

“Night Thoughts” and “Meditations among the Tombs”: The influence of English moralists on József Péczeli’s sermons and literary activities

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ABSTRACT

József Péczeli (1750–1792), a Calvinist minister educated at some of the outstanding German, Swiss and Dutch centres of knowledge, is mostly known for his editorial and publishing activities, including his translations of Voltaire’s dramas and epic works. However, this paper is meant to analyze the issues of calling and absolution as presented in “Moral Semons” edited and published by the “erudite minister of Révkomárom”. It argues that Péczeli’s sermons tend to show the influence of eighteenth century English theologians, thereby disseminating the ideas of modern practical theology, as well as interpreting and adapting them to the needs of young ministers serving in the communities of the various layers of contemporary Hungarian society.

KEYWORDS

Enlightenment, József Péczeli, Lőrinc Orczy, Alexander Pope, Voltaire, John Tillotson, John Evans, William Beveridge, Philip Doddridge, Ferenc Kazinczy

One can always wonder as to what extent an individual might be capable of distancing himself from the fashionable trends of his age and, by doing so present his uniqueness in the world of men of letters without being isolated. At the same time, aspiring writers, poets, and editors who

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happen to be individuals with strong religious convictions might not seem appealing to the majority of the contemporary public outside their own flocks. Nevertheless, the editorial and literary activities of a Reformed minister, József Péczeli (1750–1792), in conjunction with his dedicated services to the Reformed Church in late eighteenth-century Hungary earned him the respect of non-Protestants as well. In the first place, Miklós Révai (1749–1807), a linguist, university professor and a member of the Piarist Order acknowledged Péczeli's efforts aimed at launching a Hungarian weekly called *Mindenes Gyűjtemény* [Miscellaneous Collection] which was meant to entertain and to disseminate useful knowledge for women and children.¹

Péczeli was revered by his contemporaries notwithstanding the fact that his poems and prose works failed to become an integral part of the literary canon of the forthcoming decades. Yet, he was instrumental in transmitting the ideas of the Enlightenment through his translations, most of all by translating and publishing Voltaire's *La Henriade*. It should also be noted that he carried on a correspondence with a great number of aristocrats and noble poets of his age, including Baron Lőrinc Orczy (1718–1789), a soldier, whose poetry was greatly influenced by Alexander Pope.² Shortly after Péczeli's death his widow published the catalogue of her late husband's library whose unique contents certainly explain why his learned contemporaries held him in high esteem.³

For this reason, this paper is intended to explore the intellectual sources of the literary activities of the "erudite minister of Rév-Komárom" with special regard to a selection of his sermons, thereby hopefully revealing some new aspects to Péczeli's lifework, whose formative years were influenced by the reign of Queen Maria Theresa (1740–1780). It should be noted that it was not until the period after the Seven Years' War that the Queen abandoned her resolute policy of reconverting her Protestant subjects as a result of which tens of thousands of people left the Austrian hereditary lands and whole parishes were deprived of their properties, and occasionally forcefully converted to the Roman Catholic faith in Hungary. English diplomats themselves serving in Vienna reported the excessive measures to London throughout the 1750s and 1760s.⁴ However, the status of the Protestant churches substantially changed during the reign of her successor, Joseph II (1780–1790), who shortly after his accession to the throne issued a Patent of Tolerance granting a limited freedom of worship, and also went on to open career opportunities for Protestants. Some twentieth-century historians, most notably Elemér

¹György Kókay, "A komáromi Mindenes Gyűjtemény (1789–1792)," in *A magyar sajtó története, 1705-1848*, vol. 1, ed. György Kókay (Budapest, Akadémiai, 1971), 220–223.; Olga Penke, "A Mindenes Gyűjtemény egyik forrása: az *Esprit des Journalistes des Trévoux*," *Magyar Könyvszemle* 104/1–4 (1988): 248–273.

²Elemér Császár, "Magyar írók levelezése Károlyi Antal gróffal," *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 21/1 (1911): 111–113.; Sándor Fest, "Pope és a magyar költők," in *Skóciai Szent Margittól A walesi bárdokig. Magyar-angol történeti és irodalmi kapcsolatok*, ed. Czigány Lóránt and János Korompay H. (Budapest: Universitas, 2000), 276–277.; *Magyar leveleskönyv*, vol. 1, ed. József Balogh and László Tóth (Budapest: Corvina, 2001), 490–491.

³József Péczeli, *Catalogus librorum venalium quos relicta nuper beate defuncti Cl. Viri Josephi Péczeli, Pastoris quondam Ecclesiae Rév-Komáromiensis vidua Catharina Varjas* (Posonii: Peter Weber, 1793); Ferenc Bíró, "Péczeli József," *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 69/5 (1965) 557–584.; Olga Penke, "A gondolatok terjedésének nyílt és rejtett útjai: Bayle, Beccaria, Pascal és Voltaire Péczeli József könyvtárában," *Magyar Könyvszemle* 130/3 (2014) 336–352.

⁴The National Archives (Public Record Office) SP 80/121; SP 80/122; SP 80/159; SP 80/186; Lambeth Palace Library MSS 1122/1 ff. 128–129, 130–130v, 172. See also: György Kurucz, *Guide to Documents and Manuscripts in Great Britain Relating to the Kingdom of Hungary from the Earliest Times to 1800* (London: Mansell, 1992), 52–54.



Mályusz (1898–1989), imply that the Protestant churches of Hungary were on the verge of disappearance had Joseph not changed the stance of state policy *vis-a-vis* the Protestants.⁵

No doubt, the Josephine era made it possible for the previously oppressed Protestant communities in Hungary to revive their parishes, including their large scale efforts to build worthy places of worship as was the case of the Reformed Parish of Révkomárom [presently Komárno, Slovakia] under Péczeli's guidance.⁶ With a view to this we would like to argue in this paper that Péczeli was not only an able organiser, moreover, a translator and promoter of some of the classics of the French Enlightenment, but his editorial and publishing activities did try to adapt and rely on the works of English moralists and Protestant divines during his lifelong service to the Reformed communities in Hungary.

Péczeli was born to the family of a Reformed minister, Imre Péczeli, in 1750. His father's ancestors belonged to the lesser nobility, but their wealth dwindled in the course of the first half of the eighteenth century, so he moved from Hungary's central region of Pest County to Putnok, Borsod County, Northeast Hungary. On his father's death in 1756 his mother, Sára Konok, settled in a neighbouring market town, Szikszó, where he attended the local school. At the age of seventeen he began his studies at the Reformed College of Debrecen, Eastern Hungary, and excelled in languages, laying the foundations for his profound knowledge of Greek, Hebrew, French, German, Latin, English and even Arabic.⁷

After lecturing at the Reformed College for some time and having a short stint at the parish schools supervised by the same institute, Péczeli was promoted as Head Boy in 1777. Soon after that he commenced his studies abroad with the financial aid of his mother and the College. He enrolled with the University of Leipzig, then he went on to study in Halle, but he moved to Bern a couple of months later, and finally ended up in Geneva where he stayed until 1781.⁸ It should be noted that during his sojourn in Switzerland Péczeli subscribed to several theological treatises for his fellow Hungarian students as well who did not have the opportunity to study abroad. According to an entry in the visitors's book of Basel University, he visited the city in 1782, and this period coincided with his subscription to *Opuscula theologica, philosophica et philologica* by

⁵For a comprehensive overview of contemporary political, social, intellectual and religious life of the Kingdom of Hungary integrated into the Habsburg Empire see: Éva H. Balázs, *Hungary and the Habsburgs 1765-1800. An Experiment of Enlightened Absolutism*, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1997), especially 3–11, 21–42, 196–212.; Elemér Mályusz, *Magyarország története a felvilágosodás korában* (Budapest: Osiris, 2002). For a comprehensive analysis of Joseph II's reign see: Derek Beales, *Joseph II, Against the World, 1780-1790*, vol. 2, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009). For Joseph II's religious policy see: Elemér Mályusz, *A türelmi rendelet. II. József és a magyar protestantizmus* (Budapest: Magyar Protestáns Irodalmi Társaság, 1939).

⁶Pál Gulyás, *Id. Péczeli József élete és jellemzése* (Budapest: Királyi Magyar Tudomány Egyetem, 1902).

⁷*Ibid.*, 6–7.; Bíró, "Péczeli József," *op. cit.* 405–410.

⁸Gulyás, *Id. Péczeli József élete* *op. cit.* 7.; Nicholas Hans, "Educational relations of Geneva and England in the eighteenth century," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 15/3 (1967) 263–265.



Samuel Werenfels (1657–1740) both for himself and his fellow student and minister, János Kazinczy (1753–1825), whose list of his own valuable collection of books also survived the past two hundred years.⁹ On the basis of the dates of publication we can assume that Péczeli was at the same time instrumental in procuring some of the most notable theological works of Swiss, German, and even English divines such as Archbishop John Tillotson (1630–1694), the Presbyterian John Evans (1680–1730), William Beveridge (1637–1708), or William Derham (1657–1735), as well as passing them on to other ministers in his homeland.¹⁰

Péczeli had for some time been planning to carry on with his theological and linguistic studies in one of the Dutch universities traditionally frequented by Hungarian students of theology, so despite delaying his journey at the instigation of his former professor, János Varjas (1721–1786) of Debrecen, to take up the position of a family tutor in the house of Horace-Bénédict de Saussure (1740–1799), he proceeded to the University of Utrecht.¹¹ He impressed his contemporaries with his linguistic skills at the open debates held in the classical languages as well as in Hebrew or Arabic, but he declined the prestigious offer of professorship made by the University of Utrecht and returned to Hungary. The Reformed Parish of Révkomárom, a thriving market town on the right bank of the River Danube between Vienna and Buda, the capital city of Hungary, elected him as a new minister of the local community on 30 April 1783 in the wake of the Protestant revival brought about by Joseph II's tolerant religious policy.¹² Péczeli was received by the Reformed Parish of Révkomárom on 30 September 1783 and he immediately undertook the task of building a church of solid material. He managed to mobilize and motivate the members of his new parish as a result of which the building was completed within five years. His education and personality destined him for higher ecclesiastical positions, but after being elected Chief Notary of the Transdanubian Church District, he declined the post.¹³ No doubt, this decision enabled him to dedicate his time and energies to his literary activities despite being fully occupied with the duties of his new parish.

Ferenc Kazinczy (1759–1831), a contemporary writer, poet and critique noted in his autobiography that the Josephine era brought about a literary revival in Hungary and Péczeli made a substantial contribution to the rise of national literature by translating and publishing a series of plays by Voltaire, but most of all his epic poem, *La Henriade*, which was certainly deemed as a poetic manifestation of the apotheosis of a tolerant monarch.¹⁴ He also noted that the minister of Révkomárom was extremely prolific, though somewhat superficial, considering the quantity of works he translated and saw to publication.¹⁵ Nevertheless, he acknowledged that it was he who introduced the melancholic poetry of an Anglican vicar, Edward Young (1683–1765), and

⁹Ádám Hegyi, "Magyarországi diákok könyvgyűjtési és könyvtárhazsnálai szokásai Bázelen és Bernben a 18. században," *Magyar Könyvszemle* 124/4 (2008) 388.; György Kurucz, "Könyv és presztízs. Kazinczy János szóládi prédikátor könyvtára," *Korall* 12/43 (2011) 159.

¹⁰Kurucz, "Könyv és presztízs" op. cit. 157–158.

¹¹Gulyás, *Id. Péczeli József élete* op. cit. 7.; *Magyarországi diákok holland egyetemeken, 1595–1918*, ed. Réka Bozzay and Sándor Ladányi (Budapest: Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Levéltára, 2007), 163.

¹²The letter of invitation is quoted by Imre Vörös, *Péczeli József (1750-1792)* (Budapest: Universitas, 2017), 10.

¹³Gulyás, *Id. Péczeli József élete* op. cit. 8.; Vörös, *Péczeli József (1750-1792)* op. cit. 47.

¹⁴For a comprehensive analysis of the original text and the various translations see the introduction to Péczeli's translation by Imre Vörös. *Péczeli József: Henriás (1792)*, ed. Imre Vörös (Budapest, Balassi, 1996).

¹⁵Ferenc Kazinczy, "Pályám emlékezete," in *Kazinczy Ferenc műveiből*, ed. János Váczy (Budapest: Franklin, 1903), 260.



the contemplations of another vicar, James Hervey (1713–1758), to the wider Hungarian public.¹⁶ Apparently, Péczeli's choice of foreign authors was influenced by Western fashionable tastes and actually followed the literary trends of other countries, mainly those of France and some of the German speaking states, because certain Hungarian aristocrats had already familiarized themselves with the poetry of Alexander Pope (1688–1744) and Edward Young. The library of Count Pál Festetics (1722–1822), a Hungarian councilor to Queen Maria Theresa, for example, contained various French translations of Pope's *Essay on Man* in the 1760s whereas his son, Count György Festetics (1755–1819), read Pope's and Young's poems in the original English language during his formative years in the 1770s at the *Theresianum* of Vienna, an elite training college founded by the Queen in 1746.¹⁷

However, we would be wrong to assume that Péczeli's literary choice was welcomed unequivocally by his contemporaries. No sooner had he published and sent the copies of his translation of *The Complaint: or Night Thoughts on Life, Death and Immortality* by Edward Young to a group of learned Hungarian aristocrats, than Baron Lőrinc Orczy voiced his reservations with a touch of irony in his letter of 24 April 1787 concerning Péczeli's attempt to make melancholic and contemplative attitudes palatable to contemporary Hungarian readers. At the same time, he was implying that the translation might prove to be a regrettable disservice. He expressed his conviction that young ladies and girls would rather dance and be attracted to glitter and fame, or preferred being courted by young gentlemen to entertaining thoughts on death, gloom and darkness. In addition, he feared that "our melancholic author" would ornament the breviary of country clerics only as well as "passing away on the hands of respectable matrons", and, unfortunately, disregarded by the vanity of their age.¹⁸

As for Péczeli's translation of *Meditations among the Tombs*,¹⁹ that is, another emblematic piece of the English school of melancholy, we should by no means assume that it was an independent choice on his part of another author of devotional texts. He relied on Pierre Prime Félicien Le Tourneur's (1737–1788) French translation of Hervey's work published in 1771.²⁰ Although Le Tourneur considered Hervey an "imitator" of Young and his judgment may have influenced Péczeli, the Hungarian minister understandably seems to have been attracted to the common view of contemporary moralists as has been observed by Bayne "The 'bon usage de la douleur' is an acceptance of grief and its manifestations which brings the Christian closer to

¹⁶Imre Vörös, "Péczeli József, Young és Hervey fordítója," *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 115/1 (2011) 27–42.

¹⁷György Kurucz, "Könyv és főnemesi műveltség: Festetics György magánkönyvtára katonai pályára lépésének kezdetén," *Aetas* 21/2 (2006) 101–102.

¹⁸"Le célèbre Tristissimae Memoriae Young ne feroit fortune chez le Grands à cause de sa severité de ses Principes, moins il feroit chez le Bau sexe, car Nos Femmes abhorrent de la Tombeau, femmes, filles voudront vivre, et vivre Galemment, non dans le Cerceulle avec des morts non dans les tenebres, mais dans une sàlle bien ilimunée et rempli d'une compagnie de jeunes gens, qu'ils respirent la Gayeté. Je n'ose pas prononcer, tout ce que je pense, mais je suis en peur que Notre Autheur Melancolique, ne seroit pas accueilli par la Publique Hongroise selon les merites dû à sa celebrité et peut être qu'il décorait seulement le Bréviaire de quelques suivants Septuagenaires, et des Curé villagois, et mourra entre les mains des matrones Respectables, degouté par l'Age de nôtre monde plain de Vanité mais pourtant agréable." Balogh and Tóth, *Magyar leveleskönyv* vol. 1. op. cit. 491.

¹⁹James Hervey, *Hervey Sírhalmai és Elmélkedései. Fordítottak Pétzeli József Komáromi Prédikátor által* (Pozsony: Wéber Simon Péter, 1790).

²⁰James Hervey, *Méditations d'Hervey, traduites de l'Anglois, par M. Le Tourneur* (Paris: Le Jay, 1771).



repentance and compassion.”²¹ For this reason, it is hardly surprising that Péczeli declared in his introduction to the first edition of his translation of Hervey’s *Meditations* that the incoming subscriptions should be transferred to the support of our “compatriots perished” at Hátszeg [presently Hațeg, Romania], Transylvania.²²

As has been stated above, Baron Lőrinc Orczy disguised his misgivings concerning Young’s adaptability to the taste of the Hungarian public, whereas Samuel Johnson (1709–1784) went as far as exposing and ridiculing Hervey’s verbosity and charged literary style by writing his “Meditations on a Pudding”.²³ Nevertheless, it should be noted that Hervey’s *Meditations* arguably appear to go beyond the simple definition of representing the prose counterpart of graveyard poetry. In regard to the substance of Hervey’s work the *Meditations* must have been appealing to Péczeli, because contemplations of the overwhelming beauty of the created world, including the starry universe, the various manifestations of God’s overwhelming love, etc. might have served as some kind of pool of ideas, or reference for a minister having to prepare sermons week after week.

II

The catalogue of Péczeli’s library contains various translations and editions of the Old and New Testaments, theological tracts, meditations and collections of sermons by foreign divines which explains his list of reference in his *Erköltsi prédikációk* [Moral sermons], among others, to the activities of Isaac de Beausobre (1659–1738), a Huguenot pastor and intellectual in the French community of Berlin, or Johann Joachim Spalding (1714–1804), a theologian and philosopher, and of the English authors, the Anglican Bishop William Beveridge (1637–1708) and the Nonconformist Philip Doddridge (1702–1751), including the above discussed representatives of religious meditations and graveyard poetry.²⁴ At the same time, Péczeli relied on the works of German Protestant divines such as Superintendent Friedrich Eberhard Rambach (1708–1775), the former Dean of Halle und Magdeburg, whose scope of activities was instrumental in disseminating the ideas of English devotional writers through his translations, including Doddridge’s sermons and tracts.²⁵ Also, the catalogue implies that Péczeli’s concept of the notion of absolution through Christ must have been shaped by the interpretation of Johann Jakob

²¹Sheila Page Bayne, *Tears and Weeping. An Aspect of Emotional Climate Reflected in Seventeenth-Century French Literature* (Tübingen and Paris: Narr/Place, 1981), 88.

²²Hervey, *Hervey Sírhalmai* op. cit. VIII. Péczeli is referring to the victims of the Romanian peasant rebellion of 1785. For further details see: Éva H. Balázs, “A nyolcvana esztendőök drámája” in *Magyarország története 1686-1790*, vol. 2. ed. Győző Ember and Gusztáv Heckenast (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1989) 1072–1075.

²³Eric Parisot, “The Work of Feeling in James Hervey’s *Meditations among the Tombs* (1746),” *Parergon* 31/2 (2014) 121–135.

²⁴József Péczeli, *Erköltsi Prédikációk, melyeket Rész szerint maga készített, rész szerint némely Anglus és Frantzia Doktoroknak munkáiból Fordította PÉTZELI József R. Komáromi Prédikátor*, (Győr: Streibig József, 1790), 3.; Cf. Péczeli, *Catalogus librorum venalium* op. cit.

²⁵Philip Doddridge: *Heilige Reden über auserlesene Wahrheiten des Evangelii, übersetzt von F. E. Rambach* (Rostock: Johann Christian Koppe), 1760.; Id., *Reden von der Wiedergeburt und ander wichtigen Wahrheiten des christlichen Religion, übersetzt von F. E. Rambach* (Rostock: Johann Christian Koppe, 1761).; Id., *Theologische Sendschreiben über verschiedene die Religion und Gottseligkeit betreffende Materien. Mit einer Vorrede herausgegeben von Friedrich Eberh. Rambach* (Rostock/Leipzig: Johann Christian Koppe, 1764).



Rambach (1683–1735) who himself published his own comprehensive analysis of the true meaning of the sufferings of Christ in the first half of the eighteenth century.²⁶

Nevertheless, the introduction of the first volume of Péczeli's collected sermons clearly reflect Doddridge's influence on his concept of "practical theology" concerning his *desiderata* set forth in relation to the attitude of young Reformed ministers who were to serve in their new parishes. In this respect it should be no coincidence at all that the Hungarian minister of Révkomárom relied on Christ's words as to what kind of mentality is expected of young ministers at the commencement of their lifelong services.²⁷ "Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all" (Mk 10: 42–44).²⁸ Accordingly, Péczeli declared that "they should at all times descend to the poorest and weakest".²⁹ He broke with the exclusiveness of the scope of divine services restricted to the venue of the church building itself, warning the would-be ministers that they should teach the members of their parishes or say private prayers together with their family members in their homes. In addition, he deemed it necessary for them to discuss informally the chosen sections of the Bible which happened to be the guiding text of the Sunday sermon.

He considered it absolutely essential that the ministers should get to know the families of their flocks, therefore he advised them to visit each family, as well as teaching the children and young people the relevant sections of the catechism.³⁰ By doing so, they should inevitably become proper spiritual leaders within the individual community. Also, he strongly recommended that the ministers kept in touch with each other and regularly gathered in each other's houses to pray together and discuss parish matters. For this reason, he declared that appropriate guidance would be inconceivable without the profound knowledge of the Holy Scriptures and denominational dogmatics, so he argued that no-one should be vested with the authority of preaching the word of God, that is, become a consecrated minister, unless he had been properly educated and had an unblemished character, conduct and morals.³¹ Finally, in the closing paragraph Péczeli expressed his satisfaction that "not only Protestants, but Roman Catholics have received my hitherto published little works with delight".³² It goes without saying that this statement must have applied to the enlightened nobility only and it would be rather far-fetched to assume that Péczeli's optimistic remark truly reflect the overall attitude of the contemporary public since the majority of the Roman Catholic clergy grudgingly condoned the Josephine religious policy which, after all, permitted a Protestant minister to publish Voltaire's emblematic epic poem in the Hungarian language.³³

²⁶Johann Jakob Rambach, *Betrachtungen über das gantze Leiden Christi im Oelgarten, vor dem geistlichen Gericht der Juden, vor dem weltlichen Gericht Pilati und Herodis, und auf dem Berge Golgotha* (Jena: Johann Bernhard Hartung, 1730).

²⁷Péczeli, *Erköltsi Prédikációk* op. cit. X.

²⁸*The Holy Bible, Authorized King James Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, n. d.). 933.

²⁹Péczeli, *Erköltsi Prédikációk* op. cit. XX.

³⁰*Ibid.*, XXIV–XXV.

³¹*Ibid.*, XXVI.

³²*Ibid.*, XXVII.

³³Cf. László Gyürky, "Batthyány József bíboros, hercegprímás (1727–1799)," in *Batthyány Lajos nádor*, ed. Móricz Péter (Körmend: Körmendi Kulturális Központ, 2017) 185–202.



We cannot engage ourselves in a more detailed analysis of Péczeli's sermons, but it seems clear that his choice of texts tends to show his preference for the corpus of the New Testament.³⁴ The first volume of his collected sermons, for example, shows that out of twenty texts only eight had been taken from the Old Testament and this proportion also applies to the other volumes of his sermons published posthumously. It seems clear that his selection is quite balanced and it does not rely on Paul's letters in a disproportionate manner as might be expected in connection with such a collection published by a minister of the Helvetic confession. Moreover, the sequence of the sermons does seem to reflect Péczeli's editorial skills, because they appear to be in harmony with the principles, tasks and duties expected to be observed and performed by young Reformed ministers according to the introduction of the volume. Consequently, he chose a relevant text for his first sermon: "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry" (1 Tim 1: 12). The second sermon also goes along the *desiderata* of the introduction (Eccl 10: 3), and so do the succeeding three sermons whose texts were taken from the Old Testament (Eccl 10: 3; Eccl 12: 3; Prov 10: 1; Isa 26: 20). Finally, the closing sermon returns to Paul's letters to Timothy by declaring the meaning of Christian life "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses" (1 Tim 6: 12).

Nevertheless, Péczeli's sermons did contain quite a few elements of morals and values gaining ground in the age of Enlightenment. He tried to convey the idea of the exquisite role of reading and education in the process of developing faith and moral character, including the positive role of trade and craftsmanship, which indirectly refers to his actual audience, that is, a thriving community of a merchant town in late eighteenth-century Hungary.³⁵ As far as human relationships and communication are concerned, it should also be noted that Péczeli was far from being naive, for he clearly states that "straightforwardness does not seem to be the kind of tool whereby we could make ourselves appealing to other people or become successful in this earthly life".³⁶

III

As Ferenc Kazinczy observes, Péczeli was serving his country "to his last breath",³⁷ for he just managed to finish his revised version of an outline of the theological system of the Scriptures when he put down the quill on 6 January 1792.³⁸

³⁴Cf. William Beveridge, *Gewesenen Lords, und Bischoffs zu St. Asaph in Engeland, Merckwürdiger Reden, So insonderheit das Wesen der Christlichen Kirche, das Amt ihrer Diener, und die Mittel der Gnaden, so durch dieselben dargereicht werden, betreffen*, parts 1–7 (Dresden/Leipzig: Gottlob Christian Hilscher, 1732–39), 111–145.

³⁵József Péczeli, *Erkölti Prédikációk, készítette PÉCZELY JÓSEF, rév-komáromi prédikátor [...] összeszedte és most először kiadta PÉCZELY József világtörténeti, görög és deák ékesenszóllás rendes tanítója, Debreczenben*, vol. 3, (Debrecen: Tóth Ferentz, 1833), 230.

³⁶Ibid, 294.

³⁷Kazinczy, "Pályám emlékezete," op. cit. 203.

³⁸József Péczeli, *A Szent Írás theológiája, vagy az idvesség tudománya, melly áll az ó és új testamentomi nevezetesebb szent írásbéli helyeknek össze-szedésekben. Íratott ángliai nyelven, s magyarra fordítatott Péczeli József komáromi r. prédikátor által*, vols. 1–2, (Komárom: Weber Simon Péter, 1792). Cf. Philip Doddridge, *Sermons Nouveaux sur diverses Textes de l'Ecriture Sainte, traduit par Bertrand*, (Geneve: Philibert, 1759).



Péczeli's "short guide to the Holy Scriptures" is preceded by a lengthy introduction which, however, can be regarded not as a translation, but as his genuine work compiled and drafted on the basis of the guidelines expounded by his admired English moralists. No doubt, he goes along the lines of religious disputes and follows the tradition of Protestant defensive pamphlets as far as the true source of dogmatic principles is concerned by declaring the authority of the Holy Scriptures over "the Romano-Catholic Traditions and Fathers". He even offers model answers to his fellow ministers in relation to the meaning of the bread and wine in the communion as opposed to the Catholic dogma of transubstantiation.³⁹ Nevertheless, what is really striking is that he relates both to human relations and to contemporary social stratification as far as a positive and morally acceptable conduct of life is concerned. Whereas he promotes the values of marriage as laid down in the relevant books and chapters of the New Testament pointing out the criteria of the duties of men and women, he addresses "the magistrates", that is, the principals of contemporary Hungarian society in a broad sense elaborating on the importance of dedicated guardianship required of them considering that they have obtained their posts and status "by the Grace of God". Accordingly, they are supposed to act in a responsible manner since they are immortals as well.⁴⁰

The minister of Révkomárom probably died from consumption, a common disease in Hungary at the time, but the overall condition of his deteriorating health was exacerbated by his excessive workload in the last couple of years of his life. Although his translations and literary activities did not earn him a place among the classic Hungarian poets, or among the forthcoming nineteenth and twentieth-century Protestant men of letters and divines, his efforts to promote high morals and help Hungarian literature become more refined in taste and style in the mother tongue according to the western models of development certainly deserve respect from the part of later generations.

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³⁹Péczeli, *A Szent Írás teológiája*, op. cit. 4–5., 113–114.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 67–81., 203–27.

