

Debreceni Református Hittudományi Egyetem
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on regular theology
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Reformed High School Education in Transylvania

Universitas-fate from Protestantism to the University of Sciences in Kolozsvár

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1.

The Objective of the Research

“We can fully comprehend life only by looking backwards. Nonetheless, we ought to live looking into the future”

(Sören Kierkegaard)

My research paper investigates the issue of the university in a set of Transylvanian contexts in a relatively accurate time interval. Out of the Transylvanian Universitas idea we are primarily concerned with the Reformed correlations. For this very reason the time anchors serving as frame date back from the century of Protestantism to 1872.

In our PhD thesis we attempted to pinpoint that in the period covered and even after the idea of a university was and has been the quintessence of the existence of the Transylvanian Hungarian community. The matter and actuality of the topic is given by the fact that the issue of universitas, under the present historical and social circumstances, figures at the top position of priorities on the agenda. It is a burning issue both for the churches and the Transylvanian Hungarian society in general.

The existence of an institution designated to higher education is of key importance not only for the Hungarians but for all nations and peoples driven by the will to live. Has one nation a scientific university? Has one nation an Academy? All these are such powerful strongholds which can keep a nation and country alive.

Our Reformed churchmen invested with responsibilities inherited from our founding fathers were very much aware of this principle. This awareness, or, in other words, the law of eternal life in Biblical sense, its capability and skill to constantly renew, was put into practice in the universityschedules.

In our thesis we aimed at examining a smaller slice of the higher educational system within the Reformed Church, settled in historical context. Since “historical memory must never fade” (Botond Gaál) we can not regard the past as something that never happened, or something that manifested itself in whatever form.

If we intend to raise questions or reconstruct an issue, we must take the past, as well, into consideration for the sake of the future. God manufactures destiny and raises our sense of responsibility by instantaneously reminding us and alluding to our past. Events, things and persons pertaining to the past inspire and educate every new generation. We also follow this path with Biblical conscience and conviction with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, sent by our Lord, Jesus Christ, for this purpose (among others) (Jonah 14, 26). For this reason we set, as our objective, the investigation of every initiative for establishing an institution for higher education with Reformed interest and the accomplishment of these in a historical context till 1872. We intended to illustrate that our Reformed priests living, thinking and acting inspired by a Biblical sense of mission and firm calling fought with courage and brought many sacrifices for the Reformed higher education in Transylvania, scientific training in one’s mother tongue and union with Europe. It is our purpose, among others and, at least, on the

level of allusions, to highlight the idea that the development of scientific thinking exerted an impact upon the change of clerical and social life within the Transylvanian Hungarian community. Institutions hosting scientific education, meditation and creation, as well as, outstanding educated persons always truthfully and explicitly contributed to the evolution of our nation. These scientific centres propagated not only factual and stale education, but they taught while educating, thus providing sample and concrete examples. They prompted whole generations of students to formulate the essence of all things for themselves. Not a single day should pass without asking themselves: "Have I done something useful for God's glory and the benefit of man?" Similar ideas were advocated by József Pálincás, President of the Hungarian Scientific Academy, in one of his speeches. The Reformed colleges were authentic spiritual workshops for the Transylvanian Hungarian community. These scientific workshops and colleges, which were founded in the Calvinist school, had a spiritual appeal and practiced an ideology that shaped individuals and the society. Besides their primary objective to provide students with a professional education, they never forgot about how their vocation was formed upon the Christian faith and ethics, perseverance to traditions, responsibility and service. They practiced their calling with an ecumenical open-mindedness in a healthy, consciously tolerant and pluralist Transylvania in the name of religious freedom.

2.

The method of process

Our thesis is basically such a synthesis that is, as far as we are aware, unparalleled concerning the Reformed Transylvanian Hungarian education. Having in mind the aforementioned objectives in the period covered we intended to locate every spiritual-scientific workshop and form of education, where traces of higher education could be found to a certain degree.

During our research we compiled a historical investigation, survey and comparison from epoch to epoch following a linear chronology. Due to the fact that the Transylvanian higher education was the fundamental idea of our paper we intended to highlight the historical aspects. While elaborating the idea of university our purpose was to present that in the universitas plan dating back several centuries, the teachings of Protestantism and the work of scientists belonging to the clergy escalated in such a scientific pinnacle of ideology and openness in the Transylvanian culture of schooling that created something everlasting. This is a valid statement in local, continental and European contexts. It is a fact that the idea of university born in Reformation signified the concept of survival for the Hungarian community in Transylvania. University, as a spiritual fortress, was one of the cardinal underpinnings of the struggle maintained for the salvage of the country all the way through. With an accurate identification of historical circumstances and the will for shaping their own destiny the universities assumed the strategy of 'offence as best defence'. All this implied a sense of calling, faithful commitment, love for their nation and erudition.

There were certain colleges, where for a period, in the case of one or more outstanding individuals, the university level was accomplished. There were instances where they reached only the level of high schools or colleges (for instance Szatmár, Nagybánya, Székelyudvarhely). There were regions, where we could not find even the traces of such initiatives, for example the region of Bánság. We searched for the traces and correlations of university in the context of its three components – directors-Maecenas, professors-instructors and students. We paid emphatic attention to the legal, financial and infrastructural condition of the above mentioned. We attempted to investigate and locate the spiritual and scientific standards of the colleges in the proper education, "course-book" stock and the flow of educational materials, as well as, the gradually differentiating and growing number of real and human sciences. It was proved beyond any doubt that Reformed colleges had the lion's share in the organization of the national higher education and culture. Based on their position taken

in society they opened and closed the 'doors' of Transylvania in front of the flow of science. Men of letters, professors, pastors, based on their professional skills and in full awareness of responsibility, brought various and new types of high-standard sciences from abroad and, later on, they passed these on. Keeping an open eye to Europe they comprehended the significance of real sciences, which played a major part in the challenges facing modern civilizations. They tried to serve the benefit of the country by putting these sciences into practice. We intend to pinpoint these results as many times as possible in our thesis.

3.

The summing up of the results accumulated by the scientific research

I.

While analyzing the Transylvanian universitas-issue one can not overlook its European correlations. For this reason this scientific research locates the birth and history of the Transylvanian idea of university into the context of birth and development of the European universities. In the beginning the universities in Italian cities, as well as, Oxford and Paris served as exquisite sources of inspiration for the universitas-cause in the whole Europe. Along with the development of sciences, and their eventual differentiation, by the age of Reformation we find a multitude of smaller or bigger facilities throughout our 'old continent'. In Transylvania, however, till the age of Reformation we could not find either any traces or attempt for realization of any university. Till the middle of the 16th century traces for the most significant form of education or spiritual workshop of the highest standard can be found only at the Káptalan centres (Gyulafehérvár and Nagyvárad) and in the schools of major cities.

II.

The century of Reformation triggered the introduction of a series of major innovations in Transylvania as well. The cause of education in general and the issue of schooling in particular got into foreground. Searching for a path of the scientific education in the 16th century leads us to the first attempt of founding a Reformed institution dedicated to higher education. One can not regard this a genuine Reformed school, because between the 1560s and the 1570s the first elected Transylvanian prince, Zsigmond János, attempted, throughout years, to establish such a centre of science of European standards, which intended to fully satisfy the local needs and demands. First he tried at Gyulafehérvár then at Szászsebes. We are not entitled to call these attempts Reformed ones for the very reason that the aforementioned prince, during this period, showed rapprochement to each of the three Protestant denominations, namely Lutheranism, Calvinism and Unitarianism. With the campus like university designed by himself he intended to include Transylvania into the European intellectual cycle by inviting guests from abroad. In order to carry his plans into effect he made all the necessary preparations, such as passing parliamentary resolutions, providing sponsorship for the required infrastructure and inviting foreign men of letters, for instance Celsio Secundo Curio, Petrus Ramos, in order to raise the scientific standards. The idea, initiative and the first concrete steps, however, came soon to an end with the prince's decease. In the history of the university-case, already at this early stage, Transylvania's characteristic 'screenplay' manifested itself. In the period of the so-called 'fluctuation' of the Transylvanian throne among different denominations, the university-case clearly illustrated how this meant a genuine factor for survival for every denomination in the country.

III.

By the second half of the 16th century the Reformed education was widely spread and in the first decades after the turn of the century it created an entirely new situation in the development of the national schooling system. By this time the heated debates among particular denominations seemed to have silenced. The Transylvanian Hungarian community torn between the Austrian and the Turkish empires, or, in other words the anvil and the hammer, even under these harsh historical circumstances, strived to consciously organize its scientific and intellectual life. This purposeful endeavour and searching for a path remained a specific characteristic of the Transylvanian spirit in every age. The widely spread “particula system”, humanist schools in cities, which had been reorganized as result of Reformation, and the network of schools found in several oppidums demanded the establishment of one or more institutions of higher education on a national level. The first two institutions dedicated to high standard education was the Gyulafehérvár *Collegium Academicum* and the Nagyvárad *Schola Illustris*. The first one mentioned was more famous and functioned throughout several centuries, even if it had to be relocated. These two institutions, however, can be rightfully mentioned side-by-side. In this thesis paper, by listing a series of genuine facts, we presented these two colleges. First in the line came the one at Alba Iulia established by Gabriel Bethlen. The prince of Transylvania (also responsible for patronizing the Hungarian translation of the Bible) with this national college managed to achieve the highest standard of his age. He created the legal and financial grounds, the infrastructural background. Then he set the body of professors up by inviting lecturers from Herborn to join the already existing Hungarian staff. Therefore, he created the alternative for a high standard Transylvanian education for many students. Subsequently he contributed to the forming of an aristocracy with an entirely new mentality. The Nagyvárad Schola developing from the 1630s and 1640s, as opposing to the former college, received only a short time period to fulfil its duty in the heart of the Partium. Nevertheless, it did not vanish even after the enormous punishing Turkish campaign. It did not disappear without a trace even after the school of *Bibliopolis* (Éva Petrőczy's) did. The creative spirituality of the *Bibliopolis* school remained in Bihar County and, in several cases, in the “particula system” of schooling institutions beyond the county. Its committed, dedicated and professional teachers and priests fulfilled their duty and accomplished the high spirited Biblical ideas and thoughts characteristic of the era. With amendments they retranslated the Holy Scripture, the fundamental document of Christianity, into Hungarian under the supervision of scientist Sámuel Köleséri. The translation was printed due to Ábrahám Szenczi Kertész's, master printer, persistent endeavours. For the third time, subsequent to the Oradea exodus, the representatives of the scientific life moved to Debrecen, where they lifted the college life to an even higher standard.

IV.

The Turks in their punishing campaign at the end of the 1650s burnt almost the entire Transylvania to the ground. The intellectual centres of the country also fell victim to the cruel demolition. Oradea, as a scientific centre, ceased to exist. The centre from Alba Iulia moved to Nagyenyed. In the meantime Marosvásárhely and Kolozsvár grew stronger from an educational point of view. The latter became significant due to János Apáczai Csere, who had been exiled by György Rákóczi II from the princely centre. Still, the professor, who was extremely talented and in possession of such an encyclopedic knowledge that was high above of his contemporary colleague's, could not be diverted from the path assigned to him by God. After Rákóczi's decease Apáczai put such a detailed blueprint concerning a scientific university on prince Ákos Barcsay's table which had been designed by prince Gabriel Bethlen. The blueprint served the whole nation's interest and up to that moment it was without precedent. In its academic concept it covered every aspect in details. Nonetheless, Apáczai's plan, just like so many concepts in Transylvania, remained pure desire.

V.

From the 18th century on, Transylvania changed in every aspect. The new political and historical times, explicitly the installation of the Habsburg rule and the harsh process of re-Catholisation, brought storm and stress. For long decades the case of the university was not even permitted to be included on the agenda. The already existing colleges could hardly withstand the systematically organized attacks on the part of the power. Some of them were closed down or downgraded. Still, we are not entitled to declare that the continuity of science and education was ever discontinued. Moreover, in the resistance movement colleges were courageous and dedicated champions of the intellectual life. In this fight members of the High Consistorium played an outstanding role by consciously assuming the tasks of safeguarding, maintaining and coordinating the scientific life during approximately 150 years. Besides the professors, students and the board of directors those professional teachers (who acted as 'pilgrims') were significant representatives of the Transylvanian educational training and scientific life, who connected this region with Europe.

VI.

In the second tierce of the 18th century there were no remarkable results in Transylvania. In other words scientific life did not wing its flight. There were many professors and priests, however, who, even under the circumstances, fought for maintaining the high standards of the contemporary education. In this austere period, which pushed religious freedom into the background, there was a scientist of encyclopedic knowledge, named Péter Bod, who was never allowed to teach at any university. His life's work, however, convinces us that dedicated and faithful intellectuals committed to the cause could not have been withheld even by the secluded way of life in village parishes. Distance or remoteness could not deprive him from education or the organization or practice of educating. Péter Felsőcsernátoni Bod was an extraordinary representative of the Transylvanian spirit committed to the Hungarian education.

VII.

The enlightened Rationalism, as the leading movement of the 18th century, triggered the process of changes in Transylvania in the last quarter of century. In politics, the processes reshaping society, clerical life, scientific thinking and other domains as well Rationalism as leading principle exerted its effect. In the century, also referred to as the century of the light, education, professional instructions, schools, students and materials became present and vivid subject matters. From philosophy, as hosting subject, several real sciences were born. Gradually they grew independent and started to move on a large scale. These were organized and practiced, first and foremost, by the pilgrim professors, who acted as authentic and intermissionary links among colleges. By the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century a new spirit modified the traditional content and framework and, naturally, shaped and built these new sciences. The awakening idea of nationalism, the importance of the mother tongue and sensitivity to social issues opened the gates for the development and flourishing of human sciences. It was obvious that colleges were the main hosting facilities for a scientific life. Nevertheless, besides colleges, the number of new organizations, societies and institutions was rapidly growing. The establishment of a national Transylvanian university, however, was still to follow. Although in the 19th century there were suggestions, schedules, plans and official papers elaborated, the Transylvanian fate remained unchanged. After attempts for several centuries, in 1872, at Kolozsvár the first university was founded, which stood above religious denominations and served a national interest.

VIII.

In the final chapter of our thesis paper we arrived at the most important part: the conceptual summary. Until this moment “we provided an overall synthesis on the idea of the Reformed Transylvanian ‘universitas’, its history of several centuries implying a continuous, committed and purposeful struggle”. We investigated the trials of the Reformed Transylvanian education, more precisely, the attempts to establish a high standard educational system, along with the plans, the notions and partial results. In our thesis we emphasized the idea that there were no such periods without concrete attempts to establish, in one form or another, an institution dedicated to higher education: university or academy. In the following part we infer our conclusions. From the four historical denominations neither of them was able to found a permanent university until 1872. The Roman Catholic university established by István Báthori in 1581 was ephemeral as well. A famous Reformed university was not established either. We know the concepts and attempts. We illustrated the partial accomplishments, which could attain ‘only’ the level of colleges. There were, however, several instances when a professor or board of teachers, instructors, at least for a short time and in an undeclared manner, raised education to an university level in a few colleges. Though no university was founded, the idea, plan and thought were always ready to be carried into practice. Colleges fulfilling the role of universities never wasted the abundant Reformed heritage, spiritual-intellectual activity, demands for high scientific standards, but they, under every circumstance, safeguarded, enriched and passed them on to the next generations. Several individuals embodied this legacy. From the list containing outstanding Transylvanian personalities we would like to mention only a few: János Apáczai Csere, Ferenc Pápai Páriz, Miklós Bethlen, Péter Bod, Sámuel Kölesséri Jr., Farkas and János Bolyai, Sándor Kőrösi Csoma, Zsigmond Kemény, Miklós Jósika, Pál Sipos. They did not practice science for its own sake, but for God’s glory and for the benefit of the nation and country. Their Biblical faith and mandatory sense of calling given by God’s grace nourished their knowledge and conviction. These inspired the Transylvanian spirit to endlessly act and courageously renew all initiatives. It was the firm conviction shared by scientists belonging to the Reformed Transylvanian church that the future of the country and the salvation of Transylvania and the Hungarian community would best be served by the establishment of such a university, which was organized based upon the Calvinist principle propagating Reformed faith and scientific freedom. We presented the mandatory Calvinist character for undertaking education of high standard in four points. These emphatically show those characteristics which refer to the Reformed nature of the idea of university. “The Calvinist nature of the mandate, which granted to undertake the cause of university and higher education, can be observed in the following aspects: in the first place, Bible based priorities and deep confession, in the second place, its individual and collective nature, in the third place, organizational forms in the schooling system and, in the fourth place, we consider the consistorial church one of the key figures and institutions of the events”.

4. Suggestions for thesis points

1. In general it was not Calvin, but Calvinism that influenced Transylvania.
2. The impact exerted by the Herborn professors in Transylvania is obvious and beyond any doubt. Nonetheless, their millenarian convictions linked to a specific date was not embraced by the sober Transylvanian theology.
3. In the 17th century Apáczai, who dreamt about and planned the realization of the academy, embodied the European type of man of letters with encyclopedical knowledge.
4. In Transylvania there were those subjects constantly present, which provided students with an education of European standards.
5. A number of examples illustrate that the existence of colleges and the spirituality represented by these was as important as the creative work of individuals of remarkable skills.