PART III

POLITICAL THEOLOGY AND DISCOURSES OF IDENTITY
While the conception of elect nationhood as a “metahistorical” interpretative tool is usually linked to Protestantism, the “providentialist” narrative of “national history” was present prior to the Reformation. For instance, Aenea Silvio Piccolomini’s admonishing letter, *Ad legatos regni Hungariae*, deploring the Hungarians’ infidelity to their king, connected the motif of divine punishment with that of the apparent “historical decline” (the imminent ruin of the “once flourishing kingdom”) well before the fateful Battle of Mohács in 1526.

The subject of this narration is the “elect nation”—the community analogically identified with Israel. In the late medieval period, however, the chosen community was not a particular political/cultural entity, but universal Christendom. Even the fifteenth-century Hungarian humanist clergyman, János Vitéz, used the analogy this way. Christianity “was raised by God, and is never finally abandoned by Him, and we have to hope that, exactly as the Philistines for the Jewish people, this enemy [i.e. the Turks] is ordered by Him for the Christian soldier as an ordeal and not elimination (…).” In some sense, this “providentialist” vision of determining responsibility for the decline of “ancient glory” and meditation on the punitive instrument of God were at the root of both the Catholic and Protestant narratives of history that emerged in the sixteenth century. The beginning of the sixteenth century also witnessed the rise of popular preaching with eschatological overtones, rooted mostly in Franciscan spiritualism. As Jenő Szűcs documented, the encompassing “national” community envisioned in the writings of Pelbárt Temesvári and especially Osvát Laskai challenged the corporate paradigm by setting the examples of

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