

PERCEPTION AND RECEPTION OF JÁN CHRYZOSTOM KOREC AS THE SUCCESSOR OF ST. METHOD AND A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE CYRILLO-METHODIAN TRADITION AMONG SLOVAKS LIVING ABROAD¹

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Abstract: ŠURÁB, Marian – JUDÁK, Viliam – KRUPA, Jozef – HLAD, Ľubomír – ZEMANČÍK, Viliam – MATURKANIČ, Patrik. *Perception and Reception of Ján Chryzostom Korec as the Successor of St. Method and a Representative of the Cyrillo-Methodian Tradition Among Slovaks Living Abroad.* The aim of the current study is to present, interpret and apply the results of quantitative research focused on the perception and reception of the prominent representative of the secret Church, bishop, witness and thinker Ján Chryzostom Korec (1924 – 2015) among the communities of foreign Slovaks. Considering the fact that in 1990-2005 Korec was the diocesan bishop of Nitra, i.e. in the place to which history ascribes the designation “Methodius’ Seat”, and at the same time taking into account the fact that all his pastoral efforts have a distinct Cyrillo-Methodian character, the results of the research on the knowledge and reception of his person can be considered relevant also for the field of research on the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition. In the first part, the study focuses on the personality of Bishop Ján Chryzostom Korec as “Methodius’ successor”. At the same time, on the basis of an analysis of his extensive literary output, we prove the thesis that the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition forms the main axis of Korec’s mission as both pastor and thinker. The second part presents the results of the quantitative survey (630 respondents: 59.5% women (N = 375) and 40.5% men (N = 255) conducted from November 2023 to January 2024. These are complemented by a discussion section that shows the comparisons of the research sample according to gender, age and place of residence. The study concludes with a summary of the research applied to practice, offering four concrete suggestions within the context of the Slovak Cardinal and his Cyrillo-Methodian legacy to make the Slovak Cardinal better known to contemporary Slovaks abroad and at home.

Keywords: *Ján Chryzostom Korec, Cyril and Methodius, tradition, foreign Slovaks, quantitative research*

Ján Chryzostom Korec as “Methodius’ successor”. Elements of the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition in the life and work of the Bishop of Nitra

Despite several historical ambiguities related to the mission of the brothers of Thessalonica in Great Moravia, the designations “Methodius’ Seat”, “Methodius’ Nitra” or “Methodius’ Successor” have

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their historical validity.² No doubt the bishop of Nitra, Ján Ch. Korec, was aware of the designation and the commitment associated with it. It is possible to say words almost identical to those that apply to the work of Sts. Cyril and Methodius in Great Moravia about the bishop's pastoral service to the people of God between 1990 and 2005: "The meaning and aim of the work of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, their literary and educational activity, was to involve our ancestors in the new life brought by Christ and which he entrusted to his Church to develop" (Korec 1994, 45). Bishop Korec was aware of the "revolutionary" nature of the missionary enterprise of the Slavic heralds of the gospel, its broad spectrum (reaching the spheres of education, education, culture, politics), but above all the fact that the vital center of their entire mission was the liturgy and religiosity formed by the liturgy, which Korec himself proves in the words: "What a revolution of the spirit it must have been when Constantine and Methodius came to our country, to Great Moravia, to Nitra and to Devín with books translated into our language, and when they gathered the best of our young people and educated them, in an intelligible language, in philosophy, in mathematics, in music, in the knowledge of the Scriptures, its depths and mysteries, and when they then celebrated together with them the 'service-mass' in Slavonic!" (Korec 1994, 44).

The emphasis on the Eucharist and the Eucharistic liturgy as the source and highlight of all his pastoral-missionary activity, covering the whole spectrum of areas and issues (from education to the arts), Korec draws precisely from the Thessalonian missionaries, which is reflected in his words, "The Eternal Light reminds each one of us of the Lord's presence among us. This has been going on for centuries with us. Sts. Cyril and Methodius celebrated the same mystery of the Eucharist as we do, and even celebrated it in the language of the people as we do today" (Korec 1997, 246). The Cyrillo-Methodian emphasis on the Eucharistic liturgy as the source of the spiritual renewal can rightly be seen as an enduring feature of Korec's activity (Korec 1997, 7-8).

The Eucharistic liturgy celebrated countless times in the midst of God's people – from the smallest chapels to large ancient and newly built temples³ – Korec understood as a source of renewal of the Slovak nation, but not only in the spiritual, but also in the broad evangelizing and social dimension necessary for today (Murgaš et al. 2022, 6185; Králik et al. 2023, 96-106; Jarmoch et al. 2022, 130-142; Jančovič 2023, 528-554).

The direct connection with the evangelizing mission is not only the sacramental-sacrificial character of the Mass and Holy Communion, but also the proclamation of the Word of God, which is an integral part of the Eucharistic liturgy. In the context of the many celebrations of the Eucharistic mystery, many homilies with spiritual-moral content were heard during his fifteen years of ministry in the Diocese of Nitra, and these were in a direct continuity with the Cyril and Methodius tradition of faith, morals and spirituality. They can therefore rightly be regarded as an important contribution to the development of the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition and as an update of it. It is not difficult to discern in the homilies of Korec an echo of the preaching of Methodius, who "taught and encouraged to bind oneself to the fear of the Lord, and, controlled and tamed by it, to turn away from every evil as if with a bridle" (Korec 1994, 45). Ján Ch. Korec, like St. Methodius, pointed out moral indiscretions – "marital infidelity, violence, theft, physical harm, and even

² The connection of St. Methodius with Nitra and thus the designation „Methodius' Nitra“ is based on the encyclical of Pope John VIII *Industriae tuae*, by which the Pope in 880 confirmed Methodius in the rank of Archbishop of Moravia, while for the first time the Bishopric of Nitra and its Bishop Viching – suffragan subordinate to Methodius – are also mentioned. The text says: „We commanded him to obey his archbishop in everything, as the holy canons teach“ (Judák – Liba 2012, 17).

³ During the spiritual exercises at the Vatican (March 1-7, 1998), describing the powerful work of the Holy Spirit in the local Church, Korec reports that in seven years he consecrated 47 new churches; cf. (Korec 1998, 172).

murder” and spoke of “spreading forgiveness and Christian charity” (Korec 1994, 45). Korec also addressed, as his holy predecessor, rulers – politicians – to be aware in all their actions that injustice in the political-social sphere would be brought before the judgment of God, and thus to act in conformity with divine and human justice in their actions (Korec 1994, 56-59).

Since there is a demonstrable consensus between St. Methodius and Cardinal Korec on what is essential in the evangelizing mission, what is the “heart of the Christian life”, i.e. a consensus that the mystery of the Eucharist – sacrifice and feast – is the foundation of every mission, it is right to postulate a similar consensus in other areas – moral education, education and schooling, science, politics, social issues, family, culture, etc. (Kondrla 2023, 19-32; Murgaš – Petrovič 2020, 261-274; Murgaš et al. 2023, 169-186; Kobylarek 2020, 5-12; Polák 2021, 469-474). In most of the above-mentioned areas that belong to the portfolio of the episcopal ministry, it is possible to recognize a Cyrillo-Methodian feature, as evidenced by a considerable number of studies of this focus (Ďatelinka – Judák 2023, 34-46; Hromják 2023, 65-77; Ivanič 2019, 98-106; Džujko 2022, 151-159).

Thus, it is clear from the above – which is sufficient for the purposes of our research study – that the personality and work of the Bishop of Nitra and Cardinal Korec can be, in a certain sense, considered a faithful “icon” of the legacy of his predecessor – St. Methodius. It is indisputable that the pastoral work of Ján Ch. Korec can be seen as an actualizing presence of the mission of Methodius in the conditions of the 20th and 21st century. The degree of penetration of Korec’s personality into the consciousness of Slovaks abroad (but also at home) says a lot about the vitality, extent and intensity of the Cyril and Methodius legacy within the same sample of the Slovak population. In the following section we will therefore present our research and its results in the Slovak population abroad.

Objective of the study

The main goal of the study was the presentation, interpretation and application of the results of quantitative research focused on the perception and reception of the person of Ján Chryzostom Korec (1924 – 2015) in the communities of Slovaks abroad.

Sub-goals (hypotheses) examined using the Pearson chi-square test:

- Do the answers of women and men differ significantly?
- Do the answers differ significantly according to the age of the respondents?
- Do the answers depend on whether the respondents come from a village, small town or big city?

Methods

Research design

The research design of the study was chosen with regard to the target and available measurement methods. We chose a non-experimental research design – a comparative study – and analyzed the results obtained from the measurements using basic descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The research set was obtained through purposive sampling. As the target research groups, we selected Slovaks living abroad. The research took place for three months from November 2023 to January 2024, online, by distributing access data to the research questionnaire.

Methods of statistical processing

The results were examined through descriptive statistics, contingency tables and a contingency table variability test. The variable independence test assumes that the random variables X and Y are independent, so the values of one variable do not affect the values of the other variable. The dependence between variables can be either one-sided (asymmetric) or mutual (symmetric), where both variables interact with each other. Pearson's chi-square test was used to test the independence of two categorical variables in the PivotTable, regardless of the direction of their dependence. The null hypothesis of this test assumes that both variables are independent of each other. We test this null hypothesis at the determined level of significance α , that the variables are independent, as opposed to the alternative that there is a dependence between the variables. We write the hypotheses as follows:

$$H_0: n_{ij} = \frac{n_{i.} * n_{.j}}{n}$$

$$H_1: n_{ij} \neq \frac{n_{i.} * n_{.j}}{n},$$

when indicates the frequencies in the PivotTable where $i = 1, 2, \dots, r$ denotes the categories of the variable X and $j = 1, 2, \dots, s$ denotes the categories of the variable Y.

The test criterion χ^2 is defined as:

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^r \sum_{j=1}^s \frac{(n_{ij} - n_{ij}^t)^2}{n_{ij}}$$

where $\chi^2 \approx \chi^2 [(r-1)(s-1)]$. The larger the differences between the categories of the examined variables, the larger the test criterion χ^2 .

The prerequisite for using this test is that theoretical frequencies where there are less than 5 observations make up less than 20% of the PivotTable fields. Individual categories of variables can be combined to meet this assumption. The data were processed using the statistical program SPSS (version 23) and MS Office Excel.

Research file

Data were collected from November 2023 to January 2024. A total of 630 respondents were involved, of which 40,5% were men (N = 255) and 59,5% were women (N = 375).

Filling language

Answer choices	(N)	(%)
SVK	585	92,8
ENG	15	2,4
ESP	30	4,8
Total	630	100,0

Gender

Answer choices	(N)	(%)
Man	255	40,5
Women	375	59,5
Total	630	100,0

Representation of age groups

Answer choices	(N)	(%)
15-25 years	116	18,4
26-40 years	125	19,8
41-60 years	273	43,3
61-74 years	79	12,6
75-90 years	37	5,9
Total	630	100,0

Religious confession

Answer choices	(N)	(%)
Without religion	92	14,6
Christian	480	76,2
Jewish	11	1,7
Eastern religions and similar ones	10	1,6
Your own faith	32	5,1
Other	5	0,8
Total	630	100,0

Highest education level

Answer choices	(N)	(%)
Basic education	55	8,7
Secondary education without high school diploma	49	7,8
Secondary education with high school diploma	154	24,4
Higher professional education	33	5,2
University education	270	42,9
Postgraduate education (MBA, BBA, DBA, MSc, LL.M...)	26	4,1
Postgraduate scientific education (PhD., Assoc. Prof., Prof...)	43	6,9
Total	630	100,0

Place of residence (continent)

Answer choices	(N)	(%)
Europe	527	83,7
Asia	10	1,6
North America	33	5,2
South America	31	4,9
Africa	11	1,7
Australia	18	2,9
Total	630	100,0

Place of residence (population)

Answer choices	(N)	(%)
Up to 1,000 inhabitants	80	12,7
1,001 to 5,000 inhabitants	125	19,8
5,001 to 20,000 inhabitants	103	16,4
20,001 to 100,000 inhabitants	121	19,2
More than 100,000 inhabitants	201	31,9
Total	630	100,0

The results

Measuring instruments

We did not use standardized questionnaires in our research. We created a sociometric questionnaire that also included requirements for basic demographic data. Participants answered four questions. In the following section, we present the data in frequency tables:

A) Are you familiar with the Slovak Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec (1924 – 2015), who significantly contributed to Slovak history as a devoted advocate of St Cyril and St Methodius?

Answer choices	(N)	(%)
Yes	284	45,1
No	346	54,9
Total	630	100,0

B) How would you describe your perception of the figure of Bishop of Nitra Ján Chryzostom Korec from the perspective of someone residing abroad?

Answer choices	(N)	(%)
Very positively	124	19,7
Rather positively	77	12,2
Neutrally	111	17,6
Rather negatively	6	1,0
Very negatively	4	0,6
I don't know/don't wish to answer	308	48,9
Total	630	100,0

C) Within the historical context, where would you categorise the figure of Ján Chryzostom Korec?

Answer choices	(N)	(%)
Intellectual (philosopher/theologian)	65	10,3
Dissident of the communist regime	37	5,9
Jesuit	11	1,7
Priest/bishop/cardinal	212	33,7
I don't know/don't wish to answer	305	48,4
Total	630	100,0

D) In your opinion, what was the most defining characteristic of Ján Chryzostom Korec's life?

Answer choices	(N)	(%)
Dedication to truth and loyalty to the Catholic Church	199	31,6
Political-religious pursuits	44	7,0
Preservation and restoration of cultural and historical monuments	4	0,6
Literary contributions	10	1,6
I don't know/don't wish to answer	373	59,2
Total	630	100,0

Dependency results

In this section, statistically significant differences calculated using Pearson chi-square test for independence of variables in the contingency table are presented.

A) Comparison by gender

No statistically significant dependence was observed for any of the questions examined (even when all test conditions were met).

B) Comparison by age

The figure of the Slovak cardinal Ján Ch. Korec is the most familiar to respondents aged 61-74 (58.2% are familiar with him), but the least familiar to respondents aged 15-25 (only 13.8% are familiar with him) (P-value of the Pearson chi-squared test: 0.000). Korec is perceived most positively among respondents aged 75-90, and least among respondents aged 15-25. (P-value of Pearson chi-square test: 0.000). There is a trend between age and the proportion of respondents who evaluate Cardinal Korce in a positive way – the older the age group, the more positively they perceive this person.

C) Comparison by size of the residence location

Personality of Ján Ch. Korec's personality is most known to respondents who live in cities with 100,000 inhabitants (59.7% know him), and least identified by respondents who live in villages with up to 1,000 inhabitants (only 26.3% know him) (P-value of Pearson chi-square test: 0.000).

Discussion

It is obvious that abroad (especially in Europe) there is a large community of people claiming Slovak ancestry. This is also the conclusion of the data presented, when 83.7% (N = 527) of our respondents indicated their place of residence as European. It was convenient that the age distribution of the participants was diverse and included multiple age groups without age limitation. The results confirmed the fact that Slovaks living abroad claim to be mainly of the Christian faith (76.2%, N = 480). Two thirds of our respondents are university graduates (59.1%, N = 372), which implies a general and balanced view of the questions presented and their answers. In a similar line, we see the size of the environments and their variety of options, with one-third of the respondents (31.9%, N = 201) indicating their place of residence above 100,000 inhabitants. It is from this group that the personality of Cardinal Korec is known to the majority of the respondents (59.7%).

On the basis of the results of the quantitative study, we can state that almost 60 percent perception and reception of the personality of Cardinal Korec in the 61-74 age group (58.2%) leads us to the statement that the historical context of the Cyril and Methodius legacy in the person and work of the Nitra Cardinal, as well as the degree of his recognition and reception in the group of foreign Slovaks, copied the observed percentage values. It is a matter of point of view and interpretation whether the given results give grounds for optimism or, on the contrary, for pessimism. In both cases, however, it is true that the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition – not only in its content, but also in its procedural meaning (tradition as a process of passing on the message from one generation to the next) – should be unbroken and continuous. Therefore, it is desirable that the way/form of the tradition of the Cyril and Methodius content, which is a kind of icon, sacrament, or history-specific variation of the universal evangelical message, should be constantly renewed and adapted to the language of new generations, the heirs of the mission of Cyril and Methodius. Here the possibility for creative interdisciplinary thinking is revealed, as the conclusion of the study shows us in the four directions presented (the revival and development of the Cyril and Methodius awareness among Slovaks not only abroad but also at home). At the same time, we see here an open space for an extended, so far unexplored scholarly research on kerygmatic catechesis in the “mother tongue” of the Church (the relationship between sacramental liturgy and the community of engagement of the believers), especially in the post-revolutionary generation Y/Z (Reimer 2022, 69-87), whose advantage is the perfect orientation in the digital environment (the possibility of online research). Our study declares the willingness of these groups to participate in scientific inquiry in a fairly large proportion (38.7%, N = 241), which we see as a positive development from the perspective of new research.

Conclusion

From the data gathered, we arrived at a final evaluation of the results, which generated a key question based on the aforementioned objective of our research: *How to effectively present the personality of Ján Chryzostom Korec to Slovaks living abroad, so that the generations after us will not forget the spiritual legacy of a Slovak who made an unforgettable mark on the history of our nation?* We offer to the general public four possible solutions, which we want to be open to further discussions towards tangible goals, i.e. to contribute not only to pastoral-theological research, but also to raise awareness among Slovaks at home and abroad:

1. Introducing the general public to the life and work of Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec, based “on the spirituality of Cyril and Methodius”, can be realized through various forms of organized and voluntary activities.

These may include:

Exhibitions and museums: Organizing exhibitions on the life and work of Ján Ch. Korec. This can offer the public the opportunity to see historical documents and photographs related to his legacy.

Memorial Sites: Identifying and marking places associated with Cardinal Korec, such as memorial sites with information boards or memorials where the public could learn more about his spiritual legacy.

International symposia and conferences: Organising conferences or symposia with experts and historians to discuss the impact of Cardinal Korec on domestic and international society.

Educational events: Organising educational events in the form of lectures, seminars and workshops where the general public can learn more about Korec’s spiritual heritage.

Publication of books and documents: Publishing books, brochures and documents dedicated to the personality of Korec.

Film documentaries and television programmes: Creation of documentaries or television programmes that would shed light on the life and work of the Slovak Cardinal and would thus be accessible to the general public.

Internet platforms: Creation of a website or social media dedicated to the life of Cardinal Korec, where articles, photographs and videos would be shared in order to raise awareness of his lifelong legacy.

Social (cultural) events: Incorporate outreach activities on Ján Ch. Korec into cultural events such as festivals, concerts or theatre performances, so that the public can also learn about his legacy through artistic media.

2. Spreading awareness of Korec’s spiritual message based on the anthropological-theological principles of the Christian faith, with an emphasis on the young generation (using contemporary tools). In addressing young people, we consider these principles to be relevant:

Clarity and relevance: It is important to share the message of faith in a way that is understandable and relevant to young people. This means using contemporary language and examples that are relatable and understandable to them.

Adaptation of content: The content of the spiritual message should be adapted to reflect the current issues and challenges that young people are facing. Ideally, it should offer answers and perspectives that will help them find meaning and value in their lives.

Creative use of technology: The young generation is digital, so the use of technological tools such as social media, mobile apps, podcasts, videos and interactive websites can be very effective in spreading spiritual messages.

Interactivity and participation. Therefore, it is important to create space for their questions, discussions, but also for their creative contribution to the content of the message.

Sharing spiritual values: The Christian message should be based on the values of love, solidarity, justice and pro-life (Polák 2020, 523-537; Dobříková et al. 2022, 20-37; Tomiczek et al. 2022, 59-65; Plašienková – Vertanová 2023, 184-196; Vivoda 2023, 237-249). It is important to transmit these values to young people and show them how they can be relevant in today’s world.

A personal approach: Reaching young people should be personal and authentic. It is important to create a space to share experiences, testimonies and life stories that can be inspiring and encouraging to them.

Fostering community and fellowship: Creating a space for young people where they feel accepted and supported is key. This can include organizing meetings, camps, volunteer activities and other events where they can build lasting relationships and grow in their faith with their peers. These principles can help ensure that the spiritual message of Korec is accessible, relevant and inspiring for the young generation in today's digital/economic world (Kobylarek et al. 2022, 7-16; Fiľa 2017, 412-423; Gómez – Antošová 2019, 26-39; Korenková et al. 2020, 9996).

3. Ján Chryzostom Korec was an important figure in the history of the Slovak Catholic Church and society as a whole. His life and work played an important role in shaping the identity and cultural legacy of Slovaks, not only those living in Slovakia, but also those abroad. The application part of his legacy concerns the way his ideas, values and vision carry on in the lives of individuals and communities after his death. Korec was known for his intellectual depth, spiritual leadership and courage during the communist regime.

His message in the context of the Cyrillo-Methodian legacy can also be applied in the following ways:

Spiritual leadership and moral principles: Korec was known for his determination to stand by his convictions and resist the totalitarian regime, which can serve as an example for people today who face similar challenges. His moral principles and courage can be an inspiration to anyone facing injustice or oppression.

Intergenerational dialogue: the work and legacy of the Slovak Cardinal can serve as a bridge between different generations of Slovaks. His story and legacy can be a source of discussion between older and younger generations about the values, history and culture of Slovakia (Javor 2023, 62-77).

Promoting democracy and human rights: Korec was a principled defender of democracy and human rights. His legacy can serve as a reminder of the importance of defending these values in a world where they are under constant threat.

Support of Slovak culture abroad: For Slovaks living abroad, Korec's legacy can serve as a reminder of their cultural roots and history. His story can serve as a motivation for the preservation and development of Slovak identity and culture abroad (Lenovský et al. 2023, 150-167; Valčová et al. 2022, 207-215), where the legacy of the Thessaloniki saints Cyril and Methodius is at the centre of attention (Ivanič 2022, 106-126; Kondrla et al. 2022, 149-159; Kondrla – Králik 2016, 90-97; Botek 2023, 201-217).

4. Publishing the final results of the life and work of Slovak Cardinal Korec in foreign journals can be an important way to strengthen his international presence and message in the Cyril and Methodius legacy.

Scholarly articles and studies: Academic articles and studies can be published in foreign journals that address the legacy of Methodius' successor. These articles could provide a deeper insight into his contribution to Christian theology in relation to the culture and historical dimension of the Slovak nation.

Reviews and essays: Publishing reviews and essays on Cardinal Korec's works can also enhance his international reputation. These texts could evaluate his work from different perspectives and offer valuable interpretations of his ideas and influence for our times (Králik – Torok 2016, 45-53; Pavlíková 2016, 111-119; McAleer 2023, 70-85; Plašienková 2023, 151-157).

Historical and theological perspectives: Publications could also include historical and theological perspectives on the period in which Cardinal Korec was active and his influence on the ecclesial and social situation at the time.

Interviews and profile articles: Foreign journals could also publish interviews with experts on Cardinal Korec's life or with people who worked directly with him. These interviews could shed light on his personal life, motivations and beliefs touching on contemporary theological and philosophical trends (Plašienková – Bizon 2023, 77-93; Pavlíková – Tavilla 2023, 200-224; Martín et al. 2021, 48-57; Jančovič 2023, 158-171; McAleer 2023, 70-85).

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