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HUNGAROLOGY STUDIES

*"An Unworthy Teacher
of the Orthodox [Protestant] Ecclesia "*
*Hungarian Books by Szathmárnémethi Mihály:
a rhetorical-theological Approach*

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Keywords

17th Century, Protestantism in Eastern Europe, reformed congregation, religious identity, strategies for representing the self and the religious community, ancient Hungarian literature, religious texts, sermons, prayers, catechisms, polemics, paratexts, devotional literature, rhetoric, Protestant homiletics, theology.

Summary of the Chapters

The reformed priest Szathmárnémethi Mihály (1638-1689) is one of the authors who came to the periphery of the literary canon in the history of Hungarian literature. The present study focuses on the proper analysis of the priest's work. At the beginning of the research I realized that the period of the reformation is an important research subject. Therefore, the research of this volume of religious writings must consider the constant changes in the research of the period in which they appeared. For this purpose, I have endeavored to search both current and older sources in the field (history of literature, of the christian church, of rhetoric, of homiletics, of the literary genres, of reading, of books, of politics, theology) as well as the writings of Szathmárnémethi's contemporaries. The guarantee of proper analysis in this way consists in the autonomy of the texts written by the reformed priest and the synthetic adaptation of the specialized literature.

The reformed priest left behind a vast oeuvre. The number of his volumes published during his life as well as in the next few years shows that he was a well-known and recognized writer.

The thematic and typological variety of his works are promising from the perspective of understanding the period in which they appeared. The introductions, the letters of dedication appearing in the preface to the volumes are representing the relationship of the author and of the society with literature, with the readers, with the native language, with the members of the nation, with the country, with life, faith, Protestantism, history, with the true church, persecuted status, etc. In conclusion: the analysis of Szathmárnémethi's volumes enriches our knowledge of the image of the early modern age in Transylvania.

Sándor Lukácsy referred to the volume of religious writings as "abnegated literature." Mihály Szathmárnémethi's sermons are part of this abnegated literature. The priest's writings came to the periphery of the literary canon, but their interdisciplinary recitement and analysis

brings benefits to the in-depth knowledge of inter-confessional relations, a process in which continuity and discontinuity are equally present, the literary genres, the use of volumes, and the memory-strategies.

Reading and analyzing the texts has changed the negative opinion about them expressed by some literary historians (eg Márton Tarnóc wrote about Protestant sermons that they are gray rocks). The texts have shown that in the period as they appeared literary thinking was based on values such as imitation, performing of rhetorical-homiletic rules, originality being the product of the context in which they created the texts. The analysis of the texts has also shown that the extreme denominations (eg Orthodox vs. Puritan) used to describe the authors of the period, must be rethought: the reformed priest himself calls himself Orthodox, as all the members of the reformed church in the Transilvania of the 17. century were called Orthodox. Therefore the writings of Szathmárnémethi mirror not only the rules of the orthodoxy.

In the process of research, the volume of texts readily decreased: those written in Latin are only to a minor extent analyzed. Several manuscripts of the priest as well as other church documents (protocols, funeral sermons) have been lost. So, the priest's Hungarian books form are the basis of this research.

I have studied the following main topics in Szathmárnémethi's volumes: confessional identity, Orthodoxy and Puritanism, the portrait of the ideal christian, the forms of religious behavior, the forms of remembrance and the priest's function. The studied volumes are as follows:

1669 *Igazság próbakövének nyert peri*, Sárospatak, RMK I. 1095/RMNY 3592

1673 *Az örökkévaló egy isteni állatban lévő három személyeknek mutató tüköre*, Kolozsvár, RMK I. 1150

1675 *A négy evangélisták szerint való dominica*, Kolozsvár, RMK I. 1179

1679 *Szent Dávid psalteriuma*, Kolozsvár, RMK I. 1234

1685 *Szent Dávid psalteriuma*, Lőcse, RMK I. 1341

1679 *Mennyei tárház kulcsa*, Kolozsvár, RMK I. 1239

1681 *Mennyei tárház kulcsa*, Kolozsvár, RMK I. 1262

1685 *Mennyei tárház kulcsa*, Debrecen, RMK I. 1332

1683 *Halotti centúria*, Kolozsvár, RMK I. 1301

1686 *Dominicalis prédikációk todalékja*, Kolozsvár, RMK I. 1353.

The study of the listed volumes was developed in the following way: I started with the two volumes of Sunday sermons, then I developed the circle of volumes studied according to the trends defined by the two volumes of these sermons: confessional identity, the issue of the true church, representation strategies of the ideal christian, of the self and of the religious community, methods of interpreting biblical texts, the issue of the use of volumes, the role of priests in the congregation. So I studied other volumes to have a complete image on these topics: the polemic volume on the subject of identity, the exegetic volume about Davids psalms and the book of funeral sermons on the method of interpretation of biblical texts, the volume of prayer on the issue of using texts by true christians.

I tried to analyze the writings of the reformed priest with maximum openness and correct predisposition. I have inspected the predispositions so that they contribute to the proper interpretation of the texts. Professor Gábor Csilla found that - although the representatives of different cults were mercilessly confronted against one another - they used the same sources and the texts of their "opponents."

This scientific conclusion motivated me to report to the texts in the knowledge that the reformers could not restore the original stage of the Christian church without referring to the existing traditions. Protestant writers had to report to a rich Christian tradition as representatives of different denominations. Each writer used the existing traditions according to the belief of the congregation to which they belonged. They have endeavored to build systems of thought with immanent coherence - so we can understand the absurdity of religious polemics.

The research consisted of the close-reading of the above-mentioned volumes, sporadic texts about the erudite priest and scientific studies in the matter. Primary texts have been constantly studied, rereading them each time I have studied a scientific text that has contributed to their understanding and interpretation. The volume of scientific studies is constantly changing as the interest towards peripheral writers is steadily increasing.

The structure of the paper has been articulated by the expectations defined by the specialists in the field and by the immanent authority of the primary sources. The structure of the paper reproduces these two aspects.

The introductory chapter is followed by the chapter presenting the methodological basis of the study. Two principles were followed in the analysis of the texts: the interdisciplinary study (recommended by Mihály Imre 's studies) and the rhetorical analysis (recommended by István

Bartók's studies). These two principles have articulated in building the contexts (concept developed by the authors Takáts and Sári) of volumes based on historical, theological, rhetorical sources. The contexts clarified the various interpretations of the basic concepts throughout history (of the personality, community and Christian behaviors, as well as the definition of the divine person). The understanding of the basic concepts guaranteed the proper understanding of the texts written by Szathmárnémethi.

The history of the reception of the priest has been outlined in volumes that convey lexical knowledge, texts in church history and literature, and theological texts. These sources transmit information about the priest's life, then catalog his volumes. Only at the end of the 20. century studies have been published whose authors actually read Szathmárnémethi's texts. So far, interest in the writings of this author is increasing.

The issue of the *vera ecclesia* and the identity of the true Christians is at the heart of Szathmárnémethi's writings. At the time as the reformed priest lived the ecclesiological dispute already had a tradition in the history of the church. The erudite writer connects to this tradition using a specific narrative based on the Protestant notion of martirology and using a Protestant ecclesiological model. He was forced by circumstances - Catholics accused reformists of heresy and making a new church that is not in conformity with the Bible, political power was persecuting the reformed, reformed parishioners were uncultivated and thus incapable of defending or expressing / living Christian principles - to argue that the true church existed from the very beginning through the existence of those who behave according to the Bible. This church existed in an invisible way, became increasingly visible and finally clearly appearing through reformation. Martyrs are in the vision of Protestant priests, all who confess their faith, do not need to die to become martyrs. Thus, all who have confessed the principles of true faith have been through the years who represented the true *invisible* church. The true *ecclesia* became more and more visible through the act of reformation, and thus became members of the martyrs' catalog of all missionaries, the priests who contributed to the spread of true faith: from Martin Luther to the priests in Cluj, among whom he identifies the author himself.

In the historical period of the 17th century of the Reformed Church was important to articulate in words the principles of faith, Christian moral directives, and hence the definition of the true church and the true believer's profile. A basic element used by Szathmárnémethi in arguing that the Reformed Church is the true one, according to the Bible, is the persecuted status.

In the biblical plan of salvation, all who were truly faithful have been persecuted.

In order to fulfill its role as a teacher, the reformed pastor fulfilled the rhetorical requirement of clarity and intelligibility. Thus he formulated, based on very clear questions, most of the principles of the Christian faith. He has deliberately endeavored to communicate these knowledge and forms of conduct in a clear, intelligible and biblical manner. He called the community to whom he lectured with the grammatical formula "we", guided them by the formula "you" or "us", and separated the community from others by the formula "they." That is, he polarized his community with and about which he is speaking, the true ones, the persecuted, those who live according to the Bible) and other communities (the hypocrites, persecutors, who do not believe the holy third, etc.) through biblical metaphors and parallelizations.

The issue of confessional identity is connected with the strategies of remembrance (the notion of martyrs, the perception of the church's history), the commemoration (letters of dedication), and the theological vision (Orthodox and Puritan).

The way of remembrance is outlined in two forms: the letters of dedication by which a he commemorates his *maecenas* and the confessional memory, that is the historical narrative used to sustain the continuity of the reformed church starting with the biblical apostles.

The dedication letters follow both the formal and content rules. The author self-represents himself as an unworthy servant who strives with all his talents to serve. Thus he is grateful to God and to protectors of various rankings. In order to raise the names of those who supported him, he uses the method of biblical mitization that consists in representing the supporting ones through biblical texts (they are like King Solomon or King David), enumerating their deeds by which they glorified the name of God and strengthened the true church. Letters dedicated to supporters with whom he was in a relationship of friendship or kinship contain fewer formulas of glory and focus more on the main subject discussed in volume, or present the circumstances of the appearance of the volume, or provide detailed instructions on the use of the volume.

Because the priest himself has been named Orthodox, many have cataloged him as a priest who has engaged in this trend. However, the latest research has shown that the distinction of trends is artificial and post-period. Thus, the priest Szathmárnémethi combined two tendencies (later distinguished) in the way he fulfilled his vocation as a teacher: the orthodox one by communicating the principles of faith, the Puritan to endeavor to show how it is fit to live the Orthodox Christian (ie the true, the reformed) faith. Religious dogmas appear in texts whose

typology is appropriate to communicate such principles. The book of prayer communicate these doctrines in an undisclosed way.

In the volume of sermons *Dominica ...* presents Szathmárnémethi the theological system and the attributions of a true Christian behavior. These define the profile of the ideal Christian, who will be saved for the life beyond. The sermons interpret the events of social and natural life in the framework of the biblical plan of salvation and regulate even the most intimate aspects of the life of parishioners. Thus he builds on the anthropological concepts God-person-communities a theological, intellectual and moral vision of the world.

The ideal believer's profile can be rebuilt based on the texts created by this priest. In fact, all his ideas appear in the vast volume of sermons *Dominica...* The texts in this volume contain numerous informations so that the book equates to a mini library. This volume of sermons can be read as such, but also as a Puritan conduct-book, as a church code, as a manual of Calvinist theology, as a catalog of martyrs, as reformed church-history because it provides instruction in connection with the true church, clarifies the principles of Christian faith, moral norms, secular and religious vocations, recommends solutions to social and political issues as well.

The structure of the texts (the sermons) - which seemed annoyed and without any exigency - became interpretable by understanding the literary thinking of the period in which they were drafted. Thus, we recognize the writer's erudition that complied with homiletic, rhetorical and functional rules in the way he structured all the texts.

The writings of Szathmárnémethi present both the specificity of the Orthodoxy and of the Puritanism. These two religious tendencies are inherently inseparable: the Orthodox were rather concerned about the question what do we believe in?, while the Puritans sought answers to the question of how to live faithfulness? Answers to one of the questions contain a latent answer to the other question and vice versa: the use of native language in the practice of faith is important both from the perspective of the Orthodox (so will the believers know, understand and teach the foundations of the faith) and from the Puritan's perspective (to pray without intermediaries).

The reformed priest complied with the expectations of the church magistrates through the correct and clear instruction of the parishioners about the principles of faith, but his writings also clearly refer to the biblical ways of living faith, puritan moral norms, solving social problems, and offering a volume of prayers that contains prayers based on biblical texts, formed in an artistic way for different occasions and people of different ranks.

Within the chapter of Szathmárnémethi's writing program, I endeavored to present how he defined the importance of his role as a reformed priest. He often talked about wanting to be the teacher of the community. He accomplished this vocation by producing volumes in which he instructed both ordinary parishioners and colleagues, even magistrates.

The texts of the reformed priest define the teaching of knowledge as an influence on the knowledge, on one's will and feelings. Szathmárnémethi committed himself as the teacher of the other priests, parishioners, of the smaller community, and of the nation. His method of instruction is by writing texts that clarify all aspects of the faithful life.

The final chapters contain the conclusions and the following directions of the research. At the beginning of the research, I learned that the writings of Szathmárnémethi were "banished" from the literary canon, both because the way in which the specialists defined the concept of literature and because some writers wrote discouraging critics. The sermons, the catechisms, the texts of exegesis, the polemic texts have lost their literary value, because the way in which the specialists and amateur readers defined the concept of literature altogether. All of these texts seemed annoyed, devoid of any aesthetic value. Appropriate analysis of the texts showed that this attitude was wrong. (However, the volume of prayer was received with success because it corresponded to the expectations of those who used it.)

I have sharpened the superficial criticism of the reformed priest's writings through close-reading of the texts and adaptation of the scientific studies. Research has emphasized that the guarantee of an adequate interpretation is the use of notions in a reflected way. Such an example can be understood the use of the notion of martyrology in the protestant narrative.

The reformed priest Szathmárnémethi faces the other religious congregations in Cluj in the second half of the 17. century. The theology presented by him, his method of interpreting biblical texts, the religious identity represented in his works, the ecclesiological model of the writer are defined in this opposition even if they are based on the sources and traditions of the Catholic church. He freely uses these sources and traditions in the sense that in his view the Catholic cult of his present is the one that has distanced itself from what the truthful church is.

New research goals have emerged in the research process that resulted in the present thesis. They would be the following:

Biblical and congregational bible analysis of the sermons completes the interpretation made on this work. This analysis would focus on strategies consistent with St. Paul's preaching

style and the elements used by priests in various religious cults. So, we could learn more about the sources of the priest-writer and the free circulation of communication strategies between different congregations.

The analysis of the texts will be complemented by research on their literary reception. The volumes of sermons were written in order to be used, and the prayer volume appeared 10 times. The next step of the research is to understand how these volumes were used.

The volume of funeral sermons (*Halotti centúria*) is the writer's interpretation of the appropriate way to die (*ars bene moriendi*). The close analysis of these sermons from the perspective of the appropriate way of dying would contribute in understanding the thinking of Orthodox reformists.

The reformed priest's writings have an anthropological substratum that represents religious traditions, human genres, normal and deviant behaviors. Their study would result in interesting conclusions.

The anniversary of the reform has intensified the scientific interest in the reformation as a long-standing historical event (long reformation). This scientific interest produces new scientific results which could enrich the analysis of Szathmárnémethi's volumes.

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1679 *Mennyei tárház kulcsa*, Lőcse

1681 *Mennyei tárház kulcsa* Kolozsvár

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