

11-2015

## The Genesis of 'Hungarism': Bishop Ottokár Prohászka and the Extremist Right in 1920s Hungary

Csaba Fazekas  
*University of Miskolc, Hungary*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree>



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Eastern European Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Fazekas, Csaba (2015) "The Genesis of 'Hungarism': Bishop Ottokár Prohászka and the Extremist Right in 1920s Hungary," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 35 : Iss. 5 , Article 5.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol35/iss5/5>

This Article, Exploration, or Report is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact [arolfe@georgefox.edu](mailto:arolfe@georgefox.edu).

## THE GENESIS OF 'HUNGARISM': BISHOP OTTOKÁR PROHÁSZKA AND THE EXTREMIST RIGHT IN 1920S HUNGARY

by Csaba Fazekas

Csaba Fazekas, Ph.D., is a historian and associate professor at the University of Miskolc in Hungary. His research interests are Church–State relations in 19th and 20th century Hungary and Central Europe, Roman Catholic Church history, political movements and parties in interwar Hungary, and Christian policy in 20th century Hungary. Principal publications: “The Roman Catholic Church and the Extreme Right-wing Ideologies in Hungary, 1920–1945,” in Nelis, Jan and Morelli, Anne and Praet, Danny, eds., *Catholicism and Fascism in Europe, 1918-1945* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2015), 367–378.; “The Super-Ego of the Empire: Church and State”, in Gáspár, Zsuzsa, ed., *The Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy (1867–1918)* (London – Sydney: New Holland, 2008), 152–175.; and “Collaborating with Horthy: Political Catholicism and Christian Political Organisations in Hungary, 1918–1944,” in Kaiser, Wolfram and Wohnout, Helmut, eds., *Christian Democracy in 20th century Europe*, (London: Routledge, 2004), 195–216.

Ottokár Prohászka (1858–1927) was a famous and well-known Hungarian Catholic cleric, starting from 1905, when he became bishop of Székesfehérvár. His life and works often got into the center of discussions, not only among historians and ecclesiastical circles, but also among politicians. This is not surprising because Prohászka was not only an energetic priestly leader, but a very well-known and important public figure.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Prohászka was also extremely popular with liberals, as his activities represented a promise to renew and modernize Catholicism. Prohászka imagined this modernization on the basis of the social principles of Catholicism, and considered the spread of a “Jewish” mentality, alien to the Hungarian nation, as the fundamental problem. On the foundation of Political Catholicism, he dealt a lot with the problem of poverty and other important social issues. Significantly, Prohászka was characterised by deep social sensitivity as he linked social modernization with the rise of the

poor, and the creation of conditions of social security for them. Nevertheless, Prohászka was of the opinion that the integration of the Jewish community into Hungarian society had only been outward and superficial as there could have been no real assimilation. He denied the mere possibility of this. For Jews, he considered getting baptized into Christianity or emigration (Zionism) as the only possibilities.

After World War I, he became one of the most popular personalities, an influential ideologist and orator, the leading figure of the so-called “Christian-nationalist” awakening, an official ideology of interwar Hungary, representing a strong nationalism, anti-liberalism, anti-Semitism, and anti-revolutionary viewpoint, unifying Christianity and Hungarian national feelings. In Prohászka’s lifetime, his *epitheton ornans* were: “the prophet,” “Apostolus et Praeceptor Hungariae” [‘apostle and teacher of Hungary’], “bishop with fiery-soul,” etc.

Prohászka was already elevated to cult status in the 1920s. As in every cult, the bishop was one of the most important and, at the same time, most controversial personalities. After 1927, this cult image of his became even stronger. After 1945, similarly to those of other emblematic personalities of the Horthy era, his name was hardly mentioned with the first attempt at the realistic historical evaluation of his activities made in the 1980s. In this respect, the change of the political system did not simply bring about a Prohászka renaissance but also the revival of his cult, and furthermore, the multidirectional division of the latter. In the last 25 years, there has been a lot of research into his work as thorough biographies have been published and several conferences have been organized with the contribution of Catholic ecclesiastical personalities. It is a bibliographic challenge to take into account the individual papers or booklets published in various series about the different details, produced continuously in traditional or electronic form by Catholic professionals cultivating Prohászka’s memory.

In the last 20 years, we have also witnessed the rediscovery and reassessment of Prohászka, the politician. The process unfolded in the way that the bishop, who was originally regarded as a model only by anti-Semite right-wing radicals, was more and more referred to by other politicians on the conservative, moderate right side as well, until he emerged as the emblematic figure of the whole political right by the beginning of the 2010s. The only difference in his evaluation is that while moderate conservatives and representatives of the Catholic Church regarded him as a model, denying his radicalism (particularly, his viewpoint concerning anti-Semitism), the latter was not only handled by right-wing radicals (extremists) as an idea that is acceptable but also one that should be followed. However, both the ecclesiastical and the right-wing public were united in their protest against the inscription in the Holocaust Museum in Budapest in 2005. Under a portrait of Prohászka, there was a title: “one of the leaders of the conservative anti-Semite ideology.” A Hungarian bishop declared he would not go into the museum while this characterization remained. The whole conservative camp viciously protested against those who declared Prohászka as an anti-Semite. According to many, his statements about Jews cannot be characterized as anti-Semitism.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1990s, many public streets and Catholic institutions (schools, etc.) were named after Ottokár Prohászka. The radical right-wing always highly and spectacularly respected the Prohászka traditions; even a paramilitary group took the name of the bishop. In the 21st century, there were two very hectic debates about Prohászka’s heritage occurring in 2008 and 2012. In the first case, the conservative (not the extremist, but moderate) right-wing politicians erected a half-length statue for Prohászka. In 2012, they wanted to erect a new full-length statue in a public square, but after violent protests, the organizers postponed their plans.

---

<sup>1</sup> See footnote 14.

1. It is a well-known fact in relevant literature that Hungarian national socialist and Nazi movements in the 1930s used the attribute 'Hungarist' for their ideology and called it 'Hungarism.' It is also a known fact that the expression was first used by Ottokár Prohászka, and was spread as a result of his activities. The leader of the Hungarian national socialists (Arrow Cross Party), Ferenc Szálasi, adopted this term from Prohászka to designate the ideology defining his own movement in the mid 1930s.<sup>2</sup> The historical works on the era and Prohászka biographies are unanimous that the expression used by the bishop has nothing to do with Szálasi's Hungarism.<sup>3</sup> It makes no sense to try to find a direct connection between Prohászka's and Szálasi's Hungarisms.<sup>4</sup> I do not wish to devote much time and space to the fact that this connection was analysed by many, both among right extremists underlining a kind of ideological heritage, and among those who considered it worth following Ottokár Prohászka's *oeuvre* in opposition of the Hungarian Nazis. It is worth mentioning that Arrow Cross Party right-wing extremists always consciously declared that they were the followers of

---

<sup>2</sup>Fischer, Rolf, *Entwicklungsstufen des Antisemitismus in Ungarn, 1867–1939. Die Zerstörung der magyarischen-jüdischen Symbiose.* (München: Oldenbourg, 1988) (Südosteuropäische Arbeiten 85.) 154. Thereafter: Fischer, *Entwicklungsstufen*; Horváth Sz., Franz 'Prohászka, Ottokár'. in Benz, Wolfgang, hrsg., *Handbuch des Antisemitismus. Judenfeindschaft in Geschichte und Gegenwart.* Bd. 2/2. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009.) 655–656.; Vági, Zoltán – Csósz, László – Kádár, Gábor: *The Holocaust in Hungary. Evolution of a Genocide.* (Washington DC: US Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2013) (Documenting Life and Destruction. Holocaust Sources in Context) 151. etc.

Remark: the Hungarian phrase ('hungarizmus') is translated into English mostly as 'Hungarism', thereafter we follow this practice. In the literature we can find another version ('Hungarianism') e.g. in Moshe Y. Herczl's (or rather his interpreter's) text: Herczl, Moshe Y., *Christianity and the Holocaust of Hungarian Jewry.* transl., Lerner, Joel. (New York – London: New York Univ. Press, 1993) 64., 67–70., 95., 102. Thereafter: Herczl, *Christianity.* Or: Dunai, Eleanor C., *Surviving in silence. A Deaf Boy in the Holocaust. The Harry I. Dunai story.* (Washington DC: Gallaudet Univ. Press, 2002) 7. etc.

<sup>3</sup> Szabó, Ferenc SJ, *The Life and Work of Ottokár Prohászka, 1858–1927.* (Budapest: Szent István Társulat, 2007) 247.; Paksa, Rudolf, 'Ferenc Szálasi and the Hungarian Far-Right Between the World Wars'. in Sandu, Traian, ed., *Vers un profil convergent des fascismes? 'Nouveau consensus' et religion politique en Europe centrale.* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010) (Cahiers de la Nouvelle Europe, 11.) 125–139., 133.

<sup>4</sup> Gyurgyák, János, *Magyar fajvédők.* ['Hungarian Race-Defenders.'] (Budapest: Osiris, 2012) 73. Thereafter: Gyurgyák, *Fajvédők.* About the question and possibilities of the continuity see e.g.: Kovács M., Mária, 'The Problem of Continuity between the 1920 Numerus Clausus and Post-1938 Anti-Jewish Legislation in Hungary.' *East European Jewish Affairs*, 35 (2005), 23–32.

Prohászka's intellectual heritage<sup>5</sup> while conservatives distancing themselves from the former denied that this approach was justified.<sup>6</sup> Both before and after World War II, the Nazi press kept publishing Prohászka articles in an attempt to justify their use of the expression "Hungarism."<sup>7</sup> Here, I cannot elaborate on the details of this debate but only make the following remarks: 1. I find such questions as 'what would Prohászka's opinion have been about the Arrow Cross movement?' senseless (with all the positive and negative answer options), 2. The right extremist radicals of the 1920s ("Awakening Hungarians," racists) later had different approaches to Szálasi's Hungarist movement.<sup>8</sup>

I think the genesis of the term 'Hungarism' is an interesting problem in itself, and no allusions formulated after Prohászka's death render it unnecessary to investigate what the bishop, who had a powerful impact in his era, understood by the term himself, and how it was interpreted during his lifetime and period of public activity.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> The extremist right-wing press often published Prohászka's articles in the 1930's and in the years of World War II. See e.g.: Herczl, *Christianity*, 234–235. The MPs of the Arrow Cross Party and other extremist political formations in the Hungarian parliament always declared their spiritual relationship with Prohászka's heritage. See e.g.: Paksa, Rudolf, *Szálasi Ferenc és a hungarizmus*. ['Ferenc Szálasi and the Hungarism'.] (Budapest: Jaffa, 2013) 139., 152.; Gergely, Jenő – Glatz, Ferenc – Pölöskei, Ferenc, eds., *Magyarországi pártprogramok, 1919–1944*. ['Party Programs of Hungary'.] (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1991) 497. The most detailed work on Szálasi's Hungarism now in Hungarian is László Karsai's Academic Doctoral Thesis: *Szálasi Ferenc. Politikai életrajz*. ['Ferenc Szálasi. A Political Biography'.] (Budapest, 2012)

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Kálmán Hubay, an Arrow Cross Party leader interpreted their election success of 1939 as 'the triumph of Prohászka's Hungarism'. Some Catholic intellectual protested against this interpretation, e.g.: 'Prohászka és a Hungaristák'. ['Prohászka and the Hungarists'.] *Nógrádi Hírlap*, 25 June 1939. 1.; 'Nomád levele Prohászkaról és a nyilaskeresztről'. ['Nomad's Letter from Prohászka and the Arrow Cross'.] *Magyar Nemzet*, 17 Nov. 1940. 12. (This 'Nomad' was István Lendvai who represented an extremist right, anti-Semite politician in the 1920's.) etc.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g.: Paksy, Zoltán, *Nyilas mozgalom Magyarországon, 1932–1935*. ['Arrow Cross Movement in Hungary'.] (Budapest: Gondolat, 2013) 211.; Tóth, Tibor, *A hungarista mozgalom emigrációtörténete*. ['A History of the Arrow Cross Emigration'.] (Debrecen: Multiplex – Debrecen Univ. Press 2008) 152–153.

<sup>8</sup> We can find some right-wing extremist from the 1920's who became enemies of the Arrow Cross movement in the end of the 1930's. (The most well-known is Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky who was killed by the Arrow Cross guard in the end of 1944.) But most of them got the way from the early 'race-defending' into the Hungarian version of National Socialism in the 1930's or was of service to the Szálasi's Hungarist state in 1944. (E.g. Kálmán Hubay, Emil Borbély-Maczky etc.)

<sup>9</sup> For the Christian and right-wing policy in the first period of the Interwar Hungary (so-called 'Horthy Era') in English: Fazekas, Csaba, 'Collaborating with Horthy. Political Catholicism and Christian Political Organisations in Hungary, 1918–1944', in Gehler, Michael – Kaiser, Wolfram – Wahnout, Helmut, eds., *Christian Democracy in 20th century Europe*. (Wien – Köln – Weimar: Böhlau, 2001) (Arbeitskreis Europäische Integration. Historische Forschungen. Veröffentlichungen, 4.) 224–249; László, Leslie, *Church and State in Hungary, 1919–1945*. (Budapest: METEM, 2004); Hanebrink, Paul A., *In Defense of Christian Hungary. Religion, Nationalism, and Antisemitism, 1890–1944*. (London – Ithaca NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2006) Thereafter: Hanebrink, *In*

**2.1.** The source of the term “Hungarism” is clearly related to strengthening anti-Jewism at the end of World War I. Doubtlessly, the radicalizing anti-Semitic public mood carried away Prohászka, too, and from the spring of 1918, he formulated anti-Jewish views more and more forcefully. These became popular in the country stricken by war psychosis, giving a new, radical direction to the activities of the political right.<sup>10</sup> Raising the Jewish problem made the bishop one of the best-known and most popular public personalities.

Prohászka’s first article which had great resonance was published in May 1918.<sup>11</sup> In this, he based his concern for Catholic youth on the popular anti-Semitic assumption that many more Christian youths served in war fronts while Jews backed out of the task of national defense, and replaced Christians at the universities. (This became the starting point for the arguments leading to *numerus clausus*.) The article was rejected with shock by left-wing and liberal papers as they considered anti-Semitic agitation generally harmful. At the same time, newspapers affiliated to the ‘Christian’ right-wing celebrated the bishop’s outspokenness, that is, anti-Jewish agitation in a series of articles. Prohászka himself rejected the charge of anti-Semitism first in an article and then in a speech given in the upper chamber of Parliament,<sup>12</sup> markedly maintaining his allegations concerning Jews at the same time. He repeated his ideas about Jews consciously evading military service and about their

---

*Defense*; Bodó, Béla, ‘Do not Lead us into (Fascist) Temptation’. ‘The Catholic Church in Interwar Hungary’. *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 8 (2007) Nr. 2. 413–431.

<sup>10</sup> See detailed: Hanebrink, *In Defense*, 56–59.; Fischer, *Entwicklungsstufen*, 122–123.; Pók, Attila, ‘The Politics of Hatred. Scapegoating in Interwar Hungary’. in Turda, Marius – Weindling, Paul J., eds., *Blood and homeland. Eugenics and racial nationalism in Central and Southeast Europe, 1900–1940*. (Budapest – New York: CEU Press, 2007) 375–388.; Bihari, Péter, *Lövészárkok a háttérországban. Középosztály, zsidókérdés, antiszemitizmus az első világháború Magyarországon*. [‘Trenches in the Hinterland. Middle Class, Jewish Question and Anti-Semitism in Hungary of the First World War.’] (Budapest: Napvilág, 2008) 230., 234–238. About the impact of the war e.g.: Deák, István, *The Social and Psychological Consequences of the Disintegration of Austria-Hungary in 1918*. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1980) (Österreichische Osthefte. Sonderdruck. Jahrgang 22.)

<sup>11</sup> Prohászka, Ottokár: ‘Pro iuventute catholica’. *Alkotmány*, 16 May 1918. 1. See: Schütz, Antal, ed., *Prohászka Ottokár összegyűjtött munkái*. [‘Ottokár Prohászka’s Collected Works.’ Thereafter: OPCW.] XXII. (Budapest: Szent István Társulat, 1929) 184–186. Prohászka’s role and his articles in 1918: Hanebrink, Paul A., ‘Transnational Culture War. Christianity, Nation, and the Judeo-Bolshevik Myth in Hungary, 1890–1920’. *Journal of Modern History*, 80 (2008) Nr. 1. 55–80.

<sup>12</sup> Prohászka, Ottokár: ‘Pro re christiana’. *Alkotmány*, 30 June 1918. 1. (= OPCW. XXII. 186–188.); ‘Az általános választójogról’. [‘On the Universal Suffrage.’] (31 July 1918.) in OPCW. XIII. 309–317.

“occupying space.” His style became more forceful and his convictions about the necessity to discriminate against Jews became stronger. Prohászka mainly rejected the charge of anti-Semitism by acknowledging the positive traits of some Jewish personalities. At the same time, he made it clear that he was only protesting against the attribute “anti-Semitic,” and in fact, continued emphasizing the necessity of the collective discrimination of Jews and of mobilizing Christian Hungarian society against them. For the right-wing public, such simultaneous statements of his and the following proved to be much more attractive: “I do not want to sacrifice my Hungarian nation for another mighty race or its power overwhelming in aggressivity or intelligence.” Or: “We must take care not to turn a blind eye to national perils for fear of being charged with anti-Semitism.”

In the more and more heated debate in the press, former Minister of Justice Vilmos Vázsonyi rejected anti-Jewish hysteria in his article bearing the suggestive title *Elég volt!* [‘Enough of this!']. Under the combined effect of criticisms and encouragements, the bishop summarized his ideas concerning Jewish people in another article.<sup>13</sup> For the topic of this paper, it is particularly interesting because – as far as I know – this was the first time that Prohászka had publicly used the term Hungarism. The bishop rejected the idea that anti-Jewish sentiments would be actively stirred up but described them as the national reaction of the Hungarian nation, that is, he blamed Jewish people themselves for them. Prohászka concluded that the Jewish minority clearly represented a threat to the Hungarian nation. Therefore, his own program was nothing else but the reaction of a “conscious race” threatened by “extinction.” He thought that Hungary was irreversibly becoming a Jewish country, where the positions of the Christian middle classes would be occupied by Jews, and five percent of the population would “infest the body of the Hungarian nation, seize power,

---

<sup>13</sup> Prohászka, Ottokár, ‘Elég volt-e?’ [‘Was it Really Enough?'] *Alkotmány*, 11 Sept. 1918. 1–2. (= OPCW. XXII. 189–194.)



form an intellectual elite and take over the government.” Prohászka rejected that his ideas could be called anti-Semitism. He said: “Is it anti-Semitism if we want the Christian Hungarian nation to maintain its hegemony in Hungary? This is not anti-Semitism but Hungarism, this is not a chase but [...] this is national self-defense.”

As the basic ideas of his first concept of Hungarism, which the bishop later elaborated on in detail, the following may be underlined in his words: 1. Hungarism is essentially a notion created along the lines of anti-Semitism as the "Jewish problem" was its central, determining component from the very beginning. 2. Prohászka regarded the political activity denoted by the term a reaction to – as he put it – the organized anti-Hungarian endeavours of the Jewish minority to seize power. 3. He rejected being called an “anti-Semite.” 4. He tried to put Hungarism in a positive light by defining it as “the nation’s self-defense.” As regards Prohászka’s anti-Semitism, there have always been two opposing views about it: an assertive and an apologetic opinion.<sup>14</sup> However, when one judges the content of a political standpoint, self-definition is important, but not sufficient. In other words, there might have been other motivations behind Prohászka’s declaring several times that he was not anti-Semitic.<sup>15</sup> In my opinion, this declaration can only be accounted for by tactical considerations: he did not want

---

<sup>14</sup> Some of Prohászka’s followers among the Catholic intellectuals and conservative public personalities deny that the bishop was an anti-Semite. One of the detailed pamphlet from this circle: Barlay, Ö. Szabolcs, *Hítvédelem és hazaszeretet, avagy antiszemita volt-e Prohászka?* [‘Apologetics or Patriotism, or: was Prohászka an anti-Semite?’] (Székesfehérvár: Prohászka Kör, 2003) On the other side a lot of historians have no doubt about the fact that Prohászka’s anti-Jewish attitude was clearly anti-Semitism. (The dispute on the bishop’s relation about Jewish question is sometimes very vehement.) E.g. about the mentioned book: ‘Barlay’s pamphlet was written in defense of Prohászka, but I am of the opinion that it confirms to the reader that Prohászka’s thought is utterly untenably anti-Semitic.’ See: Gárdonyi, Máté, ‘The Function of Anti-Semitism in Ottokár Prohászka and Béla Bangha’s View of Society and the Church’. in Molnár, Judit, ed., *The Holocaust in Hungary. A European Perspective*. (Budapest: Balassi, 2005), 198–210., 202. Cf. Fischer, Rolf, ‘Anti-Semitism in Hungary, 1882–1932’. in Strauss, Herbert A., ed., *Hostages of Modernization. Studies on Modern Antisemitism, 1870-1933/39. Austria – Hungary – Poland – Russia*. (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1993) (Current Research on Antisemitism, 3/2.) 863–892., 884.; Peter, Pastor, ‘Review Article: Inventing Historical Myths – Deborah S. Cornelius. Hungary in World War II. Caught in the Cauldron’. *AHEA: E-journal of the American Hungarian Educators Association*, 5 (2012) Online: <http://ahea.net/e-journal/volume-5-2012> Last visited: Dec. 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Szálasi declared: ‘Hungarism is not Hitlerism, not Fascism, not Anti-Semitism – but: it is Hungarism.’ See about this detailed: Karsai, László, ‘The Jewish Policy of the Szálasi Regime’. *Yad Vashem Studies*, 40 (2012), No. 1, 119–156.

to give a negative name to his political program. The same is the case with the concept of “national self-defense.” It is clear that it did not involve taking a defensive but rather an assaulting position against the emancipation of Jewish people. This character of the concept of the “self-defense” of the Christian Hungarian nation was also revealed by the fact that he made no mention of any other minorities but solely designated Jewish people as the ones representing a threat to the nation. Furthermore, it is also significant that the general public clearly interpreted Prohászka’s words as an anti-Semitic program.<sup>16</sup>

**2.2.** Prohászka elaborated on the content of the slogan “Hungarism,” which quickly became popular, in an interview.<sup>17</sup> In the introduction, the editor of the paper explained that there were essentially two wars being waged: the nation did not only have to hold out in the front lines but also in the hinterland: the “Hungarian nation, which forms and maintains the country, should struggle against a destructive economic power,” and the Christian character of the country was endangered, as well. Prohászka embodied the person who called attention to this peril. As the journalist put it, the bishop did not only diagnose the danger for the nation but also offered a clearly understandable “work program” for the Hungarian nation that he summarized in the ideology of Hungarism, urging an active approach instead of passive defense. The impact of the article entitled *Elég volt-e?* [Was it really enough?] proved to be much more far-reaching than a simple ‘fuss in the press’ as the program of saving the Christian Hungarian nation was embodied in the new slogan of Hungarism. Prohászka first sensed the impact of Hungarism in that it encouraged the general public, “moving souls even

---

<sup>16</sup> According to the important Holocaust historian’s exact diagnostic about Prohászka’s ‘spiritual leadership and sophisticated anti-Semitism exerted a profound influence on public opinion for several decades’. Braham, Randolph L., *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary*. Vol. 2. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1981), 1028.

<sup>17</sup> ‘A hungarizmus programja. Beszélgetés Prohászka püspökkel’. [‘The Program of Hungarism. Conversation with Bishop Prohászka.’] *Alkotmány*, 24 Sept. 1918. 1. (János Anka’s report.) A short analysis in the literature: Galántai, József, *Hungary in the First World War*. (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1989) 298. Thereafter: Galántai, *Hungary*.

among Catholics,” especially the souls of those who had until then been afraid of the “fabricated charge of anti-Semitism.”

It is clear even from this that Prohászka’s Hungarism was only able to exert an influence on public opinion through its anti-Semitism. However, in the interview, Prohászka explained in great detail that although it was very important for him, it only meant the starting point as he planned to develop “Hungarism” further into a complex social program. At the same time, he also designated anti-Jewism as his basic idea. The bishop made it clear that the attacks in the press did not dishearten him but had a motivating effect on him. He saw the essence of the conditions in Hungarian society as the antagonistic struggle of two completely different races: Hungarians and Jews. He stated: “I am of the opinion that if a Jew does not assimilate, he will always remain the representative of a separate race with disintegrating effect.” He only saw the solution of the Jewish problem in complete assimilation. He acknowledged some unspecified “valuable traits” of the Jews but emphasized that these traits could only be realized “in harmony with the interests of the Christian Hungarian nation.” He only thought it possible to solve the problem by the conversion of Jews to Christianity and their integration into the Hungarian national community.

In the following section, it will become clear that he did not define Hungarism as a simple ideology but as a well-organized movement in which he put the emphasis on the organization of a real folk movement instead of parliamentarism. He stated: “By Hungarism, I mean the work to protect and organize Christian Hungarians. I do not have any parliamentary action in mind but urge cultural and economic action.” According to Prohászka, the social basis of Hungarism was clearly represented by the Christian Hungarian society of the villages in contrast to both the industrial proletariat organized by Social Democrats and immoral urban culture. He considered the problems of two social groups most acute: One of his concerns was to strengthen the middle classes and ensure their financial security. The other important

group was Christian Hungarian youths. He stated: “This is the ultimate issue. Hungarism should be started here.”

He defined three direct practical steps in the organization of the Hungarist movement, aimed at the defence of the nation: 1. “Solving the problem of racial health care service,” by which he meant the supply of the villages with doctors as well as moral education. 2. Nationwide popularization activities, which primarily covered awareness raising by the Social Museum,<sup>18</sup> and the social mission of the clergy. 3. Land reform, which Prohászka considered a key issue in post-war Hungary. To all this, he added: “Hungarism also has its roots in the soil.”

**2.3.** A good example of the reception and interpretation of the concept is represented by the leading article commenting on Győr county’s support for Prohászka:<sup>19</sup> “Hungarism, initiated by Prohászka, has captured people’s conscience with admirable quickness. Regaining consciousness from its daze among thousands of its wartime problems and worries, the Hungarian general public has become aware of itself, and may at last be able to force those who can still think in historical perspectives to make a united front in Prohászka’s Hungarism.” The journalist quickly added that Hungarism “did not intend to use any of the rusty weapons of romantic anti-Semitism” but at the same time urged the repression of the “Jewish spirit” and complete assimilation.

In October 1918, Prohászka became probably the most popular public personality on the political right. The bishop’s 60th birthday offered a good opportunity to highlight this. Béla Bangha’s (1880–1940) words are typical of the greetings: Prohászka “has been brought down from the clouds by the moaning of his oppressed, racked and misled nation [...] to lead

---

<sup>18</sup> Social (later: National Medical) Museum (‘Társadalmi / Népegészségügyi Múzeum’) was founded by the Ministry for Trade Affairs in 1901 in Budapest. The aim was propagating among the poor people the methods of healthy way of living, hygiene, preventing accidents, alcoholism, every day infections and similar social problems. The exhibitions included presentations, showings of films etc. (The museum was totally destroyed in World War II.)

<sup>19</sup> ‘A győri üdvözlés’. [‘Greetings from Győr’] *Alkotmány*, 26 Sept. 1918. 1–2.

Christian Hungarians. He is our leader. He proclaims life struggle in the name of Hungarism and Christianity, which our opponents would cunningly like to degrade to anti-Semitism.”<sup>20</sup>

**3.1.** As good as breaking away from his former public statements, from the end of October, Prohászka enthusiastically greeted the revolution (so-called: “Aster Revolution”) and the Hungarian republic of 1918, played a prominent role in it and was even concerned with finding a way out during the rule of the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919, which oppressed the churches. From this period, I have found no data of any public mention of his “Hungarism.”

The bishop, who was extremely active in politics from August 1919, again represented the anti-Jewish ideas he had formulated in 1918 with full outspokenness while laying the foundation of a “Christian national” ideology. What is more, Prohászka held the revolutions to be the Jews’ anti-Hungarian revolts. Although in one of his interviews, he did not use the term “Hungarism,” he said that the communist dictatorship had been the manifestation of the “striving for power of a particular race.”<sup>21</sup> He promoted the program of national self-defense against the Jews, which was exactly the same as the idea defined as Hungarism. The “Christian” right-wing had no doubts that this was the reformulation of the sharply discriminative, anti-Jewish content of Prohászka’s Hungarism, for example, in the following way: “In our memory, Prohászka’s memorable slogan, Hungarism is called up by the idea of saving the Hungarian race, which comes up every day [...] the duty that every nation has towards itself to eliminate any elements racially harmful for it.”<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> *Magyar Nő*, 12 Oct. 1918. [Special edition for Prohászka’s birthday.] 1. Cf.: ‘Hungarizmus’. [‘Hungarism’] *Élet*, 27 Oct. 1918. 1013.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Prohászka Ottokár a felebaráti szeretetről, nemzetvédelemről és a sajtóról’. [‘Ottokár Prohászka on the fraternal love, national defense and the press.’] *Új Nemzedék*, 12 Oct. 1919. 3.

<sup>22</sup> ‘A magyar faj megmentése’. [‘Saving the Hungarian race’.] *Nemzeti Újság*, 18 Oct. 1919. 2.

Prohászka wrote an interesting article for a Viennese weekly on the Jewish problem of Hungary as he saw it.<sup>23</sup> He regarded the Jewish problem as the "destiny" for Hungary. In his viewpoint, the reallocation of land could have contributed to the formation of a vigorous peasant middle class, which was indispensable for the predominance of a Christian-national ideology. In Prohászka's thinking, due to their interests, the Jewish community (the "Galician element," adversary to Hungarians) was totally against the economic rebuilding and strengthening of the peasantry. He drew a sharp, impenetrable dividing-line between Hungarians and Jews, which could only be eliminated by conversion to Christianity and a total denial of descent: "A Jew remains a Jew until he disowns the Jewish community as a religious and racial community. Anybody who considers facts will realize that there are no Hungarian Jews but there are only Jews living in Hungary who speak Hungarian." According to Prohászka, this race represented the greatest threat to the Hungarian nation and should be fought. In the bishop's visions, the whole issue became simplified to the level that the Jews wanted to take the country from the Hungarians by conspiracy, occupy it as their own and oppress the majority, to which the first step was getting their rights acknowledged and codified. He put forward his ideas in a polarized, agitative way: "In our country, Hungarians face a Jewish community speaking Hungarian but strictly preserving their special racial features and living in a closed, compact racial community. The following question should be asked: is this our country or theirs?" Prohászka also added that this approach, which was common in Hungary, could not be labelled anti-Semitism but only "Christianity and Hungarism."

---

<sup>23</sup> Prohászka, Ottokár: 'Die Judenfrage in Ungarn'. *Das Neue Reich*, 7 Dec. 1919, 150–152. See detailed: Fazekas, Csaba, 'Numerus clausus represents a strong national ideology: Bishop Ottokár Prohászka and the closed number law in Hungary' in Karady, Victor – Nagy, Peter Tibor, eds., *The numerus clausus in Hungary: Studies on the First Anti-Jewish Law and Academic Anti-Semitism in Modern Central Europe*. (Budapest: Central European University, 2012) (Research Reports on Central European History, 1) 165–175, 168. Thereafter: Fazekas, *Numerus clausus*.

In his speech held in January 1920,<sup>24</sup> Prohászka, who had been elected a member of parliament, again said that he was not anti-Semitic “as Christ’s servant cannot be anti-Semitic at all. But yes, I am a Hungarist who cultivates Christian culture, and if I am worthy of it, I am an apostle of Christian culture, too.” The distinction of Hungarism from anti-Jewism was a tactical move this time as well, as he firmly stated that “Jews are a race and Hungarians are a race, too.” Unusually for a Christian priest, he even declared that “God had not created peoples but nations.” This utterance, which was at least strange from a theological aspect, might only have been justified by his getting involved in politics as a nationalist.

Both in and outside parliament, Prohászka often spoke about the establishment of a “Christian national Hungary” and the repression of the Jews. However, he mentioned the term ‘Hungarism’ itself less and less often. Compared with the pre-revolutionary period, there was no change in the content and style of his many speeches and newspaper articles. The less frequent mentioning of ‘Hungarism’ must have been justified by the fact that he did not want to offer a party program with this slogan but found the role of the national prophet, who gives guidance, more appealing. Most probably, Prohászka found the content, that is, social agitation stemming from the Christian-Jewish conflict more important. The bishop, who had an increasing aversion towards party politics and the forms of parliamentarism, preferred associations capable of mobilising large crowds. He established particularly close connections with the Association of Awakening Hungarians, well-known for its radical anti-Semitism. For example, in one of their events, he spoke about the antagonistic struggle of two cultures just like at the time when he had declared the program of Hungarism earlier:<sup>25</sup> “We are anti-Semitic in the sense that we do not want to get killed so newcomers should know the limits how far it befits a guest who has found home with us to go.”

---

<sup>24</sup> Székesfehérvári Friss Újság, 13 Jan. 1920, 1.

<sup>25</sup> *Zalai Közlöny*, 12 Dec. 1920, 2.

But he continued acknowledging the term that he had made part of the public sphere as his own, together with its content. In a private letter written at Christmas 1920, he expressly interpreted Hungarism along the lines of anti-Semitism and stated clearly: “The slogan is: We want a strong and beautiful Hungary! – naturally, it cannot be Jewish, or the Jews cease to be Jews. This is not anti-Semitism but Hungarism, and this will perhaps be understood even in America.”<sup>26</sup>

**3.2.** In the public life of the 1920s, ‘Hungarism’ came up several times as the synonym of radical right-wing, anti-Semitic ideologies (the ideas of the “awakening,” the racists or fascists – the latter becoming popular due to Mussolini). In summer 1922, right-wing radicals often referred to the national self-defense of Christian Hungarians as Hungarism. For example, one of the leaders in the newspaper titled *A Nép* [‘The People’], the administration led by István Bethlen was criticized from a right-wing standpoint, and tougher measures were urged in the Jewish problem.<sup>27</sup> The text echoed Prohászka’s views: “This is not anti-Semitism but Hungarism: the historical way and life program of the Hungarian nation. [...] Hungarian nationalism should be accepted without any backdoor intents, any Semitic racial solidarity should be unconditionally given up, and it should be acknowledged that Hungary belongs to Christian Hungarians.” Menyhért Kiss declared that the self-organization of Christians against Jews is, in fact, the defense of the race, “which can justifiably and rightly be called Hungarism.”<sup>28</sup> Kiss urged the wide-scale–economic and social–application of *numerus clausus*, and expressed his hope that at last, Hungarism would be manifested in actions, too.

---

<sup>26</sup> Ottokár Prohászka’s letter to Rev. Francis Grosz, 25 Dec. 1920. See: Prohászka Ottokár, *Naplójegyzetek*. [‘Ottokár Prohászka’s Diary’.] eds., Frenyó, Zoltán – Szabó, Ferenc SJ. III. (1919–1927) (Szeged–Budapest: Agapé – Ottokár Püspök Alapítvány, 1997) [Pázmány Péter Electronic Library. Nr. 316. – www.ppek.hu – Last visited: Dec. 2014.]

<sup>27</sup> ‘A magyar nép történelmi útja’. [‘Historical Path of the Hungarian Nation’.] *A Nép*, 2 Aug. 1922, 1.

<sup>28</sup> *Nyírvidek*, 5 Aug. 1922. 1. Menyhért Kiss was a poet, journalist, an overactive representative of the ‘awakeners’, later the ‘race-defenders’. He was an idolater of Prohászka, and a follower of his spiritual teachings.



In his interview given at the end of August, Prohászka himself did not use the term 'Hungarism' but reformulated its content in an updated way.<sup>29</sup> He underlined support for the government but rather wanted to put pressure on it. He spoke about the complete separation of the Hungarian and Jewish races, consistently using the words "we" and "they," and rejecting any dialogue. He promised his support for the "Awakening Hungarians" and considered the example of Italian fascists worth following mainly because he was impressed by their national commitment and by the fact that instead of just speaking, they seemed to be ready to act. In October, he expressed these views in a more marked way.<sup>30</sup> He reformulated his original concept of Hungarism when he spoke about the "more ideally national character" of villages as compared with cities, the necessity of counteracting "judaicized trends" in literature and of active self-organisation. He openly referred to the example of Italian fascism: "We need not worry about the Hungarian national and Christian uprising even though there are so many intrigues. [...] Fascism must certainly be a social organization which puts individuals from different parties in a unified system, and which confronts this more marked nationalist direction in a concrete and practical form with the hostile attempts present everywhere." Prohászka looked forward to the flaring up of "the gust or even storm of national outcry" sooner or later, actively creating a Christian Hungary. The bishop's wording was exactly the same as in his former definition of 'Hungarism' with the difference that this time, he expressed the same, mainly anti-Jewish, socio-political content under the term "fascism." He stated: "Therefore everywhere where Jews make advances, fascism should make a front against them and nip any alien attempt in the bud." This time, Prohászka had no objections to being stamped an anti-Semite either. To the contrary, he urged its "correct" interpretation: "This is the correct way of anti-Semitism, and there is no more

---

<sup>29</sup> 'Prohászka Ottokár püspök az időszerű kérdésekről'. ['Ottokár Prohászka on actual questions.'] *Szózat*, 31 Aug. 1922, 1–2. Cf. Fazekas, *Numerus clausus*, 173–174.

<sup>30</sup> 'A keresztény koncentráció: keresztény népfelkelés Magyarországon'. ['The Christian Concentration: Christian People's Revolt in Hungary.'] *A Nép*, 15 Oct. 1922, 1–2.

fruitful and effective anti-Semitism than when people are confronted with the terrible economic oppression and pauperization of the Hungarian nation in its real dimensions and horror.”

Mussolini’s coming into power at the end of November 1922 gave an impetus to radical right-wing movements in Hungary as well as to their demand of finding their organizational framework and self-definition.<sup>31</sup> When the government first banned the organization of fascist parties by Awakening Hungarians, Nazis and other right-wing extremists, the paper *A Nép* made a poll involving some prominent personalities.<sup>32</sup> Károly Wolff first said that although he did not consider himself a fascist, he approved of the movement as long as “it remained on a universal national platform.” He stated: “Fascism is nothing else but nationalism and nationalism can neither be crushed nor regulated, [...] it has the future on its side.” István Friedrich considered it important to make clear that fascism was a movement which represented a “trend becoming ever stronger in souls” therefore it could also expect success in Hungary. For our topic, it is important that the editorial board of *A Nép*, which was very close to Prohászka, underlined that although Hungarian conditions were different from those in Italy, the ideology of fascism was spreading in Hungary too: “It is nothing else but the energy in Hungarian souls, an ineradicable desire for a nationally Hungarian and Christian Great Hungary of moral integrity.” Feeling that a striking name should be chosen for the movement, one that reflects on the Hungarian conditions in a special way but also carries the content of fascism, they proposed: “And as *A NÉP* wish to serve the Hungarian nation with all their feelings and thoughts, let us be the first to give a new name to this idea,

---

<sup>31</sup> *A Nép*, 28 Sept. 1922, 3. Tibor Eckhardt, later president of the Association of the Awakening Hungarians declared: ‘We can visualize circumstances when fascism is necessary. Fascism is a social movement which uses the social way for protecting the lawful order.’ According to István Friedrich ‘Hungarian fascism’ will realize the Christian-Nationalist idea. Menyhért Kiss – sharing Prohászka’s viewpoint on the spread of Anti-Semitism – said: ‘nobody makes Hungarian fascism, but it is made by the Hungarian people’, it is only a reaction to the Jewish ‘repression’ on Hungarians.

<sup>32</sup> ‘Nem fascista, hanem hungarista’. [‘Not Fascist but Hungarist.’] *A Nép*, 12 Nov. 1922, 1–2.

which expresses our objectives, endeavours and the direction of our struggle in itself. From now on, let the name of the uncompromising militant Hungarians be: Hungarist, instead of fascist!”<sup>33</sup>

At this time, this standpoint was supported by one of Prohászka’s significant speeches given in one of the rallies of the Association of Awakening Hungarians.<sup>34</sup> It is worth taking note of the line of thought with which the bishop again denied being anti-Semitic, at the same time leaving no doubt about it that the Christian and Hungarian action he urged against an “alien power” was targeted at Jewish people. He stated: “We are not anti-Semites but Hungarists. Shame on a nation that gives leadership over to aliens in its homeland and digs its own grave, declaring itself incapable of living. We want to love the Hungarian homeland, we want to work, and we want to put power, above all, in the hands of Hungarians.” He accepted that Jewish people might also become part of the new Hungarian state, “if Jews really want to work,” but considered it important that “in Hungary, power should not be held by aliens but by the Hungarian land, the Hungarian blood and Hungarian fraternity.” The Awakening Hungarians clearly interpreted this speech as a call for anti-Semitism and the declaration of Hungarism evoked the same reaction.<sup>35</sup>

**3.3.** It is not known how all this contributed to the fact that the extremist party established on December 17, 1922, which, however, later proved to be short-lived, officially chose the name “Hungarian Fascist (Hungarist) Camp.”<sup>36</sup> The originally planned name of the formation

---

<sup>33</sup> Presumably this phrasing is written by János Anka.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Fekete csillagzat a magyarság egén’. [‘Black Stars on the Sky of Hungarians.’] *A Nép*, 14 Nov. 1922, 3–4.

<sup>35</sup> E.g. the local ‘Christian’ press welcomed Prohászka’s speech with this subtitle: ‘The Jewry was hidden in their cavities. – We have to start the serious work of national salvation.’ – ‘Az Ébredő Magyarok népgyűlése’. [‘Assembly of the Awakening Hungarians.’] *Czeglédi Keresztény Hírlap*, 19 Nov. 1922, 1–3. Cf. in the national press: ‘Hungaristák vagyunk’. [‘We are Hungarists.’] *Nemzeti Újság*, 15 Nov. 1922. 3. About the relations between Prohászka and the ‘awakeners’: Herczl, *Christianity*, 42–43.

<sup>36</sup> In the interwar Hungary there were in all 29 parties which had in their official name the item ‘Fascist’ or ‘National Socialist’. One of them was the mentioned fascist party organized in December 1922. See: Ungváry, Krisztián, ‘Egy magyar intézmény. A „Zsidókérdéskutató Magyar Intézet” keletkezéséhez’. [‘A Hungarian Institution. The Origin of the »Jewish Question Research Institute«.’] in Standeisky, Éva – Rainer M., János, eds., *Évkönyv XI. – 2003. Magyarország a jelenkorban*. (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 2003), 147–163., 158. Cf.

did not include the word “Hungarist” in brackets.<sup>37</sup> It is evident that during the preparations, the founders thought that the character of the Hungarian version of fascism could be made more explicit with this attribute. The speakers of the inaugural meeting mostly gave anti-Jewish speeches. What was said about the necessity of organizing the Hungarian fascist movement basically echoed Prohászka’s concept of Hungarism and of the necessity of activity and mobilization. The name of the party was a recurring issue in several speeches. For example, Zoltán Hornyánszky (an ardent follower of Prohászka), who had become known for his radical anti-Semitic statements, said the following: “This camp needs men, Christians without any denominational distinction to unite the Christian Hungarian nation and resuscitate in sacred Christian Hungarism.” In addition, he defined the “strangling” of the unpatriotic press, “economic dictatorship” and union against “Semitic bancocracy,” etc. as the tasks of the near future. Menyhért Kiss stated: “I have come here to confess being a Hungarist.” Then, he also defined himself as a conscious fascist, which makes it evident that the two names meant the same for party founders.<sup>38</sup>

Surely, it was no coincidence that following the foundation of the fascist party, the Christmas issue of *A Nép* republished Prohászka’s 1918 articles, thus consciously associating the radical political movement with the bishop’s person.<sup>39</sup> It is worth highlighting the wording of the introduction written by the editor. The text pointed out that Prohászka’s Hungarism and “the whole system of racist politics” had been developed prior to the 1918

---

in English: Paine, Stanley G., *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945*. (Madison WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 267–271.

<sup>37</sup> *Budapesti Hírlap*, 16 Dec. 1922, 5. The program of the Hungarian fascist party in ten points was published: *Pesti Napló*, 8 Nov. 1922, 1.

<sup>38</sup> The most detailed report was published in *A Nép* about the formation of the ‘Hungarian Hungarist Camp’ in 19 Dec. 1922. We have used other newspapers: *Budapesti Hírlap*, *Pesti Hírlap*, *Népszava*, *Szózat*, *Új Nemzedék* and a secret diplomatic report: Garai, Ildikó, ‘A fasiszta hatalomra jutást megelőző és azt követő olasz külpolitika összehasonlítása’. [‘Comparison between the Italian diplomacy before and after the fascist rise to power.’] *Külügyi Szemle*, 2 (2003), No. 3, 153–183.

<sup>39</sup> ‘A fajvédelmi politika első hirdetői’. [‘The First Propagators of the Race-Defense Policy.’] *A Nép*, 24 Dec. 1922, 15–17. The collection contained Prohászka’s article and interview (see footnotes 13 and 17 above) furthermore an Anti-Semitic pamphlet from József Vass: ‘A nagy kérdés’. [‘The Big Question.’]

revolution. It filled the writer with pride that the foundations of what was held to be a popular right extremist ideology in 1922 had already been laid down in the articles of the paper *Alkotmány* 'Constitution' before the revolutions. He concluded about Hungarism that “what now shines in our sky as a conquering star was only a ray spreading light in only a few souls.” It was a bold association that he compared the *Alkotmány* of 1918 to the manger in Bethlehem, where the ideas resuscitating “the Hungarian people having sunk into the sins of soul-killing aliens” were born.

Hungarism, considered to be the Hungarian version of fascism, and its forefather were celebrated by the paper in its article entitled “Changes in the Jewish problem from 1918 to 1922.”<sup>40</sup> The writer pointed out that the idea of Hungarism had been put forward by Prohászka back in 1918, and it had always been in close connection with the “modifications of the Jewish problem,” stating “every line written by the great Hungarian thinker, the bishop Ottokár Prohászka, the forefather of Hungarism sends its light from the past to present day Hungary with the force of unquestionable truths.” In 1922, Lajos Méhely’s discussions<sup>41</sup> who was considered to be the forerunner of “racial biology,” were interpreted by the paper as completing Prohászka’s 1918 assumptions, and the journalist envisioned the triumphant advance of anti-Jewish Hungarism.

At the beginning of January 1923, the delegation of the Hungarian Fascist (Hungarist) Camp had negotiations with the governor, Miklós Horthy, who emphasized “the necessity of the unification of national forces.”<sup>42</sup> However, Prime Minister István Bethlen’s standpoint soon sealed the party’s fate: “This government has a Christian standpoint and this will remain so under any circumstances. Therefore, there is no need for fascism here, there is no need for

---

<sup>40</sup> *A Nép*, 6 Jan. 1923. 2.

<sup>41</sup> Gyurgyák, *Fajvédők*, 87–102.

<sup>42</sup> ‘A fasiszták vezetői a kormányzó előtt’. [‘Fascist Leaders at the Governor.’] *Pesti Napló*, 3 Jan. 1923, 3.

an alien institution which may work in other states but we should remain Hungarians.”<sup>43</sup> The Ministry of the Interior did not give permission to establish the party in this form, either, so it was re-founded under another name.<sup>44</sup>

In 1923, the name, Hungarist, was content-wise considered to be an exact equivalent of the terms “fascist, awakening, racist,” etc. They were used interchangeably, as synonyms.<sup>45</sup> Extreme right-wing personalities defined themselves and their movements with the variants of these terms.

The term did not fall into oblivion later, either. In October 1924, the anti-Semitic right extremists even organized a street demonstration in support of the bishop “attacked by the Jewish press” because of another speech of his.<sup>46</sup> In the course of this, the leader in *A Nép* celebrated Prohászka as “defender of the Hungarian race,” who “laid down the new Hungarian way of life in Hungarism.”<sup>47</sup>

**3.4.** Ottokár Prohászka did not use the term ‘Hungarism’ too frequently but did not consider its use improper at all. In January 1925, he gave a lecture titled *Hungarism and culture*, in which he again made an attempt to give a theoretically adequate definition of the term.<sup>48</sup> In the introduction of his speech, he said: “Hungarism! What is it? Hungarism is the past, present and future, the Hungarian fate. Hungarism is blood, race, history, joy and sorrow. [...] Hungarism is Hungarian life, Hungarian soul, Hungarian air, special Hungarian

---

<sup>43</sup> *Szózat*, 21 Nov. 1922, 1–2. Mussolini declared at this time that fascism contained Italian characteristics and it was impossible to export to another country.

<sup>44</sup> The searching of the title was commented in different ways (seriously or ironically) in the dailies, e.g. *Pesti Napló*, 2 Febr. 1923. 3.; *Népszava*, 2 Febr. 1923, 5–6.

<sup>45</sup> Zinner, Tibor, *Az ébredők fénykora, 1919–1923*. [‘The Golden Age of Awakeners.’] (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1989), 176–177.

<sup>46</sup> Detailed: Fazekas, Csaba, ‘Prohászka Ottokár a XVI. Országos Katolikus Nagygyűlésen, 1924. október’. [‘Ottokár Prohászka on the 16th National Catholic Assembly. October 1924.’] in Mózessy, Gergely, ed., *Prohászka-tanulmányok, 2009–2012*. (Székesfehérvár: Székesfehérvári Püspöki Levéltár, 2012), 153–174.

<sup>47</sup> K.Török, Miklós, ‘Prohászka Ottokár’ *A Nép*, 31 Oct. 1924, 5.

<sup>48</sup> For the sources and circumstances of Prohászka’s speech: Fazekas, Csaba, ‘Prohászka Ottokár és a *Magyar Jövő* székházavatása Miskolcon’. [‘Bishop Ottokár Prohászka and the Initiation Ceremony of the *Magyar Jövő* House in Miskolc.’] (1925) in Pusztai, Tamás, ed., *A Herman Ottó Múzeum évkönyve*, LII. (Miskolc: Herman Ottó Múzeum, 2013), 277–293.

character. Hungarism is God's idea in a Hungarian edition, Hungarism is Hungarian culture!" This means that he basically identified Hungarism with the affection for the nation. He thought that a hundred years earlier, Hungarian people had been characterized by uncorrupted national commitment, which, however, had unhealthily degraded by 1918. He contrasted the glorious nation concept of the past with the corrupted one of the present in sharp contours. He quickly went on to the essential cause of decay, the "Jewish press," destroying the soul of the nation by "injecting the venom of toads into it." Prohászka did not see the cohesive force of the nation in the common language but basically in spiritual factors. He was of the opinion that "destruction" had gained ground in the originally healthy spirit of the Hungarian nation, and did not stop devastating it in 1918 but was present in contemporary Hungarian society with the same force. He, in fact, set up an antagonistic contrast between nationalistic conduct and the destructivity of the "Jewish press" opposing it, which would have the characteristic feature to hate everything and everybody loyal to his/her nation. As a matter of fact, as positive European models of nationalism, he referred to Mussolini's Italian and Hitler's German regimes while for him, the positive Hungarian nationalist models were represented by racism and the Association of Awakening Hungarians.

He justified Hungarism by stating that secret anti-national "interest groups" had designs on the Hungarian nation and they were controlled by cosmopolitan Jews, stating "We must be aware of this. This is our destiny. We are forced to fight, and we will either cope with this or will perish." Prohászka called the position of the Hungarian nation miserable in this struggle, and equalled Hungarism with the demand of the forceful mobilization of the nation. He labelled loyalty to the nation a "divine idea" and based his concept of nation solely on Christianity. Thus, compared to his ideas in 1918, he did not change the basic conceptual construction of Hungarism: it remained a nationalism with a strong religious basis which fought for survival against Jews and any hostile ideologies he attributed to Jews, and he

linked this with the demand for the total mobilization of the nation, stating “I am Hungarian, and it is my duty to be Hungarian, to build up the Hungarian construction, to develop the nation’s latent strengths, to raise the Hungarian way of life to the level of [...] self-awareness: this is our duty! If this passion is stirred up in Hungarism, we can then speak about a nation and can hope for a more beautiful, safer and more befitting future.”

At the end of his speech, Prohászka only saw the possibility of saving the nation in relentless confrontation with the enemy: “You either remain loyal to Christ and then save the national idea, or turn your backs on Christ, and then you will be taken to hell in a downward spiral with all your idealism!” (This means that he identified devout Christianity with national commitment.) To this, Prohászka added the practical advice that true Hungarians should not read “Jewish papers.” The bishop often voiced his peculiar “infection theory” on other occasions, as well. He thought that through the mere reading of the papers of the Jewish press, an alien spirit would invade the organisms of Christian Hungarians like a virus, and would continue poisoning them unnoticed until it finally destroyed them. He called upon his audience that Christian Hungarians should avoid any contact with the Jewish press and other institutions of a Jewish character, and linked the advent of a “new Hungarian heaven” with mobilizing his audience: “We need struggle, resistance and great assertion against great negation. That’s what we must do! If we do this, Hungarism will not remain an empty term, then Hungarian culture will not be a cloud or January fog. We must be aware that we were born Hungarians so we should not be filled with cosmopolitan infection in order not to lose our proper orientation.”

In the last period of Prohászka’s life, the term “Hungarism” was still used to designate Christian radicalism. For example, a leader published on New Year’s Eve interpreted the



term created by Prohászka in the way that it was nothing else but nationalism “crystallized with all the historical demands of self-serving Hungarian interests.”<sup>49</sup>

4. To sum up, one can hardly challenge the standpoint present in both older and more recent historiographic works that no matter how different it was from Szálasi’s ideology, who monopolized the term, Hungarism was nothing else even in the 1920s but “an ideology popularising racism.”<sup>50</sup> Or: Hungarism is “the ultranationalist and fascistic program of the new Right designed as a ‘necessary defense for the Hungarian race.’”<sup>51</sup>

The starting point of Ottokár Prohászka’s Hungarism was defining Jewish people as a basically alien race to Hungarians, and defining the essence of the “Hungarian race” in Christianity. Hungarism was an anti-Jewish ideology, tactically defined as self-defensive but in reality, aggressively discriminative, which was also tinted with other features, for example, preferring the population of the villages to that of the cities, etc. It can be regarded as a self-serving, powerful version of nationalism, clearly regarding Jewish people as a rival nationality. Furthermore, for the bishop, the essential features of Hungarism also included the demand for forceful mobilization and the program of instructing, agitating and mobilizing Christian Hungarians as well as a kind of ambiguity: while on the level of declarations, he denied being anti-Semitic, in content, he demanded the social isolation and discrimination of Jewish people, and mobilized the extreme right public in this sense. All those who spoke about Hungarism during Prohászka’s lifetime were, at the same time, extreme right-wing, anti-Semitic public personalities and the bishop’s followers and devotees.

I think that in the 1920s, Prohászka’s concept of Hungarism was exactly equivalent to what his contemporaries called “racism.” the ideology of the “Awakening” movement or simply only Christian national radicalism. Although there was an attempt to use the term

---

<sup>49</sup> ‘A jövő útja: a hungarizmus’. [‘Way of the Future: the Hungarism.’] *Szegedi Új Nemzedék*, 1 Jan. 1926, 1.

<sup>50</sup> Galántai, *Hungary*, 298.

<sup>51</sup> Wasserman, Janek, *Black Vienna: The Radical Right in the Red City, 1918–1938*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2014), 41.

“Hungarist” as the independent name of a party, in the 1920s, the term “racist,” synonymous with it, proved to be much more suitable for this. This is shown by the fact that the latter was incorporated in the common name of the extreme right-wing opposition party led by Gyula Gömbös.<sup>52</sup>

5. What can we say in conclusion about the heritage of Prohászka’s original “Hungarism” concept? As we mentioned above, the title “Hungarism,” “Hungarist,” etc. and some elements of the original ideology was appropriated by extremist radicals of the 1930s and 1940s. But the typology of this ideological approach survived World War II and we can identify its pure and sematized structure. We can also recognize this structure in the ideology and practice during the strict communist (Stalinist) period, as well as in the thinking of the post-transition Hungarian nationalist right wing.

The most important element in Prohászka’s Hungarism is the strong separation between two segments of society: “good” and “bad” groups, and there are no other alternatives or transitions between them. According to this approach, there is no possibility for social integration or cooperation; the most important duty of “our” every member is to fight against “them.” In Prohászka’s speeches and articles, we can discern the two parts of the society:

"We"	—	"They"
Christian	—	Jewish
Native	—	Alien,immigrant
National	—	International
Honorable	—	Dishonorable
Spiritual nature	—	Material nature
Idealist	—	Materialist
Constructive	—	Deconstructive
Public activity	—	Secret activity

---

<sup>52</sup> The extremist right-wing opposition party between 1923–1928 lead by Gyula Gömbös according to their official words was ‘Hungarian National Independence Party’ (‘Magyar Nemzeti Függetlenségi Párt’). But the press and the public figures always called the organization as the ‘race-defender party’ (‘fajvédő párt’).

Of course, some elements were totally illogical, e.g. the Hungarians were characterized as a “native” nation – but it was very popular to be against all “aliens” who came into our land. Or “Christianity” in the Hungarian case was only a fiction in the religious – and not in the political – sense. (In addition to the Roman Catholic Church, the Calvinist and Lutheran Churches were very wide-spread in Hungary.)

While the content was very different, we can recognize the parallels, for example, in the communist ideology (in this case the “aliens” are the capitalists, the westerners, etc.) But we can also see many elements, for example, in the anti-gypsy activities by the extremist right in the 1990s, and in the anti-migrant attitudes in the 2010s.