

The crisis and its solution: Examples from Slovak homiletic works

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Arrival of locusts

An integral part of Slovak literature is also the Slovak Lowland literature, which originated in the first half of the 18th century. It is the result of the migration of Slovaks from the overpopulated and less fertile north of Hungary to its more southern parts, the Lowland (today the territory of Hungary, Romania and Vojvodina in Serbia). The resettlement intensified when the Ottoman Turks were driven out from Hungary and a peace treaty was concluded with the Ottoman Empire (1699). The internal situation became stable, which was also partly thanks to the end of the estate rebellions caused by the centralisation and recatholicisation policy of the Habsburgs (Treaty of Szatmár in 1711). By 1750, approximately fifteen to twenty thousand Slovak serf families had left the territory of Slovakia.¹ ‘Almost from the moment of their immigration to these plains, the Slovaks of the Lowland began to create and consolidate their own ethnic and cultural identity. In this they had enormous help from intellectuals, mostly priests and teachers, from Slovakia, who laid the foundations of the Slovak Lowland culture.’² Scholars who were called to the newly established Slovak villages integrated ‘this breakaway community into the nationwide cultural sphere by many means, raising the awareness in the Lowland that these parts of the nation also form a unity with the part of the nation at home.’³ An effective means of maintaining ethnic and cultural unity was the preached and printed word.

¹ Mrva, I.: Novoveké Uhorsko [Modern Hungary]. In Segeš, V. – Mrva, I.: Dejiny Uhorska a Slováci [History of Hungary and the Slovaks]. Bratislava: Perfekt, 2012, p. 205.

² Harpáň, M.: Dolnozemska básnická vetva [The poetic branch of the Lowland]. In Harpáň, M.: Ars Poetica Pannonica. Nadlak: Vydavateľstvo Ivan Krasko, 2014, p. 47.

³ Mráz, A.: Rozhovory o juhoslovanských Slovákov [Conversations about the Yugoslav Slovaks]. Bratislava: Pravda, 1948, p. 21.

Slovak Lowland literature is connected with the Slovak literary whole by a common spiritual tradition manifested in language.⁴ On the other hand, the works created in the Lowland also have their own specifics; the authors often portray different life experience in them.⁵

This thematic otherness characterises works of the earlier period inspired by the natural features of the Lowland.

An unusual natural phenomenon, the arrival of locusts, which appeared in the Lowland in 1748 and 1749, paralysed the life of the resettled Slovaks, so much so that it became the subject of the works of two evangelical pastors, Matej Markovič Sr. and Bohumil Mezibrodský.

The literary historian Štefan Krčméry drew attention to Markovič whom he viewed as a remarkable authorial personality: 'There is more in Matej Markovič, a Szarvas priest and author of many didactic compositions in verse, than meets the eye.'⁶ Markovič arrived in the Lowland town of Szarvas in the Békés County in 1734 and two decades later, the seniorate convention elected him as the senior of Pest and Békés. To this day, he is also recognised as the first historian of the region and known for his Slavic awareness, which he demonstrated in his history textbook in verse *Kratičká historie království uherského ve versších* (*A Short History of the Kingdom of Hungary in Verse*, 1745).⁷ On the other hand, all we can say for certain about Mezibrodský's work is that he was from Modra and that he was a parish priest in the village of Eška (Öskü in Hungarian) in the Veszprém County.⁸

Markovič and Mezibrodský recorded a critical temporal event, which caused existential fears and great confusion among the inhabitants, in texts of different genres. Markovič captured it in his verse composition *Píseň*

⁴ Harpáň, M.: Niekoľko poznámok o literatúre juhoslovanských Slovákov [Some notes on the literature of the Yugoslav Slovaks]. In Harpáň, M.: Zápas o identitu [The Struggle for Identity]. Nadlak: Vydavateľstvo Ivan Krasko, 2014, p. 34.

⁵ Harpáň, M.: Singulár a plurál slovenskej literatúry na Dolnej zemi [Singular and plural of Slovak literature in the Lowland]. In Harpáň, M.: op. cit., p. 24.

⁶ Krčméry, Š.: Osemnásťe stolie [The eighteenth century]. In: Literárny archív, 1967 [Literary Archive, 1967]. Martin: Matica slovenská 1967, p. 32.

⁷ Kníchal, O.: Zvony dolnozemske (Portréty a úvahy) [Bells of the Lowland: Portraits and Reflections]. Budapest: Celoštátna slovenská samospráva a Združenie slovenských spisovateľov a umelcov v Maďarsku, 1996, p. 8; Jančovic, J.: Vyoralí hlboké dolnozemske brázdy [They Ploughed the Deep Furrows of the Lowland]. Nadlak: Vydavateľstvo Ivana Krasku, 2009, p. 13.

⁸ MEZIBRODSZKI (GOTTLIEB) (entry) in Horányi, A.: Nova memoria Hungarorum et provincialium scriptis editis notorum. Pars I, A-C. Pestini: Kilian, 1795, p. 609.

truchlivá o kobyolkách (*Mournful Song of the Locusts*, 1749).⁹ The analysis of Markovič's composition that we made some time ago,¹⁰ will serve as a model for us in analysing Mezibrodský's occasional sermon *Věrné probuzení k pravému pokání a modlení* (*Real Awakening to True Repentance and Prayer*, 1749).¹¹ Mezibrodský took up considerably more space than Markovič covering the unusual natural phenomenon in a sermon that he did not consider extensive enough to illustrate all the circumstances.

Both authors created their contributions with the same intention. They were not only concerned with capturing the outward aspects of the natural disaster and its catastrophic consequences, but they channelled their efforts mainly into revealing the spiritual causes of this watershed event and into pointing out a reliable way out of the crisis in which they and their parishioners suddenly found themselves. Their texts illustrate very well one of the essential ideological elements of the baroque period, which was the clergy's attempt at the moral ennoblement of the members of the church communities through the effective implementation of religious education.¹²

For Mezibrodský, this is the first publication in the vernacular because the dedication of his sermon reads that he dedicates his first literary work in Slovak to the Modra parish priest Pavel Jakobei as '*his esteemed patron and helper in Slovak language*' out of gratitude for the language skills acquired. Mezibrodský's sermon is a product of contemporary language usage and literary culture. In terms of the history of literature, it is important to note that in the 17th and 18th centuries, printed sermons were

⁹ Pseň truchlivá o Kobyolkách, které L. P. 1748. do Vher přiletely Skrze Matěge MARKOWITZE složená, a s Modlitbau proti nim wytisštěná. Wytisštěná w Presspurku v Frantisska Antonjna Royera [A Mournful Song of the Grasshoppers that Flew to Hungary in 1748 A.D. Composed by Matěg Markowitz, with Prayer against Them. Printed in Pressburg by Frantisek Antonjn Royer], 1749, [8] p.

¹⁰ Brtáňová, E.: Niekoľko poznámok k časovej veršovanej skladbe Mateja Markoviča, st. [Some notes on the time verse composition of Matej Markovič, Sr.] In Brtáňová, E.: Na margo staršej literatúry [On the Subject of Older Literature] Bratislava: Kalligram – Ústav slovenskej literatúry, 2012, pp. 61-75.

¹¹ Wěrné probuzenj k prawému pokánj a modlenj za odwráčenj pokut Božských w Vhřjch se zgewugjcejch a z částky giž zgevených w nezčislném množstwj kobylek neslýchaných. [...] Wykonané mjsto kázanj nedělnjho, w Neděli XVII. po S. Trojici, skrze M. Teofila MEZYBRODZKÉHO, tohoto času Cjrkwe Essčanské Ewangelické Nácý Slowanské y Německé S. B. Služebnjka. Wytisštěné w Presspurku v Frantisska Antonjna Royera, 1749, [32] p.

¹² Vašica, J.: České literární baroko. Příspěvky k jeho studiu [Czech Literary Baroque. Contributions to its Study]. Brno: Atlantis, 1995, p. 264.

a popular form of devotional reading. They usually underwent considerable modifications before publication. Scholarly quotations and references were added.¹³ Their recipients were the clergy as well as the wider public. With that in mind, Mezibrodský conceived and published the text of his sermon. The sermon pursues four key objectives: it seeks to teach about salvation, to warn against sin, to call for conversion to God and finally to comfort with the hope of victory over the enemy.

The sermon is characterised by baroque poetics. Mezibrodský incorporates the initial ideas already into its title. Its content focuses on the state of crisis that the southern part of Hungary got into and on the way out of the crisis, which lies in repentance and prayers for the averting of God's punishment, which he sincerely encourages: '*Věrné probuzení k pravému pokání a modlení za odvrácení pokut Božských v Uhřích se zjevujících, a z částky již zjevených v nezčíslném množství kobylek neshláchaných (Real Awakening to True Repentance and Prayer for the Averting of God's Punishments Appearing in Hungary, and in Part Already Revealed in Myriad of Unheard-of Locusts)*.' On the title page, he also gives information about the locations and times of the locusts. Locusts appeared as early as in 1748 in some counties, but in the Veszprém County and in Öskü in considerably greater numbers only in the summer of 1749. The sermon was delivered by Mezibrodský on the 17th Sunday after the Feast of the Holy Trinity, i.e. 28 September, replacing the Sunday sermon. Consequently, it is not a sermon based on a traditional passage from a Gospel and an Epistle text.¹⁴ Mezibrodský has created an occasional sermon whose textual basis is a verse from an Old Testament book, Deuteronomy, the fifth book of Moses (28:38), indicating a swarm of locusts.¹⁵ From the compositional aspect, he divided it into four thematic elements: *Předmluva – Text – Přístup – Výklad (Prologue – Text – Approach – Exposition)*, which he connected with short prayer sighs and supplications.

¹³ Strom, J.: Pietism and Revival. In Eijnatten, J. van (ed.): *Preaching, Sermon and Cultural Change in the Long Eighteenth Century*. Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2009, pp. 176-177.

¹⁴ 'Lutheran churches still followed the traditional lections for the Gospels and Epistles that were to form the textual basis for sermons on Sundays and church holidays, but other sermons offered ample opportunities for preaching on texts outside the lections. The demands on the clergy for preaching were considerable, usually requiring several sermons a week, and often many more.' In Strom, J.: op. cit., p. 175. Julius Filo also writes about the pericopic system in his article *Perikopické poriadky, ktoré používame...* [Pericopic Orders We Use...] In: *Služba slova [The Ministry of the Word]*, vol. 69, 2020, issue. 1, pp. 6-8.

¹⁵ You will sow so much seed in the field, but you will harvest little because locusts will devour it.

The Prologue or preface serves as a kind of general introduction. In it Mezibrodský presents a rough draft of the sermon. On the one hand, he speaks broadly about the sin committed by believers in not accepting God's grace, distracting themselves with earthly things, and thus provoking God to anger and to retribution for their sins; on the other hand, he appeals to his parishioners not to forget the blessing God has shown them by providing sustenance in the land that has become their new home. It reveals the motif of God's retribution for sin. He explains that the natural disaster occurred because of disrespect for God's word and its teachers. This well-deserved punishment can only be averted by sincere confession of sin and prayer. In the *Exposition*, the main thematic component of the sermon, he elaborates further on the issues raised. This part shows best the logical order of Mezibrodský's reasoning and the choice of the arguments employed. He considers the temporal event from three perspectives: from the spiritual aspect, from the aspect of historical experience and from the point of view of the people directly involved. The constitutive elements of the exposition are not only biblical texts, but, given the practical needs of the listener, it is also backed up by the statements of learned authorities and testimonies. In this regard Mezibrodský's approach coincides with Markovič's authorial strategy.

In the first part of the *Exposition*, Mezibrodský describes the locusts. In the spiritual sense, he defines them as God's army that obeys God's commands and has a permanent place in the earthly army. He sees the divine origin of the locusts, which is manifested in supernatural power and strength, in counterpoint with their physical appearance, with their tiny, frail and weak bodies. In describing the external features, he does not go into detail, unlike Markovič who depicted the locusts so thoroughly and accurately that they were easily identifiable. Mezibrodský justifies the invasion of the locusts by divine commission. He supports this claim with authentic experience. The initial idea of the inhabitants of Öskü that the locusts would die owing to high winds and cold rain, turned out to be naive and misleading, for the newly hatched locusts, in one night, grazed almost all the grain in the fields and the mown grass in the forest, even attacking the personal belongings of the inhabitants, their horsehair bags, which they had with them in the fields.

Mezibrodský strives for the persuasiveness and impressiveness of his preaching by amplifying the text. In order to highlight the unusual power of locusts even more, he illustrates it with two exempla about equally aggressive insects, flies. The episode by the Greek prose writer Claudius

Aelianus (*Varia historia*) is about the inhabitants of Megara, who were driven out of the city by flies. In the second case, Mezibrodský refers to the Italian cardinal and ecclesiastical historian Caesar Baronius (*Annales ecclesiastici*), from whom he takes an account of a miracle that took place in the Spanish city of Girona (1285).¹⁶ When the French soldiers opened the tomb of Bishop Narcissus, swarms of flies flew out of it and attacked them so violently that most of them succumbed to their injuries. Mezibrodský also applies brief historical excursions used as exempla in explaining the destructive action of locusts, which attack and damage trees and other vegetation. Testimonies about various species of locusts that appeared in the past in Bohemia and France are to inspire even greater respect for the aggression of locusts. Locusts ‘as large as a sparrow’ flew to Bohemia in 1473 and locusts ‘with four wings’ in 1527. In 874, the inhabitants of France encountered ‘locusts with six wings of different colours’. The references to ‘other lamentable examples’ given in the handbooks of the German humanist scholars Andreas Hondorff (*Promptuarium exemplorum*) and Wolfgang Franz (*Historia animalium sacra*) may be understood as inputs intended exclusively for preachers to become more familiar with this unusual phenomenon. Mezibrodský also briefly informs about the situation in Hungary, whose inhabitants also encountered the destructive power of locusts several times in the past (in 1348, 1542, 1661, 1684 – 1686, 1709). He likens the locusts’ punishing power to the Ottoman expansion into Hungary, but considers the impact of the latter to be much more devastating. The same motif is also present in Markovič’s composition.

Mezibrodský explains that God does not intend to destroy all crops and livelihood through locusts, but only wants to lead people to repentance. So, he warns them that if there is no corrective action in their behaviour and attitudes, he will allow an even greater punishment, which will be death.

Locusts are a sign of other calamities: war, dearth, famine and pestilence. To illustrate these threats, Mezibrodský again selects examples from the historical memory of European countries. After the locust swarms, Spanish troops appeared in Bohemia (1542), and war with the Ottoman Turks began in Hungary (1663). Famine struck in Milan when it was besieged by the French (1527), in Bohemia when the German King Rudolf I of Habsburg defeated the Bohemian King Přemysl Otakar II (1278) and also at the time of the power struggle with Otto V of Brandenburg (1283).

¹⁶ Mezibrodský gives the year 1286 incorrectly.

Mezibrodský illustrates the plague as a consequence of famine with a naturalistic scene of Jerusalem besieged by its enemies, whose inhabitants were forced to also seek sustenance in unclean places (places used for relieving oneself) and to consume very unusual food (tree bark, belts, shoes, waste, human and cow excrement) and to eat unclean animals (snakes, mice, spiders and venomous reptiles). We have discovered that Mezibrodský took this passage from the treatise *Historia o hrozně a strašlivé zkáze... Jeruzalema (The Story of Horrific and Terrible Destruction...of Jerusalem, probably 1617)* by the Calvinist preacher Havel Žalanský-Phaëthon, who was one of the popular authors read in the Lowland as late as the first half of the 20th century.

In the second part of the *Exposition*, Mezibrodský identifies the causes of the crisis. He states that it was clearly due to the ungodly life of the inhabitants that the locusts found their way to Hungary, therefore their wilful and deliberate persistence in sin must be punished by God, which he supports with the words of the prophet Amos (4:9).¹⁷ The effect of his narrative is heightened by Pliny the Elder's statement (*Naturalis historia*) about the locusts as 'a sea of angry gods (*pestem irae deorum*)'. In his anamnesis of the crisis, Mezibrodský proceeds to distinguish between the sins committed, of which he regards as the greatest sin the dishonouring and belittling of the Word of God, which signifies the true salvation of mankind. So, if God takes away the physical food from people who disparage the spiritual food and persecute the teachers of religion, he acts justly. Mezibrodský refers to avarice and the desire for gain as the second most common infraction of God's commands. Even rich people thus lose their food because they value movable possessions (gold, silver) more than immovable property (fertile fields). In times of dearth, they are punished by having to spend all their means on livelihood. The third transgression for which God sends the locusts is an opulent lifestyle and pride.

We can see that Mezibrodský does not avoid social criticism either, which he not only levels at the wealthy people, but also quite surprisingly, at the end of his sermon, he directs that criticism at the urban community, where everything literally '*stinks and reeks of pride*'. He reproaches the townspeople with no longer observing the rules of the social etiquette ('*there is no difference between ladies and maids*'), with failing to protect the needy ('*Where are the foster parents and nursemaids of poor wid-*

¹⁷ Many times I struck your gardens and vineyards, / destroying them with blight and mildew / Locusts devoured your fig and olive trees / yet you have not returned to me, / declares the Lord.

ows and orphans?'), with neglecting the care of the poor ('*Oh, how many people give the leftovers from the table to the dog rather than to the poor beggar!*') and with leading an extravagant and godless life. ('*Moreover, how shamefully God's gifts and fruits of the earth are wasted on gluttony, drunkenness and other godlessness.*')

In the last part of the Exposition, Mezibrodský advises on how one can crush a feared and powerful enemy, who abounds with supernatural power. He refutes the opinion that the locusts can be defeated with human strength and the use of conventional means (shooting, noise, yelling, drumming). He considers this effort futile and useless, even sinful, because it involves other sins such as cursing and anger. The right way out of the crisis lies in '*true repentance*' and '*fervent prayer*', through which one can gain favour with God, who alone can stop the locusts' attacks.

In depicting the crisis situation represented by a real event, the arrival of the locusts, Mezibrodský draws on the value framework of the evangelical denomination he represents, which is outwardly manifested in the structure of his sermonic speech and in the use of language. He created the text of the sermon in the spirit of stylistic syncretism so that it fulfils an informative function while also being emotionally and aesthetically compelling. He views the depiction of the temporal event as an opportunity to highlight the devaluation of traditional Christian values and morals. He sees the path to redress in religious discipline.

Cholera epidemic

A worldwide cholera pandemic broke out in the early 1830s when it spread from Asia to Europe, from where it spread to North America, North and Central Africa.¹⁸ It was brought to Europe by Russian soldiers sent from Persia to Poland to help suppress an uprising of the Polish nobility against tsarist Russia.¹⁹ After the outbreak of cholera in Poland, in a decree issued by the monarch Francis I of Habsburg on 2 November 1830, the borders were immediately closed and all roads and paths leading through

¹⁸ Jiroušková, M.: Zdravotnícke opatrenia proti cholere v roku 1831 [Health measures against cholera in 1831] in *Roľnícke povstanie 1831* [Peasant Uprising 1831]. Ed. Viliam Šulc. Košice. Východoslovenské vydavateľstvo 1984, p.116. According to Liška, A.: *Cholera epidémia z roku 1831 a jej priebeh v Prešovskej eparchii*. [Cholera Epidemic of 1831 and its Course in the Prešov Eparchy]. Prešov: Prešovská univerzita, 2012, p. 14.

¹⁹ Rapant, D.: *Sedliacke povstanie na východnom Slovensku roku 1831. Diel prvý – Dejiny* [Peasant Uprising in Eastern Slovakia in 1831. Part One – History]. Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo SAV, 1953, p. 33. According to Liška, A.: *op. cit.*, p. 14.

the border areas were put under military guard.²⁰ Cholera appeared in the north-eastern regions of Hungary in June and in the south-eastern regions in July 1831.²¹ Between 13 June 1831 and 14 February 1832, a total of 536,517 people contracted the disease in Hungary, of whom more than half (298,876) were cured.²²

Anti-cholera measures introduced by the state government and by the county government at regional level such as restricting the free movement of inhabitants by guards and cordons, chlorinating wells, administering anti-cholera medication, digging mass graves, estimating the possible number of victims by county officials and increased mortality among the lower classes were viewed by the broader masses of the population as attempts by the upper classes to eliminate them. For that reason, the legend of the lords' poisoning of the subjects soon began to spread. The regulations banning wakes, titular feasts and pilgrimages, restricting religious services and closing churches, and burying plague victims at night in designated places without a priest or family present had a particularly negative impact.²³ The response to the measures was a peasant revolt in eastern Slovakia in the summer of 1831.

However, cholera also spread in central and western Slovakia. Two Slovak clergymen, the Roman Catholic priest Michal Rešetka and the Evangelical preacher Matej Kosec, gave testimonies of coping with the epidemic in these regions in their sermons. A well-known collector of Slovak and foreign manuscripts and printed literature, Rešetka published in print several of his own sermons (1832, 1836, 1839) and two volumes of occasional Slovak sermons by various preachers, *Kázňe prihodné* (Occasional Sermons, 1831, 1834).²⁴ He analysed the epidemic situation in two Sunday sermons which he delivered in August and September 1831 as chaplain in Dubnica nad Váhom, which was under the territorial governance of the Trencsén County [Trenčín County], situated in the north-western part of

²⁰ Bokesová-Uherová, M.: Zdravotníctvo na Slovensku v období feudalizmu [Healthcare in Slovakia in the Period of Feudalism]. Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo SAV, 1973, p. 246. According to Liška, A.: op. cit., p. 15.

²¹ Liška, A.: op. cit., p. 18.

²² Linzbauer, X. F.: Codex sanitario-medicinalis Hungariae. Tomus III. Sectio IV. Budae 1861, pp. 489-490.

²³ Liška, A.: op. cit., pp. 26-28.

²⁴ Fordinállová, E.: Rešetka, Michal (entry). In: Lexikón katolíckých kňazských osobností Slovenska [Lexicon of Catholic Priest Personalities of Slovakia]. Bratislava: Lúč, 2000, pp. 1150-1151.

Slovakia. Kosec who was a parish priest in Poniky, a village in central Slovakia, published only two sermons in print, *Nábožné i vlastenecké dvě kázně aneb řeči (Two Religious and Patriotic Sermons or Speeches, 1832)*,²⁵ which ‘stand out with their logic, clarity and comprehensibility’.²⁶ In his sermon *Na nový rok 1832 (On New Year’s Day 1832)*, he explains the problem of cholera to his parishioners. In terms of language, Rešetka’s and Kosec’s sermons show significant differences, which is the result of a struggle for a literary linguistic standard. The content of the sermons is determined by the course of the epidemic they depict.

Rešetka preached on cholera in a time span of six weeks, the first time on the 12th Sunday after the Pentecost, the Descent of the Holy Spirit (14 August 1831), when the infectious disease was sweeping his parish, and on the 18th Sunday after the Pentecost (25 September 1831) when the cholera was already on the wane. Following the anti-pandemic measures taken by the secular and ecclesiastical superiors, Rešetka had to deliver his first *Spiritual Discourse* outdoors, in front of the church, where an altar, adorned with the image of Our Lady of Sorrows, had been erected.²⁷ He points out the importance and significance of the measures in the prologue of the sermon.²⁸ Using the parable of the Good Samaritan recorded in the Gospel

²⁵ Nábožné y vlastenecké dvě kázně aneb řeči. Prwnj při přijezitosti dáwánj mladých wogakůw ned. 2 postnj r. P. 1831. Druhá řeč po wystálých uzkostech bjdy a nemocy cholera w den sláwný noworočnj 1852. W Chrámě Ewang. Městečka Pojniky při B. Bystricy, skrze Matěge KOSEC, tamegssj Cyrkwe A. W. Slowa Božjho Kazatele, držané, a s přjměrnými proměnámi a přjměrnými proměnámi a přidawký cílem dobročinným, nákladkem wydawatelovým, na swětlo wydané. W Banské Bystricy, wytisštěn v Štěpána Mihálik 1832. 43 p.

²⁶ Michalko, J.: Kázňové smery [Preaching Orientations]. Liptovský Mikuláš: Tranoscius, 1955, p. 63.

²⁷ The information about the closure of the church is given in the second sermon Duchowná Reč, která při sláwném Poďekuwání za Odwraťení Nemoc Cholery Bohu nagmilosrdnegšemu wzďawaném, w Nedeľu XVIII. Po Sw. Duchu. Dňa 25. Žári Roku 1831 w Chráme Bozkém Dubnickém powedal Michal REŠETKA kaplán Dubnickí. W Trnawe, witlačená u Jána Jelínka Krstiteľa. Rok 1832. [The Spiritual Discourse, Which at the Glorious Thanksgiving for the Reversal of Cholera Illness to God the Most Merciful Was Delivered by Michal Rešetka, Chaplain of Dubnica, on the 18th Sunday after the Pentecost on 25 September 1831 in the House of God in Dubnica], p. 20.

²⁸ Duchowná Reč, která, kdiž sa Nemoc Cholera we Färe Dubnickég započala, w Neďelu XII. po Sw. Duchu Dňa 14. Srpna Roku 1831. Fárnikom Dubnickím prednesel Michal REŠETKA kaplán Dubnickí. W Trnawe, witlačená u Jána Jelínka Krstiteľa. [The Spiritual Discourse, Which Was Delivered by Michal Rešetka, the Chaplain of Dubnica to the Parishioners of Dubnica after the Outbreak of the Cholera in the Dubnica Parish on 12th Sunday after the Pentecost on 14th August 1831] 1832, pp. 1-15.

According to Luke (10:30-37), he interprets the measures as evidence of the exemplary care of the inhabitants taken by secular and ecclesiastical superiors. He likens the situation in his parish, which was struck by the epidemic, to the condition of the man who was attacked by robbers on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho. Rešetka does not regard the disease, which demands sacrifices in the form of the dead and the sick, as the work of man, but considers it clearly the work of God. He compares the superiors concerned about the health of the population to the Samaritan who took care of the wounded man. The monarch Francis I acts as a Samaritan, who, in order to prevent the contagion from spreading, sends physicians around the country and covers all the expenses connected with the treatment of the sick. István Illésházy, the administrator of the Trenčín County, is also likened to the Samaritan, ensuring enforcement of the relevant royal decrees at regional level and free medical aid and the distribution of medicines. The third authority, Jozef Vurum, Bishop of Nitra, is also the Good Samaritan, who sees to it that services are held only outdoors in places affected by cholera and that the deceased are buried without a priest or other members of the public and he also allows the faithful to eat meat on Fridays and Saturdays.

Rešetka says that in the crisis caused by cholera, spiritual comfort should be sought first and foremost. According to the Catholic doctrine, illness is a godsend, not a disruption to human life. So, God allows sickness for the good of mankind and brings the necessary comfort in stressful situations. These two premises form the basis of this sermon. Rešetka concentrates on a more thorough elucidation of the positive outcomes of sickness, which he summarises in three points: sickness leads to God, in sickness personal virtues are tested and refined, in sickness we pay God for our sins. Rešetka responds to the two fundamental questions that his listeners must have asked him most often, illustrating his answers with examples from the Bible. Why does God allow sickness? So that humans may *'awake from the dream of their iniquities'*. By sickness God tamed the proud and cruel King Antiochus, who persecuted the Jews and destroyed their temples.²⁹ Antiochus' realisation of his sinful actions is graphically described by Rešetka through the king's physical changes: the deflation of his puffed-up countenance, the weakening of his strong veins and also a change of heart, his decision to abandon his habitual display of cruelty and anger. Why does God allow sickness on righteous people? Is it to test and raise their moral

²⁹ See 2 Maccabees 9.

qualities? Examples of such a test of character are Job struggling with skin disease, Tobit tried by blindness and Paul the Apostle tried by muteness.

Rešetka further explains that through sickness and weakness, which serve as purgatory in the earthly world, the believer gains access to eternity. For sinful actions the human soul and body certainly deserve punishment: the soul is punished with anguish and fear of God, the body with physical weakness and wounds. Here Rešetka supports and expands on his interpretation by psychologising the sinner, in whose memory, preoccupied with *'sinful pleasures'*, *'sad and terrible images'* suddenly appear; *'scales fall from the eyes' of the mind 'like scales from Paul's eyes and it sees its faults'*³⁰; the will dazed by the vanities of the world *'now lacks all that it formerly took delight in'*. He identifies the senses as the gateway to sin. Pleasure entered the soul through the eye, the ears listened to offensive language and songs, the tongue was guilty of swearing, cursing, slander and defamation of character, the hands touched foreign property and forbidden things, the feet led on to sin and hastened to do evil. Therefore, the senses now endure punishment, the eyes see the heralds of death, the ears hear the weeping, the complaints of friends and the sound of the trumpet of death, the tongue is rendered mute, the body trembles, the skin grows pale, the feet sink and the arms become flabby. Rešetka concludes his psychologising excursus inspired by Bernard of Clairvaux stating that this human suffering is punishment enough for the sins committed. He recommends parishioners to look at cholera with the *'eye of religion'*; this is how they will find spiritual comfort and help in it.

In the second part of his speech, Rešetka focuses on explaining two propositions: God comforts the sick with his grace and helps them through the church. An example of how God shows his grace towards humans is the personal situation of Job. Job, who found in God a faithful friend, was able to patiently endure all the adversities and the sickness for which his wife left him and his whole family shunned him. Rešetka teaches his parishioners that they fear illness because of the pain and death associated with it. But the righteous view God as a comforter who cheers them up and see a strong God who encourages them spiritually. Therefore, he recommends bolstering and multiplying confidence in God's actions by remembering the image of the martyred Jesus Christ. God is also helpful through the church's care for the sick person, ministering to them the sacraments, prayers and

³⁰ 'Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptised.' Acts 9:18.

the presence of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in the liturgical rite. In his sermon, Rešetka is mainly concerned with the spiritual encouragement of the faithful, but in its epilogue, he strongly stresses that in addition to the spiritual comfort given by God, practical help in the form of the medical care and medicines offered is also important, which they should not refuse, but accept with confidence.

It is only the second *Duchovná reč* (*Spiritual Discourse*)³¹ that informs about the time and the epicentre of the outbreak (*'In 1817 in Asia'*) and describes its journey to Hungary via Russia, Poland and Galicia. Rešetka delivered the speech when the pandemic was in decline. He also gives the number of victims, which by then totalled 71,256 in Hungary. He thoroughly corrected this figure in the attached note in which he had inserted data taken from the *Prešporské noviny* (*Pressburg Newspaper*, published on 27 December 1831), which he got only just before the sermon went to press. The report stated that since the outbreak of cholera, on 13 June, 455,954 people had fallen ill, of whom 196,837 had died, 237,339 had recovered, and 21,778 remained under medical supervision. It informed about the situation in the parish of Dubnica nad Váhom, which also had suffered losses, with 201 deaths between 5 August and 25 September. Because of cholera, the church had to be closed and services and the preaching of the word abandoned for some time as the clergy had to take care of the sick and dying. In view of the fact that the cholera subsided, gratitude should be shown to God for this boon. For that reason, Rešetka puts at the heart of the sermon a short teaching on the three gradations of gratitude from Thomas Aquinas, which he applies to the situation in his parish.

The first stage is the recognition of the benefit provided, which is the foundation of all gratitude. God showed kindness to the parishioners by warding off a contagious disease and giving them a more peaceful time: sacraments could be administered to the dying relatives and acquaintances, Count Illésházy provided the sick with physicians, medicines, food and drink and gave financial support to widows and orphans, and

³¹ Duchovná Reč, která při slávném Poděkuvání za Odvrátení Nemoc Cholery Bohu nagmilosrdnegšému vzdávaném, w Nedělu XVIII. Po Sw. Duchu. Dňa 25. Žári Roku Roku 1831. w Chráme Bozkém Dubnickém powedal Michal REŠETKA kaplán Dubnickí. W Trnawe, witlačená u Jána Jelínka Krstiteľa. Rok 1832 [The Spiritual Discourse, Which at the Glorious Thanksgiving for the Reversal of Cholera Illness to God the Most Merciful Was Delivered by Michal Rešetka, Chaplain of Dubnica, on the 18th Sunday after the Pentecost on 25 September 1831 in the House of God in Dubnica], pp. 16-32.

God drew sinners to himself through cholera and the hardships caused by it, putting the righteous to the test. The second stage of gratitude requires praising the benefactor and giving thanks to him. Although God does not need verbal praise, every believer owes him a debt of gratitude. The best expression of gratitude is prayer. The third stage of gratitude is the act, which is the faithful's holy service, i.e. the believer's keeping of God's commandments, for if people remain in the wrong, neither their prayers, nor their alms count, God will not answer their supplications. If sinners want to show true gratitude to God, they should repent. The righteous show their gratitude to God by staying on the path they have begun. Rešetka points out that gratitude should be expressed to the secular as well as ecclesiastical hierarchs, not only to Ferdinand V, King of Hungary (Ferdinand I, also called Ferdinand the Benign), but also to Bishop Jozef Vurum and Count István Illésházy.

In his sermon, Matej Kosec comments on cholera several months after its peak. A retrospect of the overcoming of the disease is already hinted at in the subtitle and thematic focus of his New Year's sermon, *Nábožné na bídu a nemoc skrze nás vystálou zpět se ohledání (Religious Retrospect of the Misery and Sickness Suffered)*.³² Compositionally, Kosec divides the sermon into three thematic parts. In the first part, he recaps two events. In addition to the pandemic, he draws attention to another temporal event that preceded the pandemic. To the material deprivation caused by the crop failure in the previous year because of which, one part of the population was starving. The other part of the population suffered less serious harm, but was unable to provide food for the rest of the fellow citizens. Kosec refutes the assumption that the cholera would not have broken out if there had not been the problem with food shortages. Responding to public opinion is indicative of Kosec's speech. The time lapse since the event does not lead Kosec to describe the symptoms of the disease, but to point out the pitfalls of combating the outbreak that the people of Hungary coped with differently depending on their spiritual maturity and state of mind. Some were fooled by false claims, others were gripped by fear, which was eventually overcome by duty. Kosec commends the work of the provincial authorities and the measures taken by them against the spread of cholera. In order to protect the health of the population, guards and cordons were posted and

³² NÁBOŽNÉ Y WLASTENECKÉ DWĚ KÁZNĚ ANEB ŘEČI. [Two Religious and Patriotic Sermons or Speeches] W Banské Bystricy, wytisštěné v Štěpána Mihálik. 1832, pp. 23-39.

hospitals were established. Doctors and pharmacists, teachers and preachers were involved in the fight against cholera. Equipped with knowledge, medical advice and supplies, the inhabitants had to confine themselves to the privacy of their homes.

However, Kosec is critical of the fact that the cause of many an epidemic victim was initially insufficient or inadequate assistance. He draws attention to misinformation, to false reports on the poisoning of the people by upper classes, which domestic journalism also helped spreading. He blames the journalists for the fact that, with their efforts, this news together with reports on Hungary in turmoil, got across the border, as a result of which an image of a dehumanised Hungary began to be created in Europe. He mentions the initial confusion and lack of understanding of the situation and the '*Magisterium Vizmut*', the medicine preferred by the foreigners, the administering of which did more harm than good. But he does not see only the drawbacks of the crisis. In his view the silver lining was that there were individuals who would not be intimidated and showed their generosity and philanthropy, having a major influence on others who stopped being afraid and stood together and united against the epidemic regardless of social status and religious beliefs.

In the second thematic part of the sermon, Kosec speaks of God's sovereign action, which was behind the cholera, for despite the efforts of the secular authorities to counteract the disease as effectively as possible through various measures, they were unable to suppress it completely. The physicians, too, could not prevail over it although they did all that they deemed necessary and were diligent in the performance of their duties, trying to protect those who were attacked the most, the elderly and the weak, reminding them of the importance of hygiene principles and healthy diet, and prescribing medicines. However, people realised that not everything could be found out about the disease, nor could it be said in advance who would be affected and who would not, and that this situation only confirmed how imperfect and limited human knowledge is. In the end, the sovereignty of God's rule, wisdom, goodness, love, and fatherly care was manifested. Religious conviction and togetherness proved very helpful in surviving the dramatic moments caused by cholera. In the last part of the sermon, Kosec reveals God's intention with respect to the epidemic. God allowed the disease not only to assert his power and authority, but also to awaken his people and lead them out of immorality, out of worldly affairs and out of their sins. To achieve this, he could not use gentle means such as common sense, a clear conscience, speaking directly to the heart of man, spreading the

revealed word and proving his existence in the daily course of life. But he had to use more effective instruments such as crop failure, anguish, poverty, famine, wars, contagious diseases and pestilence. God thus spoke to believers in the previous period through crop failure and cholera, which claimed the lives of the inhabitants of towns and villages, causing a severing of ties between parents and children, between spouses and between friends and an increase in the number of orphans and widowed people. According to Kosec, the results of God's disciplination, have already made themselves felt. As for those who have not submitted to it, he admonishes and leads them to reformation, regardless of their social class.

'...even among the upper classes, there are many who do not yet stand on the level of human dignity because they simply sacrifice their income, their possessions, to the pleasures of the flesh and to vain splendour and to God knows what other things. But meanwhile, such people let the honest craftsmen, who serve them and lent money to them or their ancestors in times of need, and the posterity of those craftsmen needlessly write to them and come to them; perhaps it was over this that our Saviour used to say the excruciating "woe". They devour and devoured modest possessions of widows and orphans along with the alms which mercy placed for them on the altar of love, and, they do not orderly recompense them for it or even refuse to do so, showing a long way of justice in our country to the weeping widows and to the starving and naked orphans. O may God who speaks to us now terrify and humble those people, but also raise them up again for the better! Even the true ornaments of the homeland, the people in high positions, agreed to be led by your spirit and, as such, to whom much more is entrusted than to others, yet from whom also, according to the word of God, much more will be required than they have received, that they may strive as much as possible, to achieve the greatest benefit for themselves and their surroundings, for their neighbours, for the homeland and the king, for mankind in general and for the glory of God. And you too, people of the middle class, artisans, master craftsmen, merchants, also continue willingly and faithfully advancing after the higher classes in all that is good and possible for you. If many of you so readily resemble them in appearance,

that the once humble and simple burghers are now hardly to be distinguished from people of higher status, do not differentiate yourselves especially in those things in which a human does not and cannot differ from another human. By true, honest and virtuous actions, strive to become equal to those whom their own merits and those of their ancestors have separated from the lower and middle classes and elevated already in the countries here on earth. As members of your estate, make efforts that the work may always praise its master, that the bravery of man may honour the craft, that the merchant, in every purchase and sale, may try to obtain the most precious pearl for the fact that they have neither deceived, nor wronged their neighbours, but have traded bravely and laboured justly. The one who will also be resplendent with other ornaments of morality and live in a modest dwelling and in simplicity, will be esteemed by all who understand to whom which honour belongs, such person will also be loved and blessed by God as one who thinks no more than is fitting and controls one's soul by moderation.³³ But I also want to say a few words to you now, you people of the lowest class in this world, farmers, peasants, servants, labourers, who are the most numerous on earth and who clearly must be the most numerous, and from the midst of whom, both long ago and recently, there sprang up high-born and noble men, even kings and monarchs themselves. To you, who have your earthly masters, superiors, spiritual shepherds, who instruct you in what is necessary, who indicate and show you the way of the end, to you here I only say this: think always of those words of the Saviour, that many in some respects are the first, in others last, many, then last, are and will be the first; therefore, surpass your outward lowliness with inward dignity. Do not say that in concern for this life of yours and the life of others, you must lose and neglect your souls, but know that it is possible to align the concern for the necessities of this life with the concern for higher things, just as the proper and honourable care of this life also includes the care of our higher and eternal life, and the life here will end the same as

³³ 'Be moderate in everything you do and you will never get sick.' Sirach 31:22.

the work being done here, either in a good or bad way; as it is here also, especially depending on how people seek the things of the kingdom of God, those people may receive other things as well. But you eat your own bread by the sweat of your own brow, while also making it for others; yet they in turn by their works and gifts serve you. And you, in your hard work, are healthy, cheerful, and long-lived, as others are in their work, unless something else hinders it. In the midst of you, the complaints about hard times, about bad days, about the impossibility of fulfilling all the obligations imposed on you, are heard most of all, yet the source and origin of your miseries and deficiencies is quite elsewhere than where you seek and find it. You are not overburdened in your dear Hungarian homeland, especially where God gives philanthropic masters and justice-loving superiors. Surely for some years now, it has been hard for you to give back to the emperor what is his, the yearly taxes in coin, harder than it has been for more than twenty years, during which you have very easily supplied the king and the army, our guards, with paper money, more easily earned. But acknowledge that those times were in truth golden for taxpayers as those who knew to take advantage of those times, became more powerful, grew stronger and rich, so much so that though the taxes are again the same as before, they know how to manage also in these times, and give their share properly as befits loyal subjects. If you ask for calm, better times, do only this: reduce the expenses, the unnecessary spending, to which you have become accustomed during the calm years; exercise prudence, more consistently than is usually the case with you; do not slacken off in your work. What you ask for will happen to you, something which, without your contribution, you cannot have a part in. May you experience a conversion here, an improvement of yourselves and of many people from other classes; may we accordingly desire to understand and be open to that teaching of the apostle: enough to have on what we have just now, thus to be in accord with the times. If only, after the end of misery and sickness, after our weeping turns into joy, we glorified God in this way, better times would come without a doubt, other moral ills of our age, the unrest, the transgressions and sins that appear in our midst would

*diminish, and more joyful days would come for pure Christian morality.*³⁴

Like Rešetka, Kosec sheds light on the spiritual background of the epidemic, placing the main emphasis on the religious disciplinatio of the community. He draws the listener's attention to their personal moral code and the quality of their earthly life. At the same time, he subjects all social strata to constructive criticism.

The sermons of Mezibrodský, Rešetka and Kosec are of considerable historical value because they document the course, symptoms and consequences of exceptional events in which the preachers and their parishioners were involved. The culturological dimension of the texts lies in the assessment of the crisis, in finding its cause and solution. The preachers identify the cause of the crisis sparked off in the first case by a natural phenomenon and in the second case by an epidemic as the personal failure of the individual, in the stagnation of their attitude to faith. They see the solution in the deepening of the religious education of the community and its return to the basic Christian values that give human life its true content and meaning.

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³⁴ Nábožné y vlastenecké dvě kázně aneb řeči, prwnj při pŕjležitosti dáwánj mladých wogakůw ned. 2 postnj r. P. 1831. Druhá řeč po wystálých uzkostech bjdy a nemocy cholera w den sláwný noworočnj 1852. W Chrámě Ewang. Městečka Pojniky při B. Bystricy, skrze Matěge KOSEC, tamegssj Cyrkwe A. W. Slowa Božjho Kazatele, držané, a s pŕjměrnými proměnámi a pŕjměrnými proměnámi a pŕidawký cýlem dobročinným, nákladkem wydawatelovým, na swětlo wydané. W Banské Bystricy, wytisštěné v Štěpána Mihálíka, 1832, pp. 35-37.