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„Ha levelem elolvastad, add tovább": Bonczidai Dezső kézírásos gyülekezeti levelei a két világháború közötti Kidén ["If You Have Read My Letter, Pass It On": The Handwritten Congregational Letters of Dezső Bonczidai in Interwar Chidea (Kide)]. Edited by Emese Ilyefalvi.

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Emese Ilyefalvi, Assistant Professor at the Institute of Ethnography, Faculty of Humanities, Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE), has recently prepared for publication—and in her introduction—interpreted the pastoral letters of Dezső Bonczidai (1902–1946), a Calvinist minister of Chidea (Kide) in Cluj County, Romania. Between 1932 and 1935, Bonczidai wrote and, using a hectograph, duplicated a series of inner-mission circulars which, at the time, functioned as influential devotional texts, instruments of community building, and aids to understanding the wider world. Their significance is underscored by the fact that they entered communal memory: several households still preserve copies. In addition to publishing the texts, Ilyefalvi seeks to interpret them by asking fundamental questions: What motivated the minister of Chidea to write letters produced and circulated in partly traditional ways? How did this personal mode of address shape their content? What could justify such an endeavour in an era marked by the boom of ecclesiastical periodicals in Transylvania? How did these texts fit into Bonczidai's wider pastoral work? To approach these questions, Ilyefalvi proceeds methodically: before presenting the letters, she reconstructs the circumstances of their discovery, outlines the challenges of pastoral vocation in the period, sketches Bonczidai's life and the village milieu in the interwar years, and surveys the local Calvinist press. She then weaves these elements into an analysis of pastor–community relations, interprets the handwritten letters, and offers a synthesis; thereafter, the edition itself gives ample space to the sources.

Based on Ilyefalvi's research, these are indeed presented as historical sources. The volume includes not only the pastoral circulars but also Bonczidai's official correspondence and several contemporary entries from the registers of the Chidea

Calvinist congregation. Jointly, they offer a nuanced picture of the conditions of pastoral work. A rich photographic section follows the introductory study and bibliography, and the book concludes with summaries in English and Romanian; the back cover features a commendatory note by Vilmos Keszeg.

Although Ilyefalvi's conclusions are framed primarily in relation to Transylvania, Bonczidai's activity can also be read within a broader regional context, which further underlines the importance of the book. Since the turn of the twentieth century, the accelerated transformation of peasant society may be described as a structural shift in which previously self-evident communal roles required radical reinterpretation. Demographic change tied to altered mortality patterns, laicisation and denominational fragmentation accelerated by the experience of World War I, the loosening of traditional frameworks of family life, and the growing desire to adopt urban lifestyles—especially in dress and leisure—collectively placed new emphasis on the pastor's role in strengthening the community, from southern Transdanubia through Upper Hungary to the Szeklerland. This role was particularly significant where communities perceived their very existence as endangered. In the Borşa Valley, increasingly populated by Romanians, this was especially true for Chidea, a small Hungarian enclave.

It was in this context that Dezső Bonczidai—who had arrived in Chidea from the Sălaj region with his wife, Sára Ajtai—found his inner mission intensified. Drawing on the recollections of those who still remembered him, Ilyefalvi reconstructs the image of a frail, physically weak minister; yet beyond the figure of a committed and effective preacher dedicated to community development, the testimonies also reveal the stricter, at times confrontational aspects of his personality. Equally revealing are the weary, disillusioned lines of his own autobiographical note: "Do not become a pastor—humanly speaking—if you do not have the outward appearance and patronage. You will always be the last. You will remain in Chidea, that everyone has always fled" (p. 18). These are the words of a man living in an intellectually less inspiring and existentially precarious situation, echoing the experience of many contemporaneous pastors who longed for broader horizons.[1]

The carefully reconstructed image of the village of Chidea —chosen in the 1940s as a field site for the social-science research of the Transylvanian Institute—further highlights the character of a community practising birth control and visibly adopting urban culture, thus posing particular challenges for pastoral work. Bonczidai and his wife had to invest substantial effort to pursue their goals, as evidenced by the

1 See, for example, Kránitz, Zsolt, ed. *„A késő idők emlékezetében éljenek…" A Dunántúli Református Egyházkerület lelkészi önéletrajzai, 1943* ["May They Live in the Memory of Later Times…" Pastors' Autobiographies of the Transdanubian Calvinist Church District, 1943]. A Pápai Református Gyűjtemények Kiadványai, Forrásközlések 13, Jubileumi kötetek 2. Pápa: Pápai Református Gyűjtemények, 2013.

activities of the men's and women's fellowships, as well as the organisation of devotional evenings and Bible-study meetings several times a week. Their tragically early deaths almost certainly contributed to the ennobling of their memory in Chidea to the extent that they were the only ones buried next to the church, and Bonczidai's nephew was called to succeed him as pastor.

The handwritten pastoral letters bring us closer to several key historical questions. Above all, they demonstrate that communicating modern knowledge through more traditional forms could enhance the effectiveness of knowledge transfer. In this respect, the striking arithmetic of invisible women's labour in the 29th letter is particularly noteworthy: in a six-member household over twenty years, a mother spreads 175,200 slices of bread with butter, peels 87,000 potatoes, and so forth (p. 120). Whether or not strictly accurate, such stark figures sit uneasily with the dominant pronatalist discourse of the period, which in this region placed special emphasis on the survival of the Hungarian national community. Yet the significance of the letters lies not only in how they anchored broader social tendencies locally. However, this was substantial, mainly if, as Ilyefalvi suggests, they contributed to increased newspaper readership. At least as important was the communicative sphere generated by passing the letters from hand to hand: one copy, typically shared among four or five families, ended with the injunction that gave the book its title. In this process, the pastor communicated with his congregation; the congregants with one another—since it is hard to imagine that the letters' often highly personal content was not discussed—and, indirectly, with the pastor himself. The very fact that the letters were read and passed on constituted a form of feedback, all the more so when their content reappeared as points of reference in interactions with him. Thus, the community not only came to accept Bonczidai—who, alongside his wife, pursued innermission work with great zeal—but was also shaped by him: statements relating to the history of the village and the local Calvinist congregation were reverently preserved for decades, and his enduring memory testifies to his substantial personal impact.

Two observations in Ilyefalvi's conclusion invite further reflection. Her regret that the collector "arrived late" is justified only in the sense that not all of Bonczidai's letters and related memories could be recovered. Even so, the surviving material delineates a coherent, community-shaping role, and it is doubtful that a larger corpus would fundamentally alter this picture. It is also true that the lives of Bonczidai and his wife ended tragically—and tragically early—yet through their work and aspirations, they left behind a rich and complete life's heritage. That their memory is still alive today attests to this—and thanks to Ilyefalvi's book, it now extends beyond Chidea.