

Habilitation Thesis  
The Theological Commission

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### **Development of the infrastructure of Transylvanian colleges until the introduction of the graduation examination**

Nowadays, research on school and education history is again greatly emphasized, as learning is still a form of major breakthrough for different levels of society.

In my research in the field of school and education history, I have placed great emphasis on the exploration and analysis of paradigm changes that have defined the periods of Reformed education for five centuries, up to the establishment of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. These analyses are suitable for confronting the present with solutions elaborated for problems of the past, acting as points of inspiration in the endeavor to find the breakthrough points in education.

The history of almost all college-type Transylvanian Reformed education institutes was written in the era of Austro-Hungarian dualism. Based on recently available archive materials, some data need additions and completions.

I have written and edited such volumes conveying new information, and with my many studies I tried to somewhat fill this gap, which seems to be infinite.

The aim of my habilitation thesis is to outline the evolution of the college-type Reformed educational institution, its stages of development, and the unification plans that both the church and the state initiated for the modernization of their educational institutions in the era in question. I am presenting this development phase in ten chapters throughout my habilitation thesis.

The urban-humanist schools have become stronger in the early turbulent conditions of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. These schools have had three levels. At the primary level, the students acquired elementary knowledge, while at the second level they learned Latin grammar. At the

third level the students studied the classical authors, acquiring theoretical knowledge of poetics, rhetoric, and logic as well.

The inner structure and the core academic materials of the college-type school have developed almost in the same way in the schools of Catholics and Protestants:

*Secondary school level:*

- Grammar classes: 3–4 years Latin grammar
- Poetry classes: 1–2 years of study of the ancient Latin poetic works
- Rhetorics classes: 1–2 years of study of modern age Latin prose works

*Academic level:*

- Philosophy classes: 2–3 years of study of old and newer works of Philosophy
- Theology classes: 2–3 years of study of theological works.

The above structure of the academic levels was in fact only realized in the major Catholic and Protestant colleges in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and it had its apogee until the end of the era of reforms. In the last decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the most solid part of the college-type school was secondary school level, traditionally joined by the group of children acquiring elementary knowledge.

In the middle third of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the towns that became Protestant took on this type of school, which continued to function in an unchanged form, however, with strong religious education. This school type developed further into college-type schools, which were primarily organized according to the needs of the nobility, especially the needs of the lower nobility, but their doors were wide open to the wealthier layers of urban bourgeoisie as well. The different denominations sought to educate “good” nobles, “good” commoners and “good” bondsmen in various educational settings.

The most important and most urgent task was to secure financial resources for school organization. The Calvinist school developers were primarily hoping for the generosity of nobles who took on the Reformed faith. Nevertheless, the stability of the schools had to be ensured by internal rules and order as well. Supplementing existing regulations in the new faith and creating new ones served this purpose.

The oldest school regulation are likely to have contained only provisions governing the students’ academic and moral life.

References to the school regulations of Sárospatak (1621) and of Debrecen (1657) are often made in specialized literature. In both cases, the rules are based on the Wittenberg regulations of 1571.

Gábor Bethlen was the one to mainly support the cause of pastoral education. He did so by granting the Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia) school college rank in 1622. The Collegium Academicum of Gyulafehérvár consisted of five middle classes, a three-year philosophical and philological course, and finally a theological course of “at least one”, but in fact 2-3 years. Thus, Theology was the crown of the other sciences. According to the 1630 curriculum, the students learned: Exegesis, Dogmatics, Disputation and Practical Preaching, all in the spirit of Reformed theological orthodoxy. The same reorganization of college education took place in Nagyvárad (Oradea) as of 1636 and in Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca) as of 1652, where again three professors taught.

Teaching was done at very different levels in the schools. The Lutherans were the first among Protestants to develop a system of lower schools. In Upper Hungary and Transylvania there were schools and teachers in all major parishes. The Reformed primarily organized elementary education at a wider level in Transylvania. In Hungary and Transylvania, teachers were trained at colleges and their branch institutions. The teachers then taught at very different levels.

The main topic of education was catechism and church ceremonies. Great efforts were made to teach writing, especially in the native language. Elementary Latin was taught in several schools, and Mathematics was taught in all of them.

The contents of Reformed college education was defined by the ideological struggle that emerged in the colleges between the innovators and the traditionalists concerning fundamental issues of Philosophy and Theology. In Philosophy, innovators followed their Dutch masters and supported Descartes’s ideology, while in Theology, innovators supported Johann Koch’s work.

At each of the four major secondary schools there was a teacher of Theology, who prepared future pastors for their service. Thus, it is not surprising that the pastors educated in such a way did not reach the European level of theological education of the era. Academic degrees were only reached by students studying abroad. The lack of the system and the

scattering of the intellectual and economic forces were most felt by the Theology teachers of the schools.

In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as in the previous century as well, the idea of reorganizing theological education was raised.

During the 1848/49 War of Independence, Transylvanian Reformed colleges were subject to decay and destruction.

Immediately after the defeat of the Revolution of 1848-49, the *Entwurf der Organisation der Gymnasien und Realschulen in Oesterreich* (The Organization Plan for the Austrian Secondary Schools and Real Schools) was published, one of the most outstanding works of European educational history. Hungarian education history primarily regards it as a dangerous tool of the anti-national education policy of neo-absolutism. Nevertheless, the organization plan has an indisputable value for the development of secondary schools offering modern Hungarian general education.

The above work included the organizational structure and curricula of the eight-grade secondary schools as well as the real schools and secondary schools. In the upcoming years, this organization plan impacted the development of public education in both Hungary and Transylvania.

The most significant measure of the above work was the introduction of the graduation exam. It is no coincidence that 11 of the 122 sections of the *Entwurf* were regulations concerning this matter. In public secondary schools the organization of such an exam became mandatory at the end of each academic year. The examination was chaired by the competent school counselor. According to the *Entwurf*, a graduation examination was required for anyone who later wished to attend a university as a regular student.

Apart from the secondary schools of the state, such schools could be founded and supported by bishoprics, monastic orders, villages, church and secular bodies, as well as private persons, provided that the strict and severe material conditions were met. Such secondary schools could also become public schools. Nevertheless, the organization plan also stipulated that they were only eligible for state aid if there was a justified need for their operation.

The decree was a step forward, it lay the base of the modern education system and, after the fall of absolutism, its ideas made it possible for secondary education to meet the

demands of civil society. Its great flaw, however, was that by its actions it nullified the existing Protestant school autonomy. Protestant churches could not meet the strict conditions because of their limited financial resources. Thus, famous colleges have sunken to the level of private institutions, as they could not issue a state-recognized graduation certificate. This justified the resistance of the Hungarian educational public opinion. The dislike of the *Entwurf* even increased as foreign teachers were employed in secondary schools, who met the requirements due to their knowledge of the German language. Dislike and resistance took on major proportions and the struggle for school autonomy was intertwined with the struggle for the church's free operation.

In these conditions, the Transylvanian Reformed Consistory has sought to protect the interests of the Church. In September 1850, teaching according to the regulations of the *Entwurf* was started in each college, apart from the one in Nagyenyed (Aiud). This led to the government granting only the operation of an elementary schools in Nagyenyed, and banning the operation of the secondary school there, even that of a lower level secondary school.

In spite of the government's 1850 prohibition, the school in Nagyenyed gradually reinstated its secondary school classes from 1851, and, overlooked by the government, the full eight-grade secondary school was operating by 1859. This allowed them to restart the training of pastors in the upper classes, over time.

In my doctoral thesis defended at the Faculty of History of the Babeş-Bolyai University in 2004 I continued to discuss the problem of pastoral training in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the circumstances of finding a final solution to this matter with the launch of the Institute of Reformed Theology in Cluj, with the title: *The Transylvanian Reformed Main Consistory and the Reformed Theological Education of the 19<sup>th</sup> century*. My book with the title *Introduction to Transylvanian Reformed School History*, published in 2008 by the Bolyai Társaság (Bolyai Society) also provides a comprehensive image of school history. The conference volume *Reformed Education in the Carpathian Basin from 1690 to 1918*, again published by the Bolyai Társaság in 2009, served the same purpose. My studies also enriched the specialized literature and knowledge on school history. Please find my studies in my publication list.