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**PROBLEMS ARISING FROM WITHHOLDING INFORMATION IN
THE PRACTICE OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN THE SOUTH-
EASTERN PART OF THE HUNGARIAN KINGDOM
AT THE TURN OF THE 18th AND THE 19th CENTURIES***

Abstract: The study investigates the church administration of the Békés Reformed Church Diocese located in the south eastern region of the Hungarian Kingdom. The diocese had the size of the territory of Belgium, since its borders extended from the region of the Kőrös rivers to the Lower Danube. However, this vast territory had only 30 parishes. The examined period is from 1791 to 1821, because numerous sources survived in the period between the synod of Buda (1791) and the reforming of the diocese (1821) which report on the controlling of information. Therefore, I examine how the information of church administration reached their respective addressees and how the further dissemination of information was impeded.

Keywords Reformed Church, Hungarian Kingdom, church administration, information history, Bánát.

1. Introduction

The aim of my study is to analyze the history of the Békés Reformed Diocese located in the south eastern region of the Hungarian Kingdom from the perspective of information history. I intend to look at which pieces of information could be accessed and which were classified. In order to reconstruct this process, it first has to be investigated what kind of organizational sociological system was maintained by the Reformed Church.

During the Reformation in Europe, Protestant Churches set up various structures of church administration. The church administration of the Reformed Church in Hungary did not entirely follow the principles of Calvinism, because Calvin introduced a Presbyterian church administration in Geneva in the 16th century. In contrast, in Hungary with the introduction of the office of the deacon and the bishop, a hierarchical relationship was

* The text is translated from Hungarian to English by Zoltán Cora.

created and the involvement of secular elements into the church administration was opposed. The congregation became the main institution of the grass-rooted church in the Hungarian Reformed Church as well; however, for historical reasons, the independence of the parishes was restricted by the dioceses and the church districts. Obviously, this restriction could not be compared with the centralised organization of the Catholic Church. From the 17th century the puritan and Presbyterian movements intended to involve seculars into the church administration, but the landlords opposed the participation of serfs in the church administration. Nevertheless, in the 18th century and especially after the *Carolina Resolutio* had come into effect, the influence of the seculars in the Church strengthened because the Reformed Church could realize its interests only by the support of wealthy nobles. Thus, the office of deputy was created and the convents became regular, because the synod could not convene officially. The convent was originally a meeting of seculars held on a noble estate, where the conveners consulted about aiding the church. However, after a while it became a leading organ of church administration. In 1791 with the election of Miklós Sinai as a bishop the clash of interests between secular and ecclesiastic people intensified. During the debate between the supporters of purely religious leadership hierarchists were defeated against the secular expansion (kyriarchists). By the beginning of the 19th century the Calvinist church administration developed completely into a shared church administration of laymen and pastors, while the hierarchical system of administration remained unchanged. The administrative structure established in 1791 had remained in effect on the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary until 1881.¹

In my study I investigate in detail one of the mid-level institutions of the Reformed church administration, the Békés Reformed Diocese. The examined period is from 1791 to 1821, because the period between the synod of Buda (1791) and the reframing of the territory of the diocese (1821) is particularly worth looking at from the perspective of church administration, because the role of seculars in church administration was consolidated in this period. Before going into the analysis in detail, it is worth looking at the flow of information in the early modern administration system of the Reformed Church. The basic criterion of the Calvinist church organisation is the practice of religiosity in congregation, therefore, in spite of the hierarchical system, the structure of the church was only slightly centralized. Generally, the bishop as the leader of the church district gave instructions to the leaders of the dioceses, the deacons, who forwarded them to the pastors, who in turn led the parishes. Thus, the official channel of information was multistage, while the informal networks of communication showed a markedly different form. A good example for this is that the pastors had a direct relationship to the church district. From the perspective of organizational sociology, this system was not effective, but it did not collapse either, because it was not dismissed even after Act XXXI of 1715 and the *Carolina Resolutio* had been passed.²

¹ Molnár 1995: 269–274. The importance of Miklós Sinai's activity has been discussed in a monograph by Imre Révész. Therefore, I only draw attention to the fact that his person was indispensable because his election as a bishop initiated the change of the administrative structure of the Reformed Church that has been going on since then. Révész 1959.

² Both of these acts aimed at incapacitating the Protestant churches. Szabó 2004: 79–82.

2. A few remarks on information history

The methodology of information history mostly focuses on how a given piece of information influenced historical events. The literature on the topic very often places an emphasis on reconstructing changes in collective knowledge, because this provides an insight into what extent and why a certain piece of information was important to a society. For example, during the California Gold Rush scholars compared information found in newspapers and guidebooks with the information being spread in marketplaces and through private conversations. This way, researchers managed to reconstruct what kind of preliminary knowledge gold diggers had with regard to gold mines.³

Such and similar trends of research are relatively scarce, so it is not surprising that the historiography of communication history abounds in debates, which concern the extent to which the history of information and its reception can be studied as an independent field of historical research.⁴ According to prevailing public opinion, histories of the library, censorship or the media are intertwined with the history of the formation of an information society in several ways. I think in the case of information history definite, sharp lines could not be drawn between the various historical disciplines, since, for example, the history of administration deals with the history of communication networks and information flow at the same time. Therefore, in the following, I do not intend to reconstruct the operation of the Békés Reformed Diocese, but rather to look at how certain pieces of information could have been possibly withheld or disseminated in the deaconry. Accordingly, my paper merges perspectives of information history, church history, cultural history and history of administration respectively.

3. Research aims

In 1787 the Reformed Church of Hódmezővásárhely was examined by the church district, because they retained some information from the bishop. The main point of the case was that some people from the congregation would have liked to remove the pastor from his position. To do so, invoking the alcoholism of the pastor's son seemed to be an expedient pretence, which reflected badly on the pastor. The diocese was partly misinformed by both the pastor and the congregation, because neither of them wanted to reveal the whole truth. It was precisely the reason why the diocese impeached the congregation, namely, because the actual situation could not be clearly seen.⁵

Due to the Edict of Tolerance and Act 26 of 1791, the situation of the Lutheran and Reformed churches improved considerably in the Hungarian Kingdom, because, in compliance with these acts, the church administration got rid of Catholic control: the 'grand old enemy' could no longer have a sway over the administration of Protestant churches and the Protestants were free in the offering of the sacraments and in church visitations.

³ Stillson 2008.

⁴ Karvalics 2012; Weller 2008; Weller 2010.

⁵ TtREL I.29.i.67. nr. 10b, Másolat Hódmezővásárhely és az egyházkerület között zajló levelezésről, 1787. [A copy of the correspondence between the parish of Hódmezővásárhely and the church district, 1787.]

Moreover, after 1781 the administration of documents was not supervised by the Catholic Church either. Because of this, Protestant church administration was revived since it could freely organise its everyday affairs.⁶

I examined the information withheld or publicised in the Békés Reformed Diocese as follows: first, I surveyed the entire existing archival material of the diocese and then I selected those cases in which the recorder of the document called attention to a lack of information or the recorder intended to make the content of the document known to a wider public. Those cases in which the lack of information was not revealed for the recorder were disregarded because, in order to get a relevant image, those secrets or disseminations were important which became known to the leaders of the diocese. Therefore, those documents that contain instructions about the information that could be found in them are worth investigating.

In order to be able to offer an accurate examination, first one has to be familiar with the contemporary documentary system and administrative structure of the diocese. Second, I present the revealed sources divided into two groups containing public or secret information. After reviewing the documents it is possible to decide what kind of method was applied for concealment or disclosure: through the official channels of the diocese or in an informal way. Simultaneously, one can also ascertain to what extent concealment or disclosure was successful.

4. The Békés Reformed Diocese between 1791 and 1821

The Békés Reformed Diocese was located in the region delimited by the Kőrös rivers, the Tisza River, the Lower Danube and the Carpathian Mountains. It united Calvinists living in Békés, Csanád, Csongrád, Arad, Torontál and Temes counties as well as in the military border zone into one administrative unit. Calvinists living in this region mostly lived in villages and towns, and parishes were not established in larger towns in the examined period: the congregations of Arad, Temesvár (Timișoara) and Nagybecskerek (Zrenjanin) were all formed after 1821. The history of the diocese goes back to the Age of Reformation, but it was eventually established in 1734 in accordance with the *Carolina Resolutio*. At this time, the diocese consisted of 22 parishes.⁷

The coming into force of the Edict of Tolerance and the XXVI Act of 1791 fundamentally changed the status of the Reformed Church: Catholic suppression gradually lessened and the Reformed Church started to prosper. The unsuccessful war of Joseph II against the Turks had repercussions on the diocese as well, since many parishes lay close to the location of the fights. After the peace treaty, the situation returned to normal and until the modification of the borders of the diocese in 1821 it continuously improved.⁸

The diocese was growing in the examined period, because numerous new parishes were formed. One part of them was organised by Protestants who settled in the Bánát, while congregations were founded as gardener settlements. In 1821 the Békés Reformed Diocese

⁶ Bucsay 1979: 77–80.; Zoványi Vol. II.2004: 109–130.; Körmendy 2009: 266.

⁷ Barcsa 1908: 86. Milleker 1925: 77–78, 92–94.

⁸ Ingraio 2000: 211. Kis 1992: 79–81. Vocelka 2000: 202.

consisted of the following parishes: Ágya (Adea), Battonya (Batanja), Békés, Békéssámson, Békésszentandrás, Bélzerénd (Zerindu Mic), Borossebes (Sebiş), Doboz, Erdőhegy (Chişineu-Criş), Feketegyarmat (Iermata Neagră), Gyoma, Gyorok (Ghioroc), Gyula (Giula), Gyulavári, Hódmezővásárhely, Kispereg (Peregu Mic), Köröstarcsa, Liebling, Magyarittebe (Novi Itebej), Makó, Mezőberény (Maisbrünn), Nagyszerénd (Zerind), Öcsöd, Pankota (Pâncota), Reformátusdombegyháza, Reformátuskovácsháza, Rittberg (Végvár/Tormac), Szentés, Torontálvásárhely (Debeljača), Vadász (Vânători), and Vésztő.⁹

5. The administration of documents and church administration in the Békés Reformed Diocese

In the examined period the Békés Reformed Diocese incorporated the reformed Christians of several counties from the Kőrös valleys down to the Bánát. The tract covered an area of such extension, as in the early 19th century more and more Calvinist settlers' villages were established in the Southern Region.¹⁰ Large geographical distances hindered the administration of the diocese, which is perhaps best shown by the minutes of visitation reports and the list of participants on diocesan meetings. The deacon never appeared personally on the settlements of Bánát (Rittberg, Liebling, Torontálvásárhely, Magyarittebe, etc.), but the visitation was performed by one of the sheriffs from Temes county and a church pastor or an assessor. For similar reasons, the diocesan meetings were never held in the Bánát and the pastors living in that region hardly ever appeared personally in front of the leadership of the diocese. Furthermore, Torontálvásárhely was located in a military border zone where the military administration often intervened into ecclesiastic affairs as well.¹¹

It is known that during the history of the Hungarian Reformed Church the diaconal office was established as a so-called mobile office. This meant that the head of the tract had no permanent seat, but the archives of the diocese were always transported to the settlement where the pastor served as deacon.¹² In addition to making the contents of the archives very vulnerable, it also meant that an extensive amount of documents could not be generated during the centuries, since it would have been difficult to transport them. In 1762 the practice of records management of the dioceses was regulated in detail. This stipulated that minutes should be written on the meetings of the tract and that a separate protocol had to be introduced on the questions asked during the church visitations.¹³ The 9th canon of the Buda synod (1791) also prescribed the management of minutes and it called the attention of the deacons in particular to elaborate archival regulations in the diocesan archives.¹⁴ Additionally, the deacons were required to prepare an annual written report to the diocese on what happened in that year in the diocese, but the preparation of these reports was usually

⁹ Kis 1992: 85–91.

¹⁰ Kis 1992: 79–81.

¹¹ Barcsa 1908: 84, 122. TtREL I.29.a.2, Egyházmegyei közgyűlés, Hódmezővásárhely, 1787. február 1. [General assembly of the diocese, February 1, 1787, Hódmezővásárhely]

¹² Molnár 1995: 269–274.

¹³ Tóth 1964: 68.

¹⁴ Révész 1860: 58–62.

sabotaged by them.¹⁵ They could probably do so because the church was not organised enough to sanction this regulation.

It was also included in the canons of the Synod of Buda that the dioceses were required to implement the instructions of the church district, which meant that they regularly got circular instructions from the bishops, the principal clerk or from the general superintendent.¹⁶ Managerial tasks demanded the preparation of other written documents, too; thus, for instance, the deacon sent circular instructions to the pastors. What is more, he led the so-called diaconal diary about the daily affairs and the leaders of the congregations kept correspondence with the deacon, who also made submissions, reports and complaints about the contentious issues.¹⁷

The archives of the Békés Reformed Diocese were established at the end of the 19th century by Sámuel Szeremley, but the archival system he created was dismissed as it was merged into the Archives of the Trans-Tisza Region (Tiszántúl) Church District.¹⁸ On the basis of my experience I can state that the deacons of the diocese did not establish any archival regulation or order between 1791 and 1821. They only numbered the cases in the minutes, but the documents belonging to them were not provided with archival notes. The lack of archival order is also shown by the fact that they endeavoured to systematise the documents in 1812 unsuccessfully.¹⁹ Apart from the documents pertaining to diocese meetings or diocesan visitations, diaconal diaries and reports, no other regularly written documents were compiled in the Békés tract.

Fortunately, the reports of the general assembly of the diocese and the protocols of the church visitations still exist.²⁰ However, diaconal diaries were only being written from 1816.²¹ According to the testimony of the sources, complaints occurring in the congregations were examined during church visitations. If they could not be solved locally, they were discussed at the diocesan assembly. Submissions and complaints written during the visitations were mostly lost; now only the records of reports on the differences of opinion can be found. In addition to them, circulars and documents separately administered by the deacon survived. Circulars were issued by the organs of the church district, the council of governor general and the counties, while rather heterogeneous documents can be found among the material dealt with by the deacon: complaints against priests, denunciations, diaconal circulars, summary reports on sins committed by the members of the congregation, etc.²²

¹⁵ Barcsa 1908: 122.

¹⁶ Révész 1860: 58–62.

¹⁷ Molnár 1989: 328–333.

¹⁸ Sámuel Szeremley was a pastor and historian in Hódmezővásárhely, who published several works on the history of the Reformed Church.

¹⁹ It was noted during the assembly of the diocese held in Hódmezővásárhely on 25 May 1812 that the archives were much disorganised and the assembly ordered the deacon András Kis and Ferenc Nagy to systematically catalogue it, which, however, they did not do. Kis 1992: 157. Another unsuccessful endeavour to systematize the archival material was attempted in 1818. TtREL I.29.c.16. nr. 58., Egyházkerületi közgyűlés jegyzőkönyvi kivonata, 1818. október 3–5. [The resume of the general assembly of the district, 3–5 October 1818]

²⁰ TtREL I.29.a.2.; TtREL I.29.h.1.

²¹ TtREL I.29.o.1.

²² TtREL I.29.f.3.; TtREL I.29.c.

The revised documents revealed that the way of the information spreading or its lack in the diocese can be reconstructed on the basis of the minutes of the diocesan assembly, but valuable data were also revealed from the documents handled separately by the deacon.

6. The official way of the spread of information

Since the communications network of the diocese was regulated by the laws of the Reformed Church, it is worth examining how the official structure was built up, and how the informal system worked. Being acquainted with the system one can conclude on how the information could be concealed and to what extent the spread of the information through official ways was effective.

The organization of the diocese was regulated by various religious laws. In the examined period the canons of the Buda synod were the guiding provisions, in spite of the fact that, due to the absence of the royal assent, they never entered into force. Practice, however, shows that their influence can be clearly demonstrated, because from this point on the Presbyterian system of administration became widespread in the Church.²³ Beside the canons of the Buda synod, the canons of Geleji or Zoványi synods and the decisions of church visitations from 1762 were also used in the Trans-Tisza Region (Tiszántúl) Church District. As opposed to the decisions of the Buda synod, they tried to dwarf the role of the laymen in church administration, but they show many similarities in those fields that pertain to the diocese.

On the basis of the above mentioned arguments, it can be claimed that the leader of the diocese was the deacon and the laic superintendent. The deacon, the superintendent and the assessors together constituted the decision-making body of the diocese, the consistory. Assessors were selected in equal numbers from laymen and ecclesiastics. In special cases the delegate of the parish could also be elected as the member of the consistory with the permission of the church district and in these cases a delegate could represent more churches simultaneously, too. The president of the diocesan consistory was the deacon and the superintendent. The deacon decided in religious matters, while in other cases the superintendent's vote determined the decision.²⁴

The consistory usually convened twice a year in the Békés diocese and in the period between the meetings the deacon administered the daily affairs. Church visitation was regularly practised, on which occasions they had the opportunity to deal with the affairs of church administration as well. In the examined period the diaconal position was continuously filled, while data on the activity of the laic superintendent were available only from 1795. The number of the assessors was between 5 and 7 on average, among whom laic and ecclesiastical people could be found alternately. However, it had been unprecedented that a pastor or a member of a congregation would receive the right to vote in the consistory.²⁵ On the basis of this, it can be argued that the official system of diocese administration was conducted through the church visitations and the diocesan meetings. The

²³ Révész 1891.

²⁴ Tóth 1964: 4–5; Barcsa 1908: 47; Szentpéteri Kun 1948: 80.

²⁵ TIREL I.29.a.2.

unofficial administration was carried out among the congregations and in some cases it could be observed between the congregations and the deacon. The latter was the case when, for example, a decision was made in a diocesan affair without the approval of the deacon or they intended to influence a consistory decision by providing false information: they withheld notes or did not appear in front of the deacon, etc.

After reviewing the tract's customs of administering the documents and the organizational structure of the tract, it is worth looking at what kind of sources could be found with regard to withholding or disseminating information. First, those documents are investigated which aimed to transmit their inherent data to more and more people.

7. Public information

Written information basically spread in hand-written documents, because the small number of local printing-houses did not make it possible to disseminate quickly reproducible documents. In the examined period there was no working printing house in the Békés Reformed Diocese, the closest printing houses were in Szeged, Arad and Temesvár.²⁶

The preserved sources testify that it was important to try to spread the important public information for the diocese more effectively and more quickly than before. For example, it was essential to organize church services as soon as possible on the occasion of the death of Leopold II in all churches, because the Reformed Church intended to retain its obtained freedom by proving its loyalty to the ruling dynasty. Not surprisingly, bishop Ferenc Hunyadi personally wrote a letter to the deacon Benjámín Szőnyi in which he instructed Szőnyi that on the occasion of the death of the monarch every congregation is obliged to hold service.²⁷

Similarly, it was vitally important that the parishes should be aware of the existing regulations on churches, because prior to the publication of the Edict of Tolerance a settlement's right of freely practising religion depended on them, but it was also necessary to know these regulations after 1781 as well. Thus, during church visitations it was strictly inspected whether the parish had the royal decrees or not. It was even meticulously stipulated years after 1781 what kind of documents all parishes should have. The diocesan assembly held on February 1, 1787 at Hódmezővásárhely proclaimed that copies of royal decrees should be delivered from Csongrád, Csanád and Békés counties which they would subsequently send to every congregation and they would also check if they are available under the 7th point of the church visitation.²⁸

The need for the quick dissemination of information could also be observed in issues concerning the property and institutions of the church. The operation of schools was a central issue of the Reformed Church, too, since after the proclamation of the *Ratio Educationis* the church had to contend with the centralizing ambitions of the state on a

²⁶ Szabó 2008: 112. Gaál 2001: 5–10.

²⁷ TtREL I.29.c.12, Hunyadi Ferenc levele Szőnyi Benjámínak, Debrecen, 1792. március 27. [The letter of Ferenc Hunyadi to Benjámín Szőnyi, 27 March 1792, Debrecen.]

²⁸ Kis 1992: 139.

regular basis.²⁹ Therefore, it is not surprising that in 1796 the church district ordered the dioceses to proclaim the new regulations of the state concerning the schools throughout the tract as soon as possible.³⁰

In other cases, the consistory was ready to take into account other documents than those prepared in advance in order to facilitate a quick ruling. For example, not all the documents were available for the ecclesiastical court in the case of János Darótz, the dismissed pastor from Erdőhegy. Therefore, the court decided to send a rider to Arad to obtain the documents as soon as possible.³¹ A similar case may have occurred at a diocesan meeting, as Benjámín Hevessy, the town clerk of the city of Szentes, issued an official certificate in 1821 on why a letter for the diocesan meeting of Vásárhely did not arrive in time: a local gypsy woman from Vásárhely was sent with the letter, but she did not go directly to Szentes; instead, she spent a night in a village on her way to Szentes. (Szentes and Hódmezővásárhely are 25 km far from each other, a pedestrian was certainly able to make this way in a day.)³²

In issues concerning the whole diocese circulars were generally sent. In these cases they did not choose postal distribution, but pastors from geographically close parishes were asked to forward them. These routes were addressed usually to communities along the Maros and the Kőrös and in this way it was ensured that congregations could inform each other like a skirmish-line. In 1795 Sámuel Szentmiklósi Sebők definitely chose this way to forward his circular, for which he specifically asked pastors, because next to the addressing he also detailed the mode of the forwarding of the letter.³³

The sources indicate that these pieces of information intended for a larger audience actually reached the addressees, which was also confirmed by two examples: these circulars were copied into separate minute-books in Szentes, while in Hódmezővásárhely they were recorded in the proceedings of the presbytery.³⁴ In the following section the paper discusses what kind of information they endeavored to keep secret and what kind of means were available for this purpose.

8. Concealed information

After the death of Joseph II in 1790 protests intensified against the centralizing policy of the monarch in the Hungarian Kingdom. It was a delicate situation for the Reformed Church, because the convention of the National Assembly and the preparations for the coronation created a tense situation, in which the Protestants were interested in maintaining

²⁹ Bucsay 1979: 90–91.

³⁰ TtREL I.29.a.2., Egyházmegyei közgyűlés, Makó, 1796. március 15–16. [General assembly of the diocese, 15–16 March 1796, Makó.]

³¹ TtREL I.29.a.2., Egyházmegyei közgyűlés, Nagyzerénd, 1808. február 10–11. [General assembly of the diocese, 10–11 February 1808, Nagyzerénd.]

³² TtREL I.29.i.67. nr. 157., Hevessy Benjámín szentesi városi jegyző nyilatkozata. Szentes, 1821. szeptember 25. [The declaration of the town clerk of Szentes, Benjámín Hevessy, 25 September 1821, Szentes.]

³³ TtREL I.29.c.25., Szentmiklósi Sebők Sámuel esperesi körlevele Szentes, 1795. augusztus 8. [The circular of the deacon, Sámuel Szentmiklósi Sebők, 8 August 1795, Szentes.]

³⁴ SzNREL I.375.b.1–2.; HÓRGyL Presbiteri jegyzőkönyv 1795–1806. [Minutes of the presbyter 1795–1806.]

the status quo.³⁵ Not surprisingly, the bishop from the Trans-Tisza Region (Tiszántúl) Church District sent instructions to the deacon, Benjámín Szőnyi, not to disseminate laws submitted to the Diet and national political news in the congregations. Instead, they should reassure the disgruntled people that there would be no conscriptions and the price of the salt would not rise. The bishop also emphatically asked that his letter ought to be kept secret.³⁶

Other documents did not mention similar national affairs, but concealing and retaining information often yielded quick results. In the case of the late pastor of Makó, Miklós Ecsedi, the consistory originally decided to compile a list of his goods. The executors, however, exceeded their competence because they not only registered the pastor's belongings, but they also auctioned them. Despite the fact that they violated the diaconal instructions, they were not convicted, but only reprimanded.³⁷

The deacon repeatedly noticed that the documents he received did not reflect reality because the congregation was not interested in telling him the whole truth. For example, for a long time the congregation of Makó refused to submit its complaints concerning the dismissed cantor Mihály Újvári to the deacon, who was thereby incapacitated to arrive at a decision on the matter.³⁸ Similarly, the congregation of Torontálvásárhely made complaints regarding the teacher Márton Légárdi to the deacon in 1811, because he perturbed the service in the church with his silly singing, but parish members concealed the fact that the pastor repeatedly behaved rudely with Légárdi. The case was eventually presented to the diocese, where the people from Torontálvásárhely were reprimanded for their behavior. The adjudication straightforwardly worded that they concealed something from the bishopric.³⁹

Furthermore, a double election of bishops occurred in the diocese of the Transz-Tisza Region (Tiszántúl) in 1791 because the overwhelming majority of the pastors' faculty did not want to involve laymen into the church administration. Bishop Miklós Sinai supported the limitation of the Presbyterian governance, while Bishop Ferenc Hunyadi stood out for strengthening the role of the laymen.⁴⁰ The division could also be observed in the Békés diocese. Pastors endorsing Sinai tried to support their bishop financially as well, since his attendance on the synod organized at the very same time had to be financed somehow. It is now known that Sinai was excluded from the synod and he was also demoted from his bishopric office, which showed that the cause of the hierarchists was defeated. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the pastors of the Békés tract endeavored to keep their relation to Sinai secret. However, the information was still leaked because the assessor Ádám Kuthi complained in a letter that someone leaked the information about the plotting of the pastors.⁴¹

³⁵ Bucsay 1979: 70.

³⁶ TIREL I.29.f.3., Szathmári Paksi István körlevele. Debrecen, 1790. május 19. [The circular of István Szathmári Paksi, 19 May 1790, Debrecen.]

³⁷ TIREL I.29.a.2., Egyházmegyei közgyűlés Békésszentandrás, 1803. június 23. [General assembly of the diocese, 23 June 1803, Békésszentandrás.]

³⁸ TIREL I.29.c.25., Juhász István esperes levélfogalmazványa a makói egyháznak 1817 körül. [The circular draft of the deacon, István Juhász, to the church of Makó around 1817.]

³⁹ TIREL I.29.c.16. nr. 46., Egyházkerületi jegyzőkönyv kivonata, 1811. január 13. [The resume of the proceedings of the church district, 13 January 1811.]

⁴⁰ Révész 1959: 178–211.

⁴¹ TIREL I.29.c.15., Kuthi Ádám assessor körlevele az egyházmegye számára, Öcsöd, 1791. szeptember 14. [The

Conflicts between the laymen and the clergy could be witnessed in the following years since the general superintendent Lőrinc Domokos was repeatedly confronted with the deacon because the latter concealed something from him. One of these concealments could have been very embarrassing for Domokos because, although he was officially the secular leader of the diocese, the deacon did not notify him in 1795 that they were going to hold a general meeting. Finally, the principal clerk sent an invitation to him, which, however, expected Domokos to appear only as a deputy, not as a president.⁴² There was a long ongoing debate about who should get the circular of the diocese first, the deacon or the general superintendent, because only one copy of every document was sent from Debrecen.⁴³ Additionally, in 1800 the deacon also tried to modify the decisions of the consistory subsequently.⁴⁴ Obviously, the general superintendent did not allow himself to be deceived, which can be concluded from the fact that in other cases he refused to forward the circulars of the deacon either.⁴⁵ In 1795 he also pointed out critically that the final version of the minutes of the general assembly did not match with the draft.⁴⁶

Furthermore, the leadership of the diocese also had to tackle the problem that certain documents were removed by congregations and they refused to return them. For example, the pastor of Hódmezővásárhely Péter Bereczk had a conflict with a local resident and an investigation was initiated against him. The presbytery of Vásárhely simply took possession of the relevant files and did not want to return them. Hence, the deacon was shocked at this and demanded the undisturbed continuation of the case.⁴⁷

The fundamental interest of the diocese was to maintain a faculty of pastors, who held onto Calvinist doctrines in their lives, carried on with a morally virtuous life and preached the values of a religious life. For this purpose, it was necessary to supervise the reading material of the pastors, too, which was examined during church visitations.⁴⁸ There are several well-known visitation instructions which emphatically called the executors' attention to check the ordinary readings of the pastors. It seems, however, that these supervisions were not very successful. According to the regulation mentioned above, in 1811 the question on the pastors' readings was included among the issues of church visitations, but half of the congregations left it unanswered and after some years this

circular of Ádám Kuthi to the diocese, 14 September 1791, Öcsöd.]

⁴² TtREL I.29.c.14., Domokos Lőrinc levele Szentmiklósi Sebők Sámuelnek, Gyula, 1795. május 4. [The letter of Lőrinc Domokos to Sámuel Szentmiklósi Sebők, 4 May 1795, Gyula.]

⁴³ TtREL I.29.c.14., Domokos Lőrinc levele Szentmiklósi Sebők Sámuelnek, Gyula, 1793, június 4. [The letter of Lőrinc Domokos to Sámuel Szentmiklósi Sebők, 4 June 1793, Gyula.]

⁴⁴ TtREL I.29.c.14., Domokos Lőrinc levele Kuthi Ádámnak, Gyula, 1800. augusztus 22. [The letter of Lőrinc Domokos to Ádám Kuthi, 22 August 1800, Gyula.]

⁴⁵ TtREL I.29.c.14., Domokos Lőrinc levele Kuthi Ádámnak, Gyula, 1798. augusztus 1. [The letter of Lőrinc Domokos to Ádám Kuthi, 1 August 1798, Gyula.]

⁴⁶ TtREL I.29.c.14., Domokos Lőrinc levele Kuthi Ádámnak, Gyula, 1795. április 2. [The letter of Lőrinc Domokos to Ádám Kuthi, 2 April 1795, Gyula.]

⁴⁷ HÓRGyL 2. csomó nr. 119., Szentmiklósi Sebők Sámuel levele a hódmezővásárhelyi gyülekezetnek, Szentes, 1798. március [The letter of Sámuel Szentmiklósi Sebők to the congregation of Hódmezővásárhely, March, 1798, Szentes.]

⁴⁸ Kis 1992: 156.

question totally disappeared from the material of visitations.⁴⁹ The slackness of this monitoring was proved by the fact that a complete inspection of the preaching of the newly installed pastors was ordered in 1796. Accordingly, the pastors were obliged to send all of their preaching delivered to the deacon. In practice, however, it only meant that the preachers informed their superior in a list of selected texts and the deacon chose some of them to be submitted according to his liking.⁵⁰

9. Conclusion

After examining these cases, conclusions can be drawn about how successful the public dissemination or concealment of information was. At the same time I intended to answer the question what kind of method was used for the disclosure or the concealment: through official channels of the diocese or in an informal way.

I think that the diocese was mostly able to achieve that news or regulations of higher interest could be declared in each congregation. During church visitations it was noted only in the case of congregations with a minor membership that there were no available copies of laws dealing with religious issues. The examples presented above show that the collection of the laws in effect and the publication of information needed for the operation of the congregation functioned smoothly, since, for example, in order to ensure efficient and rapid decision-making the diocesan assembly was willing to change its official procedures and to wait for the tardily forwarded documents.

The effectiveness of the limitation of information can be evaluated less plausibly, because only those tricky abuses are known which the contemporaries noticed. Apart from this, it can be stated that they regularly endeavoured to withhold information that served various interests. The church did its best to get through the preparations for Leopold II's coronation as quietly as possible, while the congregations also kept their secrets from their deacon if their personal conflicts required that. In certain cases, they tried to exclude the general superintendent from the decisions, since the deacon did not inform him of the summoning of the diocesan general assembly.

Moreover, the question how formal and informal channels worked is more difficult to answer, because written sources contain relatively little information about oral statements, yet communication is the very basis of informal orientation. Therefore, this study did not investigate the role of orality in the examined documents, as it seemed to be impossible to reconstruct it. However, its importance is neatly shown by the fact that it had a decisive role in the disciplinary process against the pastor of Gyoma Sándor Úri in 1802: the court took oral accusations into consideration during the case, not only written pieces of evidence.⁵¹

On the basis of the examined documents, it can be plausibly claimed that the formal way of communication originating from the system of hierarchical church administration

⁴⁹ TtREL I.29.h.1., Egyházlátogatás 1811 [Church visitations 1811].

⁵⁰ TtREL I.1.b.42.807, Kuthi Ádám leve Vecsei Sámuelnek, Öcsöd, 1803. július 26. [The letter of Ádám Kuthi to Sámuel Vecsei, 26 July 1803.] Cf.: TtREL I.29.a.2., Egyházmegyei közgyűlés, Hódmezővásárhely, 1796. április 22. [General assembly of the diocese, 22 April 1796, Hódmezővásárhely.]

⁵¹ TtREL I.1.b.42.807., Egyházmegyei közgyűlés kivonata, Gyoma, 1803. szeptember 27. [The resume of the general assembly of the diocese, 27 September 1803, Gyoma.]

was also established in the Békés tract: the bishop sent instructions to the deacon, which the deacon transmitted to the parishes. This multi-layered network of information worked its way around as well since the problems occurring in the congregations had been first discussed by the diocese and it was only after that that they were presented to the district. Obviously, the informal network of relations can be identified at several various instances, including the withholding of documents or the case when the plotting of the pastors in favor of bishop Sinai came to light surprisingly promptly.

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**ПРОБЛЕМИ КОЈИ СУ НАСТАЛИ ЗАДРЖАВАЊЕМ ИНФОРМАЦИЈА
У ПРАКСИ РЕФОРМИСАНЕ ЦРКВЕ У ЈУГОИСТОЧНИМ ДЕЛОВИМА
МАЂАРСКОГ КРАЉЕВСТВА КРАЈЕМ ХVIII И ПОЧЕТКОМ ХIX ВЕКА**

Резиме

Чланак истражује црквену администрацију бискупије реформисане цркве у Бекешу који се налази у југоисточном делу Мађарског краљевства. Бискупија је била величине територије Белгије пошто су се њене границе протезале од регије близу реке Кереш до доњег тока Дунава. Међутим, ова велика територија имала је само 30 парохија. Период који се истражује је између 1791. и 1821. године, пошто су многи извори преживели у период између будимског сабора (1791) и реформисања бискупије (1821) и сведоче о контролисању информација. Стога у чланку се истражује како су информације потекле од црквене управе стигле на одговарајуће адресе и како се спречавало даље ширење информација.

Кључне речи: Реформисана црква, Угарско краљевство, црквена администрација, историја информација, Банат

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