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Nationalism as a Question for Theology – A Few Remarks on a Dividing Issue[2]

Abstract.

Nationalism remains to be one of the most compelling issues of communities. It raises questions not only for humanities but for theology as well. Thus, we approach it from the perspective of Reformed theology with the aim of trying to find such a point of reference by which Christian thinking is able to provide orientation in understanding this problem. The article first visits such basic definitions as state, nation, or people and attempts to define them. By providing inputs to this clarification from a theological point of view, the article investigates how the Christian doctrine of providence with its emphasis on the vertical dimension of human life can help us to avoid the absolutization of the notion of nation. One of the main points of the text is to differentiate between national existence and nationalism. Nationalism cannot be justified, such as decontextualized national existence since one of the main consequences would be a misunderstood concept of progress. A correctly articulated national existence always brings to the fore the concern for sovereignty. The article argues that a nation's sovereignty from the Christian point of view can be neither detached from the sovereignty of God nor expressed without taking it seriously. Since proper sovereignty is only to be practised not against but for something, it always points towards God's sovereignty.

Keywords: *national existence, nationalism, providence, sovereignty, responsibility.*

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Preliminary Observations

The question of nationalism is continually renewed.[3] This phenomenon, which originates from our personal experiences, now and then encompasses our public thoughts and ideas in order to shape the public. Because of its effect reaching all nations, theology must take it seriously, as something to be reckoned with. The responsibility of exposing itself (theology) to dilemmas such as this cannot be avoided. Already at the beginning of our discussion, we can make it clear that nationalism always has the character of overstrained political viewpoint with the aim of using it as a political plaything. This can be observed in the life of several countries over the last decades. It has its basis in what we might identify as an exalted form of valuing a certain nation since any sort of *-ism* has always been a divergence from the original intention of a certain thought. This provides ground for theology to reflect on such issues as nationalism. This we can also identify as an inner necessity of theology. There is a possibility to acknowledge an external necessity, which one cannot understand as a forced or directed representation of a specific opinion. It is more the need to answer questions being raised by the issue of nationalism as it is contextualized by specific external conditions. This becomes clearly visible in such instances, for example, when in the last decades, based on an hastened worry, which overstepped its own borders, the distortion of Hungarian national feelings shout out loud into the European public space has been considered by many to be the most flagrant. This external necessity basically originates in society. At the same time, we must admit that it also generates an inner necessity to be considered as a problem for Protestant theology, which has left various issues raised by Western Christian theological thinking unprocessed. This is especially true for Western Protestant thinking which initiated such discussions, even with respect to nationalism. This interest emerged as early as the beginning of the 1990s. In March 1994, a conference was held with the aim to provide theological orientation for the Protestant churches in Eastern Europe. In his introductory lecture, Michael Beintker, a leading German theologian, pointed out nationalism as one of the most urgent questions

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[3] LAJTAI, L. László (2015): Trendek és elméletek a nemzet-és nacionalizmuskutatásban: vázlatos kutatástörténeti áttekintés. In: *Pro Minoritate* 2015/3. 115–147; SMITH, Anthony D. (2010): *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History (Key Concepts).* 2nd edition (revised and updated; Kindle edition). Polity Press, Cambridge.

to deal with.[4] Thus, one can see that the question of nationalism cannot be underestimated, which this way compels Christian theology to take it seriously and consider it with responsibility. This is by no means an accident. After three decades of social and political shift in Central-Eastern Europe, we try to revisit this issue from the perspective of Protestant theology.

For our purposes, we need to employ definitions that are not inherently part of the system of theological reasoning, even if some of them can be discovered in the Bible. After giving a short introduction into the biblical understanding of these definitions, we go on to set forth how the refusal of politically overemphasized nationalism is possible. We will also point out how this is feasible by employing the notion and understanding of both nation and sovereignty, and the Protestant teaching of providence, so that the idea and understanding of nation would remain up-to-date for our age and generations throughout the upcoming decades, especially focusing on theology and public consequences.

Nation–Nationalism. Searching for Definitions

For theological consideration, in order to take a clear point of departure, one has to overview such definitions that are closely related to the problem of nationalism. In 1992, the Ecumenical Study Centre at Budapest published a synthesizing study presenting definitions for the notions of state, homeland/country, people, and nation.[5] According to this, we can make the following statements:

1.) *State* is "a community of a given territory with given people with government and sovereignty; its life and cooperation is ordered by established institutions. Its role is to secure peace and security outwardly, the respect of law inwardly, to enhance social and economic well-being, to cultivate cultural life".[6]

2.) *Homeland* is defined as "the geographical, spiritual, cultural environment and the related social connectedness".

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[4] BEINTKER, Michael (1994): Theologische Neuorientierung. Introductory lecture to the conference: *Die Aufgabe theologische Neuorientierung in den evangelischen Kirchen Mittel- und Osteuropas.* 4–7 March 1994, Berlin. In: *Ev. Th.* 55. 3–95, 211–217.

[5] *Ökumenikus Tanulmányi Füzetek* 1992/3. 9–16. Ökumenikus Tanulmányi Központ. Budapest.

[6] Translations of the in-text quotations belong to the author.

3.) *People* "is a more general term referring to a larger community, which is measured and connected by a common and continuous origin, history, destiny, economic and cultural-social life, especially by the use of common language, tradition, religion, and shared common values". At this point, since our consideration pertains to the theological approach, we need to have a brief summary of how the biblical narrative informs us in this respect. In the creation narrative, we read that the created human being is given a mandate to cultivate and preserve creation. This is not a specific order given to a specific people, but it is something in which all peoples participate. As a result of this, we are informed that human reality involves the potential of differences. The desire to rule over others and the desire to be god-like come to the surface (Gen 11:1ff). However, the shared responsibility cannot create any sort of case for division. On the contrary: this is the case to realize how interdependent we are in our creaturely reality. That is to say that in this context every single person has his or her place. As we turn to the Old Testament, this becomes apparent. Thus, this is the reason why we see those who belong together by blood (*am*), those who belong together by the shared cultural, lingual, religious values and means, and those who precisely because of certain pagan religious practices are considered to be one (*gój*). We also see that Israel is God's own people. In assigning this particular status, the decisive factor is the faith of Israel (Deut 7:7ff). In the New Testament, another definition lies at the heart of this understanding, although it reflects the same degree of importance. In the time of Jesus, several people converted to the Jewish religion, commonly known as proselytes. This is an integral part of proclaiming Jesus's message that geographical borders neither for Christ and later nor for the apostle Paul meant that the proclamation of the gospel would be restricted to a certain group of people. This would definitely be in contradiction with the mandate given in creation, especially being considered from the standpoint of creation theology. In the New Testament, the term demos refers to a political community of people living together on the territory of a city-state, while *ethné* alludes to people living in oneness on different territories. *Oikumené* means the entire inhabited world, thus referring to it as a common living space. Owing to the importance and role of faith, it results in such a vision of *missio Dei* which broadens the definition of God's people; so to say, it opens up for others to be part of it. In this way, it encompasses all those who take on the Christ-like life as a life programme, without aiming at the dissolution of those characters that are essential part of a certain people's identity (Gal 3:28; 1Cor 9:20ff) since the signs of our createdness remain even after being renewed in the image of Christ.

4.) For the clarification of the definition of *nation*,[7] we must first consider those factors that have influenced its formation. Several influences may be identified, according to which we can differentiate basically between two forms as far as their origin is concerned. One of them is what is usually called *political nation* (mostly reflecting the Western European phenomenon), and the other is the so-called *cultural nation* (mainly reflecting the Central-Eastern European form).[8] In our case, we observe a nation's life as a generic process. It was and still is conspicuous that political borders do not happen to coincide with cultural confines. Thus, when talking about nation, or commitment to a nation, we are to bear in mind these two aspects.

It is with these observations in focus that we start off with the consideration of our topic from the viewpoint of Protestant, i.e. Reformed theology. It is interesting to realize that even if Reformed theology has dealt with such issues as nationalism, it was very seldom discussed, at least not as frequently as one would suppose. In 1973, Mihály Bucsay makes a comment upon it in one of his lectures.[9] It was further emphasized by Jenő Sebestyén – a former professor at the Academy of Reformed Theology in Budapest – in his opening address at the inaugural convocation of the 1928/29 academic year. This speech was dedicated to the theological evaluation of the term *neo-nationalism*, being frequently used at that time by the Minister of Religion and Education. In his speech, Sebestyén pointed out that if neo-nationalism carries any positive meaning, it can be of great help in building up communities.[10] We must not forget that we are in the period shortly after WWI. It is evident that the extreme distortion of national thinking is not inherently familiar with our understanding, but in certain circumstances it can easily turn in that direction. It is obvious that what originally lies behind it is the

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[7] LAJTAI 2015, 115–147. 127ff.

[8] András Gergely makes an interesting statement about the nation when he argues that "Nation is a spiritualized form of country." See: A. Gergely, András (2002): A „végig nem beszélt" nemzetképletek. In: *Regio – Kisebbség, Politika, Társadalom* 13, 4. 23–32. 23. For further definitions of state and nation, see: GELLNER, Ernest (2009): Nations and Nationalism. Second edition. Ithaca–New York, Cornell University Press. 1–6.

[9] BUCSAY, Mihály (1973): A magyarországi református egyház és a nacionalizmus. In: *Theológiai Szemle* XVI. 261–268.

[10] SEBESTYÉN, Jenő (1929): *Neonacionalizmus és Kálvinizmus*. Különlenyomat a Dunamelléki Református Egyházkerület budapesti Theológiai Akadémiájának az 1928/29-es tanévről kiadott Értesítőjéből. Budapest.

privileged concern for thinking in terms of nation and homeland. Nationalism is the overemphasized form of this concern. Thinking of national esse/existence always indicates an inclusive process, rather than nationalism, which always tends to choose an exclusive approach. Thereby, it places the accent on exclusiveness, looking at positive national identity as something rather controversial and adversary.[11] This can serve as a proper basis for historical or communal damnification and experiences of personally identified sense, that is, the threat of lost independence.

If we accept it, it comes to the fore that creating a common national narrative is conditioned by and based on the sense of community (Gen 12). Therefore, to understand more layers at play in considering nationalism, we can turn to another definition, as Ferenc Szűcs suggests, namely to the notion of family, which allows a more detailed biblical understanding to prevail.[12]

As earlier mentioned pertaining to the spreading of the message of the gospel, people and nation do not overlap entirely. We obviously think that nation is a narrower category, which does not put us on the wrong track. But precisely because of the common language, geographical, economic, and cultural oneness determines a common framework, thereby broadening its own boundaries as opposed to what the meaning of people would cover. People is mostly alluding to an ethnic community, which, of course, inherently bears the characteristics of a common language. As a result, belonging to a specific community carries along unique talent and particular and original mission, but it does not support and foster isolated overelevated-consciousness.

We must refer to the fact that we Christians know each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, signalling our connection to another community, that is, to the church, the body of Christ. Being part of this community we are to participate in the mission of the church as being members of God's covenant, God's people. As a member either among the members of our nation or among others we have the shared responsibility to point out the necessity of an ongoing renovation of our connection with God. This is one of the most prevailing attributes of what we call the universality of the church.

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[11] See: GRENHOLM, C. H. (1994): Nationalismus (entry). In: *Theologische Realenzyklopädie (TRE)*. Bd. 24. Berlin–New York, De Gruyter. 21–22.

[12] See: SZŰCS, Ferenc (2005): Nacionalizmus a református teológia és az egyház megítélése szerint. In: *Confessio* 2005/3. 37–42.

In relation to this, we can also talk about national mission as we are members of our nation. Certainly, a history of a nation bears both the more elevating and the less glorious moments. We often apply for either renewal or preservation. We are aware of such cases in the history of our nations. Thus, we must realize that a nation is never settled, it is always under change.[13] Therefore, it cannot be considered as part of God's created order, which compels us to search for such a point of orientation from which there is a possibility and to have a clear view on nationalism. This point of orientation for us may very well be the doctrine of providence, which has lost its voice just when nationalism became even louder.

Nationalism and Nationhood
in the Perspective of the Doctrine of Providence

How can one relate to an idea that came to stay only in the 18th–19th centuries, and even the assessment of this definition is multifaceted?[14] We have a peculiar historical background. It was almost a common experience of Central-Eastern European countries that our theological reasoning was highly instrumentalized and could hardly find its own voice after the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc. Certainly, there are several reasons to this, which we will not reflect on at this point. It is enough to have in mind those questions which forced us with elemental power to search for responses and which

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[13] People is not an order of creation. See: GRENHOLM 1994, 27–28.

[14] ANDERSON, Benedikt (2006): *Elképzelt közösségek. Gondolatok a nacionalizmus eredetéről.* Budapest, L'Harmattan–Atelier; GELLNER, Ernest (1992): Nacionalizmus és politika Kelet-Európában (Transl. by György Mezei). In: *Világosság* 33, 5. 332–338; HALL, John A. (ed.) (1998): *The State of the Nation. Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press; KÁNTOR, Zoltán (ed.) 2004: *Nacionalizmuselméletek (Szöveggyűjtemény).* Rejtjel Politológiai Könyvek 21. Budapest, Rejtjel; NAGY, Levente (2001): A nacionalizmus természetrajza. In: *Kisebbségkutatás* 10, 1. 69–84. 70; BRETTER, Zoltán – DEÁK, Ágnes (eds.) (1995): *Eszmék a politikában: a nacionalizmus.* Pécs, Tanulmány; MICHNIK, Adam (1992): Egy fogalom határai (Transl. by A. Péter Lázár). In: *Világosság* 33, 5. 328–331. Magaš Branka argues that the origin of nationalism can be traced back to the disappearance of the Latin roots in our societies. See: MAGAŠ, Branka (1992): Vitám Ernest Gellnerrel (Transl. by A. Péter Lázár). In: *Világosság* 33, 5. 339–344. 340. For understanding the Hungarian context, see: GYURGYÁK, János (2007): *Ezzé lett magyar hazátok. A magyar nemzeteszme és nacionalizmus története.* Budapest, Osiris.

cried out for answers not only on the part of the church but on the part of the public as well. Among those, there is still a place for nationalism, which is reinforced by the scepticism of many towards such institutions as the EU. All of this finds the church – as far as our Protestant tradition is concerned – in a historical situation which shows that under the communist dictatorship it was only the church that remained compatible with European thinking.[15] It was supported by the self-understanding of the church as being universal, providing the possibility of common thinking. This proved to be crucial regarding the church's identity even if certain church officials were collaborating with the communist political movement. The fact that now we can trace back those lives that were involved in maintaining the communist regime would lead in the direction of taking a more detailed approach to nationalism. But this is not the case. If one looks at how the issue has been treated theologically, they will find it striking that, apart from a few different approaches, this question did not receive proper attention and due consideration. To mention but one fact, it did not turn to be a common topic in theology. It is even more interesting with respect to the idea of inner necessity of theology, which we visited earlier.

What we truly realize concerning nationalism is a very strong characteristic thereof: it is embedded into a deep-rooted hostility, so to say, a certain enemy-consciousness. It is by no accident that this sense of hostility can easily be accompanied by political overtone. However, this is not to be equated with political legitimacy. If this happens, nationalism becomes a political tool, which is not only true for a nation whose life reflects a certain traumatic event that could provide a basis for this understanding, but it may very well be true in the life of any nation. The need to dismiss the use of nationalism as a political plaything is a very urgent task.

At the same time, one cannot overlook the fact that the face of Europe is very vividly coloured as nations are in view. Many of us have numerous different interpretations, traditions, and heritages. But this pluralism of many-faced Europe gives also an opportunity for European thinking not to view the European community as a melting pot but rather as a place to preserve, to strengthen, and to enhance the unique characteristics of each nation as part of a constructive pluralism. Each nation, including the Hungarian one, has the responsibility, basic obligation, and necessity to maintain those features that appear to be identifying factors throughout generations. This can be viewed

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[15] GAÁL, Botond (1997): Religious Minorities in Central-Europe and Their Relation to the Nation-State. In: *Reformed World* 47, 79–82.

also, as one may say, a sort of national consciousness. If it were the case, it only could be as one that intensifies the value of cultural heritage. In this sense, cultural nationalism has to be stable.

The previously mentioned enemy-consciousness seems to be inherently part of certain societies today. However, this is not by any means a description of God–human relationship, even if the biblical narrative does speak about the wounded self-identity based on which humans turn to their fellow human beings and God with hatred (Gen 3:1ff). This is the broken condition of human reality that is rendered into being in community with others. In its point of intersection, there appears the distortion which is able to have effect on the life a community only by way of a moral change. This presents a shift in orientation: from the heavenly (vertical) to the earthly (horizontal). This is a clear shift in direction. As a result, the main interest is not in searching for God, that is, the consciousness that God approaches us individuals; so, we ask for God, but in realizing those measures that make human life as bearable as possible. When nationalism becomes pure political ideology, the above referred horizontal approach needs to be traced in all its characters.

Tracing its roots back to the 18th century, we see that both the French Revolution and German Romanticism, although based on different principles,[16] sought to bind these human needs together. By this, it becomes obvious how the idea of nationalism may receive support from notions. As the horizontal dimension was more and more widespread, and the heavenly orientation fell back, the potential in their digression is even further extinguished. The overestimation of the horizontal dimension with regard to nationalism highlights that it is not possible for humans to identify this. In this respect, difference makes the value, which does not reject but enhances the role of such pluralism that can be detected only under this condition. Nationalism is always able to be captivated by plurality while being elevated from personal to a communal level, fostering the communal sense of enemy-consciousness. When this happens, we experience communal egoism, which rejects the possibility of constructive pluralism. However, the secret of the Christ-like community for the church, people, and nation lies precisely in this.[17]

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[16] ANDERSON 2006, 24.

[17] The relationship of religion, or religious interpretation of reality and nationalism is an important fact in our assessment. According to Isaiah Berlin, nationalism was not possible for centuries because of the universal church and the common use of Latin language. This, however, must be treated with care. On this basis, one cannot refer to the programme of modernity as something

The idea of nationalism and its emphasis in European thinking dates back to the 18th century.[18] Thus, it is not a coincidence what we observe in theological thinking in the age of Enlightenment. This era is the time when such classic theological topics as the doctrine of providence lose their weight. Human reasoning at this time is not only sceptical but refers to possibilities that lie behind human capacity as unnecessary. The Christian teaching of *providentia Dei* has influenced for decades the establishment and organization of communities, but from this point on it seems human beings were successful in chasing away this thought for hundreds of years. The lack of belief in providence, pushing the role of individual without any control being applied upon provided good soil for forming an adversary. This makes one believe that everyone must take care of everything by themselves. We have to be careful! It would be a misconception to think that humans cannot be means in the hands of God. But it can never be under the disguise of nationalism. A strong national position can express it more vividly because in this sense it is true that every single nation has a mission.

The Christian teaching of providence has involved a critical tone. To this, nationalism could be simply related since part of its essence is to depict a certain negative picture. However, the sharp difference between these two appears when we ask: what is their orientation? The classic understanding views God's providential work as supporting an inwardly oriented critical attitude, after which it turns to be outwardly accepted. The idea of nationalism is entirely lacking this inward critical voice, which makes one fully capable of shifting attention away from what stays behind certain ideas. Instead of this negative understanding, we need to have a form of national identity which articulates its critical voice from its own message. This may be interpreted as a means of a positive view, which does not equal any positivist approach to human reality. This positive value

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that inherently carried along the potential for nationalism. See: BERLIN, Isaiah (1992): Isaiah Berlin a nacionalizmus két fogalmáról: Nathan Gardels interjúja (Transl. by A. Péter Lázár). In: *Világosság* 33, 5. 344–347. See also: LAJTAI, L. László (2005): Nemzet – történelem – szakralitás: a modernitás apoteózisa, avagy a nem nacionalista nacionalizmuselméletek buktatói. In: *2000* 17, September. 10–17.

[18] Nationalism can take different forms. It can be cultural nationalism, political nationalism. See: DIECKHOFF, Alain (2002): Egy megrögzöttség túlhaladása – a kulturális és politikai nacionalizmus fogalmainak újraértelmezése (Transl. by Rita Kéri). In: *Regio – Kisebbség, Politika, Társadalom*. 13, 4. 7–22; GAZSÓ, Dániel (2015): Volt egyszer egy Trianon. In: *Valóság* 58, 8. 70–88.

judgement only refers to a critical function that is practised based on a nation's own values. It seems to be one of our crucial problems today. A nation that has lost its moral value system could not provide a solid basis for it. It is because of this that God's renewing act, the biblical picture of new creation, is even more crucial. Today's need for national renovation can only be possible if it is placed on spiritual, moral, e.g. ethical renovation. This renovation can set forth those specific characteristics that are attributed to a nation. This is not a new invention. Christian tradition has been its essence in this process since it refers to a vertical procedure. It is with respect to this vertical dimension of human life that the horizontal, the human–human relationship can find its proper place and context again. This is the beginning of the formation of a community that assesses its reality with the mercy of God, its renovation by the grace of God, and renders its future as a mission received in this perspective. Thus, national existence and nationalism are not the same. As opposed to nationalism, national existence always wants to give, it promotes a liveable and vital, life-giving community. National existence is not a mass without control but the community of strong identity and an endeavour for creative thinking. This is the responsibility of Christian existence of all ages, which can prevent us from rendering the notion of nation to be something that is above our worldly reality.

We must see it clearly that the stigma of nationalism is very easy to be applied to a nation, especially when one meets a rather strong expression of national existence. In this respect, nationalism signals a break-even point, which compels us to pursue a precise investigation and careful circumscription in time and space in order to avoid a simplified use of the term nationalism both in our public life and the common understanding. Theological understanding and reasoning must avoid this simplified approach as well. It is because nationalism, just as our national existence, cannot be detached from that certain condition in which it appears. Nationalism becomes the most uninterpretable when it is decontextualized.[19]

As the importance of the Christian teaching of providence has faded away, the notion of progress came to the fore, according to which the human mind and knowledge have the capability to make progress towards a more elaborated and devel-

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[19] SZŰCS, Ferenc (2005): Nacionalizmus a református teológia és az egyház megítélése szerint. In: *Confessio* 2005/3. 41. DEMETER, Attila (2009): Adalékok a nemzeteszme és a nacionalizmus értelmezéséhez. In: *Limes – Tudományos Szemle* 22, 4. 35–42. 42.

oped advancement of human life and condition. This has been properly backed up by scientific discoveries. Nevertheless, today we see it as one of the most frustrating concerns of human life. The issues of sustainability, social changes, or structural reforms are indeed very difficult questions, especially in such institutions as the European Union. The level of social, economic, and developmental status of different countries is diverse, which has been, of course, deepened by historical events. Parallel to this, the conquest of nationalism is evolving just as rapidly, taking advantage of this diversity. In this context, it is the notion of progress that is ultimately valued more, to which nationalism can adjust itself easily because it happens to present itself as something which is value-oriented. But, unfortunately, it only seems to be like this! The purpose behind it is not real advocacy of true interests. This is the reason why we have to repudiate nationalism of any era since it produces almost unbreakable barriers between human and human, community and community.

The developmental differences between nations represent a crisis. If we do not take it seriously enough, we will delude ourselves. This is the responsibility of the church and Christian thinking alike. Although the national existence does not equal progression, it certainly contains the necessary elements of progress with regard to human conditions. To put it differently: the horizontal dimension of evening the uneven in a certain society is closely connected to national consciousness that is eager to enhance its nation's prosperity. The message of national existence based on this is that pluralism has value, and the purpose is not increasing uncertainty, which is often real in the case of nationalism.[20] This is why Christian thinking must take a serious stand, with a strong national existence and identity. At the same time, it has to articulate its critical voice when this thought under the disguise of nationalism wants to take over the Christian individual or the church since nationalism is not a substitute for religion. National existence can only mean commitment and engagement. Nationalism is more than a "vacuum existence" in which the existence of a nation would become secondary. This is why we must rediscover the importance of the vertical dimension of providence.

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[20] National existence is not the same as nationalism. See: KOVÁCS, Gábor (2002): Nemzet, önrendelkezés, nacionalizmus Bibó István gondolatvilágában. In: *Regio – Kisebbség, Politika, Társadalom* 13, 3. 93–115.

National Existence and Sovereignty

Finally, we need to consider the connection between national existence and sovereignty.[21] Examining the theory of sovereignty we experience that there is no universally agreed definition of its meaning. The theory of sovereignty starts to take wing in the public discourse of the 15th century. Jean Bodin made a serious step towards its definition – at least what concerns the content –, "in which the individual element (ruler) and the objective element (the separated power) is one, and the law does not appear as an objective, depersonalized norm, but it is a means of the sovereign to practise its power".[22] Just as Adam Smith, Jean Bodin is still reckoning on God's sovereign action in the reality of the world. This definition of Jean Bodin is a clear instance that carries a vertical definiteness, which we observed in discussing the topos of providence on the one hand and is reflected in the sovereignty of God on the other. This can prevent this system of correspondence from overestimating the role of human being and refers to the need of regulated human conditions being reflected in the Christian understanding of the Law.

The dismissal of this criterion is also the fruit of Enlightenment. The upsurge of the individuum cancels this need. Thereby, the idea of sovereignty is placed in the field of sheer/pure law. As a result of this, a necessary dimension of sovereignty is dismissed, which is crucial for the theological interpretation of the sovereign. Thus, the goal is not to demarcate the boundaries of the sovereign but the conceptual definition of sovereignty. This is in our view a negative process of a conceptual definition. From this point, sovereignty is not a point of orientation but an "orientation mechanism".[23] The crucial question is not *who* decides but *how* it is decided.[24]

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[21] Here we do not intend to show how the idea of sovereignty, popular sovereignty has developed from the Christian theory of God's sovereignty. But we realize that the theory of sovereignty from the point of view of Christian theology becomes problematic when it is detached from the idea of God's sovereignty. We will only provide another aspect to this concept bearing in mind the Christian understanding of sovereignty.

[22] TECHET, Péter (2008): Kontinuus vagy diszkontinuus szuverenitástörténet. Carl Schmitt és Jacques Maritain szuverenitáskoncepciójának összehasonlítása. In: *Valóság* LI, 12. 32–38.

[23] HERMS, Eilert (2004): *Souveränität* (entry). In: RGG⁴ Band 7 R–S, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck. 1462.

[24] Op. cit. 1462.

Thus, sovereignty understood in relation to national existence and nationalism marks a breaking-point since the *how* of a decision is suitable for strengthening nationalism.

If we look at the biblical narrative, especially Gen 3:1ff, we can see this is what has been broken as the individual stands in front of God being turned off of God. It is the picture of a human being who strives to be independent of the sovereign God. It reflects, however, that it is God's sovereignty that determines the God–human relationship, in which the main point is the quest for who is in the position to decide about the future of human beings. The individual wants to take over this decision by applying to himself/herself this *how* and by placing not only the present but also the future into his/her own potential. This is why the restoration of God's sovereignty with all its consequences in the Reformation theology of the 16th century occupied a central role. The theological emphasis on sovereignty can never be depersonalized. Sovereignty as a relational term bears great impact on the human condition when it is expressed in community with others. This is not something that is placed outside the human reality. It concerns the *totus homo*. As Jenő Sebestyén affirms: "The acceptance of the theory of total sovereignty creates the correct relationship between God and human, and from this follows proper <u>service</u>."[25]

It is here that we have reached the meeting-point of the theory of sovereignty and Reformed theology because both consider its content to be subjective. The difference lies in the perspective. While the jurisdictional terminology and definition grasps its essence from an external point of view, for Christian understanding this is entirely an inwardly oriented position. On this basis, it is true that it is only a state that can have sovereignty. But at the same time it does not extinguish the right of communities to be state-constitutive in order to have the status of autonomy. What proceed from this are as follows:

1.) The question of sovereignty is the tension between self-limitation and limitation imposed upon by others. Sovereignty always anticipates self-limitation, which in this context has a positive connotation as opposed to an outwardly implemented sovereignty. Self-limitation does not necessarily mean the lack of sovereignty.

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[25] SEBESTYÉN, Jenő (1993): *Református etika*. Budapest–Gödöllő, Iránytű. (Underlining in the original).

2.) If our argument is correct, we are to ask: can this idea of sovereignty be supplementary to a larger context? For a reality of a given political community is not an option but a necessity. Sovereignty understood this way can expand and at the same time complete a given political community. A system of co-operation on a national level is not an enemy of political realities but a supplementary (complementary) factor that can strengthen the specific political community to which it relates. In this context, we can better understand the problems of different societies. The sovereignty of a nation cannot be renounced, but it has to be broadened in order to be understood and practised in complementarity.

3.) Sovereignty cannot be practised *against* something but only *pro* something, expressing this way its historical, linguistic, cultural, political, and religious identity.

4.) Sovereignty for Christian thinking is the expression of God's omnipotence. The ultimate meaning and content of sovereignty is God's power by which God governs human life and the world. God is in the centre – everything starts from and returns to God. Sovereignty in this respect requires acceptance. The life of the entire world is under God's forming hand. This must be articulated consequently in the political, economic, social, and cultural life.

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