

Bishop Albert Bereczky (1893-1966) A Life Full of Questions

Bishop Albert Bereczky (1893-1966) was undoubtedly one of the most significant, controversial, and yet ambivalent persons of the Reformed Church in Hungary during the 20th Century.¹ If we call the period between the two world wars the "Ravasz-era," then the first half of the 1950s can definitely be characterized by the name and activity of Albert Bereczky. After Ravasz's retirement, Bereczky followed him in the bishopric seat of the Danubian Church District, then in the presidency of the Synod and Convent of the Reformed Church in Hungary. His office term was overlapped with the harshest anti-church policies of the Communist State led by Mátyás Rákosi.

The Bereczky's contribution to these policies are still debated.² Did he act on conviction or was he only the unconscious tool of the communist political interest? Did he save the Reformed Church from a much greater peril, like total eradication, or would there have been another way for the church instead of what Bereczky described as "the narrow road of the obedience by faith"? This study gives a short introduction to the main stages and formative events of Albert Bereczky's life and activity, while represents the main opinions concerning his motivations.

Albert Bereczky was born in Budapest in 1893. According to his baptismal records kept in the Roman Catholic Parish of Bakáts tér, his father was Endre Bereczky, a Reformed landowner, while his mother was the Baroness Mária

Pongrácz, the descendant of an impoverished aristocratic family. According to the aforementioned record, his godfather was Count Albert Apponyi, the famous politician and diplomat of the era. It was rumored throughout Bereczky's life that he was the illegitimate son of Count Apponyi, which belief was confirmed by Bereczky himself on several occasions.³

After the death of her husband, Bereczky's mother moved to Dunabogdány where she married the local Reformed pastor, Géza Kovács. His stepfather's positive pastoral example was important for Bereczky to become a pastor himself.⁴

Bereczky pursued secondary level education in the Reformed high schools of Kunszentmárton, Kecskemét, and finally in Pápa, which became one of the most significant places of his life.⁵ There, he not only made a life-long friendship with Zoltán Tildy, later his influential political sponsor, but also met János Victor, the young secretary of MEKDSZ, the evangelical movement for students. Victor's evangelical thoughts made a huge impact on the young Bereczky. Victor acted as a spiritual father for him even during Bereczky's time as a bishop.⁶ Bereczky also became friends with Imre Szabo, later dean of the Budapest Church County. During the interwar period their friendship made them good co-workers in order to increase the Reformed Church's significance in Budapest. In the early 1950s, however, Szabo turned out to be the natural leader of Bereczky's opposition within the Synod, in what resulted in Szabó's coerced deposition and relocation from Budapest to a remote Eastern-Hungarian village, where he died within three years.⁷

After Bereczky finished high school he applied to the Pápa Theological Seminary, mostly at his evangelical friends' urging. During his seminary years, Bereczky went through a conversion experience in a MEKDSZ summer camp and became a passionate member of the revival movement, while he looked at the official church more and more critically.⁸

In 1916, he finished his seminary education in Pápa. He studied in Basel, Switzerland for a short time, then he got married and was sent by Bishop Elek Petri to Salgótarján with the assignment to plant a new congregation in the fast growing industrial city.⁹ Serving in the miner communities of Salgótarján, Bereczky got his first personal and positive experiences in a congregation where the majority of the members belonged to the worker class. During the short and chaotic reign of the Hungarian Soviet Republic (21 March 1919 - 1 August 1919) following the

collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Bereczky and his small family had to flee from Salgótarján. They moved to Dunabogdány where Bereczky replaced his stepfather as a pastor until 1924, when he left for the prominent and reform-minded congregation of Pécel.¹⁰ Pécel was the home of Pastor Gyula Forgács's "Pécel Circle," a movement of pastors and laypeople who discussed the post-war challenges of the Hungarian society, politics and church in an evangelical-revivalist manner. In the 1920s Bereczky became known and respected as a devoted member and passionate preacher of the revival movement, meanwhile he also functioned as a prolific publicist for many revivalist publications. His love for the press followed him throughout his life: he edited many publications and authored hundreds of newspaper articles.¹¹ Bereczky left his ministry in Pécel in order to become the Director of the Sylvester Press and Publishing Company, co-founded by his closest friend, Zoltán Tildy. The Sylvester Press, specialized on the publication of Gospel tracts and other revivalist literature, went bankrupt shortly after its new headquarters was finished in Budapest in 1930.

After the failed business venture, Bishop László Ravasz assigned Bereczky to be the pastor of a mission congregation in one of the socially challenging worker districts of Budapest, the so-called "Tutaj Street Congregation," which later moved to the Pozsonyi Street. By his warm and open personality, moving sermons, cutting-edge church planting methods and, last but not least, his sensitivity to social issues, Bereczky turned the mission congregation into one of the most flourishing congregations of Budapest within a decade. He organized Bible study groups according to the diverse age and societal clusters of his parishioners and established social institutions for the accommodation of young apprentices and impoverished elderly. By the support of his old friend from Pápa, then Budapest Dean Imre Szabó, the congregation finished the building of a new capacious church complex on the banks of the Danube (Pozsonyi Street) in 1940.¹²

In 1944, after the occupation of Hungary by Nazi Germany, Bereczky joined the resistance movement at the influence of his friend, Zoltán Tildy. Tildy already belonged to the left wing of the Independent Smallholders Party and as such became a Member of Parliament from 1933 on. Cooperating with the resistance, Bereczky became a prominent participant in the Reformed Church's attempt to save Hungarian Jews from transportation to extermination camps. The rescue work was coordinated by the "Good Shepherd Mission Committee," established by Bishop László Ravasz in 1942. The committee's original mission was the spiritual

and social care of converted Jews, but during the last two years of the war its main focus became rescuing as many Jews as possible by issuing Christianization documents. Officially, the "Good Shepherd" was led by Gyula Muraközy, Ravasz's second in command. The Committee's fieldwork was done mostly by József Éliás, a young pastor and Jewish convert himself, who became a close confidant of Bereczky during this time. In August of 1944, approximately 1300 Jews (40% of the baptized Jews in Budapest) were baptized at Bereczky's Pozsonyi Street Congregation in order to protect them from deportation.¹³ Furthermore, with Bereczky's approval, the congregation's "Kaláka" teenage circle also played an active role in the rescue missions.¹⁴ According to the church's secretary: "The greatest wave of baptisms took place during the summer of 1944. Mostly the Old and the Young and women came, since the men have been already taken away. ././ It was not about faith any more. It was about saving their lives."¹⁵

Bereczky also played an active role in the information network between the cells of the resistance and Governor Miklós Horthy, while he personally delivered Bishop Ravasz's protestation letter against the deportations to the Reformed and Lutheran bishops.¹⁶ During the last days of the siege of Budapest, at the highpoint of Nazi terror, Bereczky hid Tildy and his family at the Pozsonyi Street church building.¹⁷ Right after the war he wrote an account about the rescue efforts of the Reformed Church under the title "Hungarian Protestantism against the Persecution of Jews."¹⁸ By the work of the "Good Shepherd Committee" about 60,000 Hungarian Jews have been saved during the war. Since he put his own life at risk, Bereczky was posthumously honored with the title "Righteous among the Nation" in 1997. Nevertheless, his significant contribution to the resistance movement and the rescue mission brought him substantial popularity and admiration right after the war.¹⁹

Bereczky joined the resistance movement by the impulse of his old friend, Zoltán Tildy. After the war, Tildy's political career was on the rise. Tildy served as the Prime Minister of Hungary from November 1945 until February 1946, when he was elected the first President of the Republic of Hungary until the communist takeover in 1948. Bereczky's deeper affiliation with left-wing politics can be accredited to Tildy. At the beginning of 1945, Bereczky also joined the Smallholders Party and became a member of the Provisional National Assembly as early as the April of 1945. Among many minor offices, Bereczky functioned as the Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture in 1945-1946 and Chairman of the

Foreign Affairs Committee in 1946. By 1947, he belonged to the leadership of the Smallholders Party.²⁰

Named in full the "Independent Smallholders', Land Workers' and Citizens' Party" was founded in 1930 to represent the interests mainly of landed farmers. The Smallholders Party was the biggest left-wing bourgeois opposition and parliamentary party in the 1930s. It acted as an umbrella for people ranging from wealthier-landed farmers to the village poor and some urban strata, advocating land reform and other liberal democratic demands. After the first general elections after the war (4 November 1945) the Smallholders Party became the largest party in Parliament, with an absolute majority. Its leaders accepted the need for nationalization to limit the scope of big capital and supported the dissolution of the system of great landed estates, but insisted on basing agriculture on private landownership and maintaining a multi-party system of parliamentary democracy. The Hungarian Communist Party (MKP), led by Chief Secretary Mátyás Rákosi, used legal and illegal methods – which became famous later as "Salami Tactics",²¹ – to combat the Smallholders. By their Machiavellian adversaries the Smallholders' power began to break early in 1947, when charges of a conspiracy against the republic were fabricated to dissolve a secret organization known as the Hungarian Brotherhood, which could closely connected to adherents of the Smallholders Party.²² Through the show-trials of the Brotherhood's real and alleged members, the direction of the Smallholders got into the hands of its left-wingers, like Zoltán Tildy, who did not have other choice than to cooperate with the Communists. By the Summer of 1947, the only Smallholders Party politicians remaining were ones who unconditionally accepted the leadership of Rákosi and the Hungarian Communist Party. It was only a matter of time before Rákosi's Salami Tactics reached their fulfillment and the Communist Party transforms the young Hungarian democracy into a dictatorship by the intimidation and false accusations of opposition leaders, forced party mergers and even voting fraud²³ Finally, Rákosi's one-party system succeeded on June 12, 1948, when the Communists assimilated their last independent coalition partner, the Social Democratic Party. The communist takeover was complete.

Due to Bereczky's revivalist past, his achievements as a church-planter, and his newly-gained political authority and connections, Bereczky became the natural leader of those church-persons who criticized the inter-war conditions of the Reformed Church, expressed the church's responsibility in the political process

resulting in the lost world war, while they had a neutral or even positive attitude toward the socialist transition of Hungary. Discussing the possible orientations of the church in the newly-formed socialist society, Bereczky and his supporters inevitably challenged the church establishment of Bishop László Ravasz.²⁴

Experiencing the rise of communist dominance, it became apparent that it would only be a matter of time before the Ravasz leadership had to give way to those who could better serve the secular political interest. Bereczky had an active role in the negotiations, which convinced Ravasz to resign, and at that point Ravasz also gave his approval. Due to the circumstances, it was decided Bereczky was the right person to replace Ravasz in the leadership of the Reformed Church.²⁵

Karl Barth, one of the most famous theologians of the era, also argued for the election of Bereczky in an open letter. Earlier in 1948, Barth, accompanied by Bereczky, visited Ravasz personally and tried to convince him of the necessity of his resignation.²⁶ Barth was purposefully misled by Ravasz's opposition (namely János Péter), and totally misinterpreted the Hungarian situation trusting the Communist State would secure the independence and freedom of the church and its members. From 1951 on, Barth realized his mistake and started to use a more critical tone against the collaborative attitude of the Bereczky church government.²⁷

After the other candidates were convinced to withdraw, Bereczky was elected by the small majority to be the Bishop of the Danubian Church District at the end of 1948. In the following year, after the forced resignation of the Bishop of Debrecen – Imre Révész – Bereczky became the President of the Synod and Convent, the Reformed Church's highest legislative and administrative body.²⁸

During Bereczky's church leadership, the Communist State implemented its anti-church policies step by step. By the nationalization of the church's educational institutions, the abolition of missionary organizations, the relocation, suspension, forced retirement and intimidation of disloyal pastors, the church was forced into the margin of the Hungarian society within one decade. The Reformed Church lost almost all of its 400 years-long political and, most importantly, educational and cultural role within the Hungarian society.²⁹

Bereczky, even before his time as a bishop, already took part in the work of the preparatory committee for the nationalization of religious educational institutions.³⁰ Under strong political pressure, the Synod of the Reformed Church

adopted the state's proposal for the nationalization of schools on 14 June 1948, two days after the Parliament already proclaimed state ownership over church schools.³¹

The nationalization of the schools was an important step toward the birth of the so-called Agreement between the Communist State and the Reformed Church, signed on the 7th of October 1948. On the surface, the Agreement advocated the idea of "free church in a free state" and promised to end the state's involvement into church issues. In reality, it led to the gradual eradication of church autonomy and the church's total financial dependency to the state. The Agreement regulated that state subsidies would decrease by 25% every five years. The cut was explained by saying the church would become more and more self-sustaining, but it was apparent that the state expected the church to be dissolved within the next twenty years.

However, it was officially signed by Bishop Imre Révész, President of the Synod and Convent until his forced resignation in 1949. Bereczky was the Agreement's main ideologist and promoter; he summed up its relevance and necessity as following:

By Christian realism, we had to take into consideration the place and time where and when we live. The past is irreversibly over and the church's task in the present is to build, help, serve by its own tools there and then where it has its possibility and opportunity to do it. The vision of the serving church originated from this comprehension. /.../ The state agreement with the Reformed Church – and later with all the Hungarian Christian churches – was the result of this theological understanding.³²

Though Bereczky declared in his inaugural speech that he would decentralize the church hierarchy,³³ under his government the church went through an unprecedented process of centralization. The traditional Reformed congregational autonomy was weakened. The church government got involved into the free elections of pastors in many cases to support their own loyal candidates. Meanwhile, the deans' and especially the bishops' power over their pastors became legally reinforced. According to the 1951 amendment of the church's bylaws, any pastor could be relocated from his congregation by the church government– an "administrative tool" which became very useful to discipline defiant pastors and establish a system of fear and mistrust. The most

famous victim of these “administrative tools” was Bereczky’s former friend, Imre Szabó, Dean of the Budapest Church County. After Szabó acted as Bereczky’s opposition in the Synod, he was relocated to a remote insignificant village in Eastern-Hungary.

As part of the centralization process, the majority of missionary societies were dissolved until the end of 1950, while the rest of them were placed under the firm control of the church authorities in 1952. This stifling process ended the longstanding tradition of voluntary lay service of the Reformed Church.³⁴ The church press had a similar fate. Many church newspapers ceased to exist, the rest was thoroughly censored by the church authorities. The adjustments of the Church Counties’ borders in 1952 also served for the purpose of centralization and personal purges. For example, the dissolution of one of the four traditional Church Districts, the Tibiscan Church District, also resulted in the deposition of its bishop, Andor Enyedy, a representative of the old era.³⁵

The most criticized point of Bereczky’s activity was that he sometimes adjusted his church policies to the state’s demands, not out of necessity but out of compliance. For example, when he approved the absorption of the Sárospatak and Pápa Theological Seminaries by the ones in Budapest and Debrecen in 1951 or when he offered to the state three secondary schools which still stayed in church ownership according to the 1948 Agreement. Giving up these schools left only the Debrecen Secondary School in the hands of the Reformed Church.³⁶ The abolition of the two historic Seminaries, both founded in the Reformation Era, made Karl Barth aware of the harmful tendencies within the Reformed Church in Hungary and motivated him to raise his voice. In a letter dated 16 September 1951,³⁷ which had been published in the West despite his intention, Barth drew parallels between the Nazi Germany’s Deutsche Christen movement and Bereczky’s church leadership: “Must Reformed Hungary always be 100 percent in agreement with whatever regime happens to be in power?”³⁸ The letter caused great panic at the Bishop’s office and its response was written and published by the supervision and approval of Mátyás Rákosi, who desperately wanted to keep the appearance in the West that religious freedom was protected in communist Hungary.

Interestingly, another area where the communist interest tried to use the church for its purpose was the ecumenical movement. The State Office for Church Affairs and even Mátyás Rákosi himself paid close attention to the participation

of the Hungarian Reformed delegates in various ecumenical organizations such as the World Council of Churches (WCC) or the World Alliance of the Reformed Churches. The Communists sought to co-opt these organizations as a tool for their political propaganda.³⁹ The freshly founded WCC could not shut out the heated political climate of the Cold War and sometimes became the theater of clashes between Eastern and Western political ideologies. Next to those who wanted to preserve the neutrality of the organization, there were always some delegates, both from the West and the East, who attempted to use the WCC's publicity as the channel of their political message.

As early as 1946, Bereczky, being involved in various forms of foreign affairs that time especially as the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, attended two preparatory conferences of the WCC in Switzerland. Consequently, he was also present at the initial WCC General Assembly in Amsterdam during the late-summer of 1948. On 8 July 1949, Bereczky became the President of the Ecumenical Commission of Hungary. When in July 1950 the Toronto meeting of the WCC Central Committee condemned North Korea's "war aggression", Bereczky criticized their statement by an open letter sent to the WCC General Secretary. Bereczky's criticism focused on the credibility and objectivity of the UNCOK (United Nations Commission on Korea) report about the Korean War, on which the Toronto statement relied. Bereczky also pointed out the contradiction of the statement which supported "police action" against North Korea, while expected a peaceful solution the same time.⁴⁰ Since the Toronto statement also condemned China's support for North Korea in April 1951, Chinese Protestant Bishop Tzu-Chen Chao, one of the six presidents of the WCC, resigned from his position as an act of protestation.⁴¹ In order to express his solidarity, Bereczky also resigned from his membership in the International Affairs Committee at the next meeting of the Central Committee in August 1951 in Rolle, Switzerland.⁴² Though he accredited great importance to his resignation, it did not bring him the accolades he expected. In spite of his aspirations, Josef Hromádka, Czech Protestant theologian, became the generally recognized leader of the Eastern churches within the WCC instead of Bereczky. It was only a cold comfort that in 1952 the Comenius Faculty of the Charles University of Prague granted honorary doctorate to Bereczky acknowledging his ecumenical service.⁴³ Bereczky also attended the 1954 WCC General Assembly in Evanston, USA, where he delivered the Hungarian Reformed Church's invitation to hold the next WCC Central

Committee meeting in Galyatető, Hungary, during the summer of 1956. In spite of his attempts, by that time, Bereczky's impact on ecumenical matters was gradually overshadowed by the diplomatic talent of his Hungarian rival, János Péter, new Bishop of the Transtibiscan Church District.

The examples mentioned above show us the Bereczky leadership became the simple executor of the Communist State's will and interests, mediated by the State Office for Church Affairs founded in 1951. This communist intention and method was later aptly described by the resigned Bishop Ravasz as "weakening the church by the church." The Communist State was wise enough not to choose the way of direct confrontation with the Reformed Church, like it did in the case of the Catholics, but acted out its anti-church program by the help of inside collaborators.

One of the key questions about the assessment of Bereczky's activity and personality are his true motivations during this process. His official statements, articles and sermons testify that he was deeply convinced by the righteousness of his church policies serving state purposes. However, Bereczky failed to develop a coherent theological system, his attitude toward the Communist State was reinforced by a theological justification, his so-called "theology of the narrow road."⁴⁴ This theology finds its origins in Bereczky's personal experiences during the last phase of the Second World War. He considered the horrors of the war and the total defeat of the inter-war Hungary as the result of God's judgement. Bereczky's life was in permanent danger because of his relationship with the resistance movement; and he experienced the Russian occupation as personal deliverance and the manifestation of God's grace. This intense personal experience brought him to that assumption that both judgment and grace manifest themselves in the historical and social context of this world. In his words: "His judgment made the old Hungary to collapse, and His grace gave us a wonderful opportunity to have a new beginning."⁴⁵

In his opinion, God's legitimate judgment was caused by sins committed within the context of human, social relations, like the social injustice of the pre-war or the war itself. On the other hand, he believed the grace of God also reveals itself there, where there is a promise and intention to solve these social problems by the implementation of a peaceful and just society. According to him, the Marxism represented by the Soviet Union had this promise and intention to a peaceful and just society by which it becomes the tool of God's grace.

Consequently, the church must also promote this new social transformation; with Bereczky's words: "In this new situation, the church must recognize its radically new assignments and earnestly embrace the service waiting for her: this was and this remains the narrow road of the church."⁴⁶ Thus, in his public statements he never questioned the righteousness of his policies what he declared to be God's will. Moreover, in the mid-1950s Bereczky in his speeches, articles and even in his sermons embraced more and more the style and terminology of the communist politicians, frequently using their usual phrases or favorite expressions.⁴⁷

However, for a more comprehensive assessment of Bereczky's motivations, it is also relevant to see that his close friendships, and in many cases kinships,⁴⁸ with the discredited and convicted members of the Hungarian Brotherhood, the Smallholders Party (and especially with the disgraced Zoltan Tildy) made him vulnerable to blackmail after the communist takeover. Eventually, Rákosi's "Salami Tactics" reached Bereczky's political supporter, Tildy, on 30 July 1948, when Tildy was forced to resign from Presidency of the Republic after his son-in-law had been arrested for corruption and infidelity. Thereafter Tildy was kept under house arrest from the end of August 1948 until May 1, 1956. Tildy's downfall resulted in the end of Bereczky's secular political aspirations, too. According to the contemporary opinion of László Pap, Dean of Budapest Seminary:

I knew what Bereczky, as Smallholders Party member, thought of the Communists, and I had no doubt that what I knew, the Communists knew it too. / ... / I was afraid that because of this political burden Bereczky will have to make concessions in church matters.⁴⁹

Considering Bereczky's delicate political situation caused by his Smallholders past and particularly Zoltán Tildy's downfall, if he wanted to secure his position he had to prove his loyalty to the Communist Regime constantly.

Interestingly, many of his closest colleagues and even friends wrote reports about him to the State Security Services, which were always suspicious and distrustful toward Bereczky. In these reports, he is characterized as somebody who publicly advocates state politics, but secretly hinders and sabotages them.⁵⁰ The State used him, but never trusted him. It was also true, that on several occasions Bereczky used his remaining political connections to intervene for deported or imprisoned pastors, church members or their relatives.⁵¹ The State's

mistrust was also strengthened by the biased reports of those young careerist church-officials who tried to blacken the “old fool” – as they called Bereczky – in order to assist János Péter, Bishop of the Transtibiscan Church District and Bereczky’s rival for the supremacy over the Reformed Church.⁵²

Inside the church the growing discontent against Bereczky’s church policies led to the formation of the Reformed Renewal Movement, which harshly opposed Bereczky’s servile attitude towards the Communist State even before the 1956 Revolution.⁵³ During the 1956 Revolution, the members of the Reformed Renewal Movement could step forward and reinstall László Ravasz as old-new Bishop. The 63 years-old Bereczky lived through the events of the 1956 revolution in a hospital. Earlier that year he had a stroke on his return from a conference in Germany; under the pressure of the new circumstances he had to announce his resignation by phone from the hospital bed.⁵⁴

After the Soviet suppression of the 1956 Revolution, Bereczky’s leadership was restored with the help of the regenerating Communist State, led by János Kádár. However, Bereczky still suffered from the consequences of his stroke and could not completely fulfill his responsibilities. He was reinstated as Bishop by the State Office for Church Affairs in order to symbolize the continuity of the new Communist Regime of János Kádár with the pre-revolution order.⁵⁵

In his 1957 episcopal report, Bereczky admitted some of the mistakes of his pre-revolution leadership. According to him the harshness of his church policies, especially the so called “administrative tools” – such as the relocation, suspension and forced retirement of pastors, or the abolition of missionary organizations – can be viewed as the “temptations of love,” meaning that their intention was to save as many pastors and church-people as possible from waking the attention of the Communist State and thus suffering harsher retribution.⁵⁶ After the consolidation of the Kádár-regime, Bereczky’s service was not needed anymore and the State Office for Church Affairs approved his retirement in 1958.⁵⁷ He died in the age of 73 in 1966.⁵⁸

When the criticisms of the Bereczky-era resurfaced after the political changes of 1989, Endre Nagy, Bereczky’s son-in-law and former synodal co-worker, replied with the argument that Bereczky’s primary motive was the preservation of the Reformed Church and its members even if this meant to suffer some losses and damages on several fields, like in education, culture and inner-mission. Nagy refreshes Bereczky’s apology from 1957, when he states that his father-in-law’s

tough church policies were needed in order to protect the anti-communist church-persons from the possible harsher retribution of the state.⁵⁹ In his opinion, the church and its leadership was on a forced course. If Bereczky had resigned, he would have given way to more willing collaborators, like János Péter and his circle of young arrogant careerists.⁶⁰ If he had resisted, he would have become a martyr like the Catholic Cardinal László Mindszenty or the Lutheran Bishop Lajos Ordass, but even this could not have prevented the State to execute its anti-church policies. In Bereczky's own words: "No one claims that this road was without mistakes, nor that it was easy. But yes, it was the only viable road for the Church here and now: the narrow road of the obedience by faith."⁶¹

On the other side, in the opinion of Gyula Gombos, Bereczky's former parishioner at the Pozsonyi Street and his expatriate critic in the 1960s, it is also necessary to take into consideration what has been saved and what is lost. Although, the church's organization, some of its institutions, most of its pastors, elders and members, so the "outside" of the church has been preserved, on the same time "Hungarian Calvinism" gave up its 400 years old formative role in Hungarian culture and education and, above all, it degraded the preaching of the Gospel to be the channel of government propaganda. With Gombos's own words: "the church government sacrificed the essential for the nonessential, the inner assignment for the outer appearance, the wine for the wineskins, the heritage for one bowl of lentils."⁶²

Bereczky's final evaluation is still debated. There are still some who emphasize his sanity, by which he preserved the church from a possible eradication. It is expressed that nobody could give a different path to the church among the given circumstances. There are also many, who still harshly criticizes his conformism to the Communist State, especially how he sometimes went beyond the "extra mile" and sought to satisfy every demands of the State, for which he is accused of opportunism and unprincipled careerism. There are also many who wonder how someone who was a devoted revivalist, church planter, and rescuer of Jews could so easily be mistaken and become the tool of a totalitarian dictatorship? Or is it even possible that this background was the very reason for what he became? Was he the victim, or the perpetrator; or maybe both? The debate is still going on as well as the research of his life, therefore it is also possible that new evidence will shed some more light on his motivations.

At the beginning of his bishopric service Bereczky declared:

“The road of the Church leads between two temptations: the first temptation is to ignore the signs of the times and protect something what has been already condemned by God’s judgment; the other temptation is to adapt ourselves to the changes of time, while sacrificing those values, which were entrusted to us by God.”⁶³

We might say that in his struggle to avoid the first, Bereczky might have exposed himself too much to the latter. In order to not protect something which he considered be condemned by God, he might have sacrificed too many values which were entrusted to the church and to him as its responsible leader.

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- 21 Rákosi used the term „Salami Tactics” describing his strategy to eliminate his opposition „slice by slice” like a salami. By portraying his opponents as fascists or fascist sympathizers, he was able to get the opposition to slice off its right wing, then its centrists, then even the left wingers, until only those politicians willing to collaborate with the Communists remained in power. The „Salami Tactics” also involved the use of false accusations, intimidation of political opponents and voting fraud, like the “blue chits” of the 1947 General Elections. FAI-PODIPNIK, J.: Feuding Hungarians in the West – Troubles with the Struggle Against Communist Ascendancy in Hungary 1945-1956, in: *International Social Science Review*, 82/1-2 (2007), 3-19 (p. 4); KÖRÖSÉNYI, A.: *Government and Politics in Hungary*, Budapest, Osiris and CEUPress, 1999., 44.
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- 47 BOGÁRDI SZABÓ, I.: *Egyházvezetés és teológia a Magyarországi Református Egyházban 1948 és 1989 között*, Debrecen, Debreceni Református Hittudományi Egyetem, 1995, 180-190.
- 48 The Bereczky couple had five daughters. The eldest, Piroska (born in 1917), married to the son of János Victor, while the youngest, Katalin (born in 1927) became the wife of the son of Zoltán Tildy, Zoltán Tildy Jr. Bereczky's love for his wife (Piroska Bencsik, teacher) and daughters is frequently mentioned in the State Security reports, which describe him as a caring husband and father: e. g. ÁBTL, O-9047/1 244.; ÁBTL, O-9047/1 260.
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- 50 e.g. ÁBTL, O-9047 1.; 61.; 236-250.; 79.; 232-233.; 81.
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- 63 BERECKZY, I.: *Püspöki jelentés*, p. 6.