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The Political Theological Questions of Proper Exercise of Power and Loyalty
for the Ruler: During Gábor Bethlen's First Expedition to the Hungarian
Kingdom, in the Light of Contemporary Publications from Hungary and from
Hungarian Authors (1617-1621)

Ph.D. Theses

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Introduction

The period of Gábor Bethlen Transylvanian prince's first expedition (1619-1621) to the Hungarian Kingdom meant not only political but also theological crisis for the leaders of the country. Innumerable undecided question surrounded the topics of *loyalty for the ruler* and *appropriate exercise of power*. *The dethronement of Ferdinand II reigning for only a couple months, then the election of Gábor Bethlen arriving with Turkish support to king of Hungary made the above mentioned topics very actual, even existential questions for all of those who had to decide which political force to join. The leaders of the country had to take the risk that affiliation to any power may mean treason.*

For those in search for answer in this political theological crisis the works published in the era could serve as guidelines. Thus, the role of book and its reader, the role of authors and printers as well as patrons of publish were significant in this period.

Throughout my study I searched for the question how the political-ethical dilemma of exercise of power and loyalty for the ruler are manifested in printed material.

What was written and what was read in this period about the issue of kingship and what arguments helped contemporary decision-makers in this dilemma? How were their arguments built up?

Present dissertation *was produced by the methods and approach of church history*. As such it supposes that in 17th century Hungary there is no political question without religious guidelines; there is no question of kingship without God. Church history keeps record of people that are religious, members of the church, belonging to some kind of denomination. This research has taken into consideration that the church always has self-understanding affecting the identity of her members and guiding man.

However, at the same time this dissertation is interdisciplinary; it relies on the works of literary historians and historians, and aims to promote communication among disciplines.

Having examined more than one hundred publications I have found forty documents containing something relevant about the question of kingship. Within this topic, proceeding with the research, an even tighter field of examination presented itself: the collection of *Biblical examples and parallels* used in the argumentation.

The dissertation contains the analysis of *twenty-three printed documents* incorporating *five years* (1617-1619), taking into consideration their appearance in literature as well as the tighter segment of Biblical parallelisms. The year of 1617, the centenary of the reformation, and the year of 1618, the coronation of Ferdinand II, are indispensable antecedents of the expedition.

In this selection encompassing *several genres* there are seventeen publications with Protestant and six with Catholic background. One of them was published in German and seven in Latin. The dissertation presents the opinion of *nineteen authors*.

The results

The assessment of data found in the publications was done through four approaches. The first approach is based on the sequence of *kings brought as examples from the Bible*. The second approach makes comparison of data about *the history and kings of Hungary*. In both cases I examined the contemporary understanding of history.

The third way of summarizing information is a collection of *pictures and metaphors* that are of biblical or theological origin, and that are characterizing the contemporary ideal of a good prince. An organic part of this is the *collection of the most important virtues* that authors found important in the personality of a ruler. This repertory could also serve as a mirror in the hand of a man in power.

In the last approach I collected *opinions*, appreciation and complaints *about the person of the ruler*.

Biblical kings

David, Solomon, Ahab, Josiah, Nebuchadnezzar and Antiochus Epiphanes IV. Three positive and three negative examples of government, among which King David is outstanding. He is the one authors most frequently mention.

Contemporary theologians attribute the Book of Psalms to King David. This way they link a Biblical compilation to the cult of the king. A compilation, that is colorful in themes, standing close to our human emotions and probably the best-known part of the Old Testament. The figure of *the psalmist prophet king* is able to provide example for most situations of pious life. We do not encounter any other biblical king whose *most inner thoughts* and struggles would be so overt.

King Solomon, his son, is the builder of the Temple in Jerusalem, and a ruler considered to be the wisest biblical king. A similar phenomenon can be observed in the relationship of Solomon and the Book of Proverbs then in the case of King David and the Psalms. According to biblical tradition the Book of Proverbs, that is God fearing people's collection of wisdom, was written by King Solomon. Thus, whenever a quote occurs from the Proverbs, the figure of Solomon appears.

Thus, in case of Solomon and David we encounter not only a concise description of the king's deeds but we also meet another Biblical book, through which these rulers get closer to Christian readers.

The next four kings share in their relationship with the *question of idolatry*. King Josiah is the example of the renewal of faith and relationship with God. He is also the example of purifying the cult from idols.

The theme of idolatry connects Ahab, Nebuchadnezzar and Antiochus Epiphanes IV as well. It is no coincidence that this is precisely the point of doctrinal disputes that receives so much attention in publications. For idolatry, from Protestant aspect, is unavoidable in the lack of opportunity for church service with Protestant liturgy, with their own songs and

prayers, in Protestant places of worship, with Protestant preachers. The *issue of the usage of temples is the key issue of the law providing free religious practise* or religious freedom. Observing the law is an important political matter in which the king has responsibility and role.

Examining the way authors depict the biblical examples of kings we find that these patterns carry over the deuteronomistic approach even in the case of those kings who are not part of the Historical Work of Deuteronomy. Such rulers are Antiochus Epiphanes IV or Nebuchadnezzar. The most important message of this approach in terms of the king is that *the survival of the country depends on the relationship wit God*. The flourishing and peace of the country is the derivative of proper worship, and a king is only good if he does what is good in the sight of the Lord. With this emphasis of the deuteronomistic view authors take on the inheritance of the Reformation, and printers refresh this understanding of history by reediting 16th century works.

The History of Hungary

The second approach aims to examine thoughts taking their examples from the history of Hungary, and will be parts of arguments with their understanding of history. While the previous approach is mainly the characteristic of Protestant authors, this one is typical of Catholics. In terms of kings, the figure of St. Stephan is the most emphasized. He is the first king of Hungary, the founder of the state, the first king to be saint, the composer of the first laws, and the first Catholic king. His cult was reaching high at a time when Hungary had fallen into three parts, and when his person could be remembered of as the force establishing and consolidating the country, connecting it to Europe. Moreover, he did this by taking on Christianity and becoming deeply Catholic himself. In addition to this, as he and his father, Géza had asked for proselytes from the Germans, Stephan I could be the example of good connections with the Habsburg Empire.

In light of the results of the previous approach the reason for the powerful cult of Stephan I in Hungary and why Catholic authors widely use him as reference is that he had also left behind a document containing Christian wisdom, the *Exhortations*. Due to the fatherly tone typical of this book people could feel themselves close to the king, to the one the furthest in line in Hungarian history. As if his personality would outline through his words of exhortation. Still, he is not only a Catholic king but a ruler with great respect in Protestant circles as well. While in case of King David and Solomon the Book of Psalms and Proverbs bring their person close to us, in case of Stephan I the Exhortations serve this role.

Protestant writers use the examples of Biblical kings, Catholic authors employ the figure of king Stephan in their arguments. Protestant writers reach back to Old Testament times, Catholics authors go back to the foundation of the Hungarian state.

Another highlighted topic in this historical approach is the historical understanding of the battle of Mohács, the Turkish occupation and the destruction of the country. According to Catholic writers, the miserable state of the country is a result of the progress of the Reformation. From their aspect the Reformation is a harmful and false teaching that could

find its way to the country through war and decline. Thus, it is understood as a spiritual force of schism taking advantage of the political split.

Theological pictures and virtues

An unquestionable principle of theological arguments is that for the completion of certain tasks God sends certain people. These people become tools of God, in their actions God's will is manifested. People holding offices at different stages of power all receive authority according to God's order. Prince and king are also God's tools. This perspective reflects the general understanding of power and kingship typical of the era, and is a foundation of all works without exception.

In publications a man of power is often called 'nurse'. This title is typical in sentences about the patrons of the Mother Church, schools and universities, or supporters of reformed ecclesiasts. Thus, nurse is a variant of patron. This expression reflects intuitively all the care and tenderness needed for the foundation of a school, the patronizing of a student or the maintenance of a church.

In these cases we can not speak about the return of financial sacrifice, as value and profit are purely spiritual and intellectual. Consequently, the offering is a real sacrifice. However, according to many publications, producing intellectual values has enormous profit; Character, manner, exploits, virtues, pursuit of justice, obedience to the law as well as deeds deriving from true faith maintain a solid state. A nurse can not expect financial profit for her protecting arm, but can look forward to a grown-up man with clear taught, noble deeds, turning to heaven. Among such people God's Kingdom is present on earth, and this is the greatest profit of all. A nurse is a patron building God's Kingdom by relinquishing money.

The picture of a 'father' is the simile most commonly used for the description of a good ruler. The concept of physical and spiritual paternity is richly present in the Old and New Testament. For people living in patriarchal cultures, where family is the basic unit of society and the head is a similar leader of family members as a ruler of a country, a king obviously plays a paternal role. In theological thinking the stress is on the fact that earthly paternity is a reflection of heavenly paternity, and the love of the Heavenly Father must be the example of earthly fathers. An earthly ruler not following the heavenly model can not be a good leader, says the policy-theology of the era.

The motif of 'provider' is in close correlation with either a nurse or a father, and it also has heavenly origins. People holding powerful offices are imperfect and misshapen, but at the same time authorized images of the heavenly model.

Image often means example, model, or reflection. Being an earthly image of the Heavenly Father as well as being a model for those we have been entrusted with is great burden and responsibility, although every Christian parent bears them. However, a country and a society have a particular and always changing scale of values, and it is impossible to be a role model without receiving scornful remarks. For this reason many contemporary authors came to the conclusion that a good ruler is in worse situation than a servant, as a *good ruler is captive*. He suffers in captivity. For if he does what God wants him to do people will despise

him. But he cannot favour people's opinion for he will incur God's wrath. Thus, the role of the earthly image of God is as difficult as captivity.

A king can also be depicted as *shepherd*, emphasizing his role as provider and leader. Even a pastor has a heavenly pattern, the Good Shepherd, Christ. In every day life contemporary society met this concept through priests or ministers. The biblical simile continues in the picture of sheep-shearing; Sheep surrender their wool, as the king's subjects pay taxes. Sheep sustain being sheared because they render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's.

The other biblical image emphasizing leadership is the image of a '*head*'. As the head is for the body so is the king for his subjects. The head is an organizing member with all the responsibility to take. In case of a defect in control the whole body falls apart.

The one taking care of others is a tool of God, and also the *column* of the poor.

Often, metaphors with biblical origin occur multiple times within one sentence. Most of these pictures reflect examples of God's provision and leading from the Scripture. A powerful man moulds the mentality appropriate for his profession from these similes. If he would not do this way, in the light of contemporary political theology, he could not be considered a good ruler. Thus, the one not taking example of the Father or Christ in the fulfillment of his role can not be a good king. He must look at the One, who entrusted him with power.

The works enumerating virtues elevate the figure of a good king to idealistic heights. The first and *most important virtue in the list is faith*. All other qualities root in this: love, mercy, charity, patience, tolerance, meekness, wisdom, conscientiousness, temperance, strength or providence.

Let it be a theological vision with biblical foundations, or a list of virtues rooting in antique wisdom supported by bible passages, a ruler comparing his manners to either becomes a better leader. But no matter to which standard subjects compare the king, it will end in disappointment. These thoughts are appropriate for introspection, for changing one's own behaviour, but raising them as expectations toward another person turns them into an unrealistic scale. The main question is what cast of mind writer and reader has and for what purpose they use them.

The person of the ruler

He must be father, providing shepherd, wise as Solomon, and holy as St. Stephan. He must be patient but strong, charitable and steadfast. Let him live his life according to God's will, and protect the country from trouble. He must be faithful (Catholic) but he must also respect the laws of the country (support Protestants). These are the expectations.

However, from the last approach it becomes obvious that meeting these requirements is impossible. Neither Ferdinand I, nor Gábor Bethlen is capable of this. While one of them aims to keep territories with different interests in union, the other one balances between Turkish suspension and inward independence. Contemporary argumentation considers their power *illegitimate*. Neither their election, nor their political orientation in the Turkish issue can be considered impeccable. Consequently, their fulfillment of the role of father and provider could have been criticized. Similarly, their "faith" could not enjoy

undivided success in a country divided by different denominations, in an era loud from polemics.

Captivity

Captivity means restricted room for maneuver and spiritual struggle. The period of Gábor Bethlen's first expedition to the Hungarian Kingdom is a heavy-laden time of three years in Hungarian history. Moreover, this is only the first act of a series closed by the peace in Linz. This first act is probably the most difficult one due to its novelty, this kind of political challenge is almost unprecedented. This is the first time when the political leaders of the country face with a bounch of theoretical dilemma waiting for them to solve. However, the solution, let it be of any kind, will be exemplary and precedent in the life of the country. If they apply *new arguments* for sorting out problems, they provide new values for the residents of the country.

Captivity is a typical feature of the political theological challenges of the expedition. Captive is the king, captives are his subjects, captives are the representatives of the diet: The room for maneuvering the country is tighter than a cell, either in terms of political options or in terms of possible answers for theological dilemmas.

The ruler takes the throne as a fallible man, and innumerable problem is falling on him, on the one with power. He is being crowned into a pre-arranged political and economical situation, and he receives a country with its inhabitants with their individual capabilities. From his predecessors he inherits countless unsolved issue and unhealed wound; not to mention the forefathers' unrealistic but desirable example from glorious historical times.

The level of honor, most often the level of grace toward the king depends on the attitude of the subject. Theologically, the subject has power over his own self. He can decide how to relate to his king entrusted on him by God. The one with power is as vulnerable as his subject. *The one with power needs honour and mercy and needs to be prayed for from honest heart and honest goodwill.*

At the same time, the situation of the Christian subject is not easier than his lord's. For he had to accept that power is from God, although it seemed power is entrusted on the king by the diet, as long as he fulfills their conditions. For he had to accept that he has to pray for the king, although it seemed the interests of the country and the law got greater respect. As for a moment it seemed there is option for choice between a Catholic and a Protestant king. Protestant subjects had to find their own answers for acute questions; What honour toward the king means when he encumbers the free practice of my religion? When he threatens with persecutions for my religious conviction? How can I obey an earthly power without disobeying God?

Theses

1. At the time of Gábor Bethlen's first expedition to the Hungarian Kingdom (1619-1621) the dilemmas of proper way of exercising power and loyalty to the king were not only political but also theological issues for the leaders of the country. Examining the contents of contemporary printed material it becomes obvious that certain theological guidelines were needed.

2. While being influenced by antique authors and the works of the church fathers, contemporary writers with mainly theological literacy adhered to the words of of the Scripture. In terms of the question of kingship their arguments were founded on Bible passages.

3. Protestant authors reasoning for the power of Gábor Bethlen based their arguments on the examples of biblical kings. Irrespective of whether the biblical book is part of the Historical Work of Deuteronomy, they examined the biblical kings through the deuteronomistic filter. Among the biblical kings the figure of David is outstanding as tradition attributes the Book of Psalms to him. The person of Solomon also receives greater significance due to the Book of Parables.

4. Catholic writers reasoning for Ferdinánd II build their arguments around king Stephan I. His cult is strengthened by the paternal tone of the Exhortations, bringing his person close to people.

5. Protestant authors are occupied with the question of idolatry in case of the biblical kings brought as examples.

6. Idolatry is the most prominent dogmatic issue in the first decades of the 17th century. The unresolved lines and expressions of the peace (1606) and law (1608) allowing free practice of religion resulted in everyday conflicts among denominations in terms of using the temple.

7. Virtues and biblical metaphors held a mirror up to the king. However, sometimes in their argumentation writers use them to prove the illegitimate power of Ferdinánd II and Gábor Bethlen.

8. Biblical images and metaphors (E.g.: father, shepherd) are integral elements of authors' argumentation. Nevertheless, they are contradictory and disputable as they can not be or only partially be interpreted from theological aspect due to the diversity of denominations.

9. In the peace settling the expedition the peace of the country emerges as a new virtue.

10. Both Protestant and Catholic writers state that pleading prayer for the ruler is the most important task of subjects.