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CONFESSION AND CONVERSION. TRANSCENDING
RELIGIOUS BOUNDARIES IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN
EUROPE, 1560-1700¹

Religious conversions are an important indicator of the relationship between the collective and the individual within a society or culture. At present, belonging to a religion or confession is hardly a matter of fate and frequently religious or confessional affiliation is chosen. Thus, conversions are a signature of modernity, which offers the individual an array of options.

Historical research on the different meanings of confessional affiliation for individuals and social groups, therefore, provides new perspectives on the long-term transformation of modern Europe. The study of religious conversion in the Age of Reformation and Confessionalization,² moreover, suggests considerable revisions in the way we look at the mechanics of early modern confessional formation, as well as the appropriation, and ultimately the relevance of confessional identity.³

The religious divisions of the Reformation and the social, political and cultural effects of the formation of different faiths played a crucial role in the long-term transformation of pre-modern European society.⁴ During the second half of the sixteenth century, as the Council of Trent set guidelines for Catholic renewal, Catholic secular authorities throughout Europe, with the help of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and religious orders, attempted to bring the faithful back into the fold.⁵ Quite often, this involved the conversion of rather committed Protestants. Religious orders were extremely active in this respect. In particular, Franciscans and Jesuits, through their experiences in faraway places, had learned to see conversion as an inter-religious process.⁶ Already, they had developed means and strategies of converting people to

¹ Funded by the "Volkswagen-Stiftung" (Volkswagen Foundation) within the research programme "Einheit in der Vielfalt? Grundlagen und Voraussetzungen eines erweiterten Europas."

² See the recent overview by Deventer, Jörg: Konversionen zwischen den christlichen Konfessionen im frühneuzeitlichen Europa. In: Wiener Zeitschrift zur Geschichte der Neuzeit 7 (2007) 2, 8-24.

³ Volkland, Frauke: Konfession, Konversion und soziales Drama. Ein Plädoyer für die Ablösung des Paradigmas der "konfessionellen Identität". In: Greyerz, Kaspar von/Jakubowski-Tiessen, Manfred/Kaufmann, Thomas/Lehmann, Hartmut (Eds.): Interkonfessionalität – Transkonfessionalität – binnenkonfessionelle Pluralität. Neue Forschungen zur Konfessionalisierungsthese. Gütersloh 2003, 91-104 (Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte 201).

⁴ Hsia, Ronnie Po-Chia (Ed.): A Companion to the Reformation World. Oxford 2004. – Rublack, Ulinka: Die Reformation in Europa. Frankfurt/M. 2003.

⁵ Bireley, Robert: The Refashioning of Catholicism, 1450-1700. A Reassessment of the Counter Reformation. Houndsmills, Washington 1999.

⁶ Châtellier, Louis: The Religion of the Poor. Rural Missions in Europe and the Formation

Christianity, albeit to their particular version of it. Yet now they faced the challenge of applying this knowledge to Europe itself. In this seemingly more familiar context, however, conversion was an increasingly complicated, inter-confessional process. Some of those the Catholic Church targeted had already converted once, when they abandoned their old religion in favor of the evangelical message. Others were born and raised as Protestants. In both cases, embracing Catholicism could be equated with conversion, but the strategies and the means needed to be adapted to each particular context.

This brings to the fore a number of questions: Who were the main advocates of conversion? Who initiated it? What sorts of strategies did missionaries develop in order to persuade people to embrace the Catholic faith? In what contexts did conversion occur? What did conversion involve? What were people's interior motives? Were these motives of a spiritual or of a practical nature? What were the means of constructing converts' new confessional identity? Did the Church use tales of successful conversion as a tactic in the conversion of others? Did converts recount their experiences? And if so, did they record the bare facts, or rather fashion their experiences according to biblical, patristic or more recent models?

In adopting a socio-cultural perspective to answer some of these questions, a collaborative research project, funded by the "Volkswagen Foundation", has brought together the expertise of three scholars from Cluj, Leipzig, and Olomouc. Hosted by the "Geisteswissenschaftliches Zentrum Geschichte und Kultur Ostmitteleuropa" in Leipzig (GWZO), the project "Confession and Conversion. Frameworks, Practices and Media for Transcending Confessional Boundaries in Central and Eastern Europe 1560-1700/Konfession und Konversion. Konfigurationen, Praktiken und Medien konfessioneller Grenzüberschreitungen in Mittel- und Osteuropa 1560-1700" focuses on conversions to Catholicism in the Habsburgs' hereditary lands, as well as in Transylvania and the Crown Lands of Bohemia. In this context, emphasis is placed on the methods of disseminating religious ideas, the staging of the conversion process, and the textual and visual representation of the convert.

The project proceeds from two assumptions. First, that in a period when Church and state cooperated to impose religious conformity, conversion to Catholicism was far from an anomaly limited to members of the social and intellectual elite. This point draws attention to the fact that in the Habsburg Monarchy, the processes of confessional division and confessional formation took place in a multiethnic, multicultural and multiconfessional framework. (Habsburg multiconfessionalism ranged from Lutheranism, Calvinism and Utraquism to a variety of other religious movements, such as Antitrinitarianism/Unitarianism, the Bohemian Brotherhood and

of Modern Catholicism, c. 1500 - c. 1800. Cambridge 1997. – Crăciun, Maria: Implementing Catholic Reform. The Jesuits and Traditional Religion in Early Modern Transylvania. In: *Oblidal, Anna/Samerski, Stefan* (Eds.): *Jesuitische Frömmigkeitskulturen. Konfessionelle Interaktion in Ostmitteleuropa 1570-1700*. Stuttgart 2006, 37-61 (Forschungen zur Geschichte und Kultur des östlichen Mitteleuropa 28). – Elbel, Martin: *Bohemia Franciscana. Františkánský řád a jeho působení v českých zemích v 17. a 18. století* [The order of St. Francis and its pursuits in the Bohemian lands during the 17th and 18th centuries]. Olomouc 2001 (Knihnice Verbum 1).

various Anabaptist beliefs.) During the sixteenth century, only a minority remained Catholic, while Protestant movements spread across the heartlands of East Central Europe.⁷ Because the Catholic Habsburg rulers pressured Protestants to abjure their faith, leading hundreds of thousands to change religious affiliation between the late sixteenth and early eighteenth centuries, converts and conversion must be regarded and examined as a mass phenomenon.⁸

The second assumption relates to the analytical framework of this research project. An approach that fixes its gaze solely on the matter of the converts' "sincerity" and the question of whether conversions were "true," is completely misleading, inasmuch as this ignores the simple fact that the motives behind conversion were far more complex and polymorphic. This makes it impossible to draw a distinction between "sincere" and "insincere."⁹ In contrast to this traditional historiographical approach, the project focuses on a comparative analysis of the social, political, and cultural contexts of religious conversion, as well as the communicative dimensions of traversing confessional boundaries.

Broadly speaking, the project explores conversion as confessional interaction, starting from the premise that converts themselves were the loci of a clash between religious cultures, the one to be abandoned and the one to be embraced. This underlying assumption allows one to not lose sight of the complexity of the issues involved, ranging from the internalization of a set of beliefs to the adaptation of everyday religious practice. This approach also allows one to take into account the fact that conversion engages with identity constructs at various levels.

In this regard, narratives of conversion also play a significant role in this research agenda.¹⁰ Early modern conversions can be approached through a wide variety of sources, which provide necessary data about the process of conversion. Written by various authors (missionaries, officials, converts themselves) with different, overlapping objectives, they provide accounts of events, glorify achievements, instruct missionaries, support new converts and seek to convince potential ones. Authors

⁷ For an overview see Eberhard, Winfried: Reformation and Counterreformation in East Central Europe. In: Brady, Thomas A. Jr./Oberman, Heiko A./Tracy, James D. (Eds.): Handbook of European History 1400-1600. Late Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation. Bd. 2. Leiden, New York, Köln 1995, 551-584.

⁸ Deventer, Jörg: "Zu Rom übergehen". Konversion als Entscheidungshandlung und Handlungsstrategie. Ein Versuch. In: Leeb, Rudolf/Pils, Susanne Claudine/Winkelbauer, Thomas (Eds.): Staatsmacht und Seelenheil. Gegenreformation und Geheimprotestantismus in der Habsburgermonarchie. Wien, München 2007, 168-180 (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung 47).

⁹ On this shift of emphasis see, for instance, Siebenhüner, Kim: Glaubenswechsel in der Frühen Neuzeit. Chancen und Tendenzen einer historischen Konversionsforschung. In: Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung 34 (2007) 2, 243-272, esp. 262-265. – Mader, Eric-Oliver: Fürstenkonversionen zum Katholizismus in Mitteleuropa im 17. Jahrhundert. Ein systematischer Ansatz in fallorientierter Perspektive. In: Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung 34 (2007) 3, 403-440, esp. 417-418.

¹⁰ See, for instance, Leone, Massimo: Religious Conversion and Identity: The Semiotic Analysis of Texts. London 2004. – Baer, Marc: Islamic Conversion Narratives of Women: Social Change and Gendered Religious Hierarchy in Early Modern Ottoman Istanbul. In: Gender & History 16 (2004) 2, 425-458.

addressed them to a rather heterogeneous audience, from secular rulers and the Roman ecclesiastical hierarchies, to families and prospective converts. Finally, the texts comprise a rich spectrum of forms, ranging from official accounts and chronicles, to memoirs and works of art.

Crossing Confessional Boundaries

In the following sections, a short overview of the respective case studies will be given. Working from a comparative approach, Jörg Deventer's project on "Conversion as social practice. The reformation commissions in Austria and Bohemia (1580-1660)" (*Konversion als soziale Praxis. Obrigkeitsliche Strategien und Handlungsspielräume der Untertanen im Spiegel der Reformationskommissionen in Österreich und Böhmen*) explores the crossing of confessional frontiers through the concerted campaigns of reformation commissions.¹¹ In the historiography of the Habsburg Monarchy, the activities of so-called "Reformationskommissionen" are considered classic examples of early modern rulers' adamant attempts to put into action the governing principle of "cuius regio, eius religio." Furthermore, historians have proceeded from the assumption that within the scope of a coercive Counter-Reformation and enforcement of religious unity, subjects had to choose between emigration, forcible conversion, and death.¹²

This research project attempts to revise the still popular – yet clichéd – "history of rape," providing a more differentiated view on the recatholicization process as a whole, with particular attention to crossing confessional boundaries. It aims to investigate processes and practices of conversion with regard to the mutual relations between an authoritarian recatholicization policy and local society. This methodological approach advocates the necessity of analyzing the main supporters of conversion and mission, as well as their intentions and methods. Furthermore, in focusing on the interaction between political and church authorities on the one hand and communities, social groups and individuals on the other, the study questions popular reaction. How were the strategies of persuasion and pressure adopted by subjects? How did the population negotiate dramatic religious upheaval?

Following the 1526 election of Ferdinand I as King of Bohemia and Hungary, the Habsburgs steered a moderate course in terms of their religious policy due to the power of the Protestant Estates.¹³ Since the late 1560s, the Estates succeeded in gaining guarantees of freedom to worship (Upper and Lower Austria 1568; Inner Austria 1572/78; Hungary and Moravia 1608; Bohemia and Silesia 1609). However,

¹¹ For recent work on the reformation commissions, see Wäntig, Wulf: *Grenzerfahrungen. Böhmisches Exulanten im 17. Jahrhundert*. Konstanz 2007, esp. 60-76 (Konflikte und Kultur – historische Perspektiven 14). – Stögmair, Arthur: *Die „Reformationskommission“ im Wiener Kärntnerviertel (1652-1654)*. Edition, Regesten, Kommentar. Wien 1995 (Staatsprüfungsarbeit am Institut für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung).

¹² See, for instance, Herzig, Arno: *Der Zwang zum wahren Glauben. Rekatholisierung vom 16. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert*. Göttingen 2000, 153.

¹³ See the recent overview by Winkelbauer, Thomas: *Ständefreiheit und Fürstenmacht. Länder und Untertanen des Hauses Habsburg im konfessionellen Zeitalter*. Teil 2. Wien 2003, 9-147.

these decades also mark the prelude to state-driven Counter-Reformation policy and inner-Catholic reform through the re-establishment of Catholic infrastructure and the promotion of pious practices according to the guidelines of the Council of Trent.

The recatholicization of the Habsburg Austrian core lands, and in the Crown Lands of the Bohemian and Hungarian-Croatian Kingdoms, was a complex and polymorphic process which extended over several generations.¹⁴ Marked by varying levels of intensity, Catholic reform prevailed stealthily *and* frankly, as well as oppressively *and* peacefully. Thus, the catholicization of the private sphere simultaneously involved authoritarian repression and individual adaptation, relatively open acceptance as well as modification of confessionally-defined norms. Broadly speaking, one can distinguish between two important phases in the intended range of Catholic reform: its implementation and its effects. The first phase lasted from the Munich Conference of 1579 until 1609, when Rudolf II granted the Letter of Majesty to Bohemia. The second began after the 1620 Battle of White Mountain and ended after the defeat of the Magnates' Conspiracy in Hungary-Croatia in 1670/71.

Drawing attention to the period following the Council of Trent until the late seventeenth century, this project investigates the activities and effects of reformation commissions in the Habsburgs' hereditary lands and the heartland of the Kingdom of Bohemia. Since their first occurrences in Lower and Inner Austria in the late 1580s, these campaigns of forcible mass conversion played a key role in the recatholicization process. While the prototype restricted its activities solely to single cities and small towns, the reformation commissions in Inner und Upper Austria in 1599/1601, as well as in Lower Austria in 1630, spread across the countryside. In Bohemia, the first reformation commissions were not founded by the sovereign until after the Battle of White Mountain, namely in 1624 and 1627/29. After the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, which granted to the Emperor the unrestrained right of reformation (*jus reformandi*) in his territories, a fourth wave of the reformation commissions engulfed the Habsburg lands, particularly Lower Austria (1652/54, 1657, 1660) and Bohemia (1651/53).

Broadly speaking, this project proceeds from the assumption that, in a confessionally-polarized society, the imposition or implementation of Catholic beliefs cannot be analyzed appropriately with a "top-down" approach. Instead, it necessitates, on the one hand, a careful examination of the interactive processes between state and church authorities of different levels, and local communities, social groups, and individuals on the other. The first set of questions addresses personnel and institutions, as well as the *modus operandi* of promotion and enforcement of the new confessional and social norms. In this context, the main emphasis is placed upon strategies of persuasion, as employed by agents of conversion, ranging from the curia, the

¹⁴ For recent case studies, see *Pörtner, Regina*: The Counter-Reformation in Central Europe. Styria 1580-1630. Oxford 2003 (Oxford historical monographs). – *Deventer, Jörg*: Gegenreformation in Schlesien. Die habsburgische Rekatholisierungspolitik in Glogau und Schweidnitz (1526-1707). Köln, Weimar, Wien 2003 (Neue Forschungen zur schlesischen Geschichte 8). – *Patrouch, Joseph E.*: A Negotiated Settlement. The Counter-Reformation in Upper Austria under the Habsburgs. Boston, Leiden, Köln 2000 (Studies in Central European Histories 19).

Imperial, respectively Royal Court, religious orders, nobles, bishops, chapters, clerical and secular members of the reformation commissions to public officers and missionaries on the local level. Moreover, in exploring the social spectrum of the converts and their monitoring, the study investigates the population's reactions to the promotion of individual and mass conversion, as well as the consequences that conversions had upon individuals, families and local society.

A third set of questions brings attention to the fact that debates about crossing confessional lines echoed not only in face-to-face communications, but also were reflected in texts and images. Therefore, through an analysis of rhetorical and visual strategies embedded in various persuasive works, this study scrutinizes the relevance of media as a weapon in the polemical battle between churches.

Urban Society and Conversion

In the project "Confession and Conversion in Moravian Towns, 1560-1700", Martin Elbel focuses on urban society and analyses the relationship between the conversion of an individual and the conversion of a town as a whole (i.e., its parishes, municipal council and other offices). Both coerced and voluntary conversions are discussed, as well as the mechanisms of conversions, public manifestations of conversions, and the overall impact upon urban society. This case study is carried out in a sample of Moravian towns, investigating differences between the centre and periphery. The comparison helps to draft an image of society as a whole, and to analyze the key research questions. Sixteenth-century Moravia was a multi-confessional territory, where various confessions and sects lived side-by-side. In contrast to Bohemia, Utraquism in Moravia was not particularly dominant, and religious division was more balanced: Lutherans (especially in royal towns with German-speaking populations), Bohemian Brethren, and even Anabaptists were relatively strongly represented. At the same time – again, unlike in Bohemia – local administration of the Catholic Church had not been shattered by the Hussite movement and the Reformation. The bishops of Olomouc (Olmütz), for example, retained a strong position, giving the Catholic Church a significant advantage in its recovery and struggle against other confessions. Preliminary findings suggest that, while in the middle of the sixteenth century Catholics directly controlled only one-tenth of parish churches, as early as 1619 300 of 660 parishes were Catholic.¹⁵ Restoration of the Catholic Church was quite intense even before the ultimate Catholic victory at the Battle of White Mountain in 1620. After that moment, changes in religious life generally followed developments in Bohemia; the bans and decrees concerning non-Catholics, which took effect in Bohemia in 1620, were issued in Moravia within several months. It was, however, only the end of the Thirty Years' War that enabled the thorough conversion of the country. Yet it was a long and complicated process, which lasted well into the first half of the eighteenth century.¹⁶ In order to compre-

¹⁵ *Válka*, Josef: *Dějiny Moravy II. Morava reformace, renesance a baroka* [A History of Moravia. II. Moravia during the reformation, renaissance, and baroque periods]. Brno 1996, 60.

¹⁶ *Zuber*, Rudolf: *Osudy moravské církve v 18. století* [The fortunes of the Moravian Church in the 18th century]. Vol. 1. Praha 1987; Vol. 2, Olomouc 2003.

hend the outcome of the conversions, their successes and failures, the period of study must include this eighteenth century data. Conversions in this project are studied from a long-term perspective: from the outer, usually enforced acceptance of Catholic faith, to more genuine conversion and identification with the Catholic confession. The project thus spans from the second half of the sixteenth to the end of the seventeenth century, with occasional investigations into the eighteenth century.

Religious plurality and the strong position of the Catholic Church make Moravia an ideal subject for research. Although attention is paid to the whole of Moravia, including rural areas, the main focus is urban society. There are several reasons for this choice. First and foremost, the situation in towns is better documented through primary sources, and the variety and richness of those sources is a prerequisite for a successful analysis of the topic. Secondly, towns were the primary missionary targets. Compared to villages, the religious situation in towns was more complex. Townsmen were usually more literate, educated, and informed regarding religious matters. They had better contact with other regions, and thus better access to information. Converting a town required a more systematic missionary approach and the establishment of mechanisms to consolidate and strengthen the new conversions.¹⁷

Every town was a world unto itself, a microcosm which reflected the situation of the world around it. The dense network of Moravian towns provides many opportunities for research. An apparent starting point is the Royal Town of Olomouc – the one-time capital of Moravia (gradually succeeded by Brno (Brünn) in the seventeenth century) and see of the bishopric, which covered almost the entire territory. Apart from several monasteries, there was also a Jesuit college with a university (founded 1573) and a papal “Collegium Nordicum” for the training of Catholic clergy from Scandinavia and the Baltic region. Yet around 1600, the population of the town (both German- and Czech-speaking) confessed belief to a whole array of Christian denominations. Naturally, it soon became the centre of recatholicization efforts. In spite of the war context (the town was occupied by Swedish troops from 1642-1650), these efforts were quite successful. In the second half of the seventeenth century, Olomouc became a distinctively Catholic town and base for missionary activities in the rest of the territory.

In order to obtain a complete picture of the process, the situation in Olomouc must be compared with one or two smaller towns, situated on noble estates. Due to the lack of a qualified Catholic clergy, in these towns pastoral care was nearly absent. Moreover, some of the smaller towns were situated on the frontier, in close proximity to those countries where other confessions legally existed, or were at least tolerated (e. g. Silesia, Hungary). Local non-Catholics could expect support from fellow-believers abroad, with Protestant pastors even visiting occasionally. Conversion of such places required different approaches and strategies than in the centre. While state authorities (usually a royal sub-chamberlain) or purged municipal councils directly supervised the conversion of a royal town, the situation in a subject town depended upon its owner and his willingness to cooperate. That is why the refor-

¹⁷ *Châtellier, Louis: The Europe of the Devout: The Catholic Reformation and the Formation of a New Society. Cambridge 1989 (Past and Present Publications 40).*

mation commissions focused primarily on lords and their officials.¹⁸ Only with official support could the conversion be fostered.

Another difference between bigger and smaller towns lay in the approach of the religious orders: Jesuits, to some degree Franciscans, and other established orders preferred to operate in and from bigger towns; new orders (especially Capucins and Piarists) mainly covered smaller towns. The foundation of their monastery (financed by the lord) was usually a turning point, as it helped implement and consolidate the conversion. When preserved sources exist, attention is given to towns with different religious traditions: Utraquist, adherents of the Bohemian-Brethren, or Lutheran.

Catholic Missions in Transylvania

Maria Crăciun's project, "The Role of the Mission in the Recatholicization Process. The Case of a Multi-Confessional Territory: Transylvania 1580-1660" focuses on the role of the mission in early modern Transylvanian recatholicization as part of the larger history of Catholic missions in this principality. The study restricts itself mostly to the Jesuit missions, as the Jesuits were the most dynamic order of the post-Tridentine era.¹⁹ Comparisons with the activities of other (traditional) orders, such as the Franciscans, are also attempted to study. The investigation explores, first and foremost, the mission at the level of intention, assessing the missionary ethos itself. Secondly, it operates at the level of actual missionary practice, addressing the strategies forged in order to draw the faithful back to Catholicism.

To achieve these goals, the study focuses on adjustments that the missionaries made in order to accommodate local needs, as well as the religious experience of a laity who had, sometimes willingly, adopted Protestantism. In this context, the study scrutinizes the meaning attributed to terms such as "conversion;" the act of defining the religious other as a "heretic" or simply a "Protestant;" defining popular religious experience as "superstition;" people's concern for Tridentine reform; and the use of the term "conversion" itself. Finally, the study focuses, in part, on the reception of Jesuit conversion efforts.

The study provides an opportunity to assess the development of Catholic restoration in a "state" whose political identity had been established recently, and where Protestant ideas made consistent inroads throughout the sixteenth century: Transylvania, which at the end of the sixteenth and in the seventeenth centuries was moving from a region within the Hungarian kingdom to an autonomous political entity. The beginning of the Jesuit mission in Transylvania coincided with the emergence of the Transylvanian principality itself.²⁰ Therefore, the history of the mission

¹⁸ For political aspects of this process, see *Knož, Tomáš: Pobělohorské konfiskace: Moravský průběh, středoevropské souvislosti, obecné aspekty* [Confiscation of property in Moravia after the battle of the White Mountain, with Central European connections and aspects of a general nature taken into account]. Brno 2006 (Knížnice Matice moravské 19).

¹⁹ O'Malley, John W. et al. (Eds.): *The Jesuits. Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1543-1773*. Toronto, Buffalo, London 1999.

²⁰ *Peris, Lucian: Le Missioni Gesuite in Transilvania e Moldavia nel Seicento* [Jesuit Missions in Transilvania and Moldavia in the 17th Century]. Cluj-Napoca 1998. – *Tóth, István*

must take into account the emergence of the principality during the reign of István Báthory (1571-1576), and the flowering of this new political entity through 1660. The new Transylvanian state thus presents a highly interesting political context, both for the study of the mission as well as for the exploration of recatholicization more broadly. The first mission coincides with the reign of Catholic Princes (1571-1606) – the most remarkable being István Báthory, who later became King of Poland (1576). The mission benefited from the support of the Prince, who had the power to initiate the recatholicization policy. The second mission continued during the era of the Calvinist Principality, when the Calvinists ruled Transylvania in cooperation with higher clergy, and benefited from the support of co-religionist Estates in transforming Transylvania into a Calvinist fortress.

In the early modern period, the recatholicization process gained very interesting dimensions in multi-confessional territories, including the traditional border regions of western Christianity. This was particularly true in the Kingdom of Hungary and specifically in Transylvania, where Catholicism encountered other forms of religiosity (Eastern Orthodox Church) as early as the Middle Ages.²¹ The confessional diversity of these territories multiplied during the sixteenth century, when various societal factions accepted the Reformation. In the context of Roman and Viennese recatholicization strategies, the Catholic Church, tried to bring back into the fold those who had embraced various strands of Protestantism. At the same time, it attempted to convert the faithful of the Eastern Church. Thus, the very concept of conversion gains fascinating dimensions while the issue of recatholicization achieves added complexity. The political situation in these regions (the defeat of the Hungarian army at Mohács in 1526, and the subsequent disintegration of the Hungarian Kingdom) as well as their status as battlegrounds for Habsburg and Ottoman contending forces, led to major disruptions in the institutional structure of the Latin Church (from the Episcopal to parish level). Furthermore, it contributed to a certain frailty in the institutional development of new churches, while making state support for any religion difficult to sustain.

This raises interesting questions concerning the applicability of the confessionalization paradigm, as confessional building often took place in the absence of explicit state support, and certainly without the backing of strong ecclesiastical institutions. All attempts to recatholicize these regions, then, were strongly reliant on the missionary efforts of religious orders. These orders were in a position to replace the traditional activities of bishops, and often stepped into the shoes of the parish priest to reach the widest possible audience.

One of the most original aspects of this study is its understanding of conversion. Restricted to a fleeting moment in time and assumed to be a rather elusive phenomenon, conversion is understood as the first step in a long process of confessional

György (Ed.): *Litterae missionariorum de Hungaria et Transilvania (1572-1717)*. Vol. 1-4. Rom, Budapest 2002-2005 (*Fontes/Bibliotheca Academiae Hungariae in Roma 4*).

²¹ For an overview of newer studies, see the review article by *Bitskey, István*: *Katholische Reform und Gegenreformation in Ungarn. Ein Bericht über neuere Forschungen*. In: *Historisches Jahrbuch* 125 (2005) 395-412.

building, as well as the end of a long process of persuasion. This understanding of conversion allows one to probe the meaning embedded in recatholicization strategies, taking into account the forces involved in initiating and fostering it, as well as the instruments of the actual implementation. Accordingly, some of the research focus must be on discursive strategies, though other aspects involved in the conversion process cannot be neglected. The study focuses both on analysis of events and on their images in the minds of the people who recorded and, consequently, shape them. The study relies mainly on discursive analysis and assesses the missionaries' strategies at both the level of intention and in practice. Although this research examines one particular case study, it is concerned with placing it in a comparative framework: that of major Habsburg strategies to recatholicize East Central Europe. Finally, while retaining the confessionalization paradigm as a heuristic model, the study aims to broaden its understanding and consider other possible triggers of confession building.

Since the 1980s, Western European and U.S. historiographies have paid attention most notably to various phenomena of conversion within Christianity,²² and to the conversion of Jews, Christians, and Muslims to other faiths.²³ These works, as well as cross-epochal and interdisciplinary research projects have convincingly shown the necessity for analysis that pays heed to the political, social, cultural, and economic dimensions of conversion in the confessional age, rather than exclusively relying on religious and theological aspects. This change in scholarly perspective is also seen in newer studies on religious transformations, which prefer terms like "confessional interaction," "cultural transmission," "diffusion," and "interactive emergence," instead of "religious conversion."²⁴ Furthermore, the reception of concepts and paradigms from the sociology of religion has contributed to newer analytical perspectives for historical research.²⁵ In recent decades, research on the sociology of

²² For recent works, see Pollmann, Judith: *Religious choice in the Dutch Republic. The Reformation of Arnoldus Buchelius (1565-1641)*. Manchester, New York 1999 (Studies in Early Modern European History). – Martin, Catherine: *Les compagnies de la propagation de la foi (1632-1685)*: Paris, Grenoble, Aix, Lyon, Montpellier; étude d'un réseau d'associations fondé en France au temps de Louis XIII pour lutter contre l'hérésie des origines à la Révocation de l'Edit de Nantes. Genève 2000 (Travaux du grand siècle 16). – Kooi, Christine: *Converts and Apostates: The Competition for Souls in Early Modern Holland*. In: *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 92 (2001) 195-214. – Luria, Keith P.: *Sacred Boundaries. Religious Coexistence and Conflict in Early Modern France*. Washington 2005, esp. 246-307. – Dursteler, Eric R.: *Venetians in Constantinople. Nation, Identity, and Coexistence in the Early Modern Mediterranean*. Baltimore, London 2006 (The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science 124, 2).

²³ Bennassar, Bartolomé/Bennassar, Lucile: *Les Chrétiens d'Allah. L'histoire extraordinaire des renégats, XVI^e et XVII^e siècles*. Paris 2001. – Graizbord, David L.: *Souls in Dispute: Converso Identities in Iberia and the Jewish Diaspora, 1580-1700*. Philadelphia 2004 (Jewish Culture and Contexts). – Mulsow, Martin/Popkin, Richard H. (Hg.): *Secret Conversions to Judaism in Early Modern Europe*. Leiden 2004 (Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 122).

²⁴ Mills, Kenneth/Grafton, Anthony: Introduction. In: *Ibid.* (Eds.): *Conversion: Old Worlds and New*. Rochester (NY) 2003, ix-xvii, esp. x.

²⁵ Bainbridge, William Sims: *The Sociology of Conversion*. In: Malony, H. Newton/Southard, Samuel (Eds.): *Handbook of Religious Conversion*. Birmingham (AL) 1992, 178-

conversion has been characterized by a growing number of models and approaches. While research on conversions' causes fixes its gaze on motivations behind the shift, other studies focus on the identification of different stages within the conversion process, as well as attempt to assess how much individuals actually change after joining a new religious fellowship. Another major field of research examines the degree and means by which personal networks and social and political contexts influence the conversions of individuals, families or groups.

Until now, the historiographies of Germany and East Central Europe rarely have attended to the outcome of this newer research on religious conversion. In recent years, however, historians have showed growing interest in the phenomena of crossing confessional frontiers, and in adopting analytic frameworks from other social scientific fields.²⁶ Therefore, the case studies presented here aim to contribute not only to a largely unexplored field of historical research, but also to a cross-disciplinary approach, scrutinising the semantic field of "conversion."

191. – *Wohlrab-Sahr, Monika/Krech, Volkhard/Knoblauch, Hubert*: Religiöse Bekehrung in soziologischer Perspektive. Themen, Schwerpunkte und Fragestellungen der gegenwärtigen religionssoziologischen Konversionsforschung. In: *Ibid.* (Eds.): Religiöse Konversion: Systematische und fallorientierte Studien in soziologischer Perspektive. Konstanz 1998, 7–43.

²⁶ *Thiessen, Hillard* von: Konversionsbereitschaft als Lebensunterhalt: Der Fall der vermeintlichen Konvertitin Catharina Baumännin vor dem Freiburger Stadtgericht (1730/31) und seine Bedeutung für unser Verständnis der Konfessionalisierung. In: *Zeitschrift des Breisgau-Geschichtsvereins "Schau-ins-Land"* 119 (2000) 87–101. – *Lozar, Angelika/Schaser, Angelika*: Die Rückkehr zum "wahren Glauben." Konversionen im 17. Jahrhundert. In: *Frühneuzeit-Info* 13 (2002) 65–74. – *Volkland, Frauke*: Konfession und Selbstverständnis. Reformierte Rituale in der gemischtkonfessionellen Kleinstadt Bischofszell im 17. Jahrhundert. Göttingen 2005 (Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte 210). – *Mat'a, Petr*: Von der Selbstapologie zur Apologie der Gegenreformation: Konversion und Glaubensvorstellungen des Oberstkanzlers Wilhelm Slawata (1572–1652). In: *Lotz-Heumann, Ute/Mißfelder, Jan-Friedrich/Poblig, Matthias* (Eds.): Konversion und Konfession in der Frühen Neuzeit. Gütersloh 2007, 287–322 (Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte 205).