

# RELIGION, POLITICS AND SOCIETY IN EARLY MODERN TRANSYLVANIA

István Keul, *Early Modern Religious Communities in East-Central Europe. Ethnic Diversity, Denominational Plurality, and Corporative Politics in the Principality of Transylvania (1526-1691)* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2009), ISBN 978 90 04 17652 2, pp. 337

**Cristian BENȚE\***

The Reformation probably represents one of the most thoroughly investigated phenomenon in the history of Europe. The evolution of Reformation in Western Europe, especially, was so thoroughly studied that can hardly be said to hold any great surprise for the historians of our day. The situation is not the same when it comes to the history of the Reformation in Central and Eastern Europe. In this area, the historians still have a lot of work to do in order to fully understand the extent and the implications of the Reformation upon this space.

István Keul's work, *Early Modern Religious Communities in East-Central Europe. Ethnic Diversity, Denominational Plurality, and Corporative Politics in the Principality of Transylvania (1526-1691)*, represents an important contribution to a better understanding of the history of the Reformation in East-Central Europe in general, and in Transylvania in particular. As the author himself underlines, "a comprehensive scholarly work on the religious history of Transylvania from a religious-studies perspective is yet to be written" (p.10). The lack of this comprehensive work is partly due to the narrow concentration of Transylvanian church historians on presenting only the history of their own denomination. Thus, the Transylvanian Lutheranism was investigated by historians like Friedrich Teutsch, Ludwig Binder, Karl Reinerth and Eric Roth.<sup>1</sup> József Pokoly and Imre Révész produced studies on the Reformed (Calvinist) Church.<sup>2</sup> Mihály Bucsay wrote historical overviews on the Hungarian Protestant churches (Lutheran, Reformed, Unitarian) that touched on Transylvania.<sup>3</sup> The development of the Catholic Church in Transylvania has only been covered in publications on the Church in Hungary, except for a volume from 1925.<sup>4</sup> There are, however, overviews on the Unitarian Church as well as on the history of the Sabbatarians in Transylvania.<sup>5</sup> Romanian church historians such as Ioan Lupaș, Ștefan Mateș, and Mircea Părcurariu wrote histories of the Orthodox Church in Transylvania.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, most of these works are committed to their respective national historiographies and emphasize, in varying degrees, the role of one group over the others.

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\* "Vasile Goldiș" Western University of Arad, Faculty of Humanistic, Political and Administrative Sciences, 3 Unirii str., Arad, Romania, e-mail: cbente13@yahoo.com

István Keul courageously attempted to surpass the limitations of the existent historical literature and to produce an objective and unbiased history of the Reformation in the Principality of Transylvania. Being a Transylvanian himself, the author had the advantage of an intimate, inside knowledge of the Transylvanian complex realities. Nevertheless, his “appartenance” could have represented a disadvantage, a natural obstacle in his pursue of objectivity. In spite of this “set-back,” we have to admit from the very beginning that the author succeeded in keeping an objective eye on the history of the Transylvanian Reformation, the result being one of the most well balanced works dedicated to this sensitive subject.

The work consists of ten chapters. The first three chapters: “Frameworks;” “The Region and Its Inhabitants,” and “Political and Economic Developments in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Centuries” represent a highly necessary introduction to the historical, political, economic, social and religious Transylvanian context. The chronological framework is clearly established: it begins with the Battle of Mohács in 1526, which brought about the end of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary, and it ends with the Transylvanian Principality’s loss of autonomy and of its status under international law, through the ratification of the Hermannstadt Declaration of 1688 and the issuance of the Leopoldine Diploma in the year 1691. The next seven chapters are dedicated to the presentation of the Reformation process in Transylvania within the above mentioned chronological frameworks. The result is a well documented, equilibrated and equidistant historical presentation of the Reformation process in Transylvania.

Although István Keul’s work is not a highly polemical one (but rather a factual, historical one), it still raises several important questions regarding the Reformation in East-Central Europe. One of the most important issues is whether East-Central Europe (and Transylvania as part of this area) belongs to the “denominational” Europe (konfessionelles Europa)? Or is there a connection between the formations of denominations and the development of an early modern state in Transylvania? (p. 7-8) The present work is very useful in preparing the ground for a comprehensive answer to these complex questions.

However, the author uses other analytical tools, such as the opposition between intended and unintended consequences, but also the differentiation among the direct, indirect, and long-term effects of the confessionalizing impulses. For instance: one intended and immediate effect of the acceptance by the Transylvanian Saxons of the Wittenberg version of the Reformation imposed by the secular authorities was to reinforce the Saxons’ difference as against the other *nations*. Over the long term this contributed to the equation of Protestantism and Germanism in Transylvania. An example of an unintended, long-term effect would be the forced introduction of the Romanian-language worship service by the Reformed church authorities as a catalyst in the nation-building process of the Transylvanian Romanians.

István Keul's work represents an essential contribution to the understanding of the complex process of Reformation in Transylvania and its implications on the historical evolution of this space in the last five centuries.

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## References

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