

From the Cradle to the Grave Representations of Confessional Identity in Mihály Cserei's Writings (1667–1747) (A Case Study in Historical Anthropology)*

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this paper is to offer, within the limits of a case study, an example revealing the determining relation between performing an identity and/while assimilating a confessional identity pattern in early modern Hungarian Calvinism. Due to the deliberately chosen micro approach, the study focuses upon one individual and his life course. Thus, the essay interprets certain moments from the life of Mihály Cserei (1667–1757), especially those, which have been recorded in writing, so that the author can elucidate how religious and confessional stereotypes, gestures, and representations promoted an identity matrix. The article also reconstructs the impact of Calvinist and English Puritan literary and theological traditions upon the spiritual life of this seventeenth-century individual. The interpretation of the author, as a case study relying on the analysis of Cserei's writing, will not simply enumerate the markers of identification with confessional attributes, but attempts to depict confessionalism as a functional component of Cserei's mental world and social or cultural existence. Mihály Cserei's case is remarkable for several reasons. He was a gifted writer and a diligent reader. Both preoccupations were dedicated to harden his Calvinist belief and religiosity. Consequently, one can decipher the multifaceted functions of reading and producing texts in early modern Hungarian Calvinist piety. Moreover, Mihály Cserei, as a historian of Transylvania proved his outstanding skills as a story teller, sustained also by his numerous narratives promoting the story of his life. Still, his genuine Calvinist education and religiosity influenced the manner and the aim of these narrative, which, no matter whether conceived at an early age or as an old man, were all centered upon a typical Calvinist narrative blueprint, suggesting that Cserei is a martyr-like individual enduring the harshness of life relying solely on his Calvinist creed. In this particular context, the experience of "religious despair" only partially admitted by Cserei, reveals an almost unknown dimension of Hungarian Puritan piety. This case study tries to contribute not only to the research related to the writings and life of Mihály Cserei, but also delivers further arguments sustaining the method and results of historical anthropology for studying the European Reformation in a comparative perspective.

KEYWORDS: confessional identity – Calvinism – historical anthropology.

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The historical anthropology of early modern Europe does not only consist of witch hunt stories, or case studies dedicated to all kinds of social, cultural, political deviance, but it has, I believe, a chapter reflecting the anthropological consequences of the Reformation. For the phenomenon of confessionalism¹ described by German historians as, 'confessional construction' or 'confessionalization' had a determining influence on the formation of early modern (imagined) communities² and individuals. It is almost certain that belonging to a community, whether it was a minority or represented the majority within a larger (imagined) community, could easily act as a marker of a certain identity, beyond the quality of Christian or the status of citizen. Thus, one can rightly suggest that by Reformation, in terms of selecting and gathering individuals in certain groups, the first steps have been made, toward the modern nation and state-building.

Although, this process surely is, one of the most spectacular long-term consequences of the Reformation, this paper confines its range of interests upon one individual experiencing confessionalism. Therefore, I will interpret certain moments from the life of Mihály Cserei (1667–1757), especially those, which were recorded in writing, in order to elucidate how religious and confessional stereotypes, gestures, and representations promoted an identity pattern. I will also construct the impact of Calvinist and Puritan literary and theological traditions upon the spiritual life of this seventeenth-century individual. The aim of this paper, as a case study relying on the interpretation of Cserei's writing, is not to simply enumerate the markers of identification with confessional attributes, but to depict confessionalism as a functional component of Cserei's mental world and social, cultural existence. Yet, this paper cannot undertake the task of giving a sound description of Mihály Cserei's religious life, although I will often refer to his religiosity, but it will deliver arguments suggesting, that confessionality can have multiple functions and applications in seventeenth-eighteenth century Transylvanian Calvinism.

As for the method applied in this analysis, I will rely on the methodology of historical anthropology which implies anthropological contextualization of the data resulting from sources. Even though, the mapping of a seventeenth century individual's spiritual life might strongly imply the concept of psychohistory,³ I would rather confine my approach to the methodological applications of historical anthropology,⁴ micro history⁵ and *histoire des mentalités*.⁶ Thus, my interpretation, will deliberately avoid the use of psychoanalytic concepts and notions, it will deliver an argumentation within the conceptual and vocabulary frame of the above-mentioned historiographic traditions. Consequently, I will evaluate the life of a single individual at micro-level, in order to reveal those social, cultural and confessional contexts, which determined the course of his life.

I. Contexts and concepts

Michael Cserei de Nagyajta or Mihály Cserei (1667–1756) is well-known as the author of *Erdély Históriája* (History of Transylvania, 1709), a remarkable combination of two contemporary genres: historiography and memoir. His unusually long life covers an unhappy and tragic period in the history of Transylvania, which culminates in the loss of its independence and the Habsburg occupation (1687). Similarly, his family life is full of tragic events and harsh experiences (he was married twice and lost several children. His life was mostly a continuous struggle to fulfill his personal and his family's needs). Moreover, he was forced very early to give up his studies (1674–1685), and he had never had the chance to study abroad at a foreign university. His father was sent to prison, which caused the economical and spiritual decline of the family. After participating in the battle of Zárne^oti (Zernest) (1690), after which Transylvania never regained its status of relatively independent principality, he undertook different positions in the Habsburg military administration. During the revolt against the Habsburgs led by Ferenc Rákóczi II, he tried to survive by being faithful to the Habsburgs. The period between the battle of Zárne^oti (1690) and his first marriage (1698) is very well documented in eight calendars (1690, 1691, 1692, 1693, 1694, 1695, 1697, 1698) in which he noted down the events of his quotidian life-experiences on a regular basis.

According to his writings, his life was a continuous struggle to survive natural disasters (fire, lightning, plague) or the economic problems caused by his rivals competing for identical social positions. Despite these afflictions, he managed to keep his confidence and trust, and never thought about his life as a failure. In his last written work, *The Apology* (1747), as he looked back to previous events of his life, he stated with joy and Godly confidence that God has reserved for him a special fate, not only during his earthly life, but in the afterlife as well. It was writing that consequently paralleled, much to our satisfaction, the most important events in his long life. Thus an impressive corpus of manuscripts had emerged due to his lifelong disposition to write and record events and experiences. Moreover, these texts are not only narrating events from his life, but in the meantime provide a powerful illustration of the complex relation between survival and literacy, or intimacy and the use of written culture. Consequently, there is a persuasive connection between the evolution of his life responsibilities, shifting from one social role to another, and the ever-growing use of writing for various reasons. One can easily confirm this fact by considering the dates of outstanding events with the dating of his most important writings.⁷

Although the quantitative index of literacy levels in early modern Transylvania is not too high, yet this period coincides with vividly developing reading culture motivated by Puritan religiosity, which was encour-

aging the use and production of written texts as tools of personal piety. This explains how a talented young man like Cserei, although without any experience of studying at foreign European universities invested time, money and energy in reading and writing almost everyday. However, he seems to be an individual who has assimilated those cultural practices remarkably well, and who moreover attributed several functions and uses to written culture. Cserei's manuscripts, displaying an impressive number and types of texts, convincingly demonstrate this statement.

The Hungarian Calvinist-Puritan religiosity, by the time Cserei had the chance to acquire it, had consumed some forty years of its existence.⁸ Even though Puritanism never became the official doctrine or policy of the Calvinist Church in the Principality of Transylvania, Presbyterian ideas about church organization, or patterns of Puritan practice of piety were fairly well promoted by contemporary catechisms, sermons, prayers and devotional literature. At the same time, if one attempts to underscore the main context of religious, and most importantly the confessional identity of an seventeenth century individual, he/she has to take into account the existing tradition of Protestant spirituality inherited from the sixteenth century. It is, therefore, worth noticing that not only literacy, but orality has also been the promoter of confessional identity. Furthermore, all kinds of cultural representations, not only visual, or textual representations, but also material culture such as clothing, buildings, use of space, furnishings as well as ritual such as the liturgy undertook the function of signaling confessional particularities, that is the collective or individual attributes of self-reflection and identification determined by confession.

Accordingly, the confessional identity of the early modern individuals is a cultural construct relying on both literacy and orality, but mostly on the anthropological concept and dichotomy of self versus otherness. The emergence of confessions simultaneously led to the formation of certain patterns of identity which allowed the articulation of (micro) communities. Individual confessional identity, in my view, consisted in the assimilation of a cultural repertoire meant to envisage in an antagonistic way, both the ideal prototype (Godly man or woman) to be imitated and the deviant prototype (heretics) to be rejected. Beyond any doubt, this performance of identity was not solely related to literacy. Illiterate people using, and decoding non-textual representations could also decipher confessional otherness or properly represent their confessional identity, using their abilities of interpreting symbolical representations.⁹

As for Cserei, I believe, it is mandatory to distinguish at least two different but overlapping layers of his confessional identity as a construction. First, he was brought up and educated in the orality promoted by the popular culture of seventeenth-century Hungarian Calvinism. Therefore, he not only had direct access to the oral tradition of popular beliefs, but he was also deeply influenced by them. Secondly, his writings and books containing his notes refer to the determining impact of contempo-

rary theological and devotional literature, which had an impressive contribution to the shaping of religious self-reflection. Even though, it is almost unavoidable the dichotomy organized along the oppositions of orality versus literacy and popular culture versus high culture, I do consider that this is not a valid approach. These traditions are not antagonistic, for they complement each other, because, as Cserei's case will demonstrate, the cultural existence and conduct of any early modern individual relies on both traditions.

In the following sections of this article I will survey Cserei's writings, mostly the autobiographical narratives, in order to contextualize and interpret the written references to his religiosity as the expression of his confessional identity. Accordingly, in the first part I will focus upon the existence and use of religious stereotypes, which display individual religiosity and allow identification with one community or delineation from another. However, this process of identification or delineation functions according to the pattern of cultural otherness, involving standards of normality and deviance. Then, I will explore the practice of Cserei's piety, so that I will be able to give a description and interpretation of his religious life, as an expression of his identification with a certain type of cultural representation. Due to the fact that Cserei has written an impressive number of manuscripts and all of them are somehow related to the major events of his life, there is a great opportunity to consider how literacy was used in order to represent confession.

II. Narrating religiosity

*The young man and his calendars (1690–1698)*¹⁰

This source has a special feature which makes it of unique importance. These eight calendars, containing everyday notes covering the period between 1690 and 1698 can be defined as a special autobiographical narrative. However, the outstanding importance of this source is its reliability. The short notes were written almost simultaneously with the events discussed. Furthermore, these written notes have never been corrected, or organized into a coherent narrative organized according to a previously well defined concept. While early modern Hungarian diaries, composed usually in later life, ostentatiously declare their sincerity, they in fact deliver a retrospectively articulated, poetical and linguistic construction of a life-story. Whilst Cserei's calendars cannot satisfy such literary and poetical demands, as sources or narratives of a life-story, they are more reliable than any other diary or memoir of the epoch. Yet, we still have to admit, that even these everyday notes as cultural representations are shaped, to some extent by linguistic and cultural patterns. This is to underscore the importance of critical reflection of the data concerning Cserei's religious life collected from this source.

The most striking feature of Cserei's discourse is the permanent use of a set of stereotypes meant to refer to his religiosity. Cserei mentions usually God as the almighty, just, and sometimes forgiving Father, whereas he casts himself into the role of the sinner, not worthy of God's love, help and grace. This kind of self-fashioning¹¹ convincingly illustrates how devotional patterns are imbibed and applied to individual existence. Cserei's concern for divine surveillance, that is this particular *coram deo* state of the Godly man, turns his life into a permanent fight against temptations or a desperate struggle to follow the right way. This attribute of his spirituality is not only expressed in a number of short prayers written generally at the beginning of each calendars,¹² but also while narrating certain episodes of everyday experiences. On 9 June 1692, he had become ill and, after a long period, he recovered. Cserei's description heavily displays the religious vocabulary of this self-fashioning process:

"June the 9th I have fallen ill and I have stayed in bed for 5 weeks. Nobody believed that I would ever recover, yet the merciful God took pity on me. After having received helpful medicines, it was He who has cured me. I got up from bed first on July 13. Hallowed be His name, blessed be He together ... with His Son and the Holy Spirit from here to Eternity, Amen."¹³

Sometimes, without any clear connection to any specific events, he just felt the need of producing a few verses expressing his vision of the Godly man. After having come back from a journey on June 20th 1693 he wrote a small poem:

"He who trusts in God is a happy man. / For no one has ever been disappointed by Him/ where human forces proves their limits/ Divine power breaks through."¹⁴

In the same way, he emphasized the importance of obedience that is the invariable consent to all of God's decisions, without any intention of questioning them or rebelling against them.¹⁵ Despite the, somehow, mechanical way of enumerating¹⁶ and promoting these stereotypes, they have major importance in the shaping of individual religiosities and the construction of confessional identities. For these stereotypes, in fact, are moral, religious and ethical standards and they compose and represent the prototype of the ideal, in Cserei's vision of course, Protestant man. Moreover, these stereotypes are easily attainable, basic components of a confessional tradition, thus they make possible the identification with an ideal, or a community. After having found and assimilated the individual and collective pattern for confessional identity, the early modern Christian became the member of a confessional community. The next step was to delineate him/herself from *the others*, because the perception of otherness made possible a more thorough identification with the chosen pattern. This is Cserei's case as well.

Having participated in a Catholic Mass on 21 May 1693, Cserei pointed out the different character of Catholic preaching, declaring that the priest

talked in a new and unknown way, like lawyers did during a trial.¹⁷ The comment clearly refers to that specific anthropological process, which is often displayed in communities where people of different religion, race, and ethnicity must live together. The idea is simple: the better you grasp the cultural or confessional otherness, the more you assimilate your own confessional identity. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that for a better definition or better understanding of the self, it is necessary to know the 'other,' to become familiar with 'otherness' so that the resulting contrast would strengthen the initial identity. It is this anthropological mechanism that governs Cserei's approach to Catholicism.

Another important experience which was probably shared by all his contemporaries is the sadness and fear connected to the misery of human condition. The vulnerability and insecurity of the individual was extensively emphasized by early modern Protestant neo-stoicism,¹⁸ and as an antidote, it was recommended the *constantia*, a kind of religious meditation combined with the ethical wisdoms of stoical tradition. But in Cserei's case it seems that beyond the officially pessimistic view of human existence, there is a powerful pressure caused by fears and sadness. These tormenting experiences, syndromes of a deep spiritual crisis, are rather difficult to interpret because they were probably not solely caused by the disturbances of Cserei's private life. The 8 years between 1690 and 1698 was a tough period for a young man, who could not pursue his studies abroad, so he was forced to find other ways for survival and social promotion. It was these years during which he had to sustain himself independently, without his father's help, and he became soon responsible for obtaining the necessary wealth not only for his existence, but for his newly found family as well.

It is almost certain that when he referred to March 1697 as *dies infoelicis, tristes*¹⁹ he expressed not only his disquiet concerning his difficult relation with his father, but he was alluding to a persistent emotion of religious anxiety. Nonetheless, it is still a difficult question to answer, why an early modern young man after his betrothal felt a need to write such a sad prayer:

"My God, my dear God, how long do you want to cause me these sorrow, when do you send me the time of my consolation and when are you going to turn your face to me, it is high time that you show some mercy to me or your fatherly heart pities me, it is high time that you pity all my sufferings and give some joy to my soul."²⁰

This unexplainable sadness felt by Cserei was often paralleled by a certain type of fear. It is this fear that can be associated both with the literary tradition of the Reformation²¹ and the oral sources of popular beliefs and which had a major influence upon all early modern culture, because it alluded to the end of the world. Cserei was also a child of his age. Therefore, it is not surprising that in his *ouillage mental* the signs, the unusual happenings constituted the ultimate proof of the ever approaching end.

Jean Delumeau rightly pointed out that fear, as one of the basic mentalities of human societies can be reified in this particular vision of the end. He also suggests that the financial, ecological, political or military crisis were always associated with the fearful oncoming end of the world.²²

Consequently, Cserei just like all his contemporaries, paid special attention to all unusual events and phenomena. In November 1697 he noticed some strange signs on the sky that he was totally convinced that he had seen a coded message sent by God.²³ Cserei also took the time to record those strange events or phenomena, which he did not see but they were told to him by trustworthy men. Thus, we can learn from his calendars that in the Kingdom of Hungary in the year of 1692,²⁴ there had been all kinds of fearful miracles, fires and comets were seen in the sky. These strange signs were considered by contemporary literate or illiterate people as signs foretelling the apocalypse. These clear signs of the Apocalypse to come were excellent promoters of the idea that repentance and the practice of piety were the sole activities, which should have been undertaken by everybody in order to survive Doomsday. Nonetheless, the doctrine of double predestination and the obsessive return of the idea of the Apocalypse had been strongly linked, and managed to project a terrifying view of the near future. Only those people could have felt safe, who had already been convinced of their election (*certitudo salutis*) for eternal happiness.

The conclusion is that this period of eight years, which ends with the life-cycle event of marriage, is an extremely important stage in Cserei's life from both social and religious perspectives. He became a responsible man as a husband (1697) and potential father so he managed successfully to survive and organize his life and existence according to the demands of early modern society. This kind of evolution, from the financial instability of youth to the self-sufficiency of adulthood, is only partially mirrored in his religious self-reflection. Yet, it is still not clear, how this evolution caused the existence of a special emotion of overwhelming sadness, something more intensive and complicated than the possible stress resulting from his family problems. While a schoolboy in the Protestant College of Odorhei (Udvarhely) he had probably assimilated the Calvinist and Puritan written tradition and spirituality of the epoch. This impact is convincingly illustrated by his habit of representing his religiosity relying on the (*loci communes*) originating from the required reading of his former studies. He also used these stereotypes to delineate his confessional affiliation from other confessions. The most important conclusion of this period is that confessionalism is not a rigid construction related to the individual's social and private existence, but it develops and changes continuously under the influence of various events and life-experiences.

The adult and his masterpiece (1709):
History of Transylvania from 1664 to 1711

Cserei wrote this work during the Kuruc riot led by Ferenc Rákóczi II. Although, it is arguable whether this is the most important work he has written, for the time being, this is the first published work of Cserei.²⁵ The History of Transylvania is actually a mixture between two genres, memoir and historical writing. Consequently, it has a very complex and highly fictionalized discourse, which describes the events between 1664 and 1711. The narrative flow is often interrupted by digression introducing episodes from Cserei's private life. Even though, this work as a narrative source is not as reliable as the calendars, it is still important, because it refers to Cserei's childhood. This period between 1674 and 1685 was not documented in any other text written by Cserei. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that this work constitutes a retrospective view of almost 50 years and the narrator is a married man, a father who managed to sustain his family and his developing household against all kind of difficulties. This fact had a strong impact upon the narrative of the *History of Transylvania*.

The most important innovation achieved by Cserei is the construction of the past from a confessional point of view. That is to say, that Protestant intellectuals of the sixteenth, seventeenth century simply divided the history of the Hungarian nation into a Catholic period, from the reign of Saint Stephan (1001–1038) to the battle of Mohács (1526), and a Protestant period starting with the formation of Transylvania as an independent state (1541). Furthermore, according to Protestant historiography, all these tragic events, the fall of the Hungarian Kingdom, the terrifying advance of Turkish occupation were the signs of the approaching Apocalypse, because both the Turks and the Pope represented the Antichrist. This historiographical model was a little bit modified during the seventeenth century, the emphasis on the Antichrist was weakened, but the main concept remained more or less the same: God is still punishing the Hungarian nation for their sins committed during the Papist/Catholic period of the past. However, in Transylvania a very interesting regionalism emerged out of this eschatological and historiographical speculation, which led to the differentiation between the Protestant Transylvania and the mostly Catholic Hungarian Kingdom.

It is this special context, which makes comprehensible Cserei's sometimes violent attitude toward Hungarians and Catholics. His confessional identity, being an ardent Calvinist, was not simply a pattern undertaken for displaying religious self-representation, but became the main argument to approach the common Hungarian past in a rather unusual way. Cserei and a number of Calvinist Transylvanian contemporaries simply divided and selected the national past according to their confessional interests. The events of the Papist Middle Ages, the most glorious period of the

Hungarian Kingdom, were simply neglected or declared the shameful acts of the Hungarian kings and the nation who deserted God. Although the sixteenth century, the period when God proceeded to punish this sinner nation, had started with the unfortunate battle of Mohács (1526) and culminated with the loss of Buda (1541) was not looked upon as the tragic period of a common national history. Cserei expressed almost a certain kind of joy, when narrating the death of the young Hungarian king, Louis II in the battle of Mohács, because this king was the first who had promoted the persecution of Protestants in the early 1520s.²⁶

Cserei's case is not only an illustration of the historical process during which, out of a dismembered, multicultural empire, emerged distinct cultural, administrative and political regions, but is also a valid example of how confessional identity prepared and promoted (proto)national identity. Yet, it is quite difficult to use or apply the concept of 'nation,' or 'nationalism' to these kinds of phenomena, but it is certain that regional self-identification very often relied on the distinctive marker of confessionalization. The culturally conceived otherness was integrated into the political, historical framework of regionalism. All the same, the *History of Transylvania* offers a narrative containing those markers and signs of confessionalism, which had been previously found in the calendars as well. Cserei seemed continuously interested in pointing out the differences between the Reformed and Catholic liturgy²⁷ then he mentioned a miracle, a sweating image, which had made him so curious that he went to see it.²⁸

In addition, one should mention his undisguised hatred toward Jesuits, which further complete his confessional spirituality. The adult Cserei was not simply curious concerning the otherness of Catholicism, but sometimes he identified Catholics as the enemies of his country and religion. Furthermore, he sometimes gave the impression that Catholic people, his political enemies or rivals were directly responsible for the harsh experiences he had to endure. Thus, we should admit that early modern confessional identity contained also violence and hostile impulses as well. This particular hostility toward Catholicism could have been related to a strange event of his childhood.

In Cserei's life, the time when his father was in prison was probably the most difficult period. Even though, he did not have a very intimate relation with his father, a problem which persisted in the following years as well, as a schoolboy he must have experienced a certain despair, anxiety and loneliness because of his father's absence. The Cserei family faced a serious financial crisis, due to the mother's desperate attempt to give gifts to different influential persons in order to have her husband liberated from prison. Cserei himself was very often taken by his mother on this kind of trip. Once, according to Cserei's account, when they went to ^aumuleu Ciuc (Csiksomlyó), the friars started to talk to the little boy, gave him different images, rosaries and eventually managed to persuade him to convert. All this was only possible, Cserei reassured his (Calvinist?)

readers, because at that time he used to be a naive and lonely boy. His mother might have noticed something, but since she was a Catholic, she had probably not been worried about this incident.

However, Cserei soon was led toward the only true religion, due to the effectiveness of his eager teachers at the College of Odorhei. After he had been caught saying the prayer Ave Maria, possessing rosaries and various images of saints, he was talked round and successfully cured. At least, this is how Cserei told the story of his near (?) conversion.²⁹ Despite the fact that Cserei narrated this event as a funny story of his childhood, it had certainly marked his life. In early modern Transylvania, especially, in those situations where people of different confession had to live together, conversion was a very serious issue. Even though, conversion or apostasy was regarded as a terrible sin by both Catholic and Reformed communities, we have a number of cases when people, for the sake of a better living or promotion, easily gave up their former religion. Nonetheless, Cserei felt the need to demonstrate his confessional persistence by mentioning a story, about a failed attempt of count István Apor to have him convert to Catholicism. In spite of the fact that the count had offered him a huge amount of money and tempting social promotion, he bravely refused him. This was supposed to be the unquestionable proof of his true religiosity and steadfast confessional allegiance.

All the same, the discourse of the *History of Transylvania*, especially when it refers to Cserei's private and religious life, highlights broadly speaking the same elements as the calendars. The Godly patience and obedience, the silent and peaceful agreement with all the harsh decisions of God, excepting one single case, when he was very sick and became desperate,³⁰ are all meant to construct a prototype, very similar to the one envisaged by the Hungarian and Latin Puritan devotional literature of the epoch.³¹ The unuttered intention of the religious self-fashioning to produce an achieved identity, which would emphasize the Puritan character of the responsible adult, husband and father aims to the highest type of Puritan piety. The life-story narrated in the *History of Transylvania* can be equated with Cserei's clearly expressed intention and desire to be considered by his readers a Godly person, and eventually, according to the theory of double predestination, an elected protestant "saint".

The adult revisited:
Compendium **Theologicum et Politicum** (1709)

In the same year of 1709, Cserei started to write another work, a collection of commentaries and observations on pious life and conduct, which was to become his *Compendium*.³² Although it is still an unpublished manuscript, its importance and value cannot be questioned. For instance, the very first page of the manuscript is an index containing the

list of authors he had read, before he wrote this impressive work. Due to this list, it is possible to reconstruct that spiritual and literary tradition, which represented the theological, ethic and political grounds of Cserei's discourse.

The *Compendium* covers an impressive range of topics, from strictly religious or dogmatic issues to more general questions concerning politics, ethics and history. Chapter 186 is entirely dedicated to the problem of religious patience and obedience. This particular chapter, entitled 'The Patience of the Godly Man,'³³ in fact, is a small treatise on the importance of patience, that is, the imitation of Job, who, as the Bible testifies, endured all kinds of affliction without revolt against his God. Cserei did not produce any kind of innovative argumentation; he just compiled the conclusions of his readings. One can say that this treatment perfectly matched his confession, which, as we have previously seen, strongly promoted this type of conduct. Yet, there is still something very interesting about this little treatise.

Notwithstanding that Cserei hated the Jesuits, this little treatise seems to echo the ideas of a Jesuit author, named Jeremias Drexel.³⁴ One of his very popular books, translated in many languages, and by Protestants as well, including English Puritans, dealt with the importance of patience, using the allegory of the school, where the Godly Christian should have learnt the absolute obedience. The title of this Latin book is, *Gymnasium Patientiae*.³⁵ Although, Cserei literally did not mention the title of this work, we can presume that he had read it, because in his list of authors the name of Drexel is mentioned.³⁶

Cserei in his treatise, probably compiled from Drexel's work, reflected on the importance of the patient and obedient endurance of all harsh experiences, of misfortune. He also suggested that these afflictions would teach the Godly Christian to be modest, moderate and wise. Moreover, he claimed that the ultimate importance of this patient suffering was to teach Christians how to adjust human will to divine intentions. This idea coincides with the last chapter of Drexel's work entitled: *Afflictiones omnes perpetiendas esse cum conformatione humana ad voluntatis divinam*.³⁷ Another mutual element in Cserei's and Drexel's work is the appeal to stoicism, especially the neo-stoic concept of *Constantia*, in order to propose a moral and religious standard of behavior. It is this link to the stoic tradition that made Drexel's ascetic work so attractive for Protestant readers as well. For this stoic conduct, consisting of the everyday performance of patience and obedience was a pattern of religious self-fashioning situated above all kinds of confessional differences.

Cserei, of course, did not suddenly become tolerant, he still hated Jesuits, but he probably found in Drexel's work a religious and moral pattern, which was in accordance to his Calvinist and Puritan demands as well. Furthermore, this is probably a common feature of Drexel's Protestant reception, because the English (1640)³⁸ or the Hungarian (1699)³⁹

translations of the *Gymnasium Patientiae* relied on the same process of cultural transformation. That is to say that the ascetic program of Catholic piety was simply realigned into the neo-stoic discourse of Protestant martyrology. Thus, patience and obedience became the attributes of Puritan Godly men, who imitating Job and relying on Epictetos or Seneca's teachings, acted as the saint or the martyr of God. This association of Protestant martyrology with Jesuit ascetics through the common tradition of (neo) stoicism was clearly expressed by the Hungarian translator, János Komáromi, who defined himself not only as the author of the translation, but as the martyr of his country.⁴⁰

The adult Cserei in these two works, the *History* and the *Compendium*, displays a complex confessional identity. The stereotypes assimilated while a schoolboy and used in order to distance himself from the otherness of Catholicism, at a later stage of his life, had turned into a complex and sophisticated discourse displaying his piety according to Puritan standards. In spite of the fact that confessional otherness still meant a hostile attitude toward Catholicism, he had apparently managed to overcome his prejudices, and found applicable knowledge for his Puritan piety in a Jesuit source as well. This was, no doubt, a genuine example of how his confessional identity was developing with his emotional, spiritual and biological progress. The more he assimilated experiences, the more sophisticated interpretation he was able to provide. Thus, getting old constituted for Cserei as a Calvinist, an increasing understanding of his life and confession, too.

The swan-song of an old man: *The Apology of Mihály Cserei (1747)*

The title of his last written work, *The Apology of Mihály Cserei Anno 1747. 10 Aug. Aetatis Suae Anno 80*, makes clear the outstanding importance of this manuscript.⁴¹ It is, unquestionably, the last written message of an extremely long and burdensome life. Cserei had two wives and ten children, most of them had died before him. During his life, he had fought to ensure his family a decent existence, although he never received any important office or social promotion. Beyond the difficulty of these experiences, he always found time for writing and reading. The list of the books, which contains the items of his library, also demonstrates his outstanding skills and impressive knowledge, due to the fact that he was widely read in theology, politics, literature, philosophy and law.

The *Apology* is a remarkable retrospection and evaluation of his life. He could not know that he was to live some ten more years, or that he would spend in bed the last eight of them.⁴² As he, an eighty years old man, looked back upon his life, and this is truly impressive, he did not feel the need of retelling the major events, he mostly reduced his narration to

comments upon human existence in general. The highly rhetorical approach of his discourse aimed at a moral evaluation, not towards a detailed account of events. Cserei regarded his unusually long life as the example of divine surveillance, a kind of theatrical performance, which after its end delivers important messages to the audience, that is, the next generation of his family. He suggested that the only real stake of human existence is the afterlife, in terms of what would happen with a man after his death. According to Cserei's creed, double predestination with the perspective of redemption or eternal damnation is the most serious consequence of human existence.

Nonetheless, Cserei's case is a typical expression of applied Puritan piety. He seemed to be convinced of his election, so he almost waited for his death, in order to join the heavenly community of Protestant saints. Moreover, he expressed his strongest conviction about his redemption, because he had interpreted his long life as a series of trials and exams which he had successfully passed. Thus, the old man, waited with confidence for his death, because he had reconciled with this mortal world and all his enemies. He made it very clear

There does not remain anything else to do for me, but to wait confidently for the exit from this mortal world as soon as possible or when the Holy God wants it, for his measureless mercy offers me eternal happiness in his holy country. Two kinds of Happiness nobody can have. In this mortal world or in the other one you can find it. This wicked world did not give me anything, so I wait for the happiness prepared by God for me. Amen.⁴³

This last piece of writing, no doubt, represents the peak of Cserei's religiosity. One can surely claim that this work constitutes the final synthesis of all those elements, which were present in his former works. One of the most spectacular results of this synthesis refers to the development of religious stereotypes and their application. While in the calendars their task was to delineate the individual from the "deviant" community and reassure his belonging to the "normal" community, in the *Compendium* and, finally in the *Apology*, these religious stereotypes turned into arguments sustaining the notion of *certitudo salutis*. That is to say that the Godly man had been convinced about his elected status, and came to the conclusion that he had been chosen, by God, for eternal happiness. The theme of the patient attitude and obedient endurance of all afflictions in order to achieve a perfect adjustment of human will to divine intention had been thoroughly debated in the *Compendium*. This idea was also brought to the surface in the *Apology* as well, but this time it became the illustration of a pious life and most importantly the main argument of the elected status.

III. Beyond the written confession

Judging only from these written narratives, seemingly, Cserei's confessional identity could be described as a continuous and progressive development, from the spiritual insecurity of youth to the strong creed of election. Attila Molnár, analyzing the relation between the theory of Max Weber and the Hungarian Protestant ethic, claimed that Cserei's religiosity, just like all his contemporary Hungarian Calvinists, did not consist of crises, and moments of spiritual decline and pressure. He also suggests that in the culture and spirituality of Hungarian Calvinism there were no signs of fears or despair associated with the doctrine of predestination. Consequently, he argued that Puritan books might have been read, but their reception never resulted in severe and sometimes fearful ethic of English Puritanism. Thus, he concluded that the memoirs and diaries written in the seventeenth century could not contain references to religious crises, because the cultural pattern for these kinds of experiences did not exist among Hungarian Puritans.⁴⁴

Even though, Molnár's arguments contain some truth, it cannot be simply applied to Cserei's case. It would be far too simplistic. It is arguable to suggest, relying on the account of written narratives, that Cserei was a religious man, who had never faced crises, or any kind of despair. Nonetheless, these written sources, with the exception of the calendars, were all produced from a retrospective view, and referred to a well-defined, interpreted past period of human existence. The written representations imply the idea of publicity, therefore they very often function as examples, or illustrations of a previously formulated truth or idea. Thus, the readers are not offered the problems, or crisis of a religious life, but only the examples of how these problems had been solved by a godly person. The written account, therefore, creates the illusion that readers are invited to explore the private life of the author, because, they could see only those aspects of private life which were presented with a certain purpose. These are, in fact, the stereotypes and commonplaces of Puritan piety originating from the devotional literary tradition or the orality of the epoch.

Yet, in Cserei's case there are some elements, which could allow a different interpretation and evaluation of his confessional identity. While analyzing the calendars, strangely enough, there were some notes, verses which referred to fears, despair and hopelessness. These could not be interpreted in the context of events which had previously taken place. Moreover, in the *History of Transylvania*, Cserei, while narrating anecdotes of his early childhood, mentioned the humorous (?) case of his conversion. He also wrote about count Apor's failed attempt to convert him. The first conversion took place, when he was a schoolboy at Odorhei, sometimes around 1678, the second case, mostly a temptation not an act of apostasy, around 1699. It is worth underlining the fact that the first conversion took place before he started writing in his calendars. Therefore, the

religiosity represented in the calendars, even though there is no reference to it, might have been shaped by the experience of the conversion too.

The *History* contains another very important remark. Cserei narrates the story of his extremely serious sickness, which kept him in bed for more than 40 days. He also mentions that

“The godly András Nánási spent a long time with me praying and encouraging me, because I got into despair concerning my redemption.”⁴⁵

The reference to *despair* is actually a very serious confession. We have seen that Puritan piety continually strives to identify obvious signs of election, which emerge into the creed of redemption. Cserei seemed to experience the absolute negative extreme of this process. This is, undeniably, a major religious crisis. Moreover, this is not the only occasion, when Cserei seemed to be preoccupied by this problem of despair. Lewis Bayley’s book entitled, *The Practice of Piety*, is one of the classics of seventeenth century English Puritanism. This conduct book had a spectacular reception not only among English puritans, but in Hungary as well. Pál Medgyesi translated this book into Hungarian in 1636, which became shortly after one of the most important bestsellers of the age. Cserei also had this book in his library and, according to his handwriting,⁴⁶ came into his possession on 22 March 1715.

Although, this book does not contain marginal notes written by Cserei, yet there are some clear signs of Cserei’s reading, as he underlined the relevant sentences, or wrote short notes.⁴⁷ The book later passed into the possession of another person, but the new owner of the book did not write anything at all in this book, therefore the underlined passages belong to Cserei. Another argument in the favor of this supposition is that Cserei had this habit of underlining passages in his books, the existing items of his library confirm this. However, Bayley’s translation contains not only advice, rulers and patterns of prayers and meditations for all categories of people and for every situation or season, but it also contains small treatises about religious issues. A whole chapter is dedicated to the extremely important problem of religious despair.⁴⁸ Every sentence of the whole chapter was underlined by Cserei, sometime after 1715.

The conclusion is, perhaps, unavoidable that Cserei, as we could have expected, gave publicity only to the bright aspects of his piety, that is, he applied a certain censorship to his religious privacy, only previously selected events and experiences were made accessible to outsiders. There is nothing unusual in this. Yet, it remains a highly debatable question, how to evaluate his confessional identity given these contradictions between his piety and the conversion or this persisting problem of religious despair. In order to deliver a pertinent answer, it is important to consider the importance and meaning of religious despair.

The religious despair in early modern Europe

Although the emotion and experience of despair was known in the middle ages, denoting the special status of the damned man, during the Reformation it became a terrifying element in the religious psychology of the epoch. The emergence of different confessions and confessional communities, of course only to a certain number of individuals, implied the question of religious choice. Strictly related to this choice was added the burden, which resulted from the acceptance or refusal of Reformed religion. Thus the conversion from one confession to another became a very difficult choice with unexpected consequences. Moreover, the various motivations, which could have determined one's decision to join the newly Reformed confession, or afterwards to turn back to the catholic religion again, this phenomenon was very common at those times. Consequently, this phenomenon was labeled apostasy and it was defined as a mortal sin, directly responsible for men's eternal damnation.

The famous example of an Italian lawyer, called Francis Spira,⁴⁹ who after having found in the Reformation, the true Christianity he always longed for, was forced to convert again to Catholicism, had an enormous impact upon religious mentality in Europe. This apostasy caused a tragic end for this unfortunate lawyer. For, this individual was so deeply convinced that because of his conversion to Catholicism God would punish him with eternal damnation that he simply refused to live. Francis Spira fell into despair. He tried to commit suicide and refused not only food, but to talk to Jesuits priests, who tried to make him change his mind. In spite of the fact that he was consoled by famous Catholic scholars, like Vergerio or Gribaldi, he argued with them so successfully that after his death, these two scholars converted to Protestantism. Spira, after a torturing period of eight weeks, simply starved to death. Nobody could change his conviction about the apostasy, which Spira defined as the mortal sin against the Holy Spirit placing the individual beyond the Lord's mercy.⁵⁰ The story of Spira's tragic end went along with the development of early modern European confessionalism.⁵¹

Even though, in the discourse of Catholic spirituality of the Middle Ages the reprobate man, as a person who had been possessed by the devil, was more or less a well-known example, it was the Reformation that attributed to this figure special significance. Since confessionalism shaped the dogmatic and spiritual differences of the age, despite its common ethical, moral and religious features, like the case of neo-stoicism, the concept of the new Christian imposed a set of rules for everybody in everyday life. The example of Geneva, which turned into reality the Calvinist ideas of Reformation up to an almost unimaginable extent, was very difficult to be similarly applied everywhere.⁵² In spite of this, the Reformation, or rather the social control exercised by the reformed clergy, wanted to build

up not only communities of true believers but morally reformed Christian societies as well.

It was this multiple and complex religious, moral and socio-economic Reformation which urged for cultural and moral patterns meant to shape a new type of believer, the one, who is totally dedicated to his confession as his religious tradition and community as well. While the prototype of the sinner doomed for eternal damnation was very often contrasted with the new Christian, the Puritan or the martyr, religious despair was similarly opposed to the idea of *certitudo salutis*. Consequently, during the sixteenth century religious despair was still strongly connected to the act of apostasy, which implied the early modern individual's refusal to identify him/herself with true Christian belief. Nevertheless, the further radicalization of Reformation, the clash between Calvinist orthodoxy and religious non-conformism, especially after the Synod of Dordrecht (1618-1619), opened a new chapter in the evolution of the concept of despair. Although the spectacular English reception of the Spira case was signaled by the impressive number of translation and adaptations to other genre, Puritanism imposed a different view upon the phenomenon.

Sixteenth-century English and Hungarian Puritanism both laid a special emphasis upon the conscience and the continuous need for its evaluation and analysis. William Perkins, William Baxter and William Ames, the most important representatives of this theological tradition, connected the dogmatic concept of *via salutis* and *casus conscientiae*, in order to set about a continuous self-reflection subordinated to the only important issue: redemption. This was, of course, a long-term process with moments of despair and hopelessness, for instance, a number of people chose suicide on these grounds in early modern England. The fear of being reprobate, since certain individuals did not manage to find the reassuring signs of their election, could have led to a tragic end. Yet, there were others, including Puritan divines, who were able to overcome moments of despair and hopelessness, consequently their reward was the conviction that they were elected to eternal life.

It was Puritanism, therefore, that promoted this reevaluation of despair, which became, in contrast with its previous definition, somehow a positive and compulsory element of the Puritan practice of piety. Furthermore, the existence of despair was actually the very first sign of Puritan godliness, since it underpinned the existence of self-reflection concerned with salvation. One can easily understand the connection between the concept of martyrology, the prototype of the martyr or the godly man, who must have undertaken the spiritual torments of this terrifying experience in order to earn the right to face divine justice, whether it was damnation or salvation. Those, certainly not many, who found the religious and emotional resources to successfully survive this exam, must have been happy and confident about their fate. They received the gift of *certitudo*

salutis, the conviction of salvation. As Michael Macdonald rightly pointed out, though it sounds fairly strange, religious despair was essential to their salvation.⁵³

Applications: the case of Mihály Cserei

According to the *History of Transylvania*, Cserei, while struggling with a long-lasting disease in 1703, became so exhausted that he fell into despair. This is the only direct allusion to the experience of this special state of mind. We can also suppose that the underlined sentences of the *Praxis Pietatis* referring to those who had got into despair, could be a further proof of this serious and probably long-lasting crisis. Even though Cserei did not make any obvious allusion to the presence of despair in his life, except the moment from 1703, it had probably been a serious problem, which preoccupied him even in his declining years as well. It can be hardly imagined that, while approaching his death, this man, so ardently concerned about theological issues, would not have thought about his salvation.

Still, it is an important challenge to decipher the possible motivations or causes of this despair. Despite the fact that he was, at least, two times tempted to convert to Catholicism, first in 1678 and then in 1699, these cannot be considered as the sole causes of his despair. Furthermore, as we have seen, by the seventeenth century, conversion was no longer directly responsible for this extreme experience. Cserei was certainly not proud of his momentary error in 1678, but he considered this an unhappy incident, which could have occurred because of his naivety and childish vulnerability. In this context the narrative about count Apor's failed attempt to attract him to the Catholic side, had certainly functioned to demonstrate his loyalty, moral integrity and reliability as a Calvinist believer. Thus, we can conclude that the experience of the conversion might have caused Cserei's remorse of conscience, yet this cannot necessarily mean that it certainly caused him religious despair, too.

The devastating effect of religious despair⁵⁴ upon seventeenth century Protestant believers, according to John Stachniewski, was due to the so-called persecutory imagination, which emerged out of the ruthless, severe and highly popularized puritan piety. He asserts that Calvinism, in terms of double predestination having transposed into the puritan theological discourse, reached a certain moral extremism illustrated by the haunting terror of the reprobate state. Frustrations and religious crises were quite often the result of Puritan discipline, which implied obsessively continuous surveillance, control and most importantly punishments, from the very early age of childhood up to adulthood. Stachniewski suggests that the puritan family and the contemporary pattern of childrearing implied the strongest conviction the disciplining children must be the first prior-

ity of education.⁵⁵ Though, Steven Ozment denies the almost legendary severity of early modern fathers, he seems to agree with the observation that obedience toward parents, teachers and educators or rulers was one of the major goals of the process of education.⁵⁶

It was probably the figure of the father, as Stachniewski claimed, who represented the authority within the family toward which every family member should have approached with respect and obedience.⁵⁷ Thus, the father and husband very often became the family despot, lording over his wife and his children. Moreover this latter relationship between father and children could have been sometimes truly problematic. In order to grasp its complex links toward religious mentality and the particular question of *certitudo salutis*, it is extremely important to admit that it was more than the mere challenge of paternal authority by early modern teenagers. Fathers, acting sometimes excessively rigidly in matters of education or through the repeated use of beatings, could influence in a frustrating way the self-formation of children. The teenage years typically a period of quest for identity, were burdened by an excessive discipline, which did not actually make any character more resilient or better, but simply frustrated these young people. Stachniewski reminds us that Puritan parents were advised, when beating children, to tell them that it was against God that they had sinned.⁵⁸

This particular disciplining method, the applied beating and the delivered explanations, did not make children godly and obedient persons, but influenced their self-reflection in a negative way. Children might probably tend to identify themselves as sinners or even reprobates, whose relation to the *father*, the strange resemblance is not a mere coincidence, must be limited to the endurance of divine justice. Of course, eternal damnation as well, could have easily been regarded as an expression of unquestionable divine justice. The experiences and emotions of alienation, cast off or desertions were probably related to problematic relations between fathers and children. Stachniewski explained that the experience of divine rejection, which caused acceptance of reprobate status and implicitly led to despair, was often related to feelings about fathers or social hierarchy.⁵⁹ It is almost certain that religious despair in sixteenth-century Calvinist and Puritan culture was not caused by conversion, but it was closely related to the malfunctioning of social network within the nuclear family.

Given this context, it is worth re-examining Cserei's account of his family, especially his relationship towards his father. Notwithstanding that he first mentioned his despair associated with a special physical and moral exhaustion, his sickness in 1703, it is his childhood, which could explain the presence of those fears and sadness in the period of 1690 and 1698, recorded by his calendars. Although, the period narrated by the calendars was, of course, more related to his childhood, these, due to their special character, do not contain references to his early years. The *History of Transylvania* is the only written source, which recorded some events,

presented as anecdotes from his childhood. Though, as we have previously seen, this narrative may not be the most reliable one, due to the selective character of memory, yet it surely has a special significance, which was kept in the memory of the 42 year old man, about his childhood, and his relation to his father. Even though, Cserei hints only to very few moments, I believe, their significance cannot be questioned.

“My father raised me in a terrible discipline, for up to the age of 14 I was not allowed to serve myself from the dishes brought to the common table. I was usually given a piece of meat and I had to be satisfied with it. Furthermore, a peasant servant of my father, named Jancsi, but called by my father Ficzko, always stood behind me. When my father had cautioned him, he slapped me, no matter how many people assisted to this scene.”⁶⁰

To these humiliating experiences were added further strange punishments by an exceedingly severe father, such as, the prohibition to sleep in bed, thus the little boy had to sleep together with his father’s dog. Moreover, because once he had accidentally trampled one of his boots, his father ordered him to go to school barefoot, in wintertime.⁶¹ Consequently, he remembered that

“I was frightened by my father so much that I did not dare to look in his eyes, sit down in his presence or just say a single word. He, however, always swore at me, and used to call me a Saxon. He also ordered my teacher to punish me as often as it was necessary. Consequently I became frustrated and overwhelmed by fear to such an extent that, even as a young man, it took me some years to get rid of it.”⁶²

Memory of childhood, envisaged with a prominently dominant and extremely severe Father-figure, whose practices of education left deep marks on Cserei’s self-confidence, confirms the possible relation between the frustration of childhood and the religious crises of youth. In addition to these confessions two important incidents should be added. First, after he had studied for six years, from 1678 to 1684, in the Protestant College of Odorhei, he had to interrupt his studies. Normally, according to the practice and common custom of the epoch, those students who finished with good final results in their studies, with the help of patrons, continued their studies abroad. Although, it was a difficult experience, which required not only intellectual skills and considerable financial effort, but endurance and all kinds of privation, it was worth undertaking. Returning students, who more easily obtained an important job with a good salary, and, in general their social promotion was more straightforward.

Thus, Cserei was deprived not only of the experience of *peregrinatio academica*, but also the opportunity of social advancement, when his father decided for him to become a valet at Mihály Teleki’s court instead. Though, Cserei disagreed, he did not dare to contradict or challenge his father, at least, not yet. However, this remained a major disappointment

– he remembered it several times as the lost opportunity of his life. He sadly expressed this, as a 42 year old man, in the *History of Transylvania*

“I wish my father did not allow me to leave school, because I might become a better man.”⁶³

The importance of the episode, compounded by recurrent references to this particular moment of his life in his later writings,⁶⁴ shows that this relation between father and son, evolved toward an unavoidable conflict. It was in 1693, when his father, after he had discovered Cserei’s scandalous love affair with a peasant girl, had a quarrel with him. This time, Cserei revolted against his father, and after having released the peasant girl, who was sent to prison by his father, he left his father’s house. Even though, he was not legally disinherited, he was forced to sustain himself independently, without any help from his father. Their relationship probably improved, especially after his first marriage in 1697, because Cserei had certainly not neglected his old and sick parents. He could not allow himself such a deviant gesture, which would have surely been against the mentality and moral demands of the age.

These incidents, as the elements of a very complicated puzzle, although they shed light only on some aspects of the overall picture, yet they strongly support the idea that the religious despair experienced by Cserei, during his disease in 1703, did have precedents. It is, therefore, quite possible that the syndromes or references to sadness, fears and spiritual crises, beyond the contextual explanations, allude to the existence of religious despair, as a more or less constant presence in the religious life of this individual. The extremely difficult period between 1690 and 1698 seems to me a veritable *rite de passage*, during which Cserei managed to find strategies of survival, which, even against the paternal will and authority, granted him social and moral promotion. Becoming a man and being accepted as a responsible adult, husband and father in early modern culture and society was not a simple achievement. Beyond the lack of moral and financial support of his family, Cserei had to undertake, handle and even solve the burden of being rejected, alienated and refused. One cannot even imagine the terrible price of self-sufficiency, freedom and responsibility chosen by this young man, against the mentality or demands of his society. He must have had doubts about his decision, moreover he must have undergone terrible crises of despair and spiritual tortures due to remorse. Everybody and probably everything, the customs, the common sense, the mentalities, and even the books he had read stated the same judgment: a son must never revolt against his father.

Nevertheless, after his father had died, he presumably faced social, financial crises, which could easily tempt him to fall again in despair. Not only terrible sickness, but certainly all his various problems he confronted, had an impact upon his confessional identity. All events, whether they

were positive or negative, were all connected with his salvation, and were possible arguments of a possible rejection of salvation. Thus, no one can pretend that Cserei, after he had declared in his *Apology* strong convictions about his salvation, he never felt despair during the following ten years, out of which the last eight years he would spend in bed.

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that Cserei carefully selected events and experiences to make public in his writings. The idea of publicity, writing for an audience is an important and constant element in his cultural practice of using literacy. Most of his manuscripts are dedicated to an audience, which probably included not only his family members. Moreover, the same need for publicity can be observed in his reading practice as well. He wrote marginal notes not only in his calendars, but in almost every book he possessed. These are notable signs of a carefully designed self-fashioning, which imitated the cultural patterns of Puritan devotional literature and strove to offer an example of godly piety and excellence. Cserei's self-censorship sought to eliminate or discretely hold back the confession of those emotions, experiences which might contradict the idealistic example promoted by his writings and readings. It was the accumulated fear and frustration of childhood, which betrayed him.

IV. Conclusions

There is an impressive analogy between the anthropological perspective of the three lifecycle events; birth, marriage, death, and the confessional evolution of the individual, who more or less produced written representations of his confessional self-reflection after almost every ritual, biological and social change in his life. Thus the young man, the adult and finally the old man had covered not only a ritual journey along the markers of his life, but made comprehensible his religious evolution as well. For this process of self-fashioning, produces a confessional identity which cannot be separated from the biological, social, cultural or political identity of the individual.

Consequently, Cserei's confessional identity, in this micro historical reconstruction, seems difficult to grasp, because it underwent that process of evolution, which resulted in the shaping of the personality of Cserei. What is the core of this confessional identity? The frustrations of the childhood, the difficult quest of the youth or maybe the confidence of the old man? Probably, all these three options simultaneously. However, all these are only anthropologically relevant representations concerning the early modern individual's special conduct and performance in the system of belief he inhabited. Cserei's confessional identity, not necessarily reflects only his particular state, it seems to be a further example of how Puritan piety envisaged the dialectic of hope and despair in the life-long experience of struggle for survival.

At the same time, all these writings represent at least two important issues. First of all, they are sources and illustrations of how a Hungarian early modern individual interpreted English Puritanism. Secondly, in a historical anthropological perspective, they allow the interpretation of how literacy, as a cultural practice, performed a ritualistic function of creating survival strategies and intellectual means to overcome spiritual crises. The existence of religious despair in Cserei's religious discourse modifies our existing image⁶⁵ of Cserei's spiritual life, and demonstrates the existence of religious despair in the discourse of Hungarian Puritanism. This second consequence has an outstanding importance, since the history of Puritanism both in literary history and theology was defined as the mere and poor reception of English Puritan ideas, without the religious and moral burdens associated with them. This article, hopefully, not only contradicts but also delivers further arguments which sustained the method and results of historical anthropology for studying the European Reformation in a comparative perspective.

□

NOTES

- ¹ Mark Greengrass, 'The French Pastorate: Confessional Identity and Confessionalization in the Huguenot Minority, 1559-1685' in Scott Dixon, Schorn Schütte eds. *The Protestant Clergy, of Early. Modern Europe*, Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2003, p 176; Thomas A. Brady, 'We Have Lost the Reformation: Heinz Schilling and the Rise of the Confessionalization Thesis' in Stefan Ehrenpreis ed. *Wege der Neuzeit: Festschrift für Heiny Schilling 65 Geburtstag* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2007), pp.211-213.
- ² I refer to Benedict Anderson's term and concept. He argues in his book that the concept of nation emerged from the imagined communities of, for instance, readers. Accordingly, he considers the nation an imagined political community. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London-New York: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2003), pp. 3-12.
- ³ During the 1980s, psychohistory had a spectacular raise, mostly due to Erikson's excellent book about Luther, but after a certain period, an almost unexplainable decline followed. Thomas Kohut has rightly pointed out that after a time, psychoanalytic concepts were so frequently used for explanation, even in such cases, when the sources did not sustain the speculation, that this method became discredited. Thomas Kohut, 'Psychohistory as History,' *The American Historical Review*, 91 (1986), pp. 336-354; Erik Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: Norton, 1983).
- ⁴ Alan Macfarlane, 'Historical Anthropology,' *Cambridge Anthropology*, 3 (1977), no. 3, pp. 7-13; Alan Macfarlane, *The Family Life of Ralph Josselin: An Essay in Historical Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Bob Scribner, 'Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Europe,' Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, Robert W. Scribner (eds.), *Problems in the Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Europe* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1997).
- ⁵ Carlo Ginzburg, 'The Inquisitor as Anthropologist,' Idem, *Clues, Myth, and the Historical Method* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989).
- ⁶ Jacques Le Goff, Roger Chartier, Jacques Reve (eds.), *La Nouvelle Histoire* (Paris: Retz - C.E.P.L., 1978); Pierre Nora, Jacques Le Goff, *Faire de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974).

- ⁷ Appendix, lifecycle events and writings dates.
- ⁸ Within the tradition of Hungarian literary history the reception of English Puritanism in the Hungarian Kingdom and the Principality of Transylvania has been soundly debated starting from the mid twentieth century. Graeme Murdock is the representative of British historical scholarship interested in the history of Hungarian Calvinism. Pál Berg, *Angol hatások tizenhetedik századi irodalmunkban* [English Influences in Seventeenth-Century Hungarian Literature] (Budapest: Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, 1946); László Makkai, *A magyar puritánusok harca a feudalizmus ellen* [The Battle of Hungarian Puritans against Feudalism] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1952); József Bodonhelyi, *Az angol puritanizmus lelki élete és magyar hatásai* [The Spiritual Life of English Puritanism and its Hungarian Influences] (Debrecen: 1942); Attila Molnár, *A "protestáns etika" Magyarországon* ["The Protestant Ethic" in Hungary] (Debrecen: Ethnica, 1994); and Graeme Murdock, 'Calvinist Catechizing and Reformed Community Identity,' Maria Crăciun, Ovidiu Ghitta, Graeme Murdock (eds.), *Confessional Identity in East-Central Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 81–98.
- ⁹ Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England 1500-1700* (Oxford: University Press, 2000), p. 27.
- ¹⁰ Although the notes written in these calendars were partially published, I rely on the originals, because the published version's transcription is sometimes inaccurate. These calendars are available at the "Lucian Blaga" Central University Library, Cluj-Napoca (BMV. 9286, BMV. 9285, BMV. 9086, BMV. 8963, BMV. 8607, BMV. 8472, BMV. 8345, BMV. 8185.). Since the blank pages, containing Cserei's notes, inserted after every printed page were not numbered, I had to elaborate a logical practice of quotation. First of all, I have given numbers to the blank pages, *recto* and *verso*. Consequently, when I refer to certain notes, I always mention the year, month and the number of the blank pages. For instance a note referring to an event occurred on May the 21st 1698, will have the following reference: 1698/MajusVb.
- ¹¹ I am relying on Stephen Greenblatt's term, who grasps the process of self-fashioning in the following way: "... it describes the practice of parents and teachers; it is linked to manners or demeanor, particularly that of elite; it may suggest hypocrisy or deception, an adherence to mere outward ceremony; it suggests representation of one's nature or intention in speech or actions ... it invariably crosses the boundaries between the creation of literary characters, the shaping of one's own identity...", Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-fashioning from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 3.
- ¹² There is a short, written prayer on the very first page of each calendar, all of them were strictly related to the idea of new beginning. Cserei, almost invariably, at the beginning of each year, basically, asked for the same favors, a dominant request is the one related to the forgiving of sins.
- ¹³ 1692/JuniVIIb.
- ¹⁴ 1693/JuniVIb.
- ¹⁵ In the summer of 1694 he expressed his idea about religious obedience with the help of a small Latin excerpt from the *Pater Noster* prayer sentence: *Fiat voluntas tua Domine, sicut in coelo et in terra* (1694/JuniVIa). At the end of the year 1693, he had probably made a retrospective consideration of all his deeds and he finally came to a very similar conclusion: *Quem Deus amat atiam flagellat. Sit nomen Domini propterea benedicendum* (1693/DecemberXIb). The last notes from December in the calendar of 1695 expressed the same idea of obedience: *Justus es Domine et justa sunt judicia tua, o Domine!* (1695/DecemberXIIa).
- ¹⁶ Cserei simply filled up a whole page of his calendar from 1698, with the wisdoms of Seneca (*Aurea dicta Senecae*) 1698/MartiusIIIa.

- ¹⁷ 1693/MajusVb.
- ¹⁸ The most popular product of European neo-stoicism was the book written by Justus Lipsius, entitled *De Constantia Libri Duo*. After its first edition in Leiden (1584) it was translated into Hungarian by János Laskai (János Laskai, *Iustus Lipsius nak az alhatatossagrol irt ket könyvei. Kikben főkeppen (Lipsiusnak és Lángiusnak) a közönseges nyomorságokban-valo beszélgetesek foglaltatik. Mostan magyarra fordittattak Laskai Janos által* (Debrecen: 1641). This Hungarian translation coincided with a larger reception of neo-stoicism in Hungarian culture. The famous poet, Balassa Bálint's disciple, János Rimay was also one of the most important representatives of this philosophy. The neo-stoic ideas promoted by the poems and prose of Rimay might have easily influence Cserei as well, because he had in his library a volume of Rimay's poems.
- ¹⁹ 1697/Martius IIIa.
- ²⁰ "én Istenem, én édes istenem, valljons meddig kesergecz engemet, mikor hozod el az én vigasztalásomnak idejét és mikor fordítod hozzám a te szent arcodat, valami ideje volna ha már egiczer könyörűlnél én rajtam, ideje volna ha megessenék a te édes Atyai szived az én nyomoruságimon, ideje volna már hogy szánniad az én szenvedésimet és megörvendeztessed az én bús lelkemet." (1697/MajusVb).
- ²¹ The instant occurrence of the apocalypse was one of the major concerns of Melancthon as well. He had not only taught history, but relied on Carion's German chronicle, published a book, which was to bring about the eschatological thinking in Protestantism for the following two centuries. *Chronicon Carionis latine expositum... a Philippo Melanthono* (Witebergae: MDLVIII).
- ²² Jean Delumeau, *Frica in Occident (secolele XIV-XVIII). O cetate asediată* [Fear in the West (Fourteenth – Eighteenth Centuries). A Besieged Castle], vol. I-II (București: Editura Meridiane, 1986).
- ²³ 1697/November XIb. He also mentioned in his calendar from 1691 a terrible "plague" of locusts in the principality of Transylvania, which also pointed to the approaching of the Apocalypse.
- ²⁴ 1692/Februarius IIIa.
- ²⁵ Cserei's work, even unpublished, was incredibly popular. An impressive number of surviving copies of the original manuscript testifies to this phenomenon. The original manuscript, which was used for the editio princeps, is available in the library of Hungarian Academy in Budapest (ms. K. 100). Gábor Kazinczy (ed.), *Nagyajtai Cserei Mihály Históriája* [The History of Mihály Cserei of Nagyajta] (Pest: Újabb Nemzeti Könyvtár, 1852).
- ²⁶ Kazinczy (ed.), *Nagyajtai Cserei Mihály Históriája*, p. 22.
- ²⁷ Ibid, p. 375.
- ²⁸ Ibid, p. 440.
- ²⁹ Ibid, pp. 103–106.
- ³⁰ Ibid, p. 339.
- ³¹ The surviving items of his books confirm his interest in conduct books, prayer books or theological treatises of contemporary Puritans.
- ³² The original manuscript is available at the Library of Romanian Academy in Cluj (ms. U.1119). Mihály Cserei, *Compendium Theologicum et Politicum*, 1709.
- ³³ Cserei entitled this chapter: A békességes tőrés hasznos a keresztény Embernek és szükséges is.
- ³⁴ Jeremias Drexel S.J. (also Drechsel or Drexelius) (1581–1638) was a Jesuit writer of devotional literature and a professor of the humanities and rhetoric. He served for

twenty-three years as court preacher in Munich to Maximilian I, Elector of Bavaria and his wife Elizabeth of Lorraine. Jeremias is the author of some 20 works that were widely read and translated.

- ³⁵ Hieremiae Drexelii, *Gymnasium Patientiae* (Mogvniae: 1645).
- ³⁶ Cserei wrote on the first page of the *Compendium* a list of the authors he had read. The list started with the following reference: One of Drexel's works (Drexeliusnak valamelyik munkája. Cserei, *Compendium*, p. 1.)
- ³⁷ Drexel, *Gymnasium*, pp. 483–528.
- ³⁸ *The School of Patience, written in Latin by H. Drexelius, translated into English by R.S. Gent* (London: 1640). This item is available at the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh (North Reading Room, ABS.1. 81. 95).
- ³⁹ János Komáromi translated into Hungarian Drexel's work, while he was in exile in Turkey. The manuscript is unpublished.
- ⁴⁰ The title of the manuscript contains this information: *Komáromi János, Békességes Törésnek Oskolája, Mellyet Édes hazáján kívül való boldogtalankodásában Deákból magyarra fordított Komáromi János, Magyarországi s Erdélyi bujdosó Fejedelem Secretariussa, s édes Hazája Martyrja.*
- ⁴¹ Although this manuscript was published, I rely on the original, which is available at the Library of the "Lucian Blaga" Central University Library, Cluj-Napoca *Cserej Mihály Apológiája Anno 1747 10. Aug. Aetatis suae Anno 80* (ms. 840).
- ⁴² Cserei Mihály's son, György provided the information in his diary, where he mentions the tragic event. This manuscript, entitled *Diarium vitae aerumnosae Georgii Cserei senioris de Nagy Ajta 1756* is available at the "Lucian Blaga" Central University Library, Cluj-Napoca (ms. 660).
- ⁴³ Nincs már egiéb hátra, varom igaz hitbol valo Tellyes bizodalommal Szegény bñnös Lelkemnek ez árnyékvilágból ez bujdosásnak siralmas völgiéből boldogul mentül hamareb mikor a Szent Istennek teczek kiköltözését s az én Istenem veghetetlen irgalmasagabol örök boldogsagomot az istennek Szent orszagaban. Mert Boldogságot kettöt senki it nem vehet. Ez világon avagj az másikon lelhet. Nekem e ros z világ részt abban ha nem tet, varom az Istentől melyet el készítet. Amen. (Cserei, *Apologia*, 4r).
- ⁴⁴ Molnár, A "protestáns etika" Magyarországon, pp. 144–145.
- ⁴⁵ A nagy anygali életü szent ember Nánási András sokat forgolódott körölem, imádkozott imádkoztatott érettem, mert szintén desperatióra jutottam vala idvességem felül is. Cserei, p. 339.
- ⁴⁶ This particular item of Praxis pietatis, which was in the possession of Mihály Cserei is available at the Library of Romanian Academy in Cluj. Pál Medgyesi, *Praxis Pietatis, az az: Kegyesség-gyakorlás ... Fordittat Angliai nyelvből ...* (Löcse: 1641) (BMV. U. 127).
- ⁴⁷ It means Nota Bene!
- ⁴⁸ Kétségben eséskor való elmékedések. Medgyesi, 1641, pp. 850–875.
- ⁴⁹ Michael Macdonald, 'The Fearful Estate of Francis Spira: Narrative, Identity, and Emotion in Early Modern England,' *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (1992), pp. 32–61.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 33.
- ⁵¹ Ibid, pp. 39–43.
- ⁵² William G. Naphy, 'The Renovation of Ministry in Calvin's Geneva,' Pettegree (ed.), *The Reformation of the Parishes. The Ministry and the Reformation in Town and Country* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p. 127.

- ⁵³ MacDonald, 'The Fearful Estate,' p. 56.
- ⁵⁴ According to John Stachniewski, the number of suicide cases was so high that even a book was published to stop this strange and overwhelming social hysteria. John Sym published a book in 1637, entitled, *Life Preservative Against Self-Killing*, but the desperate acts did not immediately ceased. John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination, English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 47.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 98.
- ⁵⁶ Steve Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled. Family Life in Reformation Europe* (London: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 151.
- ⁵⁷ Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination*, p. 82.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 100.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 95.
- ⁶⁰ Kazinczy (ed.), *Nagyajtai Cserei Mihály Históriája*, p. 91.
- ⁶¹ Ibid, p. 92.
- ⁶² Cserei, p. 92.
- ⁶³ Cserei, p. 155.
- ⁶⁴ "S bár ne engedte volna az atyám hogy a scholából kijöjjek, talám én is most jobb ember volnék." Ibid., p. 155.
- ⁶⁵ Molnár, A "protestáns etika" Magyarországon, pp. 108–112.