

The Testimony (Including a Possibility of Martyrdom) as the Mission Work of Christians in the Secret Church of the Czech Reformation

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1. Initial Information

For Christians in Bohemia and Moravia, who claimed allegiance to the Reformation, was the period from 1620 till 1781 a time of grievous testing of their belief trueness. All entitlements of Reformed Christians, who were the overwhelming majority of inhabitants in both lands, were removed step by step; since 1627 in Bohemia as well as since 1628 in Moravia the only Church all people were allowed to belong to was the Roman Catholic. In 1620s only a few of people that were nobles or burghers could sell their property below cost and emigrate abroad. Common peasants – the majority of inhabitants working in agriculture – had to stay and change their confession. Many of them did not do it that time, or they pretended the “conversion”, while having no other possibility. That is why the persecution of Christians that believed differently from Roman-Catholics (all these were titled: “heretics”) permanently escalated. In the first half of 18th century there was even an effort to exterminate them (laws allowing to seek and punish those, who remained solid, to torture them, to displace or execute them; informers were rewarded for their service). This grievous period lasted for more than 150 years. Five generations had followed, only the first (or else the second one) generation remembered the atmosphere of the confessional freedom. However, there was much to remember! Just shortly before the beginning of all that troubles, the Charter of Rudolph II (the Roman Emperor) was issued in 1609 in Bohemia. It guaranteed the conscience freedom to every person, even to anyone, who did not have any currently common and natural human rights. Indeed, it was both: the first human rights document in Europe and also the most liberal conscience rule in the whole 17th century!

People that were in five generations put to the grievous test of their belief, gathered secretly, boosted one another from ingeniously hidden Bibles and sang from hymn-books hidden as well. They created unusual secret fellowship of prayers and potet mutuality – the Secret Church of the Czech Reformation.

Of course, these devotees were not allowed to keep any comprehensive testimony about their religious belief. Couple of data you can learn from legal proceedings, when they were investigated and punished. However, those pieces of information only accidental and focussed on a certain place or small area.

Fortunately, there is one important historical source kept from the epoch that was not nearly fully free, but even then a Christian claiming allegiance to the Reformation should not be officially persecuted as a criminal. The emperor Joseph II’s rule, commonly called the Patent of Toleration, permitted them at least tolerated being. Everybody had to personally apply in front of the commission, made very frequently from their chief pursuers. Records are quite brief and not so exact. Scribes wrote it, they were both: not well versed and usually hostile against applicants. These documents cover different places in Bohemia and Moravia. Not all places; there, where then tolerational congregations were established, scribes noticed the administration only in summary. We can hear from these records also a testimony that had missionary goal for long decades and can be heard with great urgency today, too.

This testimony has been summarized to three topics:

- passing the legacy – the testimony as the mission
- passing the legacy – the formulation of the content
- passing the legacy – personal attitude of an individual

All cited archival evidences could be looked up and are connected with particular person in particular village. All citations are mentioned as footnotes in the book *Protestants in the Early Toleration Time in Bohemia and Moravia* (Evangelíci v rané toleranční době v Čechách a na Moravě).¹ Concerning the clarity, further, I will remember only their gender and geographic area in Czechia, where is he or she from.

2. Specific Examples

2.1 Passing the Legacy – the Testimony as the Mission

Asked, why he or she applies for chosen confession (Lutheran or Calvinist), the applicants respond for example this way:

“...mother and my grandfather have trained me in it. [i.e. my confession]”²

“...my dead mum had this belief and trained me and my seven siblings in it.”³

“...my father, grandfather as well as my great-grandfather were all this belief [i.e. Christian confession].”⁴

“...I have remain in it since I was a child, since I began to understand, I was led and taught in it by my grandpa.”⁵

“My father taught me it and bought me the book.”⁶

“My granny trained me.”⁷

“Already my great-grandmother and my grandmother were Protestants.”⁸

“We are Protestant Christians, because already our father, grandfather and great-grandfather had all this confession; and also due the fact that we were not allowed to read Lord’s testament ourselves.”⁹

“I have remained Protestant, because they took the Holy Writ away; and my grandpa was Protestant as well.”¹⁰

“I am owning up to the Protestant religion, because my ancestors had it already for three generations.”¹¹

“Our trunk [family] has beaten that way for many generations.”¹²

“I have been Protestant Christian, because already my father was so and due his belief he was kept for one year in jail and then he was sentenced to involuntary work; another my ancestor on my homestead had left abroad for belief. I own the Holy Bible, which is now 207 years old. There is struck a lot in it.”¹³

“Already my grandfather was this confession. That is why he was jailed for seven quarter of years.”¹⁴

“My great-grandpa fled to Silesia due his belief.”¹⁵

“My granny was whipped to death for her belief, I have it just from her and my parents.”¹⁶

1 MELMUKOVÁ-ŠAŠECÍ, Eva, ed. *Evangelíci v rané toleranční době v Čechách a na Moravě*. 2nd supplemented edition. Neratovice: VERBUM Publishing, 2017, 832 p. edition historicus. ISBN 978-80-903920-7-6.

2 male, Central Bohemia, footnote No. 479

3 female, Central Bohemia, footnote No. 480

4 male, Central Bohemia, footnote No. 482

5 male, Central Bohemia, footnote No. 483

6 female, Western Moravia, footnote No. 484

7 male, Western Moravia, footnote No. 485

8 female, Western Moravia, footnote No. 486

9 male, Northern Bohemia, footnote No. 487

10 male, Northern Bohemia, footnote No. 489

11 male, Central Bohemia, footnote No. 490

12 male, Eastern Bohemia, footnote No. 491

13 male, Northern Bohemia, footnote No. 494

14 male, Northern Bohemia, footnote No. 495

15 male, Northern Bohemia, footnote No. 496

16 female, Northern Bohemia, footnote No. 497

“Our Benedict, who due his belief died in weavehouse,¹⁷ taught me.”¹⁸

“...the belief that I confess existed here before 172 or 174 years.”¹⁹

“My already dead grandpa told us that there will be a shuffling of the confessions and the best of them will be Lamb of God’s belief.”²⁰

“My parents told me that [the confession] has dated back to master John Huss.”²¹

“Our father told us: this belief was taught by master Huss.”²²

Especially remarkable is the message of the investigating commissioner from Smiřice manor near Hradec Králové:

“Also from village Stránka an old man said that he had counted 12 predecessors from his family, who all were this confession, and his grandfather lived in the time when people in Bohemia were converting to Roman Catholic belief and when many of nobles were suffering much due their belief.”²³ Indeed, this old man knew about the continuity even since 15th century, since master John Huss’ preaching; his grandfather remembered the end of the confessional freedom after 1620. In this case there we probably have three extraordinary old men, who had handed over their legacy across generations.

2.2 Passing the Legacy – the Formulation of the Content

Asked, in which he or she recognize a difference of their own confession in contrast to Roman-Catholic, the applicants respond for example this way:

“Our belief is built and based on Christ and the Catholic belief on St Peter.”²⁴

“...on Christ, not at all on St Peter the Church can be based, just as Peter could not be the Rock.”²⁵

“I believe that Christ truly is the Lord of the Church.”²⁶

“Our belief is based on Lord Christ and Lord Christ is the Rock of Jerusalem.”²⁷

“on the Rock of Lord Christ based”²⁸

“The basis is Jesus Christ as the true Keystone.”²⁹

“On Christ and God’s word is [my belief] based, while holy Gospel mentions that the chosen people will be from all different nations.”³⁰

“What Christ trusts that also we trust.”³¹

“what Christ teaches”³²

“What holy Gospel rules that Protestant trust.”³³

“I do not agree that Roman Catholics obey what the pope commands, but what Christ commands they do not want to obey.”³⁴

“There is no good belief without zealous love to God.”³⁵

17 prison, where convicted people had to weave

18 male, Eastern Bohemia, footnote No. 498

19 male, Western Moravia, footnote No. 515

20 female, Eastern Bohemia, footnote No. 517

21 male, Eastern Bohemia, footnote No. 518

22 male, Eastern Bohemia, footnote No. 519

23 male, Eastern Bohemia, footnote No. 499.

24 male, Western Moravia, footnote No. 530

25 male, Eastern Bohemia, footnote No. 529

26 female, Western Moravia, footnote No. 531

27 female, Western Moravia, footnote No. 532

28 male, Eastern Moravia, footnote No. 533

29 male, Western Moravia, footnote No. 534

30 female, Eastern Moravia, footnote No. 535

31 female, Eastern Moravia, footnote No. 536

32 male, Eastern Moravia, footnote No. 537

33 male, Eastern Moravia, footnote No. 538

34 male, Central Bohemia, footnote No. 539

35 female, Western Moravia, footnote No. 540

Then they add an extra explanation:

“Saints can neither intercede for us nor provide us heaven.”³⁶

“St Martin is not my patron, it is Jesus Christ.”³⁷

“I do not believe into findings made by human hands, I do not admit that saints can give any help.”³⁸

“I do not believe into wooden statues, icons, I admit neither the purgatory nor praying the rosary.”³⁹

“Catholic [belief] is based in human teachings and contains much of idolatry; they bow down in front of stone, wood and picture.”⁴⁰

“that saints are first of all and God the last of all”⁴¹

“There we are making wrong against Christ, when we invoke saints for an intercession.”⁴²

“Also I do not trust that a priest is allowed to forgive our sins, the less indulgences.”⁴³

“Once, the Lamb of God has been sacrificed instead of us and it cannot be sacrificed more times. That is why the holy mess should not be. There is no purgatory, consequently praying for dead people is not valid.”⁴⁴

“I do not like that Catholics commit sins a lot and then count on indulgences.”⁴⁵

“I do not keep more than two sacraments.”⁴⁶

“I do not keep more sacraments, because the other are not mentioned in Bible.”⁴⁷

“Catholic Church commands the things that are not written in the Holy Writ.”⁴⁸

“I do not want to be Catholic for the [human] findings, pilgrimages, amulets, confraternities.”⁴⁹

“Because there are many words in Latin spoken, what we do not understand.”⁵⁰

“He was born Catholic until he got to know the Holy Writ. When he read the Writ, he interpreted it well and behaved according to it.”⁵¹

“Because it [i.e. Roman Catholic Church] did not lead me as my Writ shows me.”⁵²

“I have decided according to the Lord’s testament that I think was printed in Dresden.”⁵³

“In Protestant Church there was always permitted to read God’s word, in Catholic Church there it is forbidden.”⁵⁴

“The Catholic Church commands us to believe in both, what is and what is not written [in Bible], and I do not want to believe in things that are not written.”⁵⁵

“I do not trust anybody, only in our Writs.”⁵⁶

“I believe, what Lord’s Testament includes. And according to it I want to obtain the Eucharist in both kinds for me; that I have received in both kinds since my childhood. Why did you cancel the testament of Jesus Christ – we has been keeping it?”⁵⁷

36 male, Western Moravia, footnote No. 544

37 male, Western Moravia, footnote No. 545

38 male, Western Moravia, footnote No. 546

39 male, Western Moravia, footnote No. 547

40 male, Central Bohemia, footnote No. 548

41 male, Western Moravia, footnote No. 549

42 male, Central Bohemia, footnote No. 550

43 male, Eastern Bohemia, footnote No. 552

44 female, Eastern Bohemia, footnote No. 553

45 female, Western Moravia, footnote No. 554

46 male, Central Bohemia, footnote No. 561

47 male, Western Moravia, footnote No. 560

48 male, Northern Bohemia, footnote No. 564

49 male, Central Moravia, footnote No. 565

50 male, Northern Bohemia, footnote No. 569

51 male, Eastern Bohemia, footnote No. 574

52 male, Eastern Bohemia, footnote No. 575

53 male, Central Bohemia, footnote No. 576

54 male, Northern Bohemia, footnote No. 577

55 female, Northern Bohemia, footnote No. 580

56 female, Western Moravia, footnote No. 586

57 female, Western Moravia, footnote No. 591

“Why the testament of Jesus Christ has been cancelled! Since childhood we received it [in both kinds] secretly, now obviously; our parents did so.”⁵⁸

“Because in this teachings there is the testament of God’s Son: bread breaking and drinking from one chalice, just as Jesus Christ has commanded.”⁵⁹

“in bread breaking and drinking from chalice”⁶⁰

“Because Lord Christ during the Last Supper left us bread breaking and drinking from chalice.”⁶¹

“This Eucharist is the authentic body and blood of Lord Christ in both kinds: bread breaking and drinking from chalice. The body is not living, but bread and wine are sacred and both should be received during the Eucharist.”⁶²

“Bread is the body and wine is the blood and during consuming it the Holy Spirit comes into it.”⁶³

“The Eucharist in both kinds, because Christ said that not only the priest, but the whole congregation should receive in both kinds.”⁶⁴

“What our belief consist of: You should love your Lord God by with all your clean mind, with all your clean soul and love your neighbour just as yourself.”⁶⁵

The expressive information you can find at religious message about commissions in Čáslav Region on September 27th, 1782:

“Here in the town Čáslav there the formulation appeared for the first time that they use always when they confess their belief; almost all of them here as well as in other places respond the question: What is your belief/confession? I am Christian, apostolic, Protestant belief, which has been under Lord Jesus Christ’s testament, under both kinds of bread and wine – the body and blood of Lord Christ during the Last Supper established. The canon [i.e. higher priest] for a long time was not able to reveal, what they want to express using this formulation. Until one of them explained it: It is the Christian belief established by Christ, apostolic from the apostles, Protestant [in Czech used word Evangelical] from Gospel [i.e. Evangelium in ancient Greek] and they attach to it also the evident commandment of Christ about the Eucharist in both kinds as the rule left to believers.”⁶⁶

2.3 Passing the Legacy – Personal Attitude of an Individual

Of course, the application always needs using all personal strength and often even the confession:

“I do not want to do otherwise, nor if I should be beheaded.”⁶⁷

“I do not want to do otherwise, nor if I should put my head under a sword.”⁶⁸

“No, I do not withdraw, what I stand for since my childhood, till the last drop of blood is in me.”⁶⁹

“I am old, I will further stand for what I was born in, I will die in the same [belief]. Better to be executed than revert.”⁷⁰

“I will not be otherwise, in my old age I will not revert. I learned it with my whole heart and with my whole heart I want to die in this belief.”⁷¹

“I will remain the same as my father and mother, my heart forces me, I cannot do otherwise.”⁷²

“I will not revert, because I do not want to be either Protestant or Catholic (person with ‘double

58 male, Eastern Bohemia, footnote No. 592

59 male, Central Bohemia, footnote No. 593

60 female, Western Moravia, footnote No. 594

61 male, Central Bohemia, footnote No. 597

62 male, Western Moravia, footnote No. 606

63 female, Western Moravia, footnote No. 607

64 female, Western Moravia, footnote No. 612

65 male, Eastern Moravia, footnote No. 659

66 Mentioned on p 142.

67 male, Western Moravia, footnote No. 466

68 male, Western Moravia, footnote No. 467

69 female, Central Bohemia, footnote No. 472

70 male, Western Moravia, footnote No. 473

71 female, Western Moravia, footnote No. 474

72 male, Western Moravia, footnote No. 475

tongue’), I do not plan to deceive the commission.”⁷³

“Christ says: Better not to reveal the truth than reveal it and then renounce it.”⁷⁴

“I am born as Protestant, I have inherited the Writ from my father, I have to hide it that is why mice have eaten it up.”⁷⁵

“I have already been examined due my belief and because the belief that all receive the Eucharist in both kinds (according to Lord Jesus has established it during the Last Supper) was not permitted, only externally I remained Catholic. But in my heart I have never been Catholic. This example I had from my parents.”⁷⁶

“Definitely, I will not trade with my belief as with cattle.”⁷⁷

“Because we were not allowed to read in God’s testament, I asked the Holy Spirit to enlighten me, and then I chose Protestant confession and I want to live in it ever.”⁷⁸

Significant attribute of the fellowship of Czech Reformation Christians was their openness and respect to others’ belief. This fact either the official representatives of that time ruling Roman-Catholic Church or profane nobility were absolutely not able to understand. Themselves they considered the only one point of view of the one and valid truth as totally necessary. This collision of exclusivity and openness, it means the true ecumenical attitude, illustrate extant documents very well:

“She was so stubborn and stupid that she admitted more confessions as redemptive.”⁷⁹

“I believe that both, Catholic as well as Protestant confession, lead to salvation.”⁸⁰

“If we act the good, every confession gives us eternal life.”⁸¹

“I do not reprobate anybody in his/her belief. Christ will judge all of us.”⁸²

Pre-tolerational Protestant fellowship respected the belief of the others, but knows well about own donation, about own way to grow. Through this own, not copied benefit, the fellowship wants to serve to communion of Christ’s Church. A young 20-year-old girl expressed it instead of all of them:

“Asked on her confession she responded: the ‘old Czech Brethren’ belief, she as well as her parents. Why she has reverted from Catholic Church – she responded that we would have regretted it. When forced to answer she said that the same thing that she wants to say is written in the 1st chapter of St Paul’s Letter to Corinthians,⁸³ and in 4th chapter verses 1, 2 and 3. She refused answer other things about her belief.”⁸⁴

These verses from 4th chapter are: “Think of us as servants of the Messiah and as servant managers entrusted with God’s secrets. Now it is required of servant managers that each one should prove to be trustworthy. It is a very small thing to me that I should be examined by you or by any human court. In fact, I don’t even evaluate myself.”⁸⁵

73 male, Western Moravia, footnote No. 476

74 female, Western Moravia, footnote No. 477

75 male, Northern Bohemia, footnote No. 652

76 male, Northern Bohemia, footnote No. 653

77 male, Eastern Bohemia, footnote No. 655

78 male, Northern Bohemia, footnote No. 657

79 female, Central Moravia – record about an opinion of the religious commissar, footnote No. 670

80 female, Western Moravia, footnote No. 671

81 female, Eastern Moravia, footnote No. 672

82 male, Central Moravia, footnote No. 673

83 probably meant verses 12 to 13 from 1st chapter

84 female, Western Moravia – commission record, footnote No. 674

85 1 Corinthians 4:1–3 (International Standard Version)