

Religious Issue and the Initial Period of the Reformation in Košice

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The history of Košice in the 16th century exemplifies a Micro History of the Reformation including all local particularities. The three persons from the church background in the town represent three characteristic types and three developmental phases of initial period of the Reformation in Košice. During this time the initiative shifted from clergy to the city council, which unprecedentedly extended his competence into theology and mainly liturgy. At the same time, contact with other towns in the region and also with Wittenberg was reinforced due to the correct interpretation of reformation teachings. At that time, the city council presented itself as competent institution with the right and the duty to uphold the responsibility for religious issues also in theological meaning.

Key words: Kingdom of Hungary. Košice. The 16th century. Reformation. Religiousness.

Religious issues do not represent the same (big) problem in the Late Middle Ages or in the 19th century as it did in the early modern period. In this period it affected the political and social life in Košice significantly. The factographic scheme, which represents the actual state of knowledge, is insufficient to encompass this subject accurately, because it tied in strongly not such much with the religious institutions as with culture and personal religious practice.¹ There were several issues about the religious life in Košice in the early modern period during the accepting of the Reformation in the town on which this paper focuses.

The initial period of the Reformation in Upper Hungary has been covered in many books and studies including the Reformation in Košice. The positivist approach dominated the Slovak historiography following the research and editorial work before 1918 for along time. It was sporadically influenced interpretively by confessional aspect. Studies by Branislav Varsík,² Ján Kvačala,³ Vojtech Bucko⁴ and Anton Harčar⁵ mainly in the first half of the 20th century and collective research effort of several scientific teams after 1989 created the necessary framework.⁶ Reformation in Košice in the first half of the 16th century is part of the

1 See also the study about confessionalization from David P. Daniel: DANIEL, D. P. K problému a interpretácii konfesionalizácie a protireformácie na Slovensku. In *Evanjelici a evanjelická teológia na Slovensku*. Bratislava 1999, 55-67; DANIEL, D. P. Konfesionalizmus a konfesionalizácia ako historická interpretatívna paradigma. In *Konfesionalizácia na Slovensku v 16. – 18. storočí*. Prešov 2010, 6-16.

2 VARSÍK, B. *Husiti a reformácia na Slovensku do žilinskej synody*. Bratislava 1932. Later B. Varsík published also the study: VARSÍK, B. Vznik a vývin slovenských kalvínov na východnom Slovensku. In *Historický časopis* (39) 1991, 2, 129-148.

3 KVAČALA, J. *Dejiny reformácie na Slovensku*. Liptovský Sv. Mikuláš 1935

4 BUCKO, V. *Reformné hnutie v arcibiskupstve ostrihomskom do r. 1564*. Bratislava 1939; BUCKO, V. *Mikuláš Oláh a jeho doba*. Bratislava 1940.

5 HARČAR, A. *Historický význam protireformácie v Košiciach z roku 1604*. Budapešť 1942.

6 *Die Reformation und ihre Wirkungsgeschichte in der Slowakei. Kirchen- und konfessionsgeschichtliche Beiträge*. Eds. Schwarz, K. – Švorc, P. Wien 1996; *Obdobie protireformácie v dejinách slovenskej kultúry z hľadiska stredoeurópskeho kontextu*. Ed. Doruľa, J. Bratislava 1998; *Reformácia na východnom Slovensku v 16. – 18. storočí*. Ed. Uličný, F. Prešov 1998; *Evanjelici a evanjelická teológia na Slovensku*. Ed. Daniel, D. Bratislava 1999; *Konfesionalizácia na Slovensku v 16. – 18. storočí*. Ed. Kónya, P. Prešov 2010; KÓNÝA, P. – KÓNÝOVÁ, A. *Kalvínska reformácia a reformovaná cirkev na východnom Slovensku v 16. – 18. storočí*. Prešov 2010.

research conducted by Miloslava Bodnárová,⁷ which created essential background applicable for succeeding interpretation and research.

The comprehensive contours of historical development are well defined thanks to the aforementioned scientific research. However some essential and relevant points are yet to be observed or resolved. The importance of religion and church for society was the reason for the intervention of worldly power even on a local level. These aspects were reinforced even more during the Reformation and the Counter Reformation. The Reformation didn't lean toward the Modern World in our view, but through the opposition to secularized Renaissance Church required even wider impact of religion in society, which is possible to observe also in Košice.

Košice in the 16th century represents a Micro History of the Reformation including all local particularities. The discovery starts with estimating the start and the end of the Reformation in history of Košice. What is the year 1517 for Košice? Luther's appearance evoked a huge response and in Košice it was well known very early especially through the people with active contacts abroad. We can possibly speak about this time as the first phase of the Reformation in the town – information phase. The role of humanists and intellectuals in this process in general could be characterized by the fact that though they did not even have the first-hand knowledge about this movement in the theological spheres, they were competent to judge it based on their erudition. They probably didn't do so on mass meetings, but in the circles (also correspondence) of intellectuals and people, who had sufficient knowledge about this movement.

This humanistic period obviously ended with the second departure of John Henckel from Košice (he was in Košice since 1522) in 1528, when he was already in royal court in Buda.⁸ The first known person, who started with applying new ideas in Košice was Wolfgang Schustel. As a native he didn't return from education in Krakow to Košice directly in spite of the established habit. He was as a preacher in Košice from 1519 till 1526 when J. Henckel was still here. He later started establishing the Kingdom of Heaven in Bardejov. In the given period his reformation activity in Košice is not known. However he presented liberal ideas and advocated a release of fasting rules for some people. More importantly, the city council of Košice accused him of this by the Eger canonry (in that time the city council yet applied to Eger canonry, Wittenberg became the appellate instance later).⁹ How to interpret this correctly? It could be the result of personal animosity or decline of such experiments in religious issues. W. Schustel confirmed this animosity himself, so perhaps that could have also been the reason for his departure from Košice. Ten years after Luther's appearance, the city council of Košice banished the preacher who introduced some theologically irrelevant changes. W. Schustel has been greatly radical after arriving to Bardejov and in the issues of religious reformation he trumped M. Luther himself.¹⁰

7 BODNÁROVÁ, M. Počiatky reformácie v Košiciach. In *AFPUŠ Spoločenskovedný zborník - História* (3) 1994, 38-49; BODNÁROVÁ, M. Die Reformation in den ostslowakischen königlichen Städten in der ersten Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts. In *Die Reformation und ihre Wirkungsgeschichte*, 22-36; BODNÁROVÁ, M. Reformácia vo východoslovenských kráľovských mestách v prvej polovici 16. storočia. In *Trnavská univerzita 1635 – 1777*. Trnava 1996, 333-345; BODNÁROVÁ, M. Reformácia vo východoslovenských kráľovských mestách v 16. storočí. In *Reformácia na východnom Slovensku*. Ed. Uličný, F. Prešov 1998, 19-37; BODNÁROVÁ, M. Protireformácia vo východoslovenských kráľovských mestách v 18. storočí. In *Obdobie protireformácie v dejinách slovenskej kultúry*. Ed. Doruľa, J. Bratislava 1998, 58-68; BODNÁROVÁ, M. Vplyv mestských rád na cirkevný život miest v 16. storočí. In *Kresťanstvo v dejinách Slovenska*. Prešov 2003, 51-65; BODNÁROVÁ, M. Organizačno-správny vývoj evanjelickej cirkvi a. v. na východnom Slovensku v 16. a 17. storočí. In *Vývoj cirkevnej správy na Slovensku*. Krakov 2010, 366-390.

8 BODNÁROVÁ, M. *Reformácia vo východoslovenských...*, 336

9 BODNÁROVÁ, M. *Reformácia vo východoslovenských...*, 22.

10 Ibidem.

Development of Reformation in Hungary could not overtake the development in Germany since it was concentrated on the teachings of M. Luther and the correct commentary of them. It is known that in 1520s and also later the teachings of M. Luther in his own explanation and in interpretation of his co-operators and followers developed and changed quite quickly. In this context it is necessary to revise the idea of accepting these teachings and the Reformation in general in the form of canon, the packet of theological dogmas and pastoral work directions. In this second period, we can observe the activity of some individuals from the church background, who publicly agreed to these ideas (or some of them) and were trying to put them into practice depending on circumstances. It is characteristic, that their interpretation is very suggestive and their attitude greatly individual in a way that M. Luther is only an inspiration for them while they have own concepts of reforms needed in church. Their attitude towards the Reformation was completely selective, which applied to those „reformers“, who have only heard about the Reformation or have seen its application, but had no contact with Wittenberg as anew established center for correct interpretation of the Reformation. This unrestrained time period of the Reformation in Hungary was facilitated also by catastrophic weakening of royal and clerical power in country.

Magyar preacher Matthias Dévai Bíró served as apriest in Košice since 1531. Wittenberg was not a catchment area for students from Hungary like it was for universities in Krakow, Vienna, and Prague which were closer. He decided to study theology in Wittenberg probably after the Luther´s appearance and maybe because of it. He was between the first one from church background in Hungary and especially in Košice, who was formed directly at the heart of Protestantism. His deep captivation with the Reformation issue which made him famous in Hungary was also the reason for his capture ordered by the bishop of Eger. M. Dévai supposedly influenced a Slovak preacher in Košice Anthony Transilvanus, who was shortly released to Košice after his disclaimer. M. Dévai resisted so his imprisonment continued until he was released on appeals from the city council of Košice. After this he still continued to preach the protestant ideas mostly outside Košice;¹¹ he left the town probably in 1537.¹²

J. Henckel, W. Schustel a M. Dévai Bíró represents three characteristic types which reflected the three developmental phases of the initial period of the Reformation in Hungary/Košice – a humanist, a willful reformer and a missionary. Preference of the city council was evident. In the case of the Magyar preacher M. Dévai we assume a significant role of his charisma which influenced mainly German city council and inhabitants in the town. Especially M. Dévai who despite the short time he spent in Košice has the left a mark of a veritable reformer in the history of the Reformation in town. Without this active element which consisted of priests and preachers, the burghers would not accept the Reformation at this time; or conversely the burghers would not take over Protestantism in the case of opposition from the local church represented by priests.

The activity of M. Dévai symbolically closed the second decade of the Reformation. The first decade (1517 – 1527) is characterized by the activity of J. Henckel and W. Schustel; during the second decade approximately till 1537 M. Dévai was in Košice. The third decade was somewhat revolutionary in the history of the Reformation in this region. The decade ended by the synod in Prešov in 1546 and three years later by the declaration (which is a better term than acceptance) of confession known as *Confessio Pentapolitana*. During this time the initiative moved from clergy to the city council, which unprecedentedly extended his competency into theology and mainly liturgy. Simultaneously the contact with other towns

11 KVAČALA, J. *Dejiny reformácie...*, 55-56, 58

12 BODNÁROVÁ, M. *Reformácia vo východoslovenských...*, 24-25.

in region and also with Wittenberg was reinforced due to the need for correct interpretation of teachings. At that time the city council presented itself as a competent institution with the right and the duty to uphold the responsibility for religious issues also in theological meaning, which among other things confirms the importance of religion for the society of the period.

The third period is characteristic by systematic approach mainly thanks to the involvement of the city council. The fundamental theological issues were defined anew and practice was modified according to new needs all in cooperation with five royal free towns and with Wittenberg. This contact was arranged by the priests who completed their studies in Germany. In the beginning, the practical side was far away from the declared ideological frame defined in Germany but it was freely adapted in Upper Hungary. Practice adjusted to the ideology slowly in an evolutionary not revolutionary way.

The restoration of order in this issue and the effort to disavow radical streams of the Reformation and also independent acting reformers with own ideas of reform were accepted paradoxically by church and regal authorities. This fact needs a special attention, because it illustrates the situation inside the Hungarian church before the Council of Trent at a time when Protestants regarded themselves as catholic as well. On the other hand, the towns associated in Pentapolis appealed to the Augsburg Confession which quasi accepted or tolerated memorandum of some catholic movement like Protestantism were the new progressive stream within the Catholic Church, which could establish itself with the help of part of higher clergy. *Confessio Pentapolitana* from 1549 ended the first three decades and also three periods of the Reformation in Košice in the first half of the 16th century.

While some of the towns associated in Pentapolis had problems with Anabaptism, in the case of Košice it was Calvinism. In the context of the development of this reformation movement this polarity was topical until the half of the 16th century.¹³ In this conflict the Lutherans also left the decoration behind which together with all churches in the town including the already finished parish church dedicated to St. Elisabeth were financed by their ancestors as confirmed by the preserved testaments from the end of the 15th century.¹⁴ It was not maybe the first religious conflict in the town, because in the first half of the century the orders of Franciscans and Dominicans were still in town.

13 KÓNYA, P. – KÓNYOVÁ, A. *Kalvínska reformácia...*, 30-31

14 BODNÁROVÁ, M. *Reformácia vo východoslovenských...*, 333.

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