The liberal theology is in an undoubted interaction with the philosophical trends from the 18-19th centuries. We can not understand this phenomenon without explaining the philosophical terms of Kant, Hegel and Schleiermacher. We will make two bigger roundabouts to acquire the philosophical terms, and we will outline the liberal aspects of renaissance and humanism, and their confrontation

with the reformers from the 16th century highlighting Luther's and Erasmus' argument. At the end of this chapter we will see the connection between rationalism and liberal theology, and then I will sum up the liberal theology's criterions (1.3.2. D-G).

In the second part of my paper I will write about bishop Domokos Szász de Szemerja talking about his origins (2.1.), his opinion about the Apostles' Creed (2.2), then I will present the preacher from his lasted ecclesial speeches (2.3.)

Domokos Szász de Szemerja (1838-1899) was the first hierarch who occupied his station by election and not by success in the Transylvanian calvinist diocese. At the time of his election it was off the form that the vicar general is the expectant of the bishopric. This view was accepted later too. At the beginning of his mandatory he requested from the general assembly 40 churches and 100 schools. Until his episcopal jubilee will be ready 71 churches and tabernacles, 83 schools, 92 parsonage, will be renovated 141 buildings, and will be organized a round between 35 chaplaincys. His masterwork is the Protestant Theological Institute's building which is located at Kolozsvár at Bocskai square and the initiation of advanced pastoral education in Transylvania.

The main character of the paper's third part is bishop György Bartók de Málnás (1845-1907). I will outline his biographical aspects (3.1.), and we will size up his interpretation about the Bible analysing the catechism (3.2.1.) and New Testament textbook (3.2.2). Bartók's work in the church history is about the evolution of reformed church's administrative structures (3.3.). I am going to draw a conclusion about that, too.

Bartók was learning law at Nagyenyed and when the faculty ceased, he went to theology. He takes the priestly exam in 1871. During his studies he was influenced by the internationally famous liberal theologian Ödön Kovács, who helped him to get scholarship in Tübingen, Germany. Later, when he came home, he was elected to be 2nd pastor at Nagyenyed thanks to Kovács. In 1874 he defended his PhD-thesis which was about Lessing's philosophical and religious opinion (Lessings philosophische und religiöse Grundanschauung).

László Ravasz – his son-in-law –regarded that Bartók and Lessing were soulmates. He was a private tutor at university at Kolozsvár and he disserted about Kant's philosophy. While he was a priest at Nagyenyed and Szászváros he was an editor and religion teacher too. These experiences were later the base for his books. In 1899 – after Domokos Szász's death – he was elected to be the next Transylvanian bishop.

The dissertation will end with the afterword, portraits, indexes and bibliography.

# 1. What is liberalism?

## 1.1. *Meaning. Origin*

We aim to examine a concept with an effect sensed by all of us “in the air”, we discuss it on a daily basis, however, as we go through the definition we realize that its connotation is really vast: it can be applied to economical and political value systems, types of personalities, institution systems, activity styles and last but not least to the field of theology. The common point which connects these two wide spectrums is the ideology of freedom and equality (1). The adjective “liberal” was first used in Spain, in the time of the Napoleon wars with reference to the activity of the Central Commission of Defense stationing in Cadiz. The concept then, spread in other European countries and became decisive for the political and spiritual ideology (2). Spain is assaulted by an army of 70 thousand French invaders, Cadiz is defended by the British fleet. In 1812 the constitution is proclaimed which ends the centuries long ruling absolute monarchy in Spain. In the national assembly (Cortes) of the country in crisis, the nobility and the representatives of the church become a minority. The constitution doesn't question the monarchy, as a state form; however, it will reduce the power of the crown and proclaims equality before the law- through the confinement and limitation of privileges offered to nobility. According to William J. Callahan, the ideological basis or, if you wish, inter alia the source of the Spanish liberal constitution is the 1791 French revolutionary constitution (3). Although their objective wasn't the abolition of the church, by condemning the inquisition and by accepting the freedom of speech as a right, all show into a direction in which society secularizes and individualism strengthens (4).

There is no word for it yet, however, the form of behavior already makes its appearance at the end of the Middle Ages, and it makes its way in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, we can also state that since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it exercises a dominant influence on the European way of thinking. Its original objective was to overthrow the absolutist power and fight for the human rights of freedom. The illumination drove him to the conclusion that “a person is an independent free individual with almost supernatural traits.” (5) His thesis can be summed up in three words: rationalism, naturalism and positivism. More widely explained: the starting point is the fact that the only source of knowledge is the mind of the individual that is naturally good that is why humanity goes forward, proceeding towards a desired and mysterious fulfillment (6).

Another approach exists, according to which liberalism is the phenomenon that defines theology in a global sense that dating from the illumination (and its preliminaries) offered humanity numerous philosophical perspectives and thinkers. It will awaken the personal self which enjoys priority among others and in society- he sets out the conditions which connect him to it. With this we can state in advance that, we discuss about a selective self which selects from the possibilities; autonomous self which considers itself the law and exclusively accepts systems that were established with his assistance-a system will be legitimate if it was his own product. Thus, we can identify a preliminary director, a pre-institutional self (7). Furthermore, we can pinpoint another characteristics of the liberal phenomenon: individualism-when the individual shall be given preference in a moral sense over the community and society (8).

M. Sandel claims that, liberalism is a theory about truth and especially about the priority of the truth between moral and political ideologies. Society is a composite of the multitude of individuals, who have different goals, interests and perspectives about good. Liberal society works most efficiently if ruled by principles that won't offer any particular preconditions of “good” (9).

## **1.2. *Economical and political aspects***

Two thinkers from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, who sought the possibility of avoiding the civil war and social conflicts, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke played an essential role in laying the foundation for the political and economical theoretical background of liberalism. In the long 19<sup>th</sup> century, first it becomes a progressive ideology than a form of government, put in practice most consistently by England and the US, however, after 1945 these principles spread in the western democracy and become to this date dominant (10). Liberal thinking lays special emphasis on the unconditional and unlimited autonomy of individual because it considers that, “autonomy through the free game of individual power will help us achieve pre-defined harmony.” (11) As a consequence, liberalism promotes anti-etatism: the state should not interfere in economical affairs, it will remain “a night guard”. No need for more, or special influence from its part, since the regulatory principle is free competition, in which, according to A.Smith, the invisible hand is responsible for the smoothing of differences (12).

Free competition establishes a harmony in the whole economic system, that serves not only the interest of the individual but

also that of the community. The driving force is self-interest, which motivates individuals to make an effort; competition is the regulatory factor that forces self-interest to serve the common good since each individual can get by only by serving the common good. (13)

We consider secularization as the most important premise of political liberalism. The profanation of authority dramatically changes the attitude of individuals towards the church. The essence of it was that, the Godly legitimization of the middle aged authority (monarchy) was replaced by the validation of authority by real consensus (voting). The scope of liberalism's church policy is to separate the church from the state (14). However, this is only an excuse to supersede the institutions of church from the public life. We can firmly state that, the church drew the shorter straw since the devotees of separation maintained the right of the state to interfere in the appointment of bishops, to pass regulations for church activities, and finally to make the church financially depend upon it. By closely examining some of the countries, we can observe a partial separation where the state church is still existent (England, Scandinavian states), we can notice a radical separation in countries like: France where laicism is dominant, the United States promotes the principle of consensus (free church in a free state), however there is a model of cooperation between state and church when it comes to solving certain social problems. This is also present in Germany and Italy (15).

In historic Hungary political liberalism appears in two distinct aspects. We can mention the so-called *national liberalism*, represented by count Széchenyi István, Kossuth Lajos, Deák Ferenc, baron Eötvös József. Hungarian liberals are also protesting the autocracy; however, they respect national traditions and religion. In fact, the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century social transformation is ruled by the same principles (16). At the same time, we must mention the rationalist, masonic direction of Hungarian liberalism, that had a more powerful influence compared to the liberalism of the reform generation based on capitalism and more precisely on its negative propositions. Prohászka Ottokár objected to this because „unrestrained competition brought changes similar to to the ones generated by decay, fall and death (17). Raffay Ernő, a contemporary historian is not surprised, since the pre-war Austria-Hungary was a model state for liberalism (18).

### **1.3. *Phases of theological liberalism. Movement or outlook? Religious vs. Theological distinctions.***

Scientific literature offers a broad definition for what we call liberalism in the science of theology. Some sources reserve a whole chapter to the so-called liberal Protestantism, as a movement active in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and considers the liberal outlook of Christian theology different from it (however, the similarities in ideology are acknowledged), liberalism which can refer to soulfulness, an approach, an interpretation with active representatives in the Early Church and contemporary literature (19). From a Catholic point of view, we are dealing with the restriction of this question: according to them, this is a direction formed only in the context of evangelical theology. By flipping the pages of the 7<sup>th</sup> volume of the Magyar Katolikus Lexikon edited by Diós István and co-edited by Viczián János we may question unintentionally what does the „evangelical” word mean? Had the Reformed and Lutheran direction been blended consciously or due to negligence? (20) We gain or we lose if we stay out of liberalism? One thing is certain, Roman Catholicism sets itself apart from it, it acts as if liberalism would be a phenomenon beyond its borders (21). Besides the economical aspect it distinguishes the religious and theological liberalism. The previous one is broader, it crosses numerous time periods, the latter one is narrower, it is a history-specific concept. Religious liberalism questioned the authority of the church in the context of the freedom of the individual, the natural rights, therefore it is understandable that Pope Leo XIII. in the *Libertas paestantissimum* and Pope Pius X. in the *Lamentabili sane exitu* encyclical spoke disapprovingly about it (22).

It was Pope Leo who defined the three categories of religious liberalism: thus, we can mention the absolute, moderate and religious liberalism. Where the individual is considered the law itself, the autonomic perception prevails. Therefore, absolute liberalism will not respect any church authority. It is strongly related to atheism, materialism and pantheism. Rationalism is considered the moderate direction of liberalism, in spite of the fact that it denies the divine revelation, it still accepts that natural law originates from God. He calls religious liberalism the perception that accepts the positive divine law in private life; however, it denies their effect on the social-political life, moreover, (not necessarily) it demands the separation of state and the church; however, it expects from the church to adapt to the laws of the state. In 19<sup>th</sup> century France Le Mennais, Lacordaire and Montalambert „conjured Catholics to join democracy. Not as a social ideology, but a Christian principle and based on natural law demanded the freedom of journalism, education, associations and

services, as well as, the separation of church and state. This would contribute to the unfolding of a new Christian era. La Mennais considered the revolution inevitable and the overture of God's wish" (23). The Roman Catholic Church became the inexorable opponent of liberalism. The reasons for this are primarily of theological nature: individualism as a "shortened anthropology" didn't fit in the system of Catholic theology, which couldn't identify with the idea that religion is private matter and the church is just the free association of believers. In practice this all culminates in the measures taken by the liberal state as the expropriation of church properties, the dissolution of the so-called futile convents, the abolition of special rights given to the clergy based on the principle of civil equal rights (24). It is Friedrich Harkot who claims that the teacher should no longer be the assistant of the parish priest, he should, instead, serve the state (25).

Almost all sources agree upon the fact that the theological liberal movement (also known as: liberal Protestantism) is more predominant in Protestantism than in Catholic theology, furthermore, that it developed from rationalism, primarily under the influence of Immanuel Kant (1768-1834), Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and Albert Ritschl (1822-1889), moreover, Georg F. Hegel's (1770-1831) name also appeared among them. Note that it is also important to mention that nowadays, the Second Vatican Council is considered as the acceptance of liberal ideology by the Roman Catholic Church (26).

Kant will go down in history as the person who brought a Copernican revolution in human thinking. In 1793 "Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone" is published, a work that marks the irreversible infiltration of his criticism in the universe of theology (27). I would like to mention two of its fundamental and influential consequences on future theological thinking: 1) by denying metaphysics Kant questions the credibility of traditional natural theology which includes proofs for the existence of God as well as immortality 2) parallel with this, he also attempts to create the individual as a thinker and moral creature and also a transcendent that will overcome nature. As a result demonstrative metaphysical theology gradually withers and it is replaced by: philosophy- not theology- that accentuates the transcendent status and inner awareness of the individual (28).

Schleiermacher wanted to address the "operations that condemned religion" and following the footsteps of Kant he also rejected speculative theology. Instead, he looked for the foundation of faith in a universal trans-subjective divine consciousness, the starting point of which is the human inner aesthetic and religious answer to reality. He wants to perceive God in an empirical way, more precisely through experiencing instinctively the sense of absolute dependence on infinity. In parallel, Hegel claims that what is real is also reasonable

and advocates the Absolute Spirit revealing in the human consciousness. Under the influence of these thinkers, the 19<sup>th</sup> century German Protestant theology takes a firm anthropological character and it begins to voice the opinion according to which, there is a continuity between divine proclamation and human thinking (29).

In the head of Ritschl, Kant's, Schleiermacher's and Rudolf Lotze's (1817-1881) influence unfolds when he creates the value-judgment-theology. Its essence is that God can't be known "in itself". This is the idea borrowed from Kant. In that sense, the biblical portrait of Jesus from Nazareth becomes significant - he is the key to divine comprehension. According to Ritschl, we must look for the essence of Christianity in the factual historical strata of the Old Testament, in which we can also detect the archetype of the man conquering nature. Jesus is the one who, in spite of his suffering unconditionally trusts God's love and power, thus, showing the true answer of humans to God, who is the unconditional love and grace. Jesus is the archetype of man with capital M who, by following Jesus, recognizes what is "good" and "proper" and will escape from the yoke of the blind, mechanic and impersonal nature. With the birth of these type of individuals emerges a continuously growing community: The Country of God, a social entity with the objective to gradually redeem and ethically transform the world (30).

## ***2. Liberalism in Transilvanian Reformed Church***

In Hungary, after the reconciliation period, liberal theology finds favorable ground for unfolding. This can be explained with the rise of the middle class and as a new political factor, the bourgeoisie arrogates to itself the right to form the principles and a way of thinking. Besides the much-wanted political influence, it also wanted to obtain the spiritual capital monopoly. In this sense the Calvinist Presbyterian principle met the expectations of civil democracy. At the same time, Kovács György is aware of the fact that, the Protestant church organization is closely related to the constitutional perspective of the Hungarian gentry, as it defines ecclesiastical authority as the authority conferred on the superiors by equal members of the church- and this is the essence of the relation between royal and noble nation. In the case of Protestants, the congregation is the most important institutional unit, all units receive authorization from this particular department. This idea is worth considering, if we know the fact that, in Transylvania, the Reformed church managed to keep its state church



status obtained back in the period of principality, thus, the Presbyterian system has been established only following the constitutional synod from 1881 (31).

Kovács Ábrahám acknowledges the scientific-related merits of liberal theology, however, he firmly sets himself apart from the abuse generated by this direction. He condemns them for their intention to override the body, the form or the pot carrying the message of Christianity-call it as you wish: the institution of the church. The issue is therefore not that, whether it is proper to follow the scientific researches or apply them in the practice of theology. The fatal mistake of liberals consists in the fact that, instead of Christian justification, they elaborated a completely intrinsic self-salvatory mechanism: which is secured by the continuous and positive human development based on science and morale:

In fact - whether they acknowledged or not- liberals, undoubtedly crossed the Rubicon. They are no longer open-minded, progressive and professing theologians but from the perspective of ecclesiastical theology false prophets, as with the help of Hegelian religious wisdom, they attempted to mistakenly implement the philosophy of progressive national, political and social liberalism into the entity bearing the message of Christianity, the church. Consequently, the fault of liberals is not the application of the methods of contemporary sciences in theology (because this was necessary, Orthodoxy also practiced it), but the fact that, with their religious philosophical anthropology, they intended to override the ecclesiastical theology. In fact they were cultural Christians, more precisely religious philosophers dealing with theology and religion, philologists and historians of religion. [...] Rational religion is based on the unconditional faith in the „good” nature of humans, it substitutes the Christian doctrine of justification with self-improvement, at the same time it also reinterprets the well-known call from Jesus „Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect”. It replaces its faith in progress based on the optimism of rationality with the assimilation with the image of Jesus, following his path and with the justification offered to people. (32)

Personally, I would like to add the fact that, I absolutely agree with Márkus Mihály who detected the rational method in all theological directions of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. The method more likely links and not separates the rational, liberal, Orthodox or Barthian theologians from Transylvania. The perfect example is Kecskeméthy Csapó (33). The liberal bishops I examined are no less ambivalent personalities as Kecskeméthy. For instance, Szemerjai Szász Domokos used his texts for more than mere motto in his religious speeches. Moreover, broadly speaking, we can state that the 1/3 of Szász Domokos' sermon is made up of precise quotes from the Bible. This demonstrates the fact that Szász was perfectly familiar with the books of the Bible and he inserted parts of it in the message transmitted with the help of his sermons. The same profound lexical knowledge can be observed also in the case of Málnási Bartók György who, in his catechism illustrates and justifies his teachings with words from the Bible, moreover, in some cases he opposes the rationalist Nagy Péter, in spite of the fact that there are clear similarities between the two catechisms. I would not say that Bartók plagiarized, instead there is an organic development in the Transylvanian Reformed catechism literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, established most probably by Bodola Sámuel. Nagy Péter builds on the foundation laid by Bodola, whereas later on, Bartók will reinterpret and develop Nagy Péter's catechism. Due to limitations in the length of my study, I could not address the subject of Bodola, however, a complementary research in the future can paint a portrait about the national confirmation education from the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The other side of the coin is that, Szász Domokos, in his presentation dating back to 1872, formulates some significant „unorthodox” views – referring to Kovács Ábrahám – „false teachings” and presents these in front of a forum ( Protestant Society) made up of ministers and theology practitioners, moreover, he also yields to the fashionable visions and denies the important axioms of universal Christianity. Bartók bequeathed us a valuable catechism, more precisely, a church historical study, however, this doesn't exonerate him from his past sins, planting the seeds of doubt and biblical criticism in the soul of the youth with his study books.

We are not boasting about the fact that, as Nagy Géza meticulously presents, the results of the studies conducted by theologians from Kolozsvár at the turn of the century did not meet the expectations- there are hardly any talented students among the minister candidates, the majority has just rose to the „satisfactory” level. Those who are living outside the campus had not been subjected to any supervision. Constantly burning lamps before colloquies, red eyes and tired nerves were all elements of the college lifestyle, also in the past. On the request of bishop Bartók, in 1902 midterm colloquies are introduced for bishops and

professors to properly evaluate indolent students. At first, students deliberately sabotaged the exam, later on, they were forced to acknowledge the policy. At the same time, it is determined that in the case of choice of legation the order of priority is defined based on marks in their grade book (34). These lines give rise to doubt when it comes to the religious attitude of candidates:

If we take into consideration the lectures featured in the curriculum and we evaluate the material for study from a contemporary perspective, we can raise at least two significant objections against it. One is the presentation of the Bible and creed, the other is the lack of individual scientific education during seminars. The substantial understanding of the holy book as the foundation of the Reformed faith can't be replaced with the translation of some of its parts from the original language or with the presentation of the theological perspective of different Christian writers. „Based on my personal experience and the experience gained by others, young theologians know more about and not from the Bible”- claims Pokoly József a few years later. Kennessey's lectures and later on homiletic seminars are based on the Holy Bible he holds in his hand, however, young students use it only when they study or formulate a sermon based on it. The situation is similar in the case of the creed. (35)

The nationalization of religious schools occurred during the period in which liberal heads of church operated. From a contemporary perspective, we can state that this was a fatal mistake, however in the time of Szász Domokos and Bartók György they thought that Protestantism is loyal, it had found a strong ally in the state and the national interest clearly dictates that poorly equipped popular schools should be entrusted to the state. According to statistics, while Roman and Greek Catholics refused the possibility of nationalization, Lutherans handled it carefully, whereas the Reformed and Unitarian Church from Transylvania decided to surrender the majority of their schools to the state: in 1867 the Reformed Church members from Transylvania maintain 587 schools, in 1891 the number of schools decreased to 433 and the number constantly lowers in the period of Szász Domokos (in 1896 352, in 1897 278). In six years the Reformed Church from Transylvania surrendered 155 schools to the state! To 1918 our capacities had shrunk, with 175 schools still operating.

The deices from Transylvania surrendered a number of 412 schools to the state from the date of the reconciliation (36).

Szász Domokos claimed:

We, Calvinists, who first of all consider ourselves Hungarian patriots, welcome with profound joy, the ever-growing role of the state in the primary education, as the narrow-minded denominational concerns must take a step back, where the Hungarian state and the national interests prevail. (37)

Another interesting connection must be addressed: the relationship between Szász Domokos and Bartók György escalates from a historical perspective. In the Nagyegyed-Kolozsvár debate they are opponents, moreover, Bartók inherits a significant financial burden when he occupies his chair as a bishop. Bartók, as a bishop must accept and care for the inheritance received from Szász, the theology from Kolozsvár, in spite of the fact that, his predecessor-opponent invited the professors involved in the capital home mission to teach in Transylvania. Bartók, in his official declaration distanced himself from the introduction of weeks of prayers, he was also critical of the development of Presbyterian association, additionally, he also objected to the excessive reading of the Bible on account of the danger sects pose:

I believe that the real Bible of the people is a good song book, I personally prefer when believers read the song book instead of flipping the pages of the Bible, as the Bible raises Nazarenes whereas a good song book cane save us from Nazarenism. (38)

From the point of view of soulfulness we can't really discuss about the studied era in a positive sense: the preaching becomes religious rhetoric, it goes through a literary transfiguration, characterized by mannerism and evangelical meaninglessness. Liturgy is on the path to deterioration, however, this process is defined as the „liturgical freedom of reformed ministers” as it appears in the only agenda-book published in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Nagy Péter- Vadas József) (39).

After the death of bishop Bartók a slow mentality shift emerged, which unfolded only after the war- this time in a new social and political context. According to Kurta József, the war shed light on a significant problem: the estrangement of church and believers, an issue they neglected in the past. The confession of Gönczy Lajos presents a touching portrait of our national piety. I quote it as a warning for the posterity:

It became obvious that, there is no personal and viable relationship between church and churchgoers. Neither of the parts felt the need for this [...]. As a response to the initiative made by Nagy Károly, we made a huge of effort to turn congregational singing and voluntary financial contribution into a tradition in every congregation of our church. It was the epilogue of the sad period in which the majority of ministers read the prayers from a song book, they quoted the sermons of unknown preachers, the majority of the churchgoers entered the church only when the second song was played and did not participate in the singing ritual, just listened to the solo performance of the cantor. Furthermore, they contributed financially to the church only during the Lord's Supper, in villages there wasn't even a money box. (40)

The aforementioned aspects illustrated the era of liberal bishops. More precisely the indirect effects of liberal theology. With the reinterpretation of the Holy Trinity and redemption there is a danger that, liberal theologians established an elitist group with unique knowledge of God and immortality. This higher knowledge with a faith in the mechanical progress of humans is extremely similar to the Gnostic doctrines of the Early Church. The Gnostic Jesus was considered a Redeemer, who descended to Earth to preach the gnosis. Despite the fact that they lived among „Catholic” Reformed believers, Gnostics always felt a sense of superiority, they used to differentiate people from one another: they classified them as intellectual, spiritual or physical. In this threefold classification the intellectual Christianity was the highest category. If liberal theologians were Gnostics, then history repeated itself in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, at the same time, they can hardly get rid of the stigma of heresy (41).

According to Márkus Jenő, theological liberalism in the Hungarian Reformed Church was necessary and inevitable, it could not be prevented not even by the sudden break in the relation with the West. At first, liberalism spread in the upper class, later on in a slower pace it got to the wider so-called popular stratum. A phase shift can be observed: by the time people adopt liberalism, intellectuals already step into the phase of awakening.

As the popular stratum proved to be more resistant to liberal reality, they resisted also the evangelical actions. Our faith is that, the Gospel will overcome popular resistance. However, we

must always be aware of liberal religiousness: the ancient-desire of humans is always an opponent as it is the individual in itself.

(42)

In Transylvania, the controversial personality of liberal theologians makes us assume the fact that, interestingly, in our region liberal theology – unlike the Western examples– is interconnected with historical Calvinism (43). This aspect guarantees the existing specificity of the domestic Reformed Church. If we examine it from this perspective, the question arises, what kind of spiritual awakening was the awakening from the 20s and 30s? What are the objectives and the realistic possibilities for the revival. What started then is broken by World War II. Between 1945-1989 the church will fall into a Babylonian captivity, everything stagnates, it's about survival. What follows in December 1989 is the sudden freedom, democracy never known completely, a toy in the hands of society, not old enough to play with and intellectually unprepared for it. Liberal mentality and secularization in the relativity of the world that has been shrunk to a global village, we find ourselves in a labyrinth. New keywords emerge: welfare, standard of living, sustainable development, consumer society. Members of the Reformed Church- in an inestimable number- especially young people leave the country to try their luck in the world. Transylvania had fallen? We lost Transylvania? In terms of statistics the answer is 'yes'. Here we are now: the liberal spirit lives on, it has been transformed, it is still our duty to break the „popular resistance” foreseen by Márkus Jenő and to rescue what can still be rescued. This is the burden and the challenge of the Reformed Church. Not with power or with authority but with the Soul of God!

## **NOTES:**

1. Magyar Nagylexikon (MNL), 12. volume (head of Editing Commission: Glatz Ferenc, MTA), Magyar Nagylexikon Kiadó, Budapest, 2001, 104.
2. Idem, 104.
3. Callahan, William J.: Church, Politics and Society in Spain, 1750-1874, Harvard Historical Monographs, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts – London, England, 1984, 94.
4. „The question posed at Cádiz and repeated in the later history of liberal Spain was never whether the Church should or should not exist, nor whether it should be separated from its official relationship with the State. The question was whether the kingdom's ecclesiastical

elite would accept a redefinition of the Church's role within a new political society molded by a Catholic, educated middle class with a more secular and individualistic ideology than that underlying the old monarchical and hierarchical order.”, Callahan, 95.

5. Magyar Katolikus Lexikon (Diós István – editor., Viczián János – coeditor, MKL) VII. Volume, Szent István Társulat, Budapest, 2002, 845.

6. Idem, 845.

7. The term is attributed to a certain Schmitz. Global Dictionary of Theology (GDT), (ed. William A. Dyrness, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen), IVP Academic, Downers Grove, Illinois, USA – IVP, Inter-Varsity Press, Nottingham, England, 2008., 485.

8. Gárdonyi Máté: A liberalizmus szócikk in Liberalizmus és egyház, Magyarországi Protestáns Egyháztörténeti Lexikon (editor. Zoványi Jenő), 3. Javított és bővített kiadás, MRE Zsinati Iroda, Budapest, 1977, 565.

9.GDT, 485.

10. Gárdonyi, 565-566.

11. Conzemius, Victor: Concept Liberalism in Liberalizmus és egyház, Magyarországi Protestáns Egyháztörténeti Lexikon (editor. Zoványi Jenő), 3. Javított és bővített kiadás, MRE Zsinati Iroda, Budapest, 1977, 568.

12. MNL, 105.

13. MKL, 845.

14.Gárdonyi, 566.

15. Idem.

16. See my study in Református Szemle. Geréb Miklós: Az első felelős magyar kormány egyházpolitikája I. in Református Szemle (2015/3), Kolozsvár, 2015. MÁJ.-JÚN., 296-314.

17. MKL, 846.

18. Raffay Ernő: Szabadkőműves zsoldban, Ady Endre és a szabadkőművesség II. (1905-1908), Kárpátia Stúdió, Budapest, 2014, 8.

19. The Westminster Dictionary takes the view (Westminster), (ed. Alan Richardson, John Bowden), The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, USA, 1983, 324.

20. MKL, 844.

21. Zoványi Jenő has a different opinion, he writes about this from a Hungarian perspective, not even Catholics could avoid the winds of illumination and he mentions Révei Miklós, who in spite of being a monk he embraced views opposing Orthodoxy, Zoványi Jenő: A magyarországi protestantizmus története 1895-ig, Attraktor, Máriabesnyő-Gödöllő, 2004, II.

22. MKL, 845.

23. MKL, 845. The Roman Church answers the questions posed by illumination in a unique manner. It generates Conservatism, also-called as Ultramontanism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (in reference to the spiritual direction coming from the Alps). See: Péter Miklós: *A keresztyén egyház története*, Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület kiadása, Kolozsvár, 2004, 203. o.

24. Gárdonyi, 567.

25. Conzemiuss, 568.

26. Gárdonyi, 567.

27. Westminster, 324.

28. Idem, 326.

29. Idem.

30. Idem.

31. KOVÁCS, György: *Protestantizmus és kapitalizmus: magyar gazdaság- és eszmetörténeti tanulmányok*, PhD-értekezés, Szegedi Tudományegyetem, Közgazdaságtani Doktori Iskola, Szeged, 2010. 169.

32. KOVÁCS, Ábrahám: *Hitvédelem és egyháziasság, A debreceni új ortodoxia vitája a liberális teológiával*, Magyar Vallástudományi Társaság, L'Harmattan Kiadó, Budapest, 2010., 118-119.

33. We can observe a shift in the mentality and theological thinking of the bishop following Bartók, Kenessey Béla. Earlier on, Kenessey was also committed to religious positivism and acknowledged the beneficial effect of empirical physical science on religion, which puts an end to “doctrinal burden”. See: KOZMA, Zsolt: *Kenessey Béla in Akik jó bizonyágot nyertek, A Kolozsvári Református Theologia tanárai 1895-1948*, (szerk. Kozma Zsolt), Kolozsvár, 1996, 37.

34. NAGY, Géza: *A Kolozsvári Református Theologiai Fakultás története*, Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület kiadása, Kolozsvár, 1995, 37.

35. Idem, 34.

36. BÍRÓ, Sándor: *Egyházunk belső élete a szabadságharc után* in *A magyar református egyház története* (ed. Révész Imre, Bíró Sándor, Bucsay Mihály, Tóth Endre, Varga Zoltán), Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1949, 375-377. In the study of Nagy Géza these numbers are different, however the decrease is significant: between 1868-1896 from 587 schools only 352 are maintained, in 1908 bishop Kenessey will take over 203 at the beginning of his mandate. This means overall 384 lost educational institutions. See also: Nagy Géza, 49.



37. Bíró Sándor quotes the first Episcopal report, 375. He also emphasizes the fact that, the weekly paper of the association of Reformed teachers was published throughout the years with the following headline: “Nationalization, may your kingdom come!”.
38. Idem, 398.
39. KURTA, József: Isten Igéjének szolgái, Lelkészi életpályák a szatmárnémeti református egyházközség történetében, Exit Kiadó, Kolozsvár, 2009, 76.
40. Idem, 79.
41. ROUKEMA, Riemer: Gnózis és hit a korai keresztyénségben, Exit Kiadó, Kolozsvár, 2009, 162-163.
42. MÁRKUS, Jenő: *A liberális szellem a református egyházban, A magyar református liberális teológia*, Kálvin Kiadó, Budapest, 2005, 144.
43. KOVÁCS, György, 170. Confirmed by KOZMA Zsolt, 33.39. Kozma notes that the church-governing principle represented by Kenessey didn't criticized the work of Szász and Bartók. He wanted to become the first missionary of the diocese by claiming in his speech when occupying his chair his respect for the traditions embraced by his episcopal predecessors.”God liked the fact that, after the Nagy Péter – Szász Domokos – Bartók György line – without Kenessey deviating from this – the life of the church took a different turn. Avoiding polarization, we must conclude that, Kenessey wanted to spiritually revive the Reformed Church from Transylvania organized by his predecessors” (Quote from myself)

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