

Problems and possibilities of Catholic confessionalisation in Upper Hungary around 1640 (Based on a report sent to Rome by the bishop of Eger)

The general intellectual, social and political crisis following the disintegration of the mediaeval *Respublica Christiana* was first adequately reacted to, in Hungary as well as in most parts of Europe, by the various trends of Protestantism. On an equal footing with the more and more radical modernisation attempts, there appeared a typically conservative solution, also radically new as compared to mediaeval religiosity, first in the *Mediterraneum*. The originally bottom-up, absolutist and competing processes came to be a partially top-down phenomenon that fundamentally defined the face of Europe in the Early Modern Age in an astonishingly short time.

International research, primarily of a social historical nature, has classified the common features of the confessions, popularly known as denominations, which in the 16th century were already consolidating in terms of their interior structure, though not yet geographically, into several categories. Such common features are the following: a sense of an absolute possession of truth along with a clear delimitation of the principles of faith and an elimination of all uncertainties concerning faith; providing for suitable representatives of the doctrines and removing the unsuitable ones; applying propaganda and censorship; reorganising and monopolising education; controlling the inner life of the church; and creating their own forms of church service and a peculiar linguistic medium. We can also observe that in every significant confession a specific church organisation was built up, confession-specific educational institutions were established, various control mechanisms were applied and, last but by far not least, a symbiotic relationship with the State was created. Differences of content and form can be found within these similar tendencies.

Probably the most important shift of emphasis between the Protestant confessions and the Catholicism of Trent appeared on the institutional and organisational level. While the enthusiastic self-organised Protestant groups all began to move toward institutionalisation, the by Rome controlled part of the “Old Church” had changed its initial structural disadvantages into competitive advantages by reforming its existing institutions and establishing new ones. Owing to the vigorous uniformisation and centralisation, and to the impressive success of the Tridentine papacy, Catholicism in the Early Modern Age was able to strengthen its positions in the Americas as well as in European areas that had been modernised by Protestantism.

However, it is unclear to what extent this institutional advantage was still profitable in the first half of the 17th century, when the process that was spreading out from Italy as its focal point had finally begun unfolding in the peripheries, including Hungary, and the Tridentine papacy was suffering more and more from the burdens of the Baroque Age. The problem is obviously rather complex. If we examine the role of the old-new monastic orders and the efficiency of the missions in the occupied southern territories of Hungary, and later in Transylvania, which were mostly carried out by Bosnian Franciscans under the control of the *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*, then the potentials provided by the leading role of the Roman centre are beyond any doubt.

We will come to a completely different conclusion, however, if we examine the reports of the *ad limina* visits, a pecu-

liar genre of the internal control mechanism of Catholicism, periodically sent to Rome by consecrated bishops, the key figures of the confessionalisation. What enabled the papacy to gain an overview of the conditions of the areas controlled by the “ordinary” church organisation in a systematic and official form, and to decide on necessary changes and possible co-operations, was mainly the information provided by the *relationes status diocesis*. According to the regulations of Sixtus V, in the 17th century Hungarian bishops were required to prepare 24 reports on each diocese every four years (per *quadrennium*), taking them to Rome personally or sending them via their personal representatives. With fifteen bishoprics under Hungarian Royal Patronage and Supremacy, this means a total of 360 texts. Leaving aside the, for different reasons, most problematic dioceses, Transylvania and Szerém (Syrmia), this would still mean 312 texts. On the other hand, as we know from the results of TIHAMÉR VANYÓ, published in the 1930s, only 21 texts have been preserved from the period, most of them of little information value, 11 of which are from Croatia. There has been only one more text added to the data of the Benedictine historian by later research. This number can be increased by a further three, making 25. The result is pitiful, even if we take into consideration that some of the reports have been lost and that maintaining contacts with the dioceses under Turkish occupation was difficult. The striking absence of texts is not sufficiently explained either by the gradual evolution of Catholicism in Hungary in the Early Modern Age or by the occurrence of various military events.

Based on the facts above, just as TIHAMÉR VANYÓ did, we can draw the obvious conclusion: the leaders of Catholic Church in Hungary did not fully take advantage of the opportunities that an independent international centre could have provided over other confessions. What is more, it seems that Rome itself was not really keen on having the regulation observed.

But is this diagnosis appropriate? As was shown by ISTVÁN BITSKEY, in the ranks of the Hungarian Catholic elite of the age the reform-minded prelates who were educated in the *Collegium Germanicum et Hungaricum* in the Eternal City had a dominant role. We can get closer to solving the dilemma by examining an exceptional example.

We can also expect that the analysis will help us to better understand the enculturation of the Catholicism of Trent in 17th century Hungary. Moreover, we can expect that, remaining in the paradigm of confessionalisation, this can perhaps provide an analogy for a more down-to-earth understanding of how the evolution of Protestant confessions in Hungary had taken place, about which we have little information.

This exceptional example is the *ad limina* report of György Lippay, bishop of Eger (1637–1642), who also studied at the *Collegium Germanicum et Hungaricum*. The original of the document, containing 17 densely written folios, revised by the author himself, was preserved in the Roman archive of the Santacroce family as part of the legacy of Gaspare Mattei papal nuncio in Vienna (1639–1644). Nonetheless, this

source is not unknown in the literature. A brief summary of it was published by ISTVÁN SUGÁR, referring to it as “a report-like document, possibly written by György Lippay for the pope”. However, probably the only merit of this publication is that it called the attention of researchers to the first draft (*conceptus/impurum*) of the report, which somehow got mixed among documents from later times in the archiepiscopal archive of Eger. It is not an exaggeration to say that in this incomplete synopsis nine out of ten statements totally misinterpret the Latin text, which contains several corrections.

I dealt with the question of the exact date of the text, written around the turn of 1641/1642, and of its nature (whether it really was an *ad limina* report and not a memoir, for example) when I published a critical version of it. Here I will only highlight the main points (the message) of the source.

The most distinctive characteristic of the report is that it was intended to inform Pope Urban VIII (1623–1644) of the Barberini family about the problems and possibilities of the Catholic confessionalisation in unusual detail, giving us a view of the conditions in half of the country in the times after Cardinal Péter Pázmány. The report does not stop at providing the usual description of the episcopal see, the chapter or the monastic orders operating in the area of the diocese. It does not simply fulfil a formal requirement. It presents real and burning problems for the decision makers of the Holy See, in the interest of achieving a clear goal.

It is pervaded throughout by the determinative sense of minority that characterised Catholicism, although the reference to the 200-fold dominance of Protestants over Catholics is a symbolic overstatement rather than a fact. (The first draft still only talked about 100.) Another disadvantage that is often mentioned is the fact that in the eastern part of the country Catholics were almost completely excluded from secular power. In the areas under Turkish occupation the (exclusively Calvinist and Evangelist) Protestants could generally enlist the support of the Turks for themselves; this was also the reason for the failure of the hopeful mission of the Jesuits in Keeskemét. The fate of the mission in Gyöngyös, initiated by the bishop, is also uncertain. The major cities of the Kingdom were controlled by Evangelist magistrates (the Catholics only had a chapel in Kassa). The local secular powers, the counties were entirely under the control of the Calvinist Church; the nearby Protestant state, Transylvania provided perfect security for them.

In this constellation the fact that the majority of the aristocracy had become Catholic by then, often cited in historiographies, did not mean an exclusive advantage in the eye of the author of the report at all. Of course, Lippay does not underrate the role of Catholic aristocrats and of the “Counter-Reformation of conversion by landlords”. (He mentions the following names: Palatine Miklós Esterházy, János Homonnai Drugeth, Zsigmond Forgách, István Nyáry, Péter Melith, László Barkóczy and the child László Rákóczi, while on the other side only György Perényi, and Zsigmond Lónyay and Prépostváry.) He underlines that the aristocratic courts were excellent places for aristocrats to convert their minor noble familiars; and aristocrats were keen to drive Protestant preachers away from their estates. But the intentions of landlords are at times obstructed by the armed resistance of the counties; and it is to be feared that despite all the struggle and determination a law of parliament will finally prohibit landlords from forcing their serfs to follow their religion, Lippay shares his doubts with the reader. As we know, this term was in fact contained in the Treaty of Linz and then in its codification as well. And while historiography has rightfully voiced doubts concerning the effectiveness of the enforcement of Treaty’s articles, Lippay, already as Archbishop of Esztergom (1642–1666), considered these

points of the Treaty as a real tragedy, and solemnly objected to them. Nonetheless, he had realised half a decade earlier, and also explained in his report that the Catholicisation of the aristocracy in itself was far from being sufficient. In his opinion, Catholicism only had a real chance to become a majority confession in Upper-Hungary – and not only there, we might add – if the political positions of Protestantism both within the country and across the borders became weakened. Consequently, he marked as the main line of bearing the conversion of the Heyducks, making up the core of the Protestant armed forces, numbering around 12,000, of the minor nobles of Tiszahát, and of György Rákóczi I, prince of Transylvania (1630–1648).

However, to ensure lasting results, the bishop of Eger considered even all this insufficient. Beside the exclusion from the structures of secular power, the report highlights as the other main problem of Catholicism in Upper Hungary the unceasing intellectual expansion of Protestantism. As a result of the frequent use of JOHANN STEPHAN PÜTTER’s concept of “counter-reformation” to designate the 17th century, which was totally unknown in the age, we tend to view the Calvinist and Evangelical confessions as being in a defensive position. However, according to the author of the report, the realisation of the union with the Ruthenian people of Greek rite was an urgent task partly because several of their villages had already abandoned their old religion and had admitted the preachers. Lippay also mentioned that Catholic villages were still converting in considerable numbers to Protestantism, which he only partly attributed to the influence of György Rákóczi I, the most powerful Protestant landlord of Upper Hungary. Probably the “modernity” of the Catholicism of these settlements can also be called into question, although it also happened that freshly Catholicised areas were re-converted to Protestantism.

In particular, the bishop of Eger describes in the report the case of Tapolyhanosfalva, characterised as *oppidum non ignobile*. The conversion of this market town, lying east of Eperjes (present-day Prešov) is interesting especially because according to the report the Catholicisation of the Evangelist settlement had happened only a little while earlier, by the free will of the people. And the conversion could not be prevented or reversed even by the intervention of the local Protestant landlords. But since Lippay was unable to appoint a priest to Tapolyhanosfalva, although they had been persistently asking for it for two years, the majority of the community converted back to their “old” *i.e.* Protestant faith. The reason was that, naturally, the Protestant preachers were not willing to serve the new followers of the rival religion in their everyday needs (christening, wedding, burial).

One important lesson of the re-converted town of Tapolyhanosfalva is that Catholicism in the Early Modern Age was a competitive alternative to Protestantism for the communities of market towns in Upper Hungary, which from the old mediaeval Church organically had converted to Protestantism almost a hundred years before, as a result of its modernism and the adaptation of its doctrines by Cardinal Pázmány, even in a minority position, excluded from the structures of power. However, it could not realise its potentials, owing to the inadequate number of its representatives. The same problem occurred in the Catholicisation of landlords. As the bishop writing the report says, the Catholic aristocrats were in many cases forced to recall the preachers who had been driven away because they could not replace them.

This catastrophic lack of professional representatives of his own confession Lippay attributed, similarly to Pázmány, to a national characteristic, claiming that if young Hungarians did not receive an expedient education, they would rather become soldiers than take on the constraints of holy service.

These constraints, apart from the oath of obedience, primarily included the institution of celibacy, which was confirmed in Trent after lengthy debates. The requirement of celibacy is obviously referred to in the bishop's report as a competitive disadvantage against Protestantism.

However, he did not, and could not, question the legitimacy of the extrapolation of the Mediterranean image of the woman and the role of the woman in the Carpathian Basin. In his opinion the solution would have been to establish a seminary adjoined to the Jesuit college of Ungvár (present-day Uzhhorod), then only a residence, to be precise, where the students would pursue their studies in the humanities as members of the ecclesiastical order. According to his plans, the seminary would partly fill up the 20 places available in the just established diocesan institute in Vienna; and it would also produce graduates who after finishing their studies in rhetoric and caustics could immediately start working. And they would work not only in the Kingdom. In Lippay's opinion, primarily because of the difficulty of crossing the borders, it was hardly possible to achieve lasting results in the occupied territories only from the outside. Therefore the reserves of the occupied areas had to be mobilised and people had to be educated in Ungvár. Only people with their roots in the occupied territories could be expected to permanently work as ordained priests under the Ottoman rule. The bishop did not see a risk in the possibility that despite the considerable investment some of the students might fail to become priests, since if people who were unwilling to take on celibacy became licentiates (secular catholic preachers) with the same educational background as priests, the investment would pay off. He also planned the centre of the vitally important conversion of the Heyduck people and the minor nobles of Tiszahát to be in Ungvár, where the boarding-house to be established would have an irresistible appeal as a result of free boarding and education for the noble youth. The Ungvár centre would only not have a role in the Ruthenian union. Although the plans included the education of Orthodox students, the emphasis was placed here on the establishment of a Basilite monastery to be filled with friars who would come from Poland but would speak the language of the people and know their customs. Lippay did not detail the fantastic idea of Catholicising the Prince of Transylvania.

As the only prerequisite for the establishment of the institutions laying the foundations for the Catholicisation of Upper Hungary, the bishop named the financial contribution of the Apostolic See. He mentions in the report that his financial resources have been depleted by the foundation of the (short-lived) seminary in Vienna, adjoined to the Pázmáneum. His almost arrogantly requestive lines say: "The bishop [Lippay] humbly beseeches the Pope to provide help to him and support his intention and wish to found the aforesaid institutions. If in India, Persia and England so much effort and money is invested for the benefit of the religion, if Germany, where such wealthy and almost princely ecclesiastical benefices are found, is taken care of in the form of papal colleges (*alumnatus*) established in Rome and in other places, why does His Holiness not do the same in this Apostolic country, where the harvest seems much more abundant and great things could be achieved with the help of a modest support? To make the realisation of this plan easier, and to make the financial burdens of His Holiness as small as possible, the bishop asks for a kind and generous donation of eight thousand gold ducats... If I should be deprived of this help, I ask Your Divine Majesty to be gracious to me and not condemn me for the loss of so many souls," sound the final lines of the report.

However, the Baroque papacy that replaced the Tridentine reform papacy at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries was only willing to invest considerable amounts in the estab-

lishment of a mission organisation that it could directly control. This was primarily due to the more and more ambivalent relationship of the papacy with the Catholic powers that kept the local ecclesiastical structures under tight control. In Upper Hungary the Holy See also experimented with the missionaries of the Propaganda Congregation, this time without, and even in opposition to, the reigning ordinary episcopate, with rather limited success. Lippay (and his successors in the See of Eger) received no direct help from the pope. We have no knowledge of any reaction to his requests and demands from the Holy See of Rome. The report probably lay forgotten on the papal nuncio's desk. All that happened was that the chancellor of the papal embassy to Vienna underlined on the last pages of the text the plans and requests considered to be important.

The most important peculiarity of the report was that it presented the problems and perspectives of Catholic confessionalisation in Hungary in unusual detail. These were the following: 1. a recognition of the limited possibilities of the Catholicisation of landlords; 2. the strategic significance of the conversion of the Heyducks and minor nobles; 3. the plan for the introduction of a higher licentiate-education (and treating the pastoral care of the areas under Ottoman rule on a par with the area of the Kingdom of Hungary); providing points of reference for present-day research to create a subtler image of the Catholic confessionalisation in the Early Modern Age.

The process appearing in the relation on the level of models is clearly bipolar: the *conditio sine qua non* of the religious political struggle, of the "Counter-Reformation of conversion by landlords" or "counter-reformation of patrons" was that the process was building from bottom to top. There is no direct proportionality between the number converted aristocrats and the confessional affiliation of the masses of serfs, although the literature seems to assume this, in the lack of appropriate reflection.

The central problem of the report, which it seeks to remedy with Rome's help, is ensuring the lasting Catholicisation of people on the estates of the already Catholicised aristocracy. A decade later, already as archbishop of Esztergom, Lippay estimated that the ratio of Catholic and Protestant aristocrats in the area of his diocese was 100:8, as opposed to the 220:1000 ratio of parishes. Thus the 13-fold dominance of Catholic aristocrats was surpassed by the dominance of Protestant parishes in terms of the number of souls. The situation was probably more unfavourable for the Protestants in the area of present-day Dunántúl (Transdanubia), but the Catholicisation of landlords could not result in a religious homogeneity among the serfs of the Esterházy-estates in western Hungary even in 1659. It is thus understandable that in connection with the conversion of Rákóczi the bishop sketches the expected nationwide religious political advantages rather than the number of possible converts in Upper Hungary. He realised that Catholicism had reached the limits of its scope of extension and that there was no further advance without a consolidation of the results achieved.

Reading the text of the report carefully, it seems that although the connection between the rights of the founders/patrons over the churches, including the introduction of the priests and the religious practice of the masses was definitely tight, it was not an exclusive connection. On the one hand, the Catholic aristocracy would more readily accept that the days of the serfs were disciplined by the tenets and representatives of other confessions than let them live without any religious discipline, "like animals". (In such cases, at least so it

seems on the basis of the text, the confessional rival was accepted secretly even by the hierarchy.)

On the other hand, the legal regulation also guaranteed some freedom for the inhabitants of market towns and villages. This was because in Hungary the imperial principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* was never codified. Of course, earlier and recent studies have established a correct diagnosis when they see a parallelism between this principle and the strengthening of the rights of patrons as a result of the attitude of Werbőczy's followers. They describe historical reality by proving that the purpose of the law of 1608, extending "the freedom of religion" to villages, was nothing else than to remove the question of the religion of serfs from under the control of the central powers. Yet the overlap between the imperial principle and its Hungarian version of "he who owns the *fundus* owns the *capella*" was never complete. The aim of Protestantism was to widen the existing gap when from 1618/19 on, after the unfavourable shift in the number of Protestant aristocrats, they demanded that religious practice should be free, in particular from the influence of (Catholic) landlords.

The events that took place in Tapolyhanosfalva prove that this freedom was also taken advantage of, although only as a rare exception, by the expanding Catholic faith. This is perhaps the only known case from the area of Royal Hungary where according to the description the Catholicisation of the Protestant community of a village or market town happened entirely without the intervention of the landlord. Even in the Jákóffy-case (where György Rákóczi P's steward took back the church from the Catholicised serfs in a village in Gömör (Geomoriensis) County, described by GYULA SZEKFŰ, we find some landed noblemen on the peasant's side. Kata Pálffy also had a significant role in the conversion of Szentpéterfa, near Tapolyhanosfalva. AND ISTVÁN SZABÓ considers it utterly impossible that other such cases took place somewhere.

At this point a critique of the source text is inevitable. In the lack of further data it cannot be proved that the events at Tapolyhanosfalva actually took place as described by Lippay. Further research may uncover the precise details concerning the date and circumstances of the conversion and the identity of the anonymous landed noblemen. We are talking here about such useful and important details as the members of the possible Jesuit mission or the predecessors of the Dessewffy, Jékelfalussy and Péchy families who owned the village in the 19th century. Despite these deficiencies, we have no serious reason to doubt the truth of the bishop of Eger's words. The *ad limina* reports almost never contained descriptions of individual cases. If the bishop decided to include such a story, which in fact shed a not too favourable light on him, he must have done it because he considered it extraordinary and important.

It is of course possible that the story was unreal, but since the papal nuncio receiving the report could easily check the truth of the statements made in it, this is not very likely. Also, the problems and Catholicisation plans described in the text would in themselves have been sufficient, if received favourably, to achieve the stated goal: to prompt the required cooperation of the papal decision makers. A groundless or exaggerated statement would have meant an unnecessary risk, while Lippay's plan was much more elaborated than to allow for such a mistake. The credibility of the source is further supported by the fact that it was produced for "internal use". The outwardly combatant and uncompromising prelate practically came to the same conclusion as Palatine Miklós Esterházy, whom he regarded as a moderantist and with whom he had a permanent conflict concerning the agenda of diet that was finally not held, precisely because of the question of religion. This conclusion was that the expansion of

Catholicism cannot continue without an appropriate number of representatives having adequate qualifications.

Although Lippay formulated his plan in the context of a concrete historical situation, it was not simply an occasional idea. A decade later, in the report he wrote in Esztergom, he expounds essentially the same plan: giving priority to the establishment of seminaries, followed by Jesuit colleges and schools. The conversion of the aristocracy is only third in this line of precedence. The question of the conversion of minor nobles seems to receive more emphasis. Although minor nobles had no influence on the masses of serfs, for the Catholic hierarchy they were important from the viewpoint of parliamentary legislation and the exercising of power in the counties.

One important difference can be seen in the evaluation of the licentiate. At the turn of the 1630s and 40s it was seriously considered whether the catastrophic lack of professional representatives could be compensated for in Hungary by making permanent a semi-Protestant solution, based on appropriate education. This solution, which was so obvious in an interconfessional situation, was unheard of in the core areas of Catholic confessionalisation and was never favourably received by Rome. In 1650 the mostly married secular leaders of Catholic communities appeared again as a kind of temporary solution.

There was one even more important difference: In 1650 Lippay requested the help of the the Apostolic See for his plans of founding seminaries and colleges in a much less demanding manner, in general terms rather, asking for papal grants for two students in colleges in Austria and for two in Bohemia, and yet for two more in the Greek college of Rome, and for assistance in redeeming pledged ecclesiastical assets, but no concrete sum was mentioned. At this time the emphasis was placed on improving the position of the prime and the ecclesiastical order within the country.

The final message of the source text is that although the Hungarian ecclesiastical Catholic elite tried to take advantage of the Roman centre, in the area of confessionalisation these efforts proved less fruitful, partly because of the unhelpful attitude of the Baroque papacy, as they would have been in the second half of the 16th century, for instance. This made it ever clearer for the Hungarian episcopate that the only chance for Catholicism to become a dominant and majority confession was exclusively in a State Church framework and, based on this, in an "hors concours" solution, that is, a symbiotic relationship with the Habsburg absolutism. This became a reality in the 1670s as a result of the radical changes in the internal and external political situation: the disappearance of feudal dualism and the decline of Transylvania, and it was most clearly revealed by the forceful occupation of churches and the high treason law cases brought against Protestant preachers.

In the end, the perpetual lack of regular reports to Rome, illustrated with numbers above, was nothing else than one of the conspicuous signs of the fact that the State Church model had become exclusive for the Hungarian Catholic episcopate.

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