

INITIATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE CARPATHIAN BASIN BY THE REFORMED CHURCH

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Abstract

The current article presents an overview on the history of Hungarian higher education in the Carpathian Basin, focusing mainly on the initiations of the Reformed Church. The aim of the author is to contribute to our knowledge, appreciate the values and developments of our common past and shape our ideas to build a shared vision of the future that is worthy of the work of our ancestors. The Calvinist notion of vocation is a central concept of the paper: we should serve God in the workplaces that were assigned for us. The concept of vocation, understood as one's personal mission, is closely related to positive visions and persistent work for the welfare of future generations. This is how the idea of vocation becomes central to shaping educational policies. Respecting the legacy of the former generations, our call is to improve the present system of higher education in the Carpathian Basin.

Keywords: higher education, Reformed Church, vocation, Carpathian Basin

Introduction

Acknowledging several centuries' struggles of our ancestors to improve higher education, the author of the current paper examines the role of the Reformed Church in shaping academic life in the Carpathian Basin and in Europe. It is not possible to explore the historical, political and social background of the problem in details in the current frameworks but important milestones can be identified. The aim of the author is to contribute to our knowledge, appreciate the values and developments of our common past and shape our ideas to build a shared vision of the future, one that is worthy of our ancestors' work.

It is important to identify geographical settings when examining the issue of higher education from this perspective, as the Hungarian nation and the Hungarian Reformed Church are a whole and undivided unity, irrespectively of the political borders. This was declared at the synod of the Hungarian Reformed Church in Debrecen, Hungary on 22nd May, 2009. Institutions of academic instruction prepare students for a given vocation. What makes the difference between the system of higher education provided by the Reformed Church and higher education in other settings?

Calvin on vocation

The worldly goal and meaning of one's life is to work according to one's strength and capabilities. The order of struggle and trust formulated in "The Tragedy of Man" by Imre Madách is related to this goal: "O, Man, strive on, strive on, have faith; and trust!", One's work in the worldly life was reinterpreted on the basis of the new religion. A fundamental recognition of the Reformed believers, based on the divine communication in the Holy Scriptures vastly influenced social and economic life. According to this communication, God should be adored in every sphere of human life and obedience to God's will is not restricted to a special place but extends to the entire world. In the Reformed ethics the term "vocation" was used to denote a new concept. This new concept reflected the appreciation of everyday work and tasks as sanctioned by God. According to Luther's teachings and personal example of leaving monastery life, God created human beings to serve Him in the whole world and not solely in the monasteries. By doing so, Luther rejected medieval values, according to which monastic life is primary as compared to pursuing a worldly profession, and vocation is possible only in priesthood and religious service. Following Luther, other reformators also joined the teaching that we should serve God in everyday life in the workplaces that were assigned for us. Honest work in everyday settings is a means of glorifying God. True accomplishments is a way of relating to the sacred dimension, further, our loyalty in our worldly vocation is connected to our heavenly vocation and is a predictor of our internal relationship with God. Vocation is not a mere economic term either for Luther or for Calvin as our vocation is in close connection to the act of calling and also to the caller, God. We are called to be Christians, that is, people reflecting Christ's features, progressing in sanctity (1 Thessalonians, 4:7; Ephesians 4:1); not independently of everyday life but within everyday life; not separating from the world but participating in the world. Calvin emphasized this thesis even more by stating that our worldly vocation is not only a way of being God's people acting according to His will but accomplishing our vocation is exactly the way of pleasing God. For Calvin, hard and diligent work is equal to glorifying God. Calvin directed our attention to the Holy Scriptures, especially to the Old Covenant about the sacred world as God's creation. Following Jesus' teaching: "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working" (John 5:17) means that human life is sacred in Christ and one can recognize one's worldly destination and can understand that a human being is created for work. (Benke, 1986)

As Calvin asserts in his Institutes: "The last thing to be observed is, that the Lord enjoins every one of us, in all the actions of life, to have respect to our own calling. He knows the boiling restlessness of the human mind, the fickleness with which it is borne hither and thither, its eagerness to hold opposites at one time in its grasp, its ambition. Therefore, lest all things should be thrown into confusion by our folly and rashness, he has assigned distinct duties to each in the different modes of life. And that no one may presume to overstep his proper limits, he has distinguished the different modes of life by the name of callings. Every man's mode of life, therefore, is a kind of station assigned him by the Lord, which he may not be always driven about at random. (...) in every thing the call of the Lord is the foundation and beginning of right action. He who does not act with reference to it will never, in the discharge of duty, keep the right path. (...) Hence, he only who directs his life to this end will have it properly framed; (...). This too, will afford admirable consolation, that in following your proper calling, no work will be so mean and sordid as not to have

a splendour and value in the eye of God. (Calvin: Institutes, vol 3., chapter 10 /6/) Public service, private life and all forms education, as a foundation for these, can not exist without a sense of mission and vocation.

The Beginnings

Before discussing the attempts made at establishing institutions in higher education of the Reformed Church, the beginnings embedded in a wider European context should be explored. According to László Szögi the birth of the European universities is between the 11th and 13th centuries. (Szögi, 1994) József Pálfi, citing Sámuel Kovács, assumed that the starting point is the year 791: from this time on scholarly workshops (*studium generale*) were established in several towns. Salerno with its medical workshop was an outstanding initiation in higher education. The first university was established in Bologna, providing an excellent instruction in law from 1088 on. The University of Paris was founded in 1150. Both of them were developed on the foundations of a previous *studium generale*. The University of Oxford was established in 1096 and the University of Cambridge followed in 1208. Unlike medieval Hungarian universities, these institutions are still operative today. Further initiations were made in the 14th and 15th century, with Italy taking the lead. In our region, Prague was the first with its university founded in 1348. The Jagello University in Cracow was established in 1364 and the Vienna University followed in 1365. (Pálfi, 2008)

The Hungarian Kingdom, flourishing in the 14th century, required a great number of educated persons according to contemporary European standards, not only in church positions but in secular professions as well. King Louis the Great who was convinced by William, the bishop of Pecs, also royal chancellor, founded the first Hungarian university in Pecs in 1367. The university in Buda received its charter of foundation in 1395 from Pope Boniface IX. The University in Pozsony was opened in 1467. (Szögi, 1994) Remig Békefy in the 19th century and Jenő Gutheil in the 20th century assumed that the first Hungarian university was established in the 13th century in Veszprém and presumably it was a college of law, but was destroyed during the Mongol invasion. (Békefy, 1896; Gutheil 1961) Miklos Boda confuted the assumption, based on his archeological digs at a medieval university. (Boda, 1999)

Students at the University of Pecs were prepared for the three classical faculties (theology, law and medicine) at the *facultas atrium*, a preparatory phase in their studies. In addition to instructing the seven liberal arts (*spetem artes liberales*), Aristoteles' philosophical works and Roman and Canon Law were taught. The Pope, similarly to the cases of Cracow and Vienna, refused to give permission for establishing a theological faculty. The Avignon Popes assigned the task of instructing theology primarily to the University of Paris. The bull of the Pope focused on the establishment of a legal faculty and permitted issuing Magistral and Doctoral degrees. It was an important financing development that the magisters and doctors received their salary from the Hungarian ruler. (Szögi, 1996) The exact site of the University of Pecs was still a riddle for the researchers in the 1900's. Based on the records of Evlia Cselebi, a Turkish historian, it was hypothesized that the university had been built near the cathedral but the exact spot could only be determined by further excavations. Archeological digs have been started in 1985 and the layout of the entire building could be

identified. The medieval university was 35m long and 10m wide. It was destroyed in the winter of 1664, during the winter military campaign of General Miklós Zrínyi against the Turkish army. By 1994, the building was already explored and its function was confirmed by the heraldic stone referring to Bishop William in the contemporary aula magna.

Following a chronological order, the first charter of the second medieval university of Hungary, the University of Óbuda was issued on 6th October, 1395 by Boniface IX, on the request of Sigismund of Luxemburg, the Holy Roman Emperor, King of Hungary. The charter permitted the establishment of a complete university with all the four faculties but no data confirming that every faculty worked is available. After 1419, there is no data on the further operation of the University of Óbuda.

The third known attempt made at establishing a Hungarian university is related to King Matthew and his chancellor, John Vitez, Bishop of Esztergom. Pope Paul II, supporting the proposal made by King Matthew, authorized John Vitez and Janus Pannonius, Bishop of Pecs, (both of them being the Hungarian representatives of Italian humanism as the pervasive cultural mode of the era) to work on the establishment of a university in a Hungarian town that they could find suitable for the purpose. According to the Pope's letter there was not any other university in Hungary, so the University of Pecs and the University of Óbuda must have ceased to exist. The University of Pozsony, after flourishing for a short while, rapidly declined and was closed in the era of the founding ruler. (Szögi, 1996)

Reformed colleges as the fundamentals of Reformed Universities

The Reformed colleges as foundations for the Reformed academic institutions were formed in the 16th century and were supplemented by academic departments in Pápa, Sárospatak, Debrecen, Várad, Gyulafehérvár, Nagyenyed, Marosvásárhely and Kolozsvár. The four historic and well-known Hungarian Reformed colleges had identical and universal features; still each of them was characterized by a specific image. In the town of Pápa, an important defense centre against the Turkish army, soldiers serving in the border fortress started and maintained the college. In Sárospatak the Lutheran college that was transformed to a Reformed college was supported mainly by Gábor Perényi, a well-to-do landowner. Its 17th century leading role, and its library that was considered the first and most important in the country, were the results of the support given by the Rákóczi family. The colleges in Gyulafehérvár and Nagyenyed were established by Gabor Bethlen, Emperor, who invited renowned foreign professors and donated land to ensure the financial autonomy of the school. The College of Debrecen belonged to the town and was financed by the bourgeois, though the college grew in significance well beyond the town walls and it became the most important institution of education in the eastern part of Hungary. (Benda, 2004) In these institutions education was provided at elementary, secondary and academic levels. In minor settlements only elementary schools were established. Elements of theology, liturgical music, reading, writing, and mathematics were taught. In agricultural towns, 6-year (initially between 6 and 9 years) instruction of grammar (rhetoric, poetry, logic and certain elements of law) was provided, often together with Greek, Hebrew and an introduction to theology. Academic instruction was based on this type of education and involved 2-3 years of philosophy and a subsequent 3-4 years of theology where logic, practical physics, law, metaphysics and theology were taught.

In the 18th and 19th centuries colleges with academic faculties and their particular schools were operating in the regional centers of the parishes. In the centre of the Ante-Tisza (Tiszáninnyi) Region in Sárospatak a college academic faculty was established and in Losonc a particular school with higher grades was founded. A secondary level particular school worked in Miskolc, in Szikszó, in Rimaszombat, in Kassa, in Újhely and in Szatmár. In the centre of the Trans-Tisza Region in Debrecen there was a college academic faculty. In Kecskemét a secondary particular school was established with upper grades. There were secondary particular schools in Sarkad, Békés, Mezőtúr, Kisújszállás, Karcag, Hajdúszoboszló, Hajdúböszörmény, Hajdúnánás and Máramarossziget. In the Transdanubian Region there were two college academic faculties in Pápa and in Sopron; and there were several secondary particular schools in Curgó, Tapolca, Balatonfüred, Bicske and Komárom. In the Transylvanian Region three college academic faculties were established in Nagyenyed, Kolozsvár and Marosvásárhely, with several secondary particular schools in Szászváros, Sepsiszentgyörgy, Segesvár, Székelyudvarhely and Zilah. In the Highlands (Felvidék) Region in Pozsony there was a college academic faculty, and in Eperjes there was a particular school with upper grades. There were secondary particular schools in Kőszeg, in Selmecbánya and in Késmark. Particular schools invited renowned professors who could shape the curricula to their preference. Their work significantly contributed to ensuring the high standards of education and made the institutions acknowledged. (Molnar, 2008)

Colleges were characterized by a well-developed college spirit and self-governance. The community of 6-10 students in a learning- and bedroom was called coetus. Coetus improved students' autonomy and responsibility. Improper liberties, should they have occurred, were curbed by the school seats. Supervision, control and maintenance were the shared responsibility of the donators, the town council and the Reformed Church.

The contemporary practice of peregrination should also be mentioned. Students of the Hungarian Reformed colleges went abroad to continue or accomplish their studies there. This process of cultural migration lasted for approximately 300 years, from the middle of the 16th century to the first third of the 19th century, and was closely related to the spirit of Reformation and to school policy. In this perspective, the knowledge of other countries had to be acquired and one's own nation be improved by one's learning. Hungarian peregrines were hosted mainly in England, in the Netherlands, in Germany and in Switzerland where they could get considerable stipends. In Italy, the University of Padua was the only institution that admitted students from all denominations and it was also frequented by Hungarian students (Racz, 1992). Naturally, Hungarian students went to study abroad even before the 16th century. As Sandor Tonk asserts, almost 4.000 Transylvanian students studied abroad from the last third of the 12th century to the end of the 16th century, as it was documented in the contemporary data sources. (Tonk, 1991)

Attempts to found a university of the Reformed Church

As a precedent of the first Reformed attempt to found an academic institution, the Diets at Torda should be mentioned. In 1550 the free exercise of religion was ensured for the Lutherans. In 1564 the freedom of religion for the Lutherans and for the Calvinists was enacted. Then, first in Europe, the free exercise of any religion was declared.

In the medieval Transylvania there was not any institution of higher education, college or university, but systematically established church institutions had their two important centers in Várad and Gyulafehérvár. In the dynamics of religious debates with the gradual introduction of free exercise of religion, the idea that Transylvania may be a new home for sciences occurred to John Sigismund. He wanted to establish a university in Gyulafehérvár by ensuring the costs of maintenance and inviting scholarly persons. However, this remained a plan and the first Transylvanian university was established by István Báthori in Kolozsvár and it worked between 1582 and 1603. The language of instruction was Latin and lecturers were Jesuit instructors and priests. The Bible-reading emperors of the 17th century, Gábor Bethlen, György Rákóczi I. and Mihály Apafi were dedicated to found institutions that can operate in the long run. The emperor's capital, Gyulafehérvár, and the gate of Transylvania, the city of Várad had a major role in their initiations. The two significant Reformed collegium academicum were a legacy of the schools working previously in these chapter centers. Gábor Bethlen as an emperor and scholar, organizing and supporting scientific life, established Gyulafehérvár Academicum Collegium in 1622, a milestone in the Transylvanian system of higher education. Peregrination gained grounds again and a twofold cultural migration could commence. Famous scholars came to Transylvania and student exchange was a regular practice in the era. The emperor considered Transylvanian students' foreign studies a priority and he personally supported the peregrines. His initiations were followed by his successor, György Rákóczi I. and his wife, Zsuzsanna Lórántffy. The professors of the college had their voice in selecting the students worthy of such opportunities, in organizing their journey and assigning them a workplace on their return.

The Várad Schola Illustris, an institution of higher education joined the one in Gyulafehérvár, but it did not meet the criteria of a university even if it was termed *Universitati Varadiensi* in a contemporary theological dispute in 1650. However, the Várad students could receive a high quality education and they were able to perform very well in any foreign academic institution. Rectors and pastors were demanding, but also open-minded and committed to the truth of the Bible: these features together served as a solid basis for high quality education. Following some years of peregrination in Netherland, Janos Csere Apáczai cherished the idea of founding a university in Transylvania. However, the Transylvanian society and culture, together with the church, were not prepared for his innovations. Even the Emperor, György Rákóczi II. wrote in his letter to Zsuzsanna Lórántffy that "it is not proper to promote the welfare of such a person." (Pálfi J 2008)

Apáczai had long-term goals. His primary aim was to educate professionals who are able to manage the country and facilitate progression in Transylvania. He was convinced that the only road to development is scientific education. He visioned an academy with medical, legal and theological faculties, all based on introductory studies in philosophy. In his plan a clear-cut difference was made between a college and a university. The difference could be grasped in three major factors. First, in order to maintain a university stabile and accountable financing sources are necessary. Second, young lecturers should be motivated by a more balanced and fair salary system. Third, the academic autonomy of lecturers' as well as students' community must be ensured. He elaborated on the university structure and devised the network of background institutions (library, press, botanical garden, students' hostel and canteen) that might even bring profits for the university. According to Apáczai, the language of the university should be Latin, in accordance with contemporary European trends. His plans were not realized.

Reformed higher education from the 17th century on

The era between 1671 and 1681 may be called the decade of mourning in the history of Hungarian Protestantism. Our ancestors, the galley slave preachers, gave an example on persistence and faith in starting again under any circumstances. After one and a half centuries of Turkish conquest, a new power, the Habsburgs ruled Hungary. During the Turkish rule the independent Hungarian state was preserved in Transylvania. At the turn of the 17th and 18th century, the Hungarian state lost its sovereignty and was transformed into a subordinated principality within the Habsburg Empire. The church policy of the Vienna Court was characterized by the notion of “one empire – one religion”. (The idea is repeated in the 20th and 21st century by assigning one language to one country.) Reports and various forms of lawsuits, purchasing foundations, abasement of the Hungarian lords or buying their loyalty by promotions, and a number of violations of constitutional law or religion were the “trademarks” of the sophisticated Vienna policies. The mere existence of the Reformed denomination depended on Maria Theresa of Austria’s goodwill who supported Roman Catholic restoration. Only the rule of Joseph II. changed the situation. As a result of the general policy of religion and education/public education of the Vienna Court, the Reformed denomination chose a strategy of self defense and aimed at silent but persistent survival. As a consequence of losing state support, a conscious and committed patronage was organized among the wealthy aristocrats and bourgeois who ensured the financial background for continuity and survival.

Hopes for recovery were brought by the Reform Age. In 1848, in the year of the Hungarian War of Independence against the Habsburgs, a Hungarian renewal could have been started with the union of Transylvania and Hungary, and with the laws that were enacted on education and language use. However, university level higher education could commence later, only in 1855, when the Budapest Reformed Theological Academy was established.

In Kolozsvár in Transylvania an independent interdenominational university, the University of Kolozsvár was established in 1872 with its four faculties. The university had a faculty of humanities and history, a faculty of law and political studies, a faculty of mathematics and science, and a medical faculty. In 1881 the official name of the university was changed to Frances Joseph University.

In the last semester of the Frances Joseph University in 1918, 83% of the students enrolled were Hungarian. In 1919 in the building of the university the new Ferdinand I. University was established. The language of instruction was changed to Romanian. Former students and lecturers of the Frances Joseph University were admitted to the University of Szeged in 1921.

In 1945 the Hungarian University of Kolozsvár was called Bolyai University and its medical faculty was transferred to Marosvásárhely. In the Babes-Bolyai University established in 1959 the remaining Hungarian groups gradually ceased to exist. In 1989 Hungarian groups were allowed to be formed again, but without any autonomy. After struggling for 80 years without considerable success, the Reformed Diocese of Királyhágó took initiations to establish higher education in Hungarian in Transylvania.

Reformed higher education in the Carpathian Basin from 1990 on

An indisputable result of the process of the transition of the social system is the retrieval of former church wealth, including institutions of education in the Carpathian Basin, although political will could hinder the process in several cases. For the Hungarian nation-parts living beyond the borders of Hungary, the first step to ensure higher education in Hungarian was to establish transfer programs of Hungarian universities. From 1990 on, the Hungarian youth, a former majority but now the largest national minority in Europe, can study in institutions of higher education in their mother tongue in their native country with the help of several foundations. The previous system of peregrination would have meant a considerable financial burden on the families so it was not viable.

In the Southland (Délvidék) there is no Reformed or interdenominational Hungarian university with more than one faculty. Students can study in Hungarian and get a degree in education in the University of Novi Sad in Szabadka. They graduate as elementary school teachers. There is another university program in Hungarian at the faculty of Economics. At the Faculty of Humanities there is a Department of Hungarian Language and Literature.

In Transylvania, the Babes-Bolyai University of Kolozsvár has no autonomous faculty in Hungarian, only some courses preparing the students for a number of professions. This is why the Transylvanian Hungarian University was established in 2001 with a Kolozsvár centre, with additional courses in Marosvásárhely and Csíkszereda. The establishment of the university was determined in 1999 and it received financial support from the Sapientia Foundation. The Partium Christian University in Nagyvárad received its operation permit in December, 2000, as a legal successor of the István Sulyok Reformed College. Today it has three faculties: the Faculty of Humanities, The Faculty of Economics and the Faculty of Art.

In the Highland (Felvidék) higher education started in Komárom in 2001, also relying on foundation support. The state approved the establishment of Janos Selye University on 23rd October, 2003. The university has a Faculty of Economics, a Faculty of Education and a Faculty of Theology.

In Subcarpathia, the Ferenc Rákóczi II. Subcarpathian Hungarian College received its state permit for operation in 1996. The university is situated in a former court building owned by the Reformed Church and its dedicated lecturers provide a high level instruction for the students. The institute has a research centre and four departments: the Department of Mathematics and Science, the Department of Philosophy, the Department of Education and Psychology, and the Department of History and Social Sciences. (Molnár, 2007)

In Hungary, the Synod of the Hungarian Reformed Church decided on establishing a university with several faculties in 1993. In the same year the Theological Faculty of the Gáspár Károli Reformed University started its work. Its legal predecessor was the Budapest Reformed Theological Academy, established in 1855. In the very same year the Teacher Training College Faculty of the Gáspár Károli Reformed University was established. Its legal predecessor was the Nagykőrös Teacher Training College founded in 1839. In 1998, a Faculty of State and Law was opened at the university, and the fourth faculty established was the Faculty of Humanities.

The current historical review reveals the fights, failures and reconstructive attempts that are in the background of today's developments. This knowledge may motivate us to keep hope alive and continue our struggles under all circumstances. Our ancestors did not hesitate whether it was time for action or not: they acted and oftentimes they sacrificed their lives for a purpose.

Such a sacrifice is not necessary today; but we should be their worthy successors. We should do what the community of our motherland, the Carpathian Basin expects us to do; be our place in a church, in a school, in a library or other; in a family and in our broad environment. If we believe in God, in our personal vocation and mission we can be the sustainers of the nation, the worthy followers of our renowned ancestors.

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A REFORMÁTUS VALLÁS KEZDEMÉNYEZÉSEI A KÁRPÁT-MEDENCEI FELSŐOKTATÁSBAN

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Pécsi Tudományegyetem

Összefoglaló

A tanulmány a kárpát-medencei magyar felsőoktatás történeti áttekintésével – mint az innováció alapjaival – foglalkozik, kiemelten a megreformált vallás egykori és jelenlegi intézményeinek tükrében. A szerző célja tudásunk gyarapítása abban a tekintetben, hogy tisztán lássuk és becsüljük meg közös múltunk értékeit és eredményeit, valamint elődeink kiváló munkásságából merítve formáljuk gondolatainkat, tervezzünk és vegyünk részt jövőnk építésében.

A református vallás egyik alappillére, hogy a hivatás – bármely munkahelyen legyünk is – Istentől rendelt elhivatottság, az egyén személyes missziója, kötelesség és felelősség, mely egyszerre mind a jövő generációk jólétének alapja. Ez a központi eleme a református oktatáspolitikának is. A megelőző generációk hagyatékának tisztelettel adózva, a mi kihívásunk, pontosabban „elhivatottságunk” itt és most az, hogy továbbfejlesszük a kárpát-medencei oktatást/felsőoktatást, létrehozva a Kárpát-medencei oktatási térséget, mint az innováció alapját, hogy továbbra is az európai megújulás meghatározó szereplői lehessünk, mint voltunk is a történelmünk során nem egyszer.

Kulcsszavak: felsőoktatás, hivatás, református vallás és oktatás, Kárpát-medence