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Lay Agency in Religious Change: the Role of Communities and Landlords in Reform and Reformation

In this essay I seek to illuminate "from below" the process of growing lay agency in matters of religion within the frame of a case study. Although the expansion of lay control over church affairs is usually considered an urban phenomenon, I focus on the Hungarian countryside, on how peasants living in villages and towns under feudal authority participated in late medieval reform and sixteenth-century reformations. I contend that the late medieval observant reform of the mendicant friary of the market-town of Körmend was initiated by laymen, and the process of reform itself took place primarily in the interplay of the social and religious needs of the community and landlord. In order to assess on a more general level the role of lay participation in church affairs, I test my findings against village parish religion. I investigate negotiations between peasant communities and landlords over issues related to the election of the local parish incumbent, as well his livelihood and the maintenance of the parish church. I conclude that the high level of lay participation and investments in matters of local religion made it possible for Luther to speak about communal rights and transform locally diverse practices into a universal Christian norm.

keywords: observant cloister reform, mendicant orders, parish religion, lay agency, election of pastors

In this essay I explore the role of the laity in late medieval and early sixteenth-century religious changes. The late medieval crisis and observant reform of the mendicant friary in the market-town of Körmend, which offers illuminating insights into the religious practices and mentality of the laity,[1] is approached here as an episode in the long-term process of growing lay agency in church affairs,

1 The making of this essay has been supported by the János Bolyai Research Scholarship granted by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The register of the papal investigation has been published: Gabriella Erdélyi (ed.), *The Register of a Convent Controversy (1517–1518)* (cited as: *Register*). *Pope Leo X, Cardinal Bakócz, the Augustinians and the Observant Franciscans in Contest,* Collectanea Vaticana Hungariae II/1 (Budapest–Rome: Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egyetem–MTA Történettudományi Intézet, 2005). For articles in English see: Erdélyi, "Tales of immoral friars: morality and religion in an early sixteenth-century Hungarian town," *Social History. Hungary – a special issue*, 34 (2009): 184–203; Erdélyi, "The Consumption of the Sacred: Popular Piety in a Late Medieval Hungarian Town," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 63 (2012): 31–60.

which was shaped, I argue, in the dynamic of communal and seigniorial agendas.[2] In the second part of the essay, I draw general lessons from the Körmend story. To what extent was the active participation of community and landlord typical in bringing about religious change? To answer this question, I compare findings concerning lay agency in monastic reform with the achievements of communities and landlords in religious activities centered around the parish church, which has remained (and this constitutes a divergence from West European tendencies) the primary focus of lay devotion, even if the mendicant ethos has increasingly attracted the laity.[3] Thus I recreate the original context and reintegrate what has been separated only by historical discourses: local religion centered around two institutions, the friary, if there was one, and the parish church, with their related institutions, such as hospitals, schools and confraternities. In order to be able to reflect on continuities and changes, I also extend the timeframe of the inquiry: how did the scope and limits of communal and seigniorial action change during the early phase of the protestant reformation in the Hungarian countryside?

By the late fifteenth and the early sixteenth century, religious life within the mendicant friary in the town of Körmend in West Hungary had dissipated. Friars were rare and they lived scandalously. Körmend was an average-size late medieval market town of the country, and although it was not a manorial center, its seigniorial and religious institutions placed it among the most important towns of the county. Market-towns were franchised settlements, as the townsmen of Körmend had the right to choose a town judge each year and they traded in the region custom free and had a weekly market. Still, as opposed to free royal cities, their inhabitants were considered serfs by law and lived under the authority of landlords. Körmend underwent conspicuous development in the second half of the fifteenth century under the Ellerbach magnate family. János Ellerbach fortified the medieval *castellum* at the north-east corner of the town and founded the parish church of Saint Elisabeth in the south-east. When he died, Thomas Bakócz, cardinal-primate of Hungary, took over his estates. Under the pressure caused by local scandals and the laity's drive for reform, in 1513, during his stay in Rome, he asked the pope's

2 The concept of agency used here is outlined by Miguel A. Cabrera, *Postsocial History. An Introduction* (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2004), 97–100.

3 Marie-Madeleine Cevins, *L'Église dans les villes hongroises à la fin du Moyan Age, vers 1320–vers 1490* (Paris–Budapest: METEM, 2003); Carmen Florea, "The Third Path: Charity and Devotion in Late Medieval Transylvanian Towns," in *Communities of Devotion. Religious Orders and Society in East Central Europe, 1450–1800*, ed. Maria Crăciun and Elaine Fulton (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 91–120.

license to take control of the reform of the friary and introduce observant Franciscan friars in place of the Augustinian hermits.

The relationship between cloister and community oscillated for decades between conflict and solidarity. While the friars were an important media in the local economy of the sacred, the monastery buildings shaped communal identity. However, since the sacred economy was often endangered rather than enhanced by the friars, who proved to be unworthy mediators (and the ruinous monastery was more a source of shame than pride), the general tranquility of the streets was occasionally disturbed by clamorous scenes. The community tried everything to reform the Augustinians, ranging from derision to physical violence. They repeatedly turned to the provincial of the Augustinian mendicant friars, orally as well as in writing, to take care of the cloister of the order "for God and for the salvation of all of us," to which effect the provincial sent more friars to Körmend.[4] At certain times, even the idea of driving the friars away was voiced. One of the witnesses recalled that people were not only talking about driving the friars away, but even had come to the decision that this was the only solution.[5] Another eye-witness called the actions of the townsmen against the negligent mendicants a "rebellion."[6] György Király in turn stated that in the end the community did not dare to expel the friars. His words suggest that people perceived this to be beyond their authority, as a breach of prevailing norms and structures of power from which they refrained. How did the presence of the landlord alter the scope and limits of communal needs, aims and action?

While the notion that the Reformation constituted a complete break with the Middle Ages has gained wide acceptance, the 'observant' reform, in other words the foundation and reorganization of monasteries implemented by secular authorities (*Klosterreform* by territorial princes, city magistrates and landlords), was self-evidently described as a process running against the dissolution of the same cloisters by the next generation of the Reformation. In the past thirty years, however, as the paradigm of confessionalization has gained ground and the new focus on continuities between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries has come to the fore, the interpretive gaze has become keener and has noticed, instead of ruptures, the structural parallels and continuities between the two

4 The written requests of townspeople are mentioned solely in the *Register,* fol. 83v.

5 *Register*, fol. 72v.

6 Ibid., fol. 68v.

subsequent processes.[7] Within this framework, both the late medieval reform and the Protestant reform, including the closure of religious houses, are considered to be movements that began within the church, but as in the course of events the laity took the upper hand in channeling the process, in the end they brought about the "laicization of religion." The church(es) that had thus evolved, the argument goes, responded more actively to the needs of the laity and came increasingly under lay supervision.[8] While historians unanimously interpreted both events within the macro-historical process of the laicization of religion, opinions diverge regarding the underlying intentions of actors. Did the laity strive to expand their power over the church, which is more easily recorded subsequently, or were people moved rather by religious goals and values? Answers vary on the matter, granting primacy in the mind of actors either to religious motives or to the expansion of political power, but narratives tend to be reduced to this simplistic alternative.[9]

Looking closely at the local events in Körmend, I have become increasingly convinced, however, that the long-term processes captured by hindsight and the categories constructed to describe them cannot be adapted to the historical understanding and representation of everyday cultural practices. The experiences, choices, and decisions of social agents can hardly be reduced to a dichotomy of

7 For a focused overview of how the historiographical perspective changed see: Heinz Schilling, "Reformation–Umbruch oder Gipfelpunkt eines Tempts des Réformes," in *Die Frühe Reformation in Deutschland als Umbruch: wissenschaftliches Symposium des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte 1996*, ed. Bernd Moeller, Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte 199 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlag, 1998), 13–34. For late medieval and reformation continuities of the reform activities of secular princes see Manfred Schulze, *Fürsten und Reformation. Geistliche Reformpolitik weltlicher Fürsten vor der Reformation*, Spätmittelalter und Reformation, Neue Reihe 2 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1991); Dieter Stievermann, *Landesherrschaft und Klosterwesen im spätmittelalterlichen Württemberg* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1989). More recently, religious reform and territorial consolidation in German territories have been described as inseparable processes beginning in the fourteenth and culminating in the seventeenth centuries. William Bradford Smith, *Reformation and the German Territorial State: Upper Franconia, 1300–1600* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2008).

8 I use the term of Paul Nyhus designed to describe the laity's active role in the practice of late medieval cloister reforms in particular, and the growing lay authority in church affairs in general. Paul L. Nyhus, "The Franciscan Observant Reform in Germany," in *Reformbemühungen und Observanzbestrebungen im spätmittelalterlichen Ordenswesen,* ed. Kaspar Elm, Berliner Historische Studien 14, Ordensstudien 6 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1989), 217.

9 In addition to the literature citated in note 3, see also Walter Ziegler, "Reformation und Klosterauflösung. Ein ordensgeschichtlicher Vergleich," in *Reformbemühungen,* ed. Kaspar Elm, 585–614; Kaspar Elm, *"Verfall und Erneuerung des Ordenswesen im Spätmittelalter. Forschungen und Forschungsaufgaben,"* in *Untersuchungen von Kloster und Stift*, Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck Instituts für Geschichte 68, Studien zur Germania Sacra 14 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 188–238, 224–30.

religious versus political variables.[10] On the contrary, in order to capture the perspective of historical agents, a more flexible vocabulary and a more inclusive frame of reference is necessary. Therefore, after reconstructing the role played by subsequent landlords of Körmend in religious reform in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, I will interpret their motives and actions as integral to the processes of the legitimization of power and aristocratic self-fashioning.[11] Moreover, instead of trying to distinguish between the underlying political and religious agendas of religious reform, it seems more fruitful to acknowledge the fact that medieval (in fact, pre-modern) non-clerical authorities felt as responsible for the Christian religion and the church as they did for the building of society. Inevitably, as will be demonstrated below, the religious-devotional practices and the day-to-day practice of domination (*Herrschaft*) targeted to harness the loyalties of subjects were inseparable processes at the grassroots level. For contemporaries, the intersection of political and religious dynamics, to which modern sensibilities object, seemed natural.[12]

Cloister Reform in Körmend

With regard to the relationship of town and landlord it is striking that the community did not—as we might assume based on the silence of witness testimonies on the matter—turn to the landlord, who was the patron of the monastery, with its grievances against the friars. The people of Körmend, however, were very pro-active in their relations with other authorities: on occasion, they mobilized either their parish priest or the castellan against the friars, and they even requested the help of the Augustinian provincial in writing. Moreover, letters of complaint were a well-established manner of communication between peasant communities and landlords. Can we interpret this as an act of passive

10 The question as to whether the masses were mobilized by the 'sola fide' evangelical message about the new logic of salvation or the idea of 'sola scriptura' (with its social consequences) remains a central dilemma of the theories designed to explain the reception of Lutheran ideas in Germany. See Heinrich Richard Schmidt, "Die Ethik der Laien in der Reformation," in *Die Frühe Reformation in Deutschland als Umbruch: wissenschaftliches Symposium des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte 1996,* ed. Bernd Moeller, Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte 199 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlag, 1998), 333–70.

11 I am utilizing Greenblatt's concept of Renaissance self-fashioning, designed to denote a self-conscious shaping of personal and social identity, since it seems applicable to all historical periods. Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980).

12 As Smith argues, "for the bishops of Bamberg the idea that religious reform could provide a foundation for the expansion of princely authority seemed natural." Smith, *Reformation,* 92.

resistance reflecting the tense relationship between town and landlord? In other instances, however, the people of Körmend readily sought the mediation and protection of Péter Erdődy, who came to govern the earlier Ellerbach-estates on behalf of Bakócz in 1505 and became heir and landlord by law in 1517.[13] Erdődy never hesitated to petition the king to request protection for his peasants when they had been done harm in person or in goods by neighboring landlords.[14] No surprise, then, that the witnesses commented recurrently that as peasants they were held in respect and honor by their landlord. And even if this is measured as a calculated platitude, one of the witnesses proudly added that Erdődy was a benevolent and generous landlord, which probably reveals something of their actual relationship. In sum, landlord and town seem to have cherished a harmonious relationship.

Perhaps the community did not request the mediation of the patron of the friary, since he was doing what was expected of a good landlord anyway. This would also help to answer our initial dilemma as to why the community's action did not extend in the end to the often-mentioned "rebellion," the violent banishing of the friars. Lukács Mindszenti of Hollós, the earlier client (*familiaris*), recalled at the interrogation regarding his patron, that "he often heard the magnificent (*magnificus*) lord János Ellerbach, the landlord of the town of Körmend, reproving the Augustinian friars for neglecting the divine services and threatening to expel them from their monastery and replace them with others."[15] Another former client, Ferenc Nádasdy, also remembered the determined conduct of his patron, Ellerbach, who was landlord before Erdődy:

> János Ellerbach [...] often intended to exclude and turn the Augustinian friars out from the monastery of Körmend on account of their unbounded negligence and evil life. [...] He has also seen and heard as he threatened the friars with beating and other punishments unless they changed their lives, performed the divine services regularly, and took adequate care of their buildings. Had the landlord lived longer,

13 In that year Bakócz's testament was approved by the king, who acknowledged that the cardinal's extended estates might descend to his family rather than the church. Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (The National Archives of Hungary, MNL OL), Mohács előtti gyűjtemény (Pre-Mohács Collection), Diplomatikai Levéltár (Archive of Medieval Charters, DF), 89092.

14 See Erdődy's letter to King Louis II in which he claims that the cellars and wine of the inhabitants of Körmend within the territory of the neighboring manor of the monastery of Zalavár had been forcefully taken by the manor's governor. Zsuzsanna Bándi, *Körmend a középkorban* [Körmend in the Middle Ages] (Körmend: Körmend Város Tanácsa, 1987), 60; MNL OL DL 49892 (1526).

15 *Register*, fol. 60v.

> the friars, he believes, would have already been expelled from the monastery, since he knows that Ellerbach had already taken some steps to this end.[16]

What did Nádasdy mean when he referred to steps taken by the landlord? Did Ellerbach also—as Bakócz later did—intervene legally and turn to the general of the Augustinian order or the pope himself with a request for permission to reform the monastery as its patron? The above words of his men, Mindszenti and Nádasdy, who knew him face-to-face, suggest a more pragmatic and authoritative personality. I would therefore assume that Ellerbach started to negotiate the affairs of the friary straight away with the potential newcomers, that is, with the superiors of the religious order whom he had marked out to live in Körmend. The words of Lukács Mindszenti show that Ellerbach had also contacted the observant Franciscans: "he himself is fond of both orders, however, he would prefer that the Franciscans rather than the Augustinians stay in the friary, since the earlier landlords of Körmend had also wished, while they lived, to introduce the Franciscans to the monastery."[17] Ellerbach was probably only prevented from realizing his goal by his sudden death in 1499.

His successor, Péter Erdődy, encouraged the friars, as his more gentle manner dictated, with

> benevolent words to live as friars should live, and he promised them that he would be ready to support them in any possible way, providing them with food and clothing and helping them restore the devastated buildings, and as a sign of his promise, as the witness himself saw, lord Péter supplied them with bread and wine and made other provisions.[18]

As all his efforts were to no effect, however, his failure to reform the friars must have urged him to mobilize the authority of his prelate uncle in order to place the observant Franciscan friars in the place of the Augustinians.

Beyond the noble clients of landlords, the townsmen of Körmend most probably also knew about the intentions and the actions of their subsequent landlords. As Mátyás Tapasztó claimed at the hearing, "had the citizens of the town been able, they would already have banished the Augustinians friars, as their landlord at the time, the late János Ellerbach, also wanted to expel them, as far as he knows."[19] Town community and landlord shared the goal of reforming

16 *Register*, fol. 70r.
17 Ibid., fol. 59v.
18 Ibid., fols 62v–63r.
19 Ibid., fol. 100v.

the friars, and although they did not coordinate their actions, they both strove to overcome the crisis of the friary using any means at hand.

Some of the witnesses' words even suggest that the community's mental horizon and scope of action went beyond the goal of driving away the bad friars. The parish priest of Kölked, a village in the neighborhood, heard the townsmen murmuring only that "they want to expel the friars on their own and they would rather have the cloister empty than inhabited by these sinful friars to the scandal of the people."[20] But this appears to have been only one of several communal plans, and by no means the most ambitious. No coincidence perhaps that it was Gergely Polgár, a former town judge, who remembered that "at certain moments the indignation of the people rose so high that the citizens murmured that they would banish the negligent friars, who deserved to be driven out and replaced by others of a more religious standing."[21]

We have now seen that the landlords of Körmend, who were also patrons of the monastery, all dedicated themselves to overcoming the crisis of the friary. Although with varied tones and varied tools depending on differences in character, they all tried first to prompt the Augustinians to mend their ways, and when they failed, they sought to reform religious life by inviting another religious order to the town. The fundamental uniformity beyond the variety in detail of their actions, which in other words seem to follow a cultural pattern, suggests that a mapping of their motives will render landlord-peasant relations more comprehensible, or framed more generally the everyday practices of power beyond the pursuit of individual purposes.

In the documents designed to record and publicize and, by the same token, to legitimate their actions of religious reform, secular authorities represented their intervention as a practice of private devotion: as a good deed, pleasing to God, intended to mend their ways and help them gain individual salvation. The witnesses echoed the words of the articles of the questionnaire construed by the Erdődys: driven by religious zeal (*zelo fidei*), their landlord reformed the cloister. Similarly, King Wladislaus (Jagiello) II (1490–1516), who in 1493 closed the monastery of Visegrád because of the scandals of the Benedictine friars and donated it to the Paulines, claimed to have acted *pro salute anime nostre*.[22] In his petitions to Rome, Palatine Mihály Ország argued in 1467 that he wished to

20 Ibid, fol. 74r.

21 Ibid., fols 90rv.

22 Vilmos Fraknói, *Oklevéltár a magyar királyi kegyúri jog történetéhez* [Chartulary Concerning the History of the *Ius Patronii* of Hungarian Kings] (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1899), 55–56.

restore the desolate monastery in Szécsény because of his own devotion to the Franciscan order and his desire to achieve salvation.[23]

The Erdődy family also cherished close links with the Franciscan order. The brother of Péter, Simon, bishop of Zagreb in 1519, was granted a share in the spiritual merits accumulated by friars in return for the favors he did for the order.[24] Even more interesting, in 1531 Péter founded a friary for the observant Franciscans on his Slavonian estates of Okics (today Okić, Croatia).[25]

The practice of private devotion, however, was almost always represented simultaneously as a gesture in service of the spiritual needs of subjects. The questionnaire in Körmend gave voice to the seigniorial perspective: the landlord reformed the friary "to promote religion and further the salvation of the Christian flock." This was paraphrased by the parish priest of Hollós as follows: "so that the people's devotion to God would increase." A Körmend townsman thought that the reform "would day-by-day intensify the divine service and the devotion of the people."[26] As repeated unanimously by landlords, they reformed the religious houses in order to increase the faith of the people and to further their salvation.[27]

Private and collective devotion, or, more precisely, the authority's responsibility for the spiritual well-being of its subjects, were closely interwoven, but so were the sacred and the secular realms. Péter Erdődy admittedly hoped to provide for the terrestrial safety and prosperity of his family by raising the friary.[28] The crisis of religious institutions and the occasional violent brawls and heated quarrels between the laymen and the friars that accompanied it and disturbed everyday tranquility were undesirable for the secular authority. And such street conflicts were foreseeable when the embittered or outraged townsmen lost their temper, as probably happened not only in Körmend but also in the streets of Újlak (today Ilok, Croatia).[29] The anxieties of the authorities

23 Fr. Ulricus Hüntemann, ed., *Bullarium Franciscanum*, nova series 1 (Quaracchi: Ad Claras Aquas, 1929), no. 1397.

24 Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv (ÖStA HHStA), Familienarchiv Erdődy (Arch. Erd.), Urkunden 11106.

25 ÖStA HHStA Arch. Erd., Urkunden 11211, November 27, 1531 (later transcript).

26 *Register,* fol. 68v.

27 See the petitions of Mihály Ország, the Pálócis and Miklós Újlaki in *Bullarium Franciscanum,* no. 1397. (1467); MNL OL Fényképgyűjtemény (Photo Collection), Diplomatikai Fényképgyűjtemény (Photo Collection of Medieval Charters, DF) 275516, 275506.

28 See note 25 above.

29 "The inhabitants of the town and its surroundings […] cannot bear further the presence of the infamous friars in the cloister." MNL OL DF 275506.

must have intensified when disrespect for the local friars tended to turn into a general anticlerical attitude on the side of the laity. As some of the witnesses in Körmend confessed, the contempt of the people extended beyond the deviant friars to their religious order and even the entire clergy.[30] Any kind of mistrust or challenge of well-established power structures could not be watched idly by those in positions of authority. Kings and landlords alike expected that the "new friars of good life" would provide an example of model behavior for the town: "more than anyone else, with their holy life, they give a daily example for the faithful, by conduct and word alike, worthy of being followed."[31] As King Matthias wrote in his reform edict (1489) of all religious orders in the country: "our forerunners, kings and subjects alike, enjoyed peace and security afforded by the dedicated prayers of the religious to God. It is our duty to follow in their sacred footsteps."[32]

The discourse and its central notions concerning the religious reform activity of secular authorities help us understand them as integral to the process of domination at both the local and national levels. In other words, the authorities' endeavors to provide regular divine service and friars of exemplary lifestyles in monasteries were a symbolic means of soliciting the obedience of their subjects. In this context, the late medieval practice of Hungarian monarchs of transferring monastic houses of substantial wealth but ebbing lay demand to the mendicant orders or the hermit Paulines becomes understandable. Even if such transfers were disadvantageous economically, they functioned as gestures to legitimate and stabilize existing structures of power.[33] And returning to the case of Körmend, the fact that the anxiety, rage and contempt of the townsmen towards the friars never amounted in practice to a "rebellion" must have been due to the activities of landlords. As subsequent seigneurs all performed their duties as patrons of the friary, in the end this stopped the community from assuming their role.[34]

30 *Register,* fols 71r, 74r.

31 The reform decree of King Wladislaus II in 1493 published by Fraknói, *Oklevéltár,* 55–56.

32 László Erdélyi, ed., *A pannonhalmi Szent Benedek-rend története* [The History of the Order of Saint Benedict of Mons Sacer Pannoniae], vols 12b (Budapest: Stephaneum, 1902–1912), vol. 3, 540–42.

33 András Kubinyi, "Mátyás király és a monasztikus rendek" [King Matthias and the Monastic Orders], in Kubinyi, *Főpapok, egyházi intézmények és vallásosság a középkori Magyarországon* [Prelates, Ecclesiastical Institutions and Religiosity in Medieval Hungary] (Budapest: METEM, 1999), 239–48, 246, where the author suggests that the king undertook the economic expenses in return for religious benefits.

34 Natalie Zemon Davis, "The rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth-Century France," *Past and Present* 59 (1973): 51–91.

So far we have seen that communal and seigniorial interests ran parallel. Commoners and authorities alike strove to use all available means at hand to restore the religious life of the friary for both sacral and secular benefits, including the salvation of the soul and the restoration of civic peace and communal unity. The communal drive for reform, however, reached a stalemate and was successfully accelerated and channeled by seigniorial intervention.

How can we account for the fact, then, that their shared interests notwithstanding, even if we find no traces of direct communal and seigniorial cooperation, the reform of the friary, in the long run, ended in failure? Rather surprisingly, in later years the Erdődys, going back on their initial promises and the repeated requests of the Franciscans, neglected to restore the ruinous monastery buildings. Since the costs of restoration surpassed the financial capacities of both the town and the Franciscans, the friars eventually abandoned the uncomfortable place in 1524.[35] The failure of Péter Erdődy to restore the monastery, either out of disinterest or parsimony, renders the religious reform at Körmend an exception. Other landlords, who similarly engineered the renewal of the religious houses in the territory of their estates, never hesitated to invest financially.

If we compare the circumstances of the above cases of reform, one important difference emerges. The market-towns of Újlak, Sárospatak, and Szécsény, where the reformed monasteries in question stood, were at the same time the residences of their landlords, who came from the highest echelons of society.[36] The landlords and their families, the members of their households, often stayed in the castles adjacent to the market-towns, which also functioned as administrative centers and burial places for their kindred.

The reform of the monastery of Körmend seems to have been a more limited enterprise due to the fact that it did not form part of a grandiose plan to

35 See the letter of pope Clemens VII in 1524, in which, at the request of the observant Franciscan provincial, he grants a license for the friars to leave the friary of Körmend due to the unsuitable conditions. *Egyháztörténelmi Emlékek a Magyarországi Hitújítás korából* [Monumenta ecclesiastica tempora innovatae in Hungaria religionis illustrantia], ed. Vince Bunyitay et al., vols 5 (Budapest: Szent István Társulat, 1902–1912), vol. 1, no. 127.

36 On Szécsény and Újlak see: András Kubinyi, "Nagybirtok és főúri rezidencia Magyarországon a XV. század közepétől Mohácsig" [Great Estates and Aristocratic Residences in Hungary from the Middle of the Fifteenth Century to Mohács], *A Tapolcai Városi Múzeum Közleményei* 2 (1991): 214–17, 225. More on Újlak: Tamás Fedeles, "Egy középkori főúri család vallásossága. Az Újlakiak példája" [The Piety of a Medieval Magnate Family. The Case of the Újlakys], *Századok* 145/2 (2011): 377–418. On Sárospatak: Mihály Détschy, "Az utolsó Pálóci végrendelete" [The Testament of the Last Pálóci], in *Tanulmányok Borsa Iván tiszteletére,* ed. Enikő Csukovits (Budapest: MOL, 1988), 37–44.

create a splendid burial place for an aristocratic family, nor was it integrated into a more general scheme of estate development and urbanization. Can we perhaps attribute the final failure of the reform to this missing context? Péter Erdődy kept his residence in Monyorókerék (now Eberau in Austria), the headquarters of his estates in Vas County, which was well suited to the purpose due to the castle-construction works and foundation of ecclesiastical institutions (a parish church and Pauline monastery) carried out by his predecessors, the Ellerbachs.[37] On the other hand, Körmend at that time had no large estates attached to it, and although Erdődy turned the *castellum* here into a castle by fortification works, he had no earnest reason to spend much time there. Consequently, if Erdődy kept his residence elsewhere, the representation of the sacrality of his seigniorial authority played no role in reforming the monastery of Körmend. This would explain why he did not invest the time and money necessary in order to restore the monastery buildings.

The various strands of this inquiry, especially some of the earlier thoughts on communal action and the present discussion of seigniorial reform, suggest the conclusion that the landlord's intervention in the life of the Körmend friary seems to have been primarily triggered by clerical abuses and the discontent of the laity. With the observant Franciscans appearing on the scene, however, the scandals stopped and the feeling of insecurity quickly dissipated. The conduct of the new friars after the passing of a year met communal expectations, or at least the witnesses whose testimony has survived attested to a feeling of general satisfaction. The Franciscans made the most pressing repairs to the buildings and were said even to have tidied up the gardens. Once the daily routine set in again, the conditions of the monastery buildings, which did not serve Erdődy as a tool of aristocratic self-fashioning, were of no further interest to him, which reinforces the argument according to which the drive for reform lay with the community.

Reform was shaped in the dynamic of communal and seigniorial agendas. Their common desire to secure private and collective salvation and civic order and peace proved adequate motivation to expel the disobedient Augustinian friars. Subsequent lords of the town deemed it advisable to take charge of religious reform initiated by energy that came "from below," but which served at the same

37 In addition to Erdődy's choice of name (*de Monyorokerek,* sometimes *de Monozlo et Monyorokerek*), the fact that he was summoned to court from Monyorókerék also attests to the place of his residence. ÖStA HHStA Arch. Erd., Urkunden 10268 (1517).

time their own agenda of restoring peace and stabilizing power structures. In the long run, however, their interests diverged: for the community the cloister was an important factor, which both shaped and represented civic identity. Since communal financial resources were insufficient to accomplish the restoration, however, the fate of the friary was sealed. The final failure of reform resulted from the divergence of communal and seigniorial actions.

The Election of Pastors by Communities and Landlords

In the following, I draw general lessons from the Körmend story. Can we consider the active participation of community and landlord typical in the making of religious change? I contrast experiences with regard to mendicant reform with lay participation in religious life within the parish structure. This approach was prompted by the much contested, but established thesis according to which the protestant reformation created something originally new by turning the medieval church run by the clergy into a church of the laity. As is often claimed, under the impact of the new teachings, communities that previously were conceptualized as entirely passive suddenly realized their rights and began to demand the right to choose their own priests and supervise and control church incomes and properties.[38] A more nuanced understanding of the late medieval situation in general and villagers' busy piety and readiness to run local churches in order to further their work in particular may help us evaluate more precisely the nature of sixteenth-century religious changes. From a more general perspective, instead of assuming that practices automatically followed from ideas and that commoners passively followed the dictates of the elite, I again emphasize the constituent role of everyday practices in bringing about social and religious change.

The analysis is facilitated, furthermore, by an exceptionally rich source material on rural religion in the middle of the sixteenth century. By this time, the new teachings, which were first embraced in the royal court (where Mary of Habsburg arrived in the early 1520s with her courtiers) and the German-speaking

38 See the works of Steven Ozment ans Lawrence Stone and their "liberal protestant" followers who, with a firm belief in progress, argue for the revolutionary impact of the reformation in its religious, social, cultural and political aspects alike. Steven Ozment, *Protestants: The Birth of a Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, 1992*)*; Lawrence Stone, "The Educational Revolution in England," *Past and Present* 28 (1964): 41–80. The same argument is applied in service of an apology for Roman Catholicism against the secularization of the Reformation most recently by Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation. How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012).

cities, had reached the countryside, the Hungarian nobility and peasantry.[39] The detailed records of the church visitation carried out in the north-western regions of the country are therefore the early fruits of confessional rivalry. The commissioners of the reform-minded Catholic archbishop, Miklós Oláh (1493–1568), spared no time or energy to record what they had heard and seen in tiny villages and small towns in preparation for the national synod designed to restrain the epidemic spread of "heresy."[40] For the modern reader, their descriptions open a window onto communities in the process of religious change.

This change can best be grasped in the way local clergymen were elected and appointed to parochial positions. The ability of lay agents to elect and call reformed friars into monasteries was the key element, as we have seen, of observant reforms. It was also a crucial moment in the sixteenth century. As Robert Scribner observed writing on the early reformation in German cities:

> What made the Reformation a movement rather than a collection of abstract theological ideas was the attempt of ordinary people to put their belief into action. The most important step was to obtain a godly preacher who would proclaim the Word and share in the building of some kind of revivified Christian community. For this reason, the efforts of little communities [...] to find and keep a godly preacher are central to the understanding of Reformation.[41]

As for the countryside, villages and small towns with feudal authorities above them (which are our primary concern), we can build on Peter Blickle's convincing claim that city and village shared their basic reformation agenda of "communalizing the church," the crucial element of which was the appointment of pastors.[42]

It seems all the more intriguing to approach the appointment of clergy in the interplay of communal and seigniorial attitudes and practices, since historical scholarship, and Hungarian historians in particular, portray the process as

39 On the early reformation in Hungary see two accounts that complement each other: Katalin Péter, "Hungary," in *The Reformation in National Context*, ed. Bob Scribner, Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich, (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), 150–67; Zoltán Csepregi, "Konfessionsbildung und Einheitsbestrebungen im Königreich Ungarn zur Regierungszeit Ferdinands I," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 94 (2003): 243–75. See also Csepregi's article on the evangelical movement in the present issue.

40 The visitation records are published in *Reformné hnutie v arcibiskupstve ostrihomskom do r. 1564 (Reformatio in archidioecesi Strigoniensi ad a. 1564),* ed. Vojtech Bucko (Bratislava: Unia, 1939).

41 Scribner, "Preachers and People," 124.

42 Peter Blickle, *The Communal Reformation: the Quest for Salvation in Sixteenth-Century Germany,* trans. by Thomas Dunlap (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1992), 98–110.

orchestrated either by the one or the other. The first modern master narratives of the Hungarian reformation, in accordance with European trends of historical writing of the interwar period, are organized around the alleged "heroes" of the reformation, converted lords and "star" Lutheran pastors working in their courts. Consequently, their narratives rest on the assumption that tenants had to follow the new faith of their landlord passively. This means, on the one hand, that these narratives make no distinction between aristocratic private devotion and patronal conduct, which we observed with regard to cloister reforms conducted by landlords. On the other hand, by conjecturing that the right of patronage mechanically governed social behavior, they leave no space whatsoever for communal action.[43]

Against this background, the recent account of the rural reformation can be read as a counter narrative. Here, the protagonists are peasants who freely choose their religion, since they can find their ways in matters of religion autonomously and can make rational decisions. Their freedom of religious choice is facilitated, as the argument goes, by the indifference of their landlords. The apparent cases when Lutheran patron lords kept evangelical preachers in their castle churches yet did not remove the old village clergy from their estates made the author conclude that they were simply not interested in the religion (in what kind of divine service they attended and who performed it for them) of their subjects, just as they did not interfere with the choice of spouse and other personal affairs of their serfs. The author accounts for this seigniorial attitude within the process of domination: after the open conflict between lords and peasants in the 1514 peasant revolt, the issue of religion became neither a tool with which to elicit the obedience of subjects nor a means of everyday peasant resistance in the sixteenth century.[44]

My aim is therefore to draw a more balanced picture of the ways in which communities and landlords participated in religious reform. First of all, the large discrepancy of seigniorial action with regards to the friary and parish church is astonishing. The suggested indifference of lords to the religion of their subjects runs against the sense of responsibility for the spiritual well-being

43 The classic narrative of "seigniorial reformation" by János Horváth (*A reformáció jegyében. A Mohács utáni félszázad magyar irodalomtörténete* [In the Spirit of the Reformation. The Literary History of the Half-Century after Mohács] [Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1953]) based its social model on interwar narratives, most notably Bálint Hóman and Gyula Szekfű, *Magyar történet* [Hungarian History], vol. 3 (Budapest: MKENY 1939), 247–78.

44 Katalin Péter, *A reformáció: kényszer vagy választás* [The Reformation: Coercion or Free Choice?], (Budapest: Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, 2004).

of parishioners manifested by Péter Erdődy and other secular authorities of previous generations through their acts of reforming religious houses. The figure of the indifferent landlord emerged from the church visitation records mentioned briefly above. The thesis of indifferent communities, which is even more shocking, was voiced, moreover, on the basis of their correspondence with their landlord. In this case study on seigniorial-communal relations with regard to religion from the 1520–1530s, not only did George the Pious, Margrave of Brandenburg-Ansbach (1484–1543), a marked Lutheran convert, not take any interest in the spiritual needs of the subjects on his estates in Eastern-Hungary, but the small town communities also passively observed the appointment of his officials to parochial benefices, which consequently left the people with no mass.[45] On the one hand, we need to explain how this is compatible with the elevated communal concern for religious matters (aimed at a sufficient provision for sacraments and the preparation for the afterlife) witnessed, as one case among many, in Körmend. On the other hand, it is important to notice that active and passive communities obviously coexisted. Did the level of communal autonomy change in relation to the conduct of the lord? Or are we deceived by our sources? The church visitation record is a product of a dialogue between clergy and commoners: the church officials, when they arrived in the remote little places, asked the parish priest about his flock and the members of the community about their priest, respectively. Lord patrons, who were most often absent magnates, participated in this dialogue only exceptionally, and are mentioned only when they had done something exceptional. Do they appear as more marginal figures in the process of religious change as a consequence of this? And if communities did not negotiate with their landlords in matters of religion, does this necessarily mean that they were passive and indifferent? In order to be able to draw a more balanced picture of communal and seigniorial attitudes in matters of religion, it is worth considering a few relevant but often neglected aspects.

For one thing, if village priests followed different creeds than their patron lords in the mid-sixteenth century, this can be attributed to other factors than the alleged indifference of landlords toward religious practice in the parish. Several communities had the right to elect their own priest, a fact that was first given

45 Zoltán Csepregi, "A mezőváros és a földesúr diskurzusa vallási kérdésekben Brandenburgi György kelet-magyarországi és felső-sziléziai uradalmaiban 1523–1543" [The Discourse of Market-town and Landlord in Matters of Religion on the Estates of George of Brandenburg-Ansbach in Eastern-Hungary and Upper-Silesia], in *Mezőváros, reformáció és irodalom, 16–18. század* [Market-town, Reformation, and Literature], ed. András Szabó (Budapest: Universitas, 2005), 27–32.

due attention in the narrative of the communal reformation. While in England a lower level of communal participation in religious life developed in the form of the election of churchwardens, on the Continent (including in Hungary) several examples testify to the control of both town and village governments over the parish church. As the findings of the leading medievalist András Kubinyi suggest, communal participation in late medieval Hungary had diverse origins and involved diverse rights and practices. The right of electing the pastor could be part of the authority of the municipal government granted by royal privilege. In other instances, the "communitas parochialis," which tended to be identical with the political community, was granted the right to elect the parish incumbent by the local patron lord (*subpatronatus*).[46] But it was not unusual for the patron and community to present their common nominee to the bishop together.[47] Random examples attesting to the varied equilibrium of communal-seigniorial roles prop up relatively frequently in the fifteenth-century corpus: members of the local noble patron family, the churchwardens and the entire community of Várkony (today Vrakúň, Slovakia), a village near Pozsony (Bratislava, Slovakia), elected their new pastor together, whom they had previously dismissed for his misbehavior.[48] And we have the rare written evidence from Szentendre, a village under royal authority, where the community explicitly claimed to be acting on their right of patronage over the parish church dedicated to Saint Andrew when electing their pastor.[49]

Patrons, consequently, were probably not indifferent, but rather their scope of action was limited by communal rights. And their willingness to share rights seems to have been a natural consequence of the sharing of fiscal burdens,

46 A similar tendency prevailed in the way hospitals were run and supervised, which from the fifteenth century increasingly became urban institutions (several hospitals functioned in market-towns and a few in villages), since communities either founded new hospitals or took over the right of patronage from other founders. As a result, hospital chaplains entrusted with pastoral services were elected by town councilors acting as hospital masters. Judit Majorossy and Katalin Szende, "Hospitals in Medieval and Early Modern Hungary," in *Europäisches Spitalwesen: institutionelle Fürsorge in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, ed. Martin Scheutz (Vienna–Munich: Oldenbourg, 2008), 275–320.

47 With slight modifications, Kubinyi supported by ample evidence the arguments of Dietrich Kurze (*Pfarrerwahlen im Mittelalter. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Gemeinde und des Niederkirchenwesens*, Forschungen zur kirchlichen Rechtsgeschichte und zum Kirchenrecht 6 [Cologne–Graz, 1966] concerning communal rights in the election of parish priests in late medieval Hungary. "Plébánosválasztások és egyházközségi önkormányzat a középkori Magyarországon" [Election of Parish Priests and Congregations in Medieval Hungary], *Aetas* 7, no. 2 (1991): 26–45.

48 MNL OL DL 48649 (1456).

49 Kovachich Martinus Georgius, *Formulae solennes styli* (Pest, 1799), 280–81 (ca. 1480).

which is suggested not only by the admittedly scanty medieval evidence, but also by the more systematic data produced by church visitors in the early 1560s. Members of the official church usually met the elected representatives of village and parish community, the judge and the churchwarden (*vitricus*). In addition to interrogating members of the community about the moral and religious profile of the priest and asking the priest about the morals of the community, visitors were interested in the state of the church, inside and outside. When they found the church building in bad condition (*ruinosa, desolata*), as was often the case, they admonished the judge and the churchwarden, the elected representatives of the village community and congregation, to see to the repair of the church.[50] Decayed, disorderly churches were not exceptional, whatever the creed of the patron and community. In a few instances, however, patrons also appeared on the scene. They were the petty nobles living in the village, as opposed to the distant magnate patrons. And when visitors met patrons, they always urged patron and community together to renovate the church.[51] Looking at the ruinous church in the village Kosztolány, the visitor commented: the state of the church is due not to the priest, but to the negligence of patrons [the magnate family Ország] and community.[52] Visitors put the blame on the patrons alone when they attributed the decay to the disputes among local petty nobles, who cared little for the church buildings.[53] Obviously, the church authorities held patrons and community together responsible for the physical condition of the church. Peasants and nobles shared this view. Usually they promised to do the work.[54] When peasants refused, they claimed to be heavily overloaded by their landlord with tasks, but they never argued that it was not their duty.[55]

The visitation records also offer examples of instances in which communities actively participated in the election of the parish incumbent. For example, the peasants of Garamszentbenedek (today Hronský Beňadik, Slovakia) living under the authority of the local Benedictine abbey, caught a priest in the street

50 Bucko, ed., *Reformné hnutie,* Galánta (Galanta, Slovakia, 146), Radosna (Radošina, Slovakia, 160), Tapolcsány (Topoľčany, Slovakia, 163), Kacsány (Kvačany, Slovakia, 167).

51 Ibid., for example Bossány (Bošany, Slovakia, 158); Vásárd (Trhovište, Slovakia, 165).

52 Ibid., Kosztolány (Veľké Kostoľany, Slovakia, 187).

53 Ibid., Egyházaskarcsa (Kostolné Kračany, Slovakia, 139); Ruttka (Vrútky, Slovakia, 178); Koros (Krušovce, Slovakia, 183).

54 Ibid., for example Bossány (Bošany, Slovakia, 158). The concern of noble patrons for the state of church buildings, although it varied in intensity, is also reflected by their testamentary legacies for the building and decoration of churches.

55 Ibid., Lapás (Veľký Lapáš, Slovakia, 165); Szentmárton (Martin nad Žitavou, Slovakia, 202).

themselves. The "heretic" priest of the neighboring village had run away from the visitors. He was arrested in Szentbenedek, and the villagers took the opportunity to fill the vacancy in the parish church by electing him. They asked only the visitor for permission, which was necessary since the priest was obviously a no-good Catholic, wearing a beard but no tonsure.[56] In Magasfalva (Vysoká, Slovakia) the parishioners took good care of the church, but it had no incumbent. The visitor apparently asked them why they did not have a parish priest, to which they replied: "they are ready to keep a good Catholic priest if they are authorized."[57] This shows the people's awareness that the issue was open to negotiation and they could obtain the right to appoint their priest. And they also considered it natural to cover the living expenses of their pastor. In Szentpéter (Liptovský Peter, Slovakia), the priest was a local boy and a fierce heretic, openly refuting Catholic tenets, which the visitor noted: "confident of his parishioners' support, he fears nothing."[58] There can be little doubt that he was picked by the community.

Even these few examples offer ample testimony to the widespread experience of communal participation, though at different levels, in the election of priests. This does not contradict the contention of historians according to which communal patronage and nomination rights remained an exception throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in most parts of Europe.[59] Nevertheless, several parish communities exerted influence over the choice of the parish priest as a natural consequence of their financial responsibilities in the maintenance of the parish church and the provision of a livelihood for the priest, to which I return later.[60]

From the perspective of this inquiry, the consequence of communal participation in the election of parish priests is obvious. If the parish priest followed a different religious creed than his patron in the sixteenth century, this might have ensued through varied scenarios. True, the landlord may have been indifferent to parish religion and appointed any priest available. The shortage of priests in the transitional period of the mid-sixteenth century, with the decay of the old Church and the gradual formation of new ones, seriously

56 Ibid., 215.

57 Ibid., 142.

58 Ibid., 169.

59 Blickle, *Communal Reformation,* 166.

60 For England and Europe see Beat Kümin, "The English Parish in a European Perspective," in *The Parish in English Life,* ed. Katherine French, et al. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 24. On churchwardens in the Hungarian countryside see Kubinyi, "Plébánosválasztások," 35–38.

limited choices. But it is just as possible that the village community selected its own candidate. Either scenario (and the alternation of the two) might have resulted in the confessional diversity of parish priests within the territory of a single estate. Surprisingly, however, this was not the case. When the data of the visitation records are grouped and compared by estates, it becomes clear that in some of the estates one of the confessions, Catholic or non-Catholic, prevailed. The only plausible explanation for this is that the magnate enforced his will over all his lands, since it seems improbable that hundreds of small localities all shared the same religious sympathies. Even if it did not interfere with their feudal authority, for some magnates the creed of the village priests still mattered, as did the kind of religious services they performed for their congregations. Others did not bother. This variance of seigniorial conduct can be accounted for only by personal dispositions, the influence of which was further facilitated by the multiplicity of legal standards providing ample scope for individual action.

András Báthori, who is commonly known as having been a fierce persecutor of "heretics" as voivode of Transylvania (1552–1553) and judge royal (1554–1566), seems not to have endured any opposition in his role as lord patron on his estates either. He made sure to have Catholic priests in all parish churches, and if the community inclined to the new faith, the clashing sympathies of lord and community resulted in vacant churches.[61] Under such willful lords, communities that opted to negotiate with the priest instead of the landlord did better, as village clergy adapted more willingly to parishioners and served communion according to different practices, in one or two kinds, to everyone as requested.[62] At the same time, the "attentive" landlord rewarded Catholic congregations by renovating the church.[63] On the other side of the confessional divide there was another aristocratic combatant of the evangelical movement, György Bebek, who had a similar temperament. The new preachers to whom he had granted the old benefices openly challenged the authority of the visitors, calling Bebek their

61 The example of the village Kürt (Mostová, Slovakia) is instructive. In 1561, the visitor found a Catholic priest who, as he perceived, had started to convert the population. A year later, the community argued that the landlord was to blame for their having no priest, and noted that in earlier years they had had Lutheran pastors. So whether the community removed the Catholic priest (and put the blame on the landlord) or the landlord dismissed the Lutheran pastor, the result was that there was, temporarily at least, no incumbent. Ibid., 137–38, 147.

62 Ibid., for example Dévény (Devín, Slovakia, 141); Récse (Rechendorf, Rača, Slovakia, 143); Udvarnok (Dvorníky, Slovakia, 166).

63 Ibid., Bajna (Bojná, Slovakia, 161).

prelate, king and defendant.[64] The bewilderment or, respectively, the fascination of visiting officials, which made them comment profusely when they experienced such an overwhelming power of landlords, suggests, however, that this was not the order of the day.[65]

In contrast, on the estates of the Forgách brothers, the Révay brothers, Ferenc Thurzó and Gáspár Mágochy, parish priests (as Table 1 shows) followed various creeds, a fact which suggests no intensive seigniorial control over appointments. Whether Catholic or Protestant, their personal dispositions allowed communal tastes to prevail in matters of religion. Finally, the estate of Kristóf Ország also manifested religious diversity, with a strong Catholic majority under a landlord with Calvinist inclinations. Although in Csejte (Čachtice, Slovakia), the place where the landlord had his residence, the parish priest was a "heretic, who infected a great part of the town," those still clinging to the old faith could attend services held by two different altar-priests.[66]

While law, legal customs and the principle of reciprocity integral to social relations defined the scope of communal action, on some occasions this could be reduced to nothing by the policies of aggressive magnate lords. The process of domination, if not in relation to their peasants, also influenced seigniorial attitudes to parish religion. The scope of communal participation was limited not only by head-strong landlords, but also by the increasing role played by parish benefices in the system of noble patronage in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. As was the case in German territories, Hungarian magnates, modeling their actions on the royal practice, often rewarded their noble clients (*familiares* or *servitores*) for their services in the management of estates with ecclesiastical benefices under their patronage, parish churches featuring high among them.[67] In other words, the role of magnates as patrons of churches and as patrons in the system of noble clientele intersected at this point. Although the phenomenon can be documented all over the country, there is no single rule: the conflict of roles was resolved differently depending largely on personal dispositions.

This kind of conflict of seigniorial roles, which affected parish religion, did not arise with regard to monastic affairs. Mendicant houses had no substantial

64 Takáts Sándor, "Bebek György," in Takáts, *Régi idők, régi emberek* [Old Times and Their People] (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1922), 67–87; Bucko, ed., *Reformné hnutie,* Szögliget, Tornagörgő (Hrhov, Slovakia), 229.

65 Ibid., Zámoly ("omnia floci pendunt ipsi" [patroni Lutherani]) 127., Trsztena (Trstená, Slovakia, 168).

66 Ibid., 188.

67 Zoltán Csepregi, *A reformáció nyelve: A magyarországi reformáció első negyedszázadának vizsgálata alapján* [The Language of the Reformation: An Analysis of the First 25 Years of the Reformation in Hungary] (Budapest, 2010) DsC dissertation, 36–40.

The landlord and his private devotion	Sons of János Révay: unknown	Thurzó Ferenc: bishop of Nyitra, took a wife in 1557	Báthori András: Catholic	Ország Kristóf: with Helvetian symphaties	Simon and Imre Forgách: Patronizing Lutheran preachers	Mágochy Gáspár: Patronizing Lutheran Preachers	Bebek György: Lutheran
Estate and Year of Visitation	Estate Szklabinya (Túróc County) 1559, 1560	Estate Bajmóc (Nyitra County) 1559, 1560	Estate Sempte (Pozsony County) 1561, 1562 Estate Galgóc 1559	Estate Csejte 1560	Estate Gimes (Bars County 1559, 1561	Estate Torna (Torna County) 1561	Estate Szádvár (Torna County) 1561
Number of Catholic parish priests	4	9	15	14	1	1	0
Number of non-Catholic parish priests	4	3	0	2	1	2	8
Number of parish priests with 'suspectus' religion	1	2	0	2	3	0	0
Vacancies	1	2	6	4	1	4	several
Total	10	16	21	22	6	7	
Religious profile of estate	Diverse	Diverse with Catholic majority	Catholic	Overwhelming Catholic majority	Diverse	Diverse	Non-Catholic

Table 1. Religious affiliation of parish priests on private estates

properties, which limited the incentive of patrons to interfere. And although town and city magistrates fostered growing ambitions to control matters of local religion, religious orders, perhaps due to the direct supremacy of the pope over them, more efficiently defended the immunity of their jurisdiction over the nominations of local superiors.[68] As a result, mendicant houses could not be turned into a means of fund raising or noble patronage in the hands of secular lords, which rendered them rather predisposed to act as good patrons with no loss. And the reorganization of religious life, a process in which they willingly participated, served also the legitimation of their power, of which they were fully aware. Alongside the contingencies of individual character, the structural variables inherent in the parish and monastic contexts therefore seem sufficient to explain the varied proceedings of magnates as church patrons.

I have considered some of the factors that were at play in the dynamics of communal and seigniorial agendas, which as a consequence meant that the appointment of local clergy could proceed according to varied scripts from place to place. Just as the character of magnates exerted an enormous influence on the scenario of priest appointments, the ability of communities to act autonomously also varied independently of seigniorial behavior, an initial impression reinforced by visitation records. One is astonished by the huge differences between communities living next door to one another. In one place there were people capable of taking care of themselves, or at least the autonomous ones got the lead, whereas a few miles away people seemed to be totally passive. The diverse attitude of congregations towards religion was also reflected, irrespectively of confessional sympathies, by the condition of their churches. Several congregations lived without a priest and did nothing to change the situation. Some of them—willingly or under pressure—ungrudgingly followed the faith of their lord.[69] But for example in Liptószentmiklós (Liptovský Mikuláš, Slovakia), the community,

68 For the scope and limits of communal supervision over mendicant houses and the appointment of superiors see the examples of the relations of the city magistrate of the free royal city of Bártfa (Bardejov, Slovakia) and the Augustinian friary (Guitman Barnabás, Reformáció és felekezetszerveződés Bártfán [Reformation and Confessionalization in Bártfa], in *Szentírás, Hagyomány, Reformáció. Teológia- és egyháztörténeti tanulmányok* [Holy Scripture, Tradition and Reformation. Studies on Theology and Church History], ed. Beatrix F. Romhányi et al. (Budapest: Gondolat, 2009), 252–62, and the case of the free royal city of Eperjes (Prešov, Slovakia) and the Carmelite house. Kund Regényi, "*Az eperjesi Szentháromság karmelita konvent története"* [The History of the Carmelite Cloister Dedicated to the Holy Trinity of Eperjes], in *Tanulmányok a középkori magyar történelemről* [Studies on the Medieval History of Hungary] ed. Sarolta Homonnai (Szeged: SZTE, 1999), 103–14.

69 Bucko, ed., *Reformné hnutie,* see for example Zámoly, under the shared patronage of two noblemen, 127.

going against the Catholic parish priest, was ready to pay a Lutheran pastor in cooperation with the patrons.[70] I suspect it is no coincidence that the parish priest of Handlovalehota (Handlová, Slovakia), who was unwilling to serve the communion to his parishioners under both kinds, was replaced the following year by another priest who was ready to do so.[71]

Finally, for a more realistic portrayal it is essential to stress that religious life at the parish church was multi-layered and complex. The parish incumbent was very often not the only clergymen performing religious services. Rather there were several other clerics employed under various circumstances. Thus even when a community seems to have accepted the nomination of the landlord or the lack of a resident parish priest passively, this did not mean that they were watching helplessly as they were left deprived of priests and sacraments. The subjects of George of Brandenburg may have simply accepted that there was no priest to bury their dead, baptize their babies, and administer the Eucharist in the mass, and they calmly went without. Several other examples, however, attest to the great variety of alternative strategies that were used by communities in order to secure regular and versatile sacramental worship. Although with changing intensity, this seems to have been a general ambition of late medieval small communities.

Temporary vacancies were usually remedied at least at an individual level: some of the people visited the nearby churches to receive the sacraments.[72] Several communities, or their elected officials, judges and churchwardens, invited a nearby parish priest to hold mass a few times a week and administer the sacraments in their church in return for communal payment. This kind of mother-filial church relation was organized in the village of Grünau/Grinád (Myslenice, Slovakia) under Serédy. Serédy's official did not let the alien priest enter and declared himself their parish priest so that—as villagers complained to the investigators—he could take possession of the wine from the church's vineyard, which the villagers had started to cultivate collectively when their pastor had left them.[73] Although perhaps to no avail, even under the worst of landlords the community tried to provide for their spiritual needs.

At other places, people did not satisfy with having no parish priest. The high level of autonomy of the people living in Jánosfalva (Bačka Palanka, Serbia), a tiny

70 Ibid., 171.

71 Ibid., 157, 181.

72 See passim in ETE vol. 5, no. 92, and Bucko, ed., *Reformné hnutie*.

73 ETE vol. 5, no. 92, 92.

village in southern Hungary, is very striking. Although they had a parish priest, he was absent and "ran after worldly affairs" instead of performing his pastoral duties, as they complained repeatedly to the diocesan vicar. Their insistence brought success. As the priest Imre refused to obey the vicar's summons, the vicar allowed the community to elect and present a new priest.[74] What rendered this remote little community capable of acting so independently? Was there a landlord involved in the story, whose authority they tried to evade by appealing instead to the ecclesiastical superior of the non-resident priest? In this case the disobedient incumbent, who perhaps managed the affairs of his lord elsewhere while enjoying the benefice, trusted in the support of his patron. But it is equally possible that the community's confidence was founded by law or custom and they had long acted as patrons. We are left with the vicar's words: he allowed the community to choose and present another pastor, acknowledging the danger imminent in their being left without a priest administering the sacraments, especially in times of plague. So be it as it may, the necessity, the ultimate need to perform the last rites for the dying and to bury the dead, must have added additional impetus for communal action.

Petitioning the diocesan court concerning absent priests or vacancies seems to have been an efficient and well-established strategy that the people living on the Brandenburg-estate could also have used. If not, they had other possibilities. The peasants of Jánosfalva were totally dependent on their parish priest, as they argued, since they had no auxiliary clergymen employed at the parish church. In other words, their financial capacities were probably only sufficient to pay for the services of one priest, although they well knew, as their comment suggests, that several other villages could afford to have and did have more than one priest. There is evidence indicating that parochial assistant clergy, chaplains and schoolmasters were often hired directly by parishioners to assist the incumbent.[75] Only a systematic collection of the scanty data will persuasively demonstrate that alongside feudal patrons, village and small town communities, or communal institutions like confraternities and guilds were able and eager founders of side-altars and chapels in parish churches (as well as outlying chapels independent of the parochial structure). Yet we have good reason to conjecture that the practice, well documented in German territories,

74 MNL OL DF 266123 (1472).

75 As the villagers of Nyárasd (Topoľníky, Slovakia) said to investigators, in addition to the parish priest, who celebrated two masses a week in exchange for his livelihood, they were also maintaining a chaplain, whom they paid additionally and without detriment to the parish priest. ETE vol. 5, no. 92, 98.

existed in Hungary too.[76] Throughout the late middle ages, several churches were founded and built by parishioners, who in consequence had the right of patronage.[77]

In the case of Körmend, the data available indicates only that some of the altars in the parish church were raised by landlords, while the origin of others is unknown, but the confraternity had its altar in the cloister, which was a financially rational decision, as the friars were able to celebrate the divine services of the confraternity without having to shoulder the burden of maintaining a priest. But even village churches often had two, three, or even more side-altars, as is indicated both by the scattered late medieval data and the findings of the mid-sixteenth-century visitation.[78] And like village parish priests, chantry priest not infrequently were local boys, suggesting that the community or their families bestowed the small benefice for their sons, just as citizens also provided in this manner for both the sacred and social prestige of their families.[79] And if they had no local candidate, they could freely choose from among the increased number of vagrant priests on the lookout for benefices or at least some temporary employment.[80] Peasants in command of more moderate economic resources left their purchased vineyards, mills or the few forints they had in order to pay a priest to say perpetual or temporal masses, wishing to provide for their personal salvation and the salvation of their kindred while also aiming to meet the needs of communal clerical provision.[81]

To cite one example, a couple in the market-town of Sátoraljaújhely left a deserted mill to contribute to the cost of building a local parish church. Their

76 Cf. Fuhrmann, *Die Kirche im Dorf*; Guido Heinzmann, *Gemeinschaft und Identität spätmittelalterlicher Kleinstädte Westfalens* (Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2006), 263–72.

77 For examples see Ferencz Kollányi, *A magán kegyúri jog hazánkban a középkorban* [The Right of Private Patronage in Medieval Hungary], (Budapest: MTA, 1908), 63, 68; Ernő Marosi, *Magyar falusi templomok* [Village Churches in Hungary] (Budapest: Corvina, 1975), 26–28.

78 Bucko, ed., *Reformné hnutie,* passim, but recorded more thoroughly by visitors in Hont and Bars Counties in 1559, 201–15.

79 A good example is the market-town of Egerszeg in Transdanubia, where three out of its four chantry priests came from some of the trend-setting local families. Pfeiffer, ed., *A veszprémi egyházmegye*, 36–37. As we have seen, the majority of parish priests, chaplains and chantry-priests in Körmend and the neighborhood of Körmend were also locals.

80 For the growing number of unbeneficed clergy in late medieval Hungary (in line with the general European tendency), see Gabriella Erdélyi, *Szökött szerzetesek. Erőszak és fiatalok a késő középkorban* [Runaway Friars. Violence and Youth in Late Medieval Hungary] (Budapest: Libri, 2011), 97–114.

81 Examples of peasants' pious legacies: ETE vol. 1, no. 66, 68 (vineyards for side-altars); Other immovable assets given to local religious houses, primarily the Paulines or parish churches in return for masses for the soul: MNL OL DL 20905, 21175 (1500), 21327 (1504), 21935 (1509). Also László Solymosi,

private legacy came under communal management: the three churchwardens sold it to the parish priest of the neighboring market town, Patak, and through them the *tota communitas* was responsible for defending him in its peaceful possession.[82] Another parochial event in the same place a few years earlier also shows tangibly that parish religion was a communal matter. In 1506, the citizens of the free royal city of Bártfa (Bardejov, Slovakia), who were cultivating vineyards in the wine-growing hills of Újhely, proposed to the councilors of Újhely that they would raise a new chantry in the parish church provided also with living expenses for a chantry-priest. The people of Újhely were so enthusiastic about the enterprise that they added two more vineyards, obviously from the communal asset accumulated by similar pious donations, to the chantry-benefice. The chantry foundation letter issued by the parish priest and councilors of Újhely entrusted the citizens of Bártfa to elect the person of the chantry-priest, whom they subordinated to the incumbent, also specifying his liturgical obligations, which included ministering the incumbent in festive masses. Thus the entire community profited from the religious services of the third chantry-priest in the town.[83] The patrons of the parish church, the members of the magnate Pálóci family, played no role in the joint enterprise of the two communities, the actions of which illustrate well the scope and limits of communal participation and financial resources.

Conclusion

Whether communities managed to influence absentee incumbents to nominate as their vicars people from among the assistant clergymen fostered by parishioners is a question that still waits to be answered. As the rich German evidence suggests, in practice this tendency rendered congregations capable of controlling parish

"Két középkor végi testamentum Szabolcs vármegyéből" [Two Late Medieval Testaments from Szabolcs County], in *Emlékkönyv Rácz István 70. születésnapjára* [Festschrift for the 70th Birthday of István Rácz], ed. Ágnes Kovács (Debrecen: KLTE, 1999), 218–20.

82 MNL OL DL 21935 (1509).

83 Ibid., 216809. For more details on the chantry-foundation in particular and the churches of late medieval Újhely in general see István Tringli, "Sátoraljaújhely egyházai a reformáció előtt" [The Churches of Sátoraljaújhely before the Reformation], in *Erősségénél fogva várépítésre való. Tanulmányok a 70 éves Németh Péter tiszteletére* [Proper for Castle Building for its Strength. Studies in Honour of Péter Németh on his 70th Birthday], ed. Juan Cabello et. al. (Nyíregyháza: Jósa András Múzeum, 2011), 377–96.

religion.[84] One nonetheless can conclude that local religious life was manifold and complex, including communal and individual practices that created autonomous levels of parish religion, independent of patrons. Negotiation with landlords was only one means among many for communities to provide for their priests and their sacramental demands. Much as the people of Körmend mobilized their resources in order to restore religious life in the friary, parish communities actively participated in the maintenance of parochial religion. Sacramental piety and clergy served a variety of individual and communal needs, both spiritual and temporal. The vitality of the sacramental mentality is well reflected by the general demand of communion under both kinds. The widespread practice of people taking both the body and the blood of Christ irrespectively of their Catholic or Protestant sympathies was recorded by visitors with little astonishment in the 1560s.[85]

The appointment of local clergy, which I consider the focal point of religious change, was shaped in the countryside in the matrix of communal and seigniorial agendas. The comparison of the monastic and parish context reveals that the differences in seigniorial behavior, the tendency to be dedicated to monastic reform and disinterested in parochial provision for clergy and sacraments, was unquestionably influenced by individual dispositions, but more importantly was also structurally rooted. As opposed to parochial livelihoods, mendicant houses could not be used to reward their noble clients, and magnates were predisposed to act as good patrons.

Diverse scenarios in relation to the parish church resulted partly from fragmented local conditions. The right of patronage was shared in various forms between lords and communities. And irrespectively of written law, communities had diverse strategies to participate in the election and appointment of local clergy. The late medieval multiplicity of legal standards in turn increased the scope of individual action: we have observed landlords who asserted their will in parish religion as in any other sphere of life, while others did not interfere with the religious choices of their subjects. Communities also manifested different levels of autonomous action in matters of religion, often independently of feudal authority, but rather as a result, presumably, of local politics.

84 Dieter Scheler, "Patronage und Aufstieg im Niederkirchenwesen," in *Sozialer Aufstieg. Funktionseliten im Spätmittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit,* ed. Günther Schulz (München: Oldenbourg, 2002), 315–36.

85 Bucko, ed., *Reformné hnutie,* passim, in fact on all pages. It seems highly probable that in Hungary, as opposed to Germany for example, the earlier practice of communion under both kinds for the laity did not cease by the fifteenth century. Mályusz, *Egyházi társadalom,* 317–18.

Communal election of local clergy, which in the late middle ages depended on local privileges and negotiations (in other words it was a sporadic secular matter), was turned by Luther into a universal Christian right legitimated by the Gospel, an ideological shift that must have given impetus to communal agendas.[86] Similarly, the laicization of religion, the expanding sphere of lay activities in church affairs, had already blurred the distinction between clergy and laity when Luther turned it into a general Christian norm by proposing the principle of the priesthood of all believers. My inquiry thus reinforces the scholarly perception of the interconnected nature of late medieval reform and sixteenth-century reformations, all being part of the long-term processes of Christianization of society and growing lay agency in matters of religion.

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