

THE CULTURAL CONTEXT AND IMPACT OF THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION IN SLOVAKIA

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Despite the impact of the Reformation upon the cultural development of south-east central Europe in general and upon the emergence of the ethnic or national consciousness of the Slovaks, in histories of the Reformation little attention is devoted to its impact upon the Slavs. However, the Reformation has not been extensively examined in histories of Czechoslovakia or of the Slovaks. Very few non-Slovak historians, have taken up the study of the development of Slovak ethnic consciousness; exceptions are Ludwig von Gogolak, J.G. Locher and Fritz Valjavec. Likewise, Czech historians usually do little more than assert that the Reformation fostered or reinforced the cultural ties between the Czechs and the Slovaks. Even many Slovak scholars have often quickly passed over the era of the Reformation and barely note its significance.

There are, of course, significant exceptions. Among the older Slovak historians the works of Pavol Krížko, Branislav Varsik and Ján Kvacala established the study of the Reformation in Slovakia as a distinct field of study. Their work has been enlarged by specialized studies. In the field of literature, the extremely significant work of Ján Durovic published in 1940, *Evanjelická literatúra do tolerancie*, which surveyed the literary production of evangelicals in Slovakia, has been joined by recently published general literary historical studies by M. Pišut, Jozef Minárik and Stanislav Smatlák which indicate the significance of the Reformation upon the development of literary activity among the Slovaks. Likewise, recent examinations of the history of education in historical Hungary by István Mészáros, or in Slovakia in particular, including those of Peter Vajcik and Vladislav Ružička build upon the works of older historians, especially Ján Rezik and Samuel Matthaëides and clearly indicate the transformation wrought by the Reformation in public education. The development of printing and the book trade, which has been a significant area of research for many recent sixteenth century historians, has also been reflected in the work of **Julius** Valach, Jozef Kuzmik and Viliam Cičaj who have examined the emergence of the printing and the book trade in Slovakia.

These and other recent studies substantiate the assertion that the Reformation was one of the significant formative influences on the emergence not only of a Slovak intelligentsia but also upon the national consciousness of the Slovaks. As Frederick Heymann noted in his history of Czechoslovakia, "among the Slovak gentry and intelligentsia, Lutheranism maintained a foothold, and its adherents remained one of the most active, culturally productive and nationally conscious elements of the Slovak people in the period down to the late eighteenth century." Indeed, its influence reached into the nineteenth century. Many of the leaders of the national revival movement of the nineteenth century in the Austrian Habsburg lands were raised in Lutheran homes or parsonages and attended Lutheran schools. Among these can be numbered Ján Kollár, L'udovit Stur, Jozef Miloslav Hurban, Michał M. Hodža, Karol Kuzmány as well as the Czech František Palacky and the Hungarian Lajos Kossuth.

What explains the impact of the Reformation upon the emergence of ethnic consciousness in general and, specifically, upon the development of the ethnic or national consciousness of the Slovaks? Certainly several explanations can be offered. Many scholars have emphasized the impact of the Reformation upon the development of the language and literature of individual nations in Europe. But, while it is true that literature, in the broadest sense of the word, encapsulates the language, manners, customs and ideas of a nation, it must also be recognized that the possession of a literature in a national language is not the only prerequisite for the emergence of a national identity. A nation must also share a common history and a sense of itself as a peculiar people. This usually requires that individual representatives of a people have access to political, social, and cultural institutions or structures, no matter how primitive they might be, which enable them to form and express their peculiar conception of themselves and to shape not only current public opinion but to create the hope of a common future.

Even a cursory survey of the Slovakia during the sixteenth and early seventeenth century indicates that the reformation provided an opportunity for Slovaks to emerge as public personalities, to assume leadership roles as theologians and administrators, pastors and teachers. In addition, the Reformation fostered the growth of popular education in Slovakia and provided Slovaks with an opportunity to obtain not only a rudimentary education but to gain access to the broader intellectual development of Europe. The theological changes and controversies of the reformation era demanded the preparation of a broad range of liturgical, devotional, in-

structional and polemical works which stimulated the emergence of printing and the book trade in Slovakia. Through these controversies and the emergence of Slovak intelligentsia, the Reformation led many Slovak intellectuals to recognize that they were a distinct community which faced common challenges. At the same time, the Reformation was marked by growing contacts between Czech and Slovak evangelicals and helped to foster the particular ethnic orientation of the Slovak Lutheran intelligentsia.

Therefore, the Reformation of the sixteenth century was a major moment in Slovak history and a significant milestone in the emergence of the Slovaks as a distinct national group. First, it established the institutional structures within which individual Slovaks emerged as significant personalities and leaders of the community in Slovakia. Especially important was the emergence of popular education in Slovakia which not only enabled the Slovaks to gain more than a rudimentary education but also to encounter, absorb and adapt the broader streams of European cultural development. Secondly, it shaped the specific forms used by Slovak intellectuals to express their ideas and fostered the growth of literary activity among the Slovaks. Finally, taken together, the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, provided both the immediate and broader intellectual context and conflicts which shaped the ideology, concerns and attitudes of the Slovaks in the early modern era.

I. Institutional Structures

The Reformation entered Slovakia during the third decade of the sixteenth century from the south, north and west. It first appeared in the court of Queen Mary (Maria) and in the mining cities of Central Slovakia. From Poland and Silesia reform ideas spread through eastern Slovakia while reformers from Moravia and the Austrian patrimonial lands appeared in western Slovakia. However, Lutheranism began to spread rapidly only after the defeat of the Hungarian forces by the Turks at Mohács in 1526 and the Diet of Augsburg in 1530 and then, primarily among the Germanic population of the major towns. Only after mid-century, as many of the leading nobles also converted to the new faith, did increasing numbers of Slovaks adhere to the new faith.

While in the cities "Windisch" or Slovak preachers were called by the town authorities to serve the Slovak population, the individual nobles

possessing the patronage right for churches in the towns and on the lands under their control, appointed reformist clergy. By the 1580s the Slovaks, especially in western Slovakia and in Gemer county (comitatus, župa) had begun to assume positions of authority in their local pastoral fraternities or seniorats.

Even in areas where evangelical pastors of Germanic heritage were numerous, such as in the towns of Spiš and Šariš counties, individual Slovaks, such as Elias Lani (Eliáš Láni) and Severinus Sculteti (Skultéty) attained positions of theological and administrative significance. During the 1590s Sculteti served as senior of the fraternity of the pastors of the five royal free cities of eastern Slovakia. Lani served as an instructor at the school of Gregor Horvath Stančić in Stražky near Spišská Belá, as senior in Turiec county, as a chaplain and advisor to the Palatine of Hungary George Thurzo and finally, alongside two fellow Slovaks, Samuel Melikus (Melik) and Isaac Abrahamides Hrochotsky, was elected one of the three superintendents for the Lutheran churches in western Slovakia at the Synod of Žilina in 1610 which finally created an independent, legally sanctioned ecclesiastical organization for Lutherans in western Slovakia. Of the approximately 300 congregations in the seven major Superintendencies created for the Lutherans in Slovakia, Slovaks formed the majority in at least four of them.

During the sixteenth century the pastors of these Slovak Lutherans, whether from the native Slovak population or from the many Slovaks and Czechs who emigrated from Moravia especially into western Slovakia, received much if not all of their education in the evangelical schools in Slovakia or in Moravia, Bohemia and Silesia, with the schools in Prague attracting a considerable number. To be sure, a not insignificant proportion of the 360 individuals from Slovakia who matriculated at the University of Wittenberg during the sixteenth century were Slovaks, but the majority were of Germanic heritage. Thus, the evangelical schools in Slovakia were especially significant agents not only for the spread of the Reformation but as the essential means by which Slovaks entered the intelligentsia.

Prior to the Reformation, at least forty schools had been established by the three chapters in Slovakia (Nitra, Spiš and Bratislava) and by many of the major towns in Slovakia. During the course of the Reformation, many of these schools were secularized, brought under the jurisdiction of the local authorities, and then confessionalized. Between 1520 and the end of the sixteenth century, over eighty schools were established by individual nobles

and smaller towns. The majority of these were founded after 1550 in predominantly the areas in which Slovaks were the majority of the population. Moreover, of the over one hundred Lutheran schools in Slovakia by the end of the sixteenth century, at least sixteen of the city and eight of the noble schools can be considered higher Latin schools. The rectors of these schools as well as those at some of the schools in the smaller towns and even in some of the villages had received some university training.

The curricula of these schools and the life of its student body was governed by school orders and regulations borrowed or adapted from Lutheran Germany. These schools sought to inculcate "pure doctrine", that is Lutheran theology, "true evangelical pity" and "eloquence", in all who attended these schools, whether German, Slovak or Magyar. They saw themselves as nurseries of both Reformation theology and humanist learning. They initially followed the three division model recommended by Melancthon but gradually adopted a five and even nine-class system as formal classes in Greek, theology and philosophy were added to the curriculum to prepare the graduates to assume positions as school teachers and pastors. While instruction was designed to promote the mastery of Latin, the native language of the students was also used, especially in the early grades. Even in larger city schools in the predominantly German cities Slovak cantors were often entrusted with the instruction of the youngest children alongside his other duties. In 1571 the rector of Banska Bystrica, Abraham Schremmel, complained that the Slovaks "They don't even want to give me another ten cents. They shout at me, 'Why doesn't the rector have a Slovak cantor for us as if this was dependent upon me.'"

But since the goal of the Reformation schools was the mastery of Latin and evangelical doctrine it did not directly foster the development of the native languages of their students but did so only indirectly. The native languages were used as a tool to attain the educational goals of the schools just as they were tools to be used in promulgating the new religion among the populace through devotional and didactic religious literature.

II. Forms of Expression

The Reformation of the sixteenth century throughout Europe was the first movement which effectively used the printing press as a means to spread the views of its leaders, carry on disputes, attract and educate its

followers. However, during the first two-thirds of the century, no printing presses regularly functioned in Slovakia. The demand for religious and other literature was met by the production of presses abroad, in Germany, Poland, Bohemia and Switzerland which book sellers sold to individual collectors and public institutions in Slovakia. Initially authors in Slovakia used these presses to publish their works the great majority of which were either religious tracts or poetry and disputations in Latin, although in 1545 (1561?) Vašek Záleský (z Zálesy) printed a devotional book in slovakized Czech in Wittenberg. Only during the last third of the century printing presses were established and those in Bardejov, Košice, and Levoča were especially significant for the Lutherans.

From these local and foreign presses were issued scores of books by Lutheran authors, most of them polemical, didactic or devotional works. One stimulus to the local printing industry in eastern Slovakia was the Crypto-Calvinist controversy among the Lutherans there during which Lani and Sculteti emerged as major theological figures and the former published two important tracts in Latin. Sculteti may have also been involved in preparing the translation of Luther's Small Catechism into slovakized Czech, the so-called Bardejov Catechism of 1581.

While most of the published and a large proportion of the manuscript literature by representatives of the Slovak intelligentsia was in Latin until the mid-seventeenth century, a considerable amount, mostly devotional tracts, sermon collections, and especially religious and even secular poetry was produced in or translated into slovakized Czech for personal and public needs. In addition, several seniorats including Trenčín and Gemer used this language in recording the official decisions of their meetings while Nicodem Sartorius of Zvolen produced the first commentary on the Bible in Slovak (1591).

As a standard liturgical guide for Slovak speaking Lutherans the Bohemian Agenda of 1581 served as the basis for the so-called Bystrica Agenda of 1585. This was revised in 1595, 1608 and in 1613 when it was adopted as the standard for the Slovak Lutheran congregations of western Slovakia. Equally significant were the various manuscript collections of hymns by Juraj Bánovský, Ján Prúno, Eliáš Laňi and Daniel Pribiš. Pribiš included as an appendix of his catechism of 1634 the *Pisně duchovní*, a collection of 113 hymns. Extremely significant were the works of Juraj Tranovský published in Levoča, the *Pbiala, Odoramentorum*, a collection of

prayers published in 1635 and the *Citbara Sanctorum* of 1636 with 414 hymns.

In addition to these products by intellectuals living in Slovakia, works in Czech translation or by Czechs were also readily available and often used by the Lutherans. Their use increased after many Czech Protestant emigrated to western Slovakia immediately prior to and after the Battle at White Mountain in 1620. The works of Protestant reformers from Germany had early been translated into Czech. Tranovský, in addition to his other works, also prepared a translation of the Augsburg Confession into Czech and he included hymns by Czech and German authors in the *Cithara*. Perhaps the most significant work in Czech extensively utilized in Slovakia by Slovak Lutherans was the Kralice Bible, published in Moravia in six volumes during the years 1579 to 1593. George Thurzo, the Palatine of Hungary who was also a close friend of the patron of the project, John Žerotín, obtained copies of the work and encouraged its use by Slovak Lutherans.

III. The Intellectual-Political Context

One of the most significant results of the Reformation was that it brought to an end the hegemony of medieval Catholicism in Europe. It shattered the intellectual and religious cohesion and universality of medieval Europe, which was, to be sure, more theoretical than actual. It created a new world view and new cultural conditions. It led to the emergence and establishment of particular, clearly differentiated religious and national groups. As each of the reformation churches sought to define itself and secure its own legal existence through the preparation and presentation of confessions of faith, the confessionalization of society occurred.

Thus the Reformation shaped the ideologies of the ages which followed. In Slovakia, the institutions and literary forms used by the Lutherans were adopted by those who led the Counter-Reformation in Slovakia, especially the Jesuits and the Piarists. They often borrowed some of the practices of the Protestant educations and recognized the need to use the vernacular in publications and instructions. Moreover, the almost struggle between Lutherans and Catholics in Slovakia ensured that religious questions would continue as the major topic of literature. To be sure, the literary activity of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was not limited to

religious literature but included historical and even topics from the natural sciences. However, the religious element and religious questions predominated well into the eighteenth century.

This was not only the result of "baroque" literary taste but also of the attacks made upon the Lutheran movement by a revitalized Roman Catholic Church, the reconverted upper nobility and the officials of the Habsburg monarchs. After the beginning of the legal process against the Protestant intellectuals in 1670, the Diet of Sopron of 1681, the failure of the second siege of Vienna of 1683 and the *Explanatio Leopoldina* of 1691, the Lutheran community was not only substantially reduced in number and placed on the defensive, it also saw many of its leaders forced into exile, many going to Germany.

The events of the second half of the seventeenth century helped to accentuate the particular orientation of the Lutheran intelligentsia in Slovakia. Their intellectual heritage was rooted deeply in the evangelical humanist tradition which had emanated from Wittenberg and the other Protestant universities of Germany during the sixteenth century. As a movement, Lutheranism in Slovakia did not develop a unique theological or intellectual position but generally reflected and participated in those of their co-religionists in Germany. Because Lutherans in Slovakia, indeed in the whole of the Habsburg lands, were not able to establish their own university, they were forced to go abroad, primarily to Germany, to complete their education, especially after the Thirty Years' War had forced the closure of many Protestant schools in Bohemia. This helps to explain the orientation of the Slovak intelligentsia towards Germanic academic theology, philosophy and science while Catholic intellectuals were trained in Italy, Austria and South Germany and were not only influenced by but became leading proponents of Catholic baroque culture and supporters of Habsburg authority until the end of the eighteenth century.

In addition to this Germanic orientation of Slovak intellectuals in their theological, philosophical and eventually political views as a result of their academic experience and contacts, there also existed a cultural bond with the Protestant Czechs. On the one hand, during the sixteenth century more than a few Slovaks had participated in the Reformation in the Czech lands and achieved positions of influence there. On the other hand, a considerable number of the teachers and pastors in the Lutheran church in Slovakia during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries came

from the Czech lands and were joined by the Czech Protestant exiles including Tranoscius (Tranovský) and Comenius. This personal tie was further accentuated by the utilization of publications in Czech, including translations of works by the German reformers and the Bible. This cultural link was strongly imprinted upon the consciousness of the Slovak intelligentsia and continued to manifest itself not only during the era of the national revival but even during the struggle to establish the Czechoslovak state.

Thus, the Protestant reformation must be viewed as one of the significant forces in the shaping of Slovak culture and through it, the Slovak nation. It also established a distinct Slovak Lutheran intelligentsia which through its literary, educational and political activity and contracts, did much to help make of the Slovak people a nation, and to bring them, as a nation, into a modern state.

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