

A Report on Theological Education and Travels in Eastern Europe

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In May, 2002 I was invited to teach a course on Presbyterian Polity at the Károlyi Gáspár Institute of Theology and Missions in Miskolc, Hungary. During this trip I honoured this commitment and also had opportunity to learn more about evangelical and Reformed work in Eastern and Central Europe. This report will highlight some of my findings.



Miskolc is a city which is strategically located in eastern Hungary near the Romanian border. Thus the students come from three countries: Ukraine, Romania and Hungary, though all belong to the Hungarian people group in these respective lands. This Institute is quite new having been only founded in 1992 and belongs to the new Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central and

Eastern Europe. This evangelical Presbyterian Church holds to the Helvetic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Westminster Confession of Faith and is ruled by presbyters. (The use of the title “Presbyterian” in their name shows the contrast with the state church with bishops.) The Institute is named in honour of the great Hungarian Protestant Reformer, Károlyi Gáspár, who translated the bible into Hungarian in three years. It was published in 1591 shortly before his death.

In the classroom I was struck by the dedication of these students and pastors who were sacrificially serving Christ Jesus. After my return to Canada I was glad to hear of the first baptism service of three Gypsies by ministers of this mission work. The students were faithful in class and I was blessed with very capable translators. I also did several lectures on homiletics and had opportunities to preach there.

One of the most recent publications from the staff at this Institute in Miskolc is the first Hungarian translation of J. Gresham Machen’s *Christainity and Liberalism*. This has often been viewed as a classic work here in the West but was unavailable in these Hungarian speaking lands. Imré Szöke wrote an introductory essay to accompany this work. I received several favourable comments about this essay and asked Imré if he would translate it into English for our *Haddington House Journal*. He consented and here it is. (I actually met Imré in 2001 in Philadelphia at the International Conference of Reformed Churches where he was there as an observer, so my 2002 trip to Hungary was our second meeting.) Imré’s article which follows this report bridges several things not only in our *Journal* but also in our work at Haddington House. It is an essay helping establish the context for this new Hungarian translation of Machen’s work, but it also helps us in the Haddington House community to learn about churches abroad and their theological work. It gives Imré’s personal insights into Hungary and helps us understand this people group and the context for ministry. We are grateful to Imré for translating this essay for us to read.

Now to return to my tour of Eastern and Central Europe. After leaving Miskolc I was hosted in Budapest by another minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. Miskolc and

Budapest to me are cities in contrast. Budapest is more in “western” Hungary and is closer to Austria. It is a fascinating city. I toured the Bible Museum at the Károlyi Gáspár University of the Hungarian Reformed Church (this is the “state” Protestant Church) and many historic sites before leaving for the Czech Republic by train. A highlight was walking across the chain link bridge built by Scottish engineers to link Buda and Pest. (As I walked across the bridge I thought about the work of Rabbi Duncan and the Jewish Mission.)

My train route was north along the Danube River into Slovakia through its capital – Bratislava where I was joined in my coach by a Salesian priest from Prague. The only common vocabulary we could find was some German, but he handed me some papers in English so I devoured these. The train route meandered through Slovakia and on into the Czech Republic, through the Bohemian forest, Moravia, and into Prague. The purpose of my time in Prague was to meet Pavel Hosěk at the Evangelical Theological College and to learn about Evangelical theological work in the Republic. This College is operated by the Brethren (not Brethren as in Plymouth, but the word is used here to describe sympathizers of Jan Hus, the martyr of 1415). Here I met with two faculty and was graciously hosted in their seminary. The Church lost their seminary building in 1948 when it was seized by the Communists. In 1990 they were awarded a building which they sold and have built this facility. I was also taken to two of their new church plants to talk to students in English and make observations.

Both Brethren churches I was taken to were, from my impressions, wonderfully balanced evangelical church plants. At the first church my translator was a Canadian who runs youth camps in Moravia. The second Brethren church I attended on Sunday evening was very well attended with mainly young students. The prayer meeting at the end of the service was especially moving. I had hoped to visit the new Baptist seminary in Prague but time did not allow. However, I did tour the historic Charles University founded in 1348, with three faculties of theology.

My host, Pavel Hosěk, is sponsored by Mission to the World of the Presbyterian Church in America, and he is a Czech citizen. His parents were atheists as he was until age 20. He was able to help sort out a highly complex ecclesiastical and educational scene to this Canadian. Pavel teaches Systematic Theology and is also in the Department of Augustinian Theology, reflecting an older European Hussite tradition.

One of the very exciting works in Prague is the Institute for Christian Studies that serves in various universities and colleges there. Dr. Ted Turnau (supported in part by Ballston Centre ARP Church, Ballston Spa, New York) is another PCA missionary working in Prague but entering the national universities teaching apologetics and worldview courses. I commend the work of the Institute and their commitment to evangelism in this city. Their work in Prague takes the name of The Komensky Institute.



Dr. Morton Smith had encouraged me to meet with Rev. Sid Anderson, the Presbyterian Church in America missionary in the Czech Republic, who is involved with a new seminary. Unfortunately, while I was there he was on furlough and we never met.

I appreciated seeing the way theological education and training is being developed in the Czech Republic now following the Velvet Revolution. It was interesting to see that almost the entire library at the Evangelical Theological College was in English as was also the case at the Károlyi Gáspár Institute in Miskolc. This is reflective of the rise of English as the Latin of our day. The other very striking thing about theological work in Hungary and in the Czech Republic was the youthfulness of all the staff – another sign of an emerging church after Communism and liberalism.

Pavel Hosěk reviewed with me the developmental stages of how in 1989 they reopened the Evangelical Brethren Seminary by distance courses then in 1994 they began to supplement this with day classes and now things are a combination of both modes with more teachers proving a fuller opportunity to the student body which averages about 10 new students each year.

Like any trip one must be selective and there were other places which I would have liked to have visited. Two which I mention and inform our readers of are The Academy for Reformational Theology (Die Akademie für Reformatoreische Theologie) in Marburg, Germany and the Reformed Theological Institute in Bucharest, Romania. The Academy in Marburg is a Presbyterian sponsored seminary with three full time professors plus guest lecturers. Marburg is home to the world's first Reformed University. The Institute in Romania is assisted by the British Evangelical Council and has had several noteworthy conservative Presbyterians teach there.

Now to the article which follows. It is a slightly adapted introductory essay by Imré Szöke to the newly translated work of Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism*. Imré offers here his personal applications which he takes from Machen's life and offers these to the current Hungarian church situation. It would certainly make for an interesting discussion group in a church adult class or home group. His concluding thesis is that of secession – an issue which has always met with a variety of responses – Scotland and the Netherlands being two parallel situations. I encourage you to not only take this article up but all the other articles and have a discussion group one evening. As

we were going to press I read J.I. Packer's recent article in *Christianity Today* (Jan.21, 2003) entitled, "Why I Walked: Sometimes loving a denomination requires you to fight" and could not help but think of Szöke's essay. I would also direct the reader to two works by Francis A. Schaeffer which should be read together with Imré Szöke's article: *The Church Before the Watching World* and *The Mark of the Christian*. Do not be put off by the copyright years 1970 and 1971 because in many ways these two works by Schaeffer have a classic ring about them. I am convinced that you could have a very engaging study group with this suggestion.

I thank the Lord for the wonderful opportunity to teach at the Károlyi Gáspár Institute of Theology and Missions in Miskolc, Hungary and also to travel and have meetings in the Czech Republic. What a joy to meet fellow believers.