
THE ROLE OF FAITH IN FORMING THE SLOVAK HISTORY

THE CASE OF ĽUDOVÍT ŠTÚR

Eva Odlerová and Katarína Hýľlová*

*University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Faculty of Mass Media Communication, Nám. J. Herdu 2,
91701 Trnava, Slovak Republic*

(Received 6 May 2019, revised 15 June 2019)

Abstract

The aim of this article is to discuss the presence and influence of faith in formation of Slovak history in the era of first attempts of forming the autonomous Slovak nation. It also focuses on the personality of Ľudovít Štúr, who represents one of the leading individualities in creating the Slovak history. At the same time, the paper refers to the forming of the present public image on the historical events and the personality of Ľudovít Štúr.

Keywords: Slovak, history, Ľudovít Štúr, faith, religion

1. Introduction

In the following article we will focus on the era of forming of the Slovak history during the period of Austro-Hungarian monarchy when the origins of the autonomous Slovak nation started to be created. We will concentrate closer on the important personality of the Slovak history – Ľudovít Štúr, who not only laid the basis of the Slovak language, but also of the Slovak nation itself.

An integrated part of the Slovak history has also been the Protestant Church of the Augsburg denomination. During several periods the history of this Church are mixed up with the political, military, cultural, or even with the economic history of Slovakia [1]. In connection with forming of the Slovak history and the Evangelic Church, there is the personality of Ľudovít Štúr.

Ľudovít Štúr has been one of the most important personalities of the modern Slovak history. He codified the standard Slovak language and he also influenced many spheres of the public life. It is considered that Ľudovít Štúr laid the foundation of the modern Slovakia. In contrast to many other intellectuals, creating the Slovak intelligentsia, he decided not to become a priest, but a teacher.

*Corresponding author, e-mail: katarina.hyllova@gmail.com

He acted as an educator, he became a leader of the students' youth, but he was also a journalist and editor, he founded the first political newspaper in Slovakia, and succeeded in getting the position of a deputy in the Hungarian parliament, he was one of the co-founder of the political body of the Slovaks – the Slovak National Council. In the revolutionary years 1848–1849 he became one of the leading representatives of the Slovak uprising. To a significant extent Ľudovít Štúr influenced forming of the national, cultural and political life. Furthermore he was involved against Magyarization in the Evangelic Church. Every generation looks on his legacy in a specific way, this has been projected also into evaluation and looking on his personality [1]. Information about him are also spread in a greater extent by means of media, but often the information are not complete, they are misrepresented, or untrue, which influences the public image not only concerning the personality of Ľudovít Štúr, but on his role in the Slovak history.

2. The influence of Evangelic church on the personality of Ľudovít Štúr

The era, into which Ľudovít Štúr was born into, already in advance predestined his orientation and set certain limits. One of the basic factors was the fact that he belonged to the Hungarian Evangelic Church of Augsburg denomination. In the modern times the evangelics were 6–9 percent of the inhabitants of Hungary. Ľudovít Štúr was born into a family of an evangelic teacher and all his family was strongly religiously oriented. He was baptized and subsequently raised in the evangelic family. His mother was very religious – since his childhood he listened to statements from the Bible, spiritual songs, he took part in the church services, he attended an evangelic school where his father was the teacher. Later in his texts he even quoted parts from the Evangelium. On the lyceum in Bratislava Ľudovít Štúr studied the Bible principles, but also the history of the Church, Theology and Dogmatics. Subsequently at the University in Halle he also attended the lectures on Theology, but he was more oriented on Philosophy, Linguistics and History. Ľudovít Štúr could become a priest as his older brother Karol did, but in his own words he did not feel the inclination to the order.

Following his returning home from his studies in Halle, he was offered a position of evangelic priest. However, Ľudovít refused this position [Ľ. Jurík, *Ľudovít Štúr, jeho životný príbeh*, <https://www.noveslovo.sk/c/Ludovit-Stur-jeho-zivotny-pribeh17>].

He started to teach students at the Bratislava Lyceum. Later being forced to leave the lyceum, he was offered to carry out the priest's service, but he refused it again. In 1849, after the end of the Slovak uprising, in which Ľudovít Štúr took active part, he was offered the position of an evangelist priest for the third time, but he refused it again. Ľudovít did not feel the desire to become a priest, because his activities were aimed to another direction. He was trying to raise, 'waking up' the nation, until that time being suppressed within the social order of contemporary Hungary, in order to face out the existing oppression. It is

necessary to point out that the position of an evangelic priest had been offered to him in order to suppress his activity concerning the national question of Slovaks, or to inhibit it entirely. This fact had been proven by several historical documents and even Štúr himself was aware of it.

Despite the fact that Ľudovít did not become a priest he took part in the activities of the Evangelic Church. In 1842 he cooperated in publishing of the 'Evangelický Zpevník' (The Evangelic Songbook) [[https://www.noveslovo.sk/c/Ludovit Stur a jeho zivotny pribeh](https://www.noveslovo.sk/c/Ludovit%20Stur%20a%20jeho%20zivotny%20pribeh) 17]. Ľudovít grew up in the faith which accompanied him also in his student's times and after all it influenced also his attitudes and deeds.

3. Ľudovít Štúr as creator of the Slovak history

Štúr entered the Ugrian political scene seemingly as from the background, gradually and unnoticed. For this purpose he used seemingly non-political means – the language. By his enacting of the standard Slovak language, he opened his way into the politics and was able to pursue the national ideas. At the same time together with propagation of the Slovak language by means of the first political newspaper, being edited by him in our country, he developed together with his friends an active and effective political enlightenment. By means of this, within a rather short time, he became a personality, that influences of which could not be overseen. The Slovaks publicly tried to express their disagreement with the hard denationalizing policy of the ruling Ugarian upper classes. First, the evangelics organized a petitionary action for maintaining of the national school system, addressed to the emperor, later abroad they commenced to publish materials with the aim to inform Europe about inhumane treatment of the non-Hungarian nations in Hungary. In the background of both of these activities was standing Ľudovít Štúr.

In the early 1842 Štúr elaborated the proposal of the 'Slovenský prestolný prosbopis' (the 'Plea addressed to the emperor'). This document concerned in addition to other things even the freedom of the Slovak evangelics and initially it was understood as the nation-wide action on behalf of Slovak evangelics [2]. In addition to these activities Ľudovít took part as the worldly delegate in several meetings of the Evangelic Church. As professor suppliant he dealt with the clerical educational system. According to Ľudovít's statements nothing is more valuable and holy than the religion, even though he confessed that he did not feel inclination towards the order [[https://www.noveslovo.sk/c/Ludovit Stur jeho zivotny pribeh](https://www.noveslovo.sk/c/Ludovit%20Stur%20a%20jeho%20zivotny%20pribeh) 17]. He did not want to exclusively dedicate to the secular matters, but in the contrary, to include the faith, religious learning into everything what he was doing. Štúr connected the Christianity and patriotism in one unit and stated that religiosity and nationality are like sisters [[https://www.noveslovo.sk/c/Ludovit Stur jeho zivotny pribeh](https://www.noveslovo.sk/c/Ludovit%20Stur%20a%20jeho%20zivotny%20pribeh) 17].

The life of Ľudovít Štúr had been interconnected with the Evangelic Church. First he studied in evangelic schools, later the majority of professions, he used to carry out, were in connection with the Evangelic Church. Štúr was

active as a private teacher mostly in evangelic families. The adherence to the Evangelic Church has been visible even within Štúr's informal contacts, which he used in reaching his aim.

Despite the fact that the network of his contacts was rather wide, he succeeded in pushing ahead his ideas by means of the evangelic 'media' of those time. The most principal was the circle of his students, who thanks to Štúr's tutoring were able to understand his aims and ideas and consequently as teachers or priests in evangelic bodies to propagate effectively the 'Slavonic idea' and to push ahead the language within a wide circle. During Štúr's life, in every activity of the Slovak national movement just evangelics were markedly represented. In the years 1848–1850, according to historians, the Slovak national movement can be considered to be an evangelic matter. Thanks to the meaningful utilization of the evangelic intelligence, Štúr succeeded in realizing his programme. However, it is necessary to point out that despite the rather high position of the Evangelic Church, the majority of Slovaks avowed to the Catholic Church [3].

4. The language and theological disputes of Slovaks and Hungarians

The evangelic faith intervened also in the dispute between the Slovaks and Hungarians. Language and national struggle between the Hungarians and Slovaks gradually outgrow the theological disputes between these two nationalities. Accusations arose that the profane representatives illegitimate used their clerical position for politic goals, Magyarizing of the Slovak nation. On the other hand, Slovaks were accused that their requirement to use the Slovak language had a political goal [3]. Even these on-going struggle concerning language and Theology, prove the involvement in the problems of forming the society itself. Interconnection of these both fields prove even the words of Ľudovít Štúr, who in compiling the Slaves' claim stated: *„A priest wanted to obstruct selling of Slavic Bibles and by means of this he wanted to divert people from reading of the Holy Scriptures, which is the main base of the evangelic religion, so that the peoples, not reading the Slavic books, could easier forget the mother language“* [3, p. 34]. Štúr considered the most important condition of freedom the education of people in Slovak, in contrast with the majority of liberal politicians, who pushed through the education in Hungarian [3]. Just for this reason, he tried to implement the Slovak language in all fields, including the religion.

5. The situation after 1849

After 1849, in the time after the unsuccessful revolution, about which the Slovaks believed that it would solve, or at least to improve the long lasting problems regarding the national oppression and the position of Slovaks as an autonomous nation. However, this did not come true, despite the activity of Slovaks in the revolution, it cannot be said, that the situation changed for the

better. The national and especially Slavic question within the Habsburg monarchy was not resolved and nothing indicated that there are intentions of planning to do so. For the Slovak national movement the accrued situation was a great disappointment. In reaction to these events, Štúr wrote a piece of work 'Slovanstvo a svet budúcnosti' ('Slavs and the future world') which belongs to the works of important political thinkers in Europe, who in the first half of the 19th century drafted out its possible arrangement according to the contemporary values and based on the modern nationalism and humanity. At the same time, within the frame of the Slovak political thinking of the 19th century, it represents a piece of work, which succeeded to express in the utmost complex form the image about possible ways of European development and the place of Slavs [4]. In this work, Štúr comes with criticism of the Austrian Monarchy and Hungary as countries that have failed to fulfil their historical mission and seeks new, more radical ways for the Slavs to secure their future. According to experts, in this work Štúr summarized considerations, spread among the Slavic intellectuals. He criticises the West and on the contrary, he sees the hope for improvement and the future in the East [4, p.173]. This work includes Štúr's most extensive consideration on the role of the religion.

In comparison with his previous belief about the religion a considerable turn can be observed. He contemplated about the social role of the Church. According to his assumptions, the influence of Christianity and in particular of the Reformation has made the idea that freedom has become the determining idea of the development of Western history. However, he thought, that unlimited emphasizing of freedom will, in the end, result in the decay of the Church [3].

In addition to the criticism and disappointment about the social arrangement and overall development of situation, Štúr at this time comes also with his criticism of the Church and religion. In his opinion, the Catholicism became timeworn and also the Protestant faith was losing its strength. He admits, though that the Christianity had noble ideals during propagation of the faith, but gradually it ceased its mission. He also criticised the fact, that the Catholicism neglected the nobility of the heart, but it was enough that people fulfilled the rules and at the same time the Catholicism declared its doctrine to be unmistakable.

Furthermore, Štúr points out at the fact that the clergy grasped the temporal power, it did not strain for salvation, but for temporal material properties. Due to Štúr's view, the Catholic Church became exhausted and lost the confidence and faith of nations and in his opinion it approaches to the decomposition and downfall. Štúr, being a protestant, in his criticism he also did not spare the Protestant Church. As Štúr states that Protestantism originated as opposition against the practices of the Catholic Church, it refused its inerrability. Protestantism, as Štúr himself states, was opposed to the practices of the Catholic Church, rejecting her infallibility. However, he remained in close contact with Catholicism. He blamed the Protestantism for its not being an entity; it divides people rather than uniting them. According to Štúr, Protestantism draws the strength of the outside, not of itself, which is why it is

insufficient for the future global historical development of mankind [[http://www.noveslovo.sk/c/Ludovit Stur, jeho zivotny pribeh 17](http://www.noveslovo.sk/c/Ludovit%20Stur,%20jeho%20zivotny%20pribeh%2017)]. Regarding the Church, Štúr saw a solution in the Orthodox Church. In his opinion the Orthodox Church never tried to get the worldly power, it retained the independence from the state and despite this supported it. In this way it gave people stability and spiritual support. However despite the fact that Štúr belauded the Orthodox Church, according to experts, his basic idea about the adherent power of civilisation has deep protestant roots [[https://www.noveslovo.sk/sk/c/Ludovit Stur jeho zivotny pribeh 17](https://www.noveslovo.sk/sk/c/Ludovit%20Stur,%20jeho%20zivotny%20pribeh%2017)].

Therefore it can be seen that Štúr's critic words, expressed after the unsuccessful revolution from the years 1848–1849, are directed not only to the worldly fields but also to the spiritual ones. In that particular complex situation, the faith was considered to be a normal part of the life, it has its influence onto the worldly matters and vice-versa, the earthly life influenced the faith. As we mentioned several times, these two worlds were interconnected and they blended together. In case Štúr came with the criticism of the society of those times, heading of the country, it meant also the criticism of the Church, which was a part of this entity, so he could not ignore it and tried to point out to its drawbacks.

6. The clerical politics outside of Štúr's interest

Despite the fact that Štúr's life was closely connected with the faith, the Evangelical Church, as several experts argue – he was not interested in the contemporary clerical politics. Štúr, being the founder and editor of the newspaper 'Slovenské národné noviny' (Slovak National Newspaper - the first Slovak political newspaper), did not publish and neither intended to publish news from the clerical life, by contrast to other contemporary daily newspapers.

In 1844 Ľudovít Štúr founded the association Tatrín having the idea of uniting the movement and to develop a massive political enlightenment. However, the authorities would never approve such association and therefore Tatrín was founded as a publishing association, whereby Štúr in his proposal for its approval states that the aim of Tatrín was to support, to fasten and to extend purely Slovak life by means of any legal way, regardless the religion [2, p. 69].

Also this official declaration repeatedly hints at the importance of faith and its presence in every field regarding the forming of the society. It also can be seen that as far it concerns Štúr, he tried to associate people, not to divide them even if it regards the religion. However, in the code of rules of the association Tatrín there was written that the association has not been oriented on publishing books of religious kind [3]. We can see again that despite of faith being constantly present in Štúr's life and shown not only in his statements and opinions but also in his acts, officially, Štúr was not oriented to activities regarding explicitly the Church, or religion. He tried more to integrate the faith into activities of the life of those worldly times.

Since 1832 to most important topics, being discussed in the Hungarian assembly belonged also the question of religious freedom [3]. Based on the fact we pointed out to in the previous part of the article, it has been obvious that Štúr supported the religious freedom. Nevertheless, there is no record that he has formally expressed his opinion on this topic from the position of politics.

Taking into consideration that „the underlying existential dimensions of faith can show itself through action, without any formal statements at all“ [5, p. 21] we could come to a conclusion, that just such expression of faith can be observed, on what regards the personality of Ľudovít Štúr.

The faith was so deep-rooted in his thinking, that he used it in forming of his own heritage. In view of the fact that in such an environment, people from his immediate neighborhood lived, he could ultimately achieve several of his aims. Despite that, however, the centre of his work of life is possible to be found outside the Evangelic Church, because Štúr markedly exceeded its scopes.

7. Spreading information about Ľudovít Štúr in the media

Because Ľudovít Štúr belongs to the most important personalities of the Slovak history, his life became the subject of interest for the general public. In connection with this fact also the media are interested in Ľudovít Štúr, and spreading information regarding various aspects of his life. However, not all information about Ľudovít Štúr which the public received through various media, are truthful. As in many other cases, even in presenting the history and personalities of our history, many distorted information are used. In such way, the media are presenting to the public an incomplete, distorted and misleading picture about Ľudovít Štúr.

Based on the previous study [6], we can state, that in the last years the media are becoming increasingly interested in Ľudovít Štúr. The increased publicity of his personality can be seen especially since 2015, because this year was declared by the government of the Slovak Republic as the ‘year of Ľudovít Štúr’ on the occasion of 200th anniversary of his birth. In the newspapers, magazines, but also in the online media many articles were published, in the radio and TV channels broadcasted several documents, films and programmes. Very often, media submitted information, which are not true, distorted, or being taken out of context [7]. Information are often presented regardless of all context regarding the time during which Štúr was active, and because of that a distorted public image has been created.

8. Conclusions

In forming of the personality of Ľudovít Štúr, the faith in which he was raised up played rather an important role. He grew up in faith and he also lived in faith, which had undoubtedly its influence not only for forming of his own personality, but also forming of wider circle of people, who surrounded him, and

finally also having influenced the results of his works, i.e. forming the Slovak nation, laying foundations of the Slovak national history.

Ľudovít Štúr laid foundations of the Slovak language, by means of which he provided the Slovaks with the basic instrument of the modern existence. He struggled for the raising the Slovak nation. There is no doubt that he was an important personality of the Slovak history but despite that, there was in the evaluation of his personality always a certain degree of inconsistency that this article tried to overcome.

References

- [1] M. Kováč, *Ľudovít Štúr a evanjelická cirkev a. v. ako prirodzená platforma pre realizovanie jeho zápasu o povznesenie slovenského národa*, Proc. of Ľudovít Štúr na hranici dvoch vekov, VEDA, Bratislava, 2015, 17-32.
- [2] B. Mihalkovičová, *Ľudovít Štúr*, SNM-Múzeum Ľudovíta Štúra, Bratislava, 2009, 58.
- [3] B. Kertész, *Evanjelik Štúr*, Proc. of Neznámy Ľudovít Štúr, Výskumný ústav Slovákov v Maďarsku, Békéscsaba, 2016, 29-44.
- [4] D. Škvarna and B. Mihalkovičová, *Ľudovít Štúr a moderné Slovensko*, SNM-Múzeum Ľudovíta Štúra, Bratislava, Bratislava, 174.
- [5] A. Kracher, *Eur. J. Sci. Theol.*, **3(2)** (2007) 19-30.
- [6] E. Odlerová and K. Hýľlová, *Využívanie mediálnej manipulácie pri zverejňovaní informácií o Ľudovítovi Štúrovi*, Proc. of Megatrendy a médiá 2017: Budúcnosť médií I, Fakulta masmediálnej komunikácie UCM, Trnava, 2018, 169-172.
- [7] E. Odlerová and K. Hýľlová, *Dissemination of false information in domestic and foreign media*, Proc. of Megatrends and Media: Reality and Media Bubbles, Fakulta masmediálnej komunikácie UCM, Trnava, 2017, 173–176.