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Ruzsa-Nagy Zoltán:

Reformed Towns and Presbyterian Government in Hungary in the 17th and 18th Centuries

According to the nineteenth and early twentieth century ecclesiastical historiography, the success of Hungarian Reformation was bound to the Protestant conversion of the nobility which drove the serfdom living in villages and in towns (owned by a landlord) to Protestantism. This paradigm clearly links the Reformation to the survival of the ius patronatus. Up to nowadays the widespread view of the Reformation in Hungary is focused on noble courts such as Sárvár or Sárospatak and the court of the Prince of Transylvania where Reformed preachers received significant support to spread the Gospel. This paradigm has been considered to be right especially when the landlord was reconverted to Roman Catholicism in the seventeenth century. The study shows that it was not until 1753 that the Protestant worship was banned. There are examples also where a Protestant town or village could survive under a Roman Catholic landlord. On one hand stating that the local communities in most cases had a certain freedom to decide on their own religion, the landlords did not put any pressure on their serfs to abandon the Roman Catholic faith. On the other hand the paradigm of confessionalism introduced by Heinz Schilling and Wolfgang Reinhard has influenced case studies carried out by Roman Catholic scholars to prove that there was no significant difference between the social structures and church life of the Reformed and Roman Catholic towns in Hungary. Against this background, the scope of this study is to examine the establishment and operation of the first presbyteries. Also trying to study the driving forces of establishing the local Presbyteries (Church sessions) and their connection to urban settlements.

Keywords: Protestant reformation, change of religion, conversion, confessionalism, Roman Catholics, Reformed, Lutheranism, Presbyteries

According to the 19th and early 20th century Church Historiography, the success of Hungarian Reformation was bound to the Protestant conversion of the nobility which drove the serfdom living in villages and in towns (owned by a landlord) to Protestantism.¹ This paradigm clearly links the Reformation to the survival of the *ius patronatus*. Up to nowadays the widespread view of the Reformation in Hungary is focused on noble courts such as Sárvár or Sárospatak and the court of the Prince of Transylvania (in particular under the rule of Gábor Bethlen and George Rákóczi I.) where Reformed preachers received significant support (also press and schools) to spread the Gospel. This paradigm has been considered to be right especially when the landlord was re-converted to Roman Catholicism in the 17th century. E.g.: when Ádám Batthyány was converted to Roman Catholicism in the early 1630's, he banned his former private teacher, that time the Reformed bishop of Transdanubia, János Kanizsai Pálfi from the town of his noble court in Németújvár and within a year he prohibited Lutheran and Calvinist worship in all of his villages and towns.² In the case of Pápa a decade after the creation of the first consistory the landowner family changed to the Roman Catholic Csáky. Later the Esterházy aristocrats possessed the town, which made the situation of the Protestants more and more difficult. However it was not until 1753 that the Protestant worship was banned.³ On the contrary there are examples also where a Protestant town or village could survive under a Roman Catholic landlord. The town of Hódmezővásárhely was the property of the Károlyi family, who were Roman Catholics, and sometimes their relationship was full of tensions. However there was no effort to force the town to become Roman Catholics. The one thing the landlord had done to change religion was to "import" some

¹ RÉVÉSZ, Imre, *Magyar református egyháztörténet I. 1520 tájától 1608-ig: Református Egyházi Könyvtár XX.* Debrecen, 1938.

² MAKÁR, János, *Kanizsai Pálfi János élete és munkássága*, New Brunswick, 1961. p. 25.; KOLTAI, András: *Batthyány Ádám: Egy magyar főúr és udvara a XVII. század közepén*, Győr, Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár, 2012. p. 93-98.

³ TÓTH, Endre, *A pápai református egyház története*, Pápa, Főiskolai Könyvnyomda, 1941, pp. 169-172.

Roman Catholic citizens in town, in the late 18th century but it was more to show the town council where their place was rather than an act with real religious purposes.⁴ In many cases if the landlord was a Roman Catholic clergyman pressure increased on the Protestant inhabitants, which especially in the first half of the 18th century often (but not always) resulted in the ban of Protestant worship in that place. This happened among others in Veresegyház, which was the property of the Roman Catholic bishop of Vác. On the contrary the village of Foktő was the property of the archbishop of Kalocsa. The inhabitants could keep their Calvinist confession continuously from the 16th century.⁵

Though the Reformation connected to nobles' courts still survived as a main paradigm, it has been known for long that not only in Western Europe but also in Hungary the urban areas were the centres of spreading and keeping the Reformation. However this paradigm did not give a clear answer to urban Reformation. The free royal boroughs and cities were fewer and smaller than in Western Europe and primarily were inhabited by German speaking citizens. Due to their ethnicity these were the first soils for the Reformation and most cases they remained Lutheran. In the 1950's and 1960' a new paradigm was formed, strongly influenced by the Marxist social theory. According to that the civil social structures of the Calvinist reformation met the desire for freedom from feudal lordship of the serf-citizens of the towns.⁶ Thus the core of the Reformation happened in the towns of the great Hungarian plain. Later, having abandoned the marxist viewpoint, cases studies were done to prove that connecting the

⁴ The 2nd Protocollum of Hódmezővásárhelyi Református Egyházközség. (Kept in loco.) About the tensions between the town and the landlord also see: SZEREMLEI, Sámuel, *A hódmezővásárhelyi református egyház története: Tekintettel az egyház és a vidék egyházi állapotára és főbb eseményeire*, (S.a. rend.: Tereh Gyula) Hódmezővásárhely, Roth Antal Könyvnyomdája és Kiadója, 1927.

⁵ Protocollum of the Reformed Church in Foktő. (Kept in loco.)

⁶ MAKKAI, László: A magyar városfejlődés történetének vázlata, in: *Vidéki városaink*, ed. BORSOS, József, Budapest, Közgazdasági és Jogi Kiadó, 1961.

Hungarian Reformation to towns was still valid.⁷ Most of these towns being under Turkish rule enjoyed certain freedom from the landlords to decide on their own religion and also to take the church government in their own hands. In other words the *ius patronatus* after the Reformation was gradually taken over by the towns. In many cases this remained in their hands even after the liberation of the country and the restoration of the landlords' power.⁸

More recent historiography has challenged both paradigms. On one hand stating that the local communities in most cases had a certain freedom to decide on their own religion, the landlords did not put any pressure on their serfs to abandon the Roman Catholic faith.⁹ Elek Thurzó, who was one of the richest nobleman in the 16th century and Lutheran himself and George of Brandenburg, defender of Lutheranism in many ways, himself possessor of vast properties in Hungary apparently did not pay much attention to his subjects' confession.¹⁰ Péter Perényi, who was deeply committed to Lutheranism tolerated Roman Catholic mass in the town of Sárospatak, while he was taking part in Lutheran worship in the castle.¹¹ In the 16th century there was a real shortage of protestant clergy especially in the villages, which would have been a limit to the Reformation by the landlord's order. It seems now that some of those landlords, especially aristocrats, who were devoted protestants had organized Protestant "ateliers" in their courtin order to help the spreading of the Gospel but rarely used their force to change the religions of their subject. On the other hand the paradigm of confessionalism introduced by Heinz Schilling and

⁷ SZAKÁLY, Ferenc, *Mezőváros és reformáció. Tanulmányok a korai magyar polgárosodás kérdéséhez : Humanizmus és Reformáció* 23. Budapest, Balassi kiadó, 1995.

⁸ RÁCZ, István, *Protestáns patronatus*, Debrecen, 1997, pp. 86-104.

⁹ PÉTER, Katalin, *A reformáció: kényszer vagy választás?* Budapest, Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, 2004, pp. 90-118.

¹⁰ PÉTER, 2004, pp. 115-117.

¹¹ PÉTER, 2004, p. 86-87.

Wolfgang Reinhard¹² has influenced case studies carried out by Roman Catholic scholars to prove that there was no significant difference between the social structures and church life of the Reformed and Roman Catholic towns in Hungary. Works have been done to show that a Hungarian town could have been just as good Roman Catholic as Protestant.¹³ This latter has challenged the Protestant Church Historiography but so far no further studies have been carried out.

The scope of this study would be to examine the establishment and operation of the first presbyteries. Also trying to study the driving forces of establishing the local Presbyteries (Church sessions) and their connection to urban settlements.

First we must draw attention to the fact that the Presbyterian church government, unlike the Huguenots or Scotland, did not come with the reception of the Calvinist confession in Hungary. There is no remained source or at least a hint that local consistory or church session was in operation in any of the churches in the 16th century. Churches were overseen by bishops and archdeacons. Synods were attended by preachers, if members of the nobility were present was solely to put pressure on the clergy in favour of certain decisions. Church government followed the Medieval pattern, however the bishops had no absolute power, they governed their diocese together with a board of senior pastors, the presbyters. Thus in the 16th century the term "presbyter" was used, however it referred to a certain group of clergymen that helped the bishop to oversee his church district. This use of "venerabilis presbyterium" remained until the 18th century. Presbyter as lay leader of the congregation was mentioned

¹² The first and so far last in depth introduction to this theory in Hungary has been done by Gábor Kármán in the introduction of his PhD dissertation. KÁRMÁN, Gábor: *A külpolitika átalakulása a Rákócziak Erdélyében a harmincéves háború után*, PhD dissertation, ELTE-BTK, 2009. <http://doktori.btk.elte.hu/hist/karman/diss.pdf> Access: 13/05/2017

¹³ MOLNÁR Antal, *Mezőváros és katolicizmus : Katolikus egyház az egri püspökség hódoltsági területein a 17. században*, Budapest, METEM, 2005.

only in the “Tarcál-Tordai” Confession received in Hungary in 1562 and in Transylvania in 1563, which was in fact the adaptation of the *Confessio Christianae fidei* by Thèodore de Bèze. As a theoretical description¹⁴ it followed the Genevan model, however without any practical implication (eg.: about the election of presbyters), giving the impression that the two synods did not see it as a real option for church government in their time.¹⁵

Church government in Hungary resembled more the German Lutheran than the Genevan or the Huguenot model. The influence of patrons remained as strong as before the Reformation. Thurzó Szaniszló ordered in the mid 17th century that without consultation with him, the patron of the churches in villages and towns under his lordship, no preacher could be dismissed or invited in any of the churches.¹⁶ The pastor had supreme authority in spiritual matters. Local churches were overseen by the archdeacon (‘senior’) and the bishop. The regional or church district synods were attended by preachers.

The first local presbytery was established in the town of Pápa in 1617. The “founding father”, János Kanizsai Pálfi imported the ecclesial structure of Heidelberg. The scope of the consistory of Pápa was to help the Pastors to keep the ethics in order, i.e. church discipline which included the Pastors and their families, too. Also the task of the presbyters was to protect the church and its teachers in case of gossip or any attack from outside.¹⁷ The first local

¹⁴ Articles XXI and XXIV. The text of the Tarcál-Tordai Confession in Hungarian: Kiss, Áron: *A XVI. században tartott magyar református zsinatok végzései*, Budapest, 1881, p. 286-411.

¹⁵ MÁRKUS, Mihály, A presbíter rendszer kialakulása a 17. század közepéig, in: *Kálvin időszerepése*, ed.: FAZAKAS Sándor, Budapest, Kálvin Kiadó, 2009. p. 38-39.

¹⁶ ILA, Bálint, *A Thurzó levéltár protestáns egyháztörténeti iratai*: MÁLYUSZ, Elemér, ed, *Magyar Protestáns Egyháztörténeti Adattár XV*. Budapest, Magyar Protestáns Irodalmi Társaság, 1934. p. 305-306.

¹⁷ Copy of the order of the first Reformed consistory was found in the castle of Fogaras (now: Făgăraș, Romania) some 800 km away from its origin. POKOLY, József, Az első magyar ref. presbíterium keletkezése és szervezete, *Protestáns Szemle*, XIII, (1901), p. 202-220.

consistory was created with the approval of the Transdanubian bishop and the landlord of the town. This latter being also Calvinist, stated that he not only supported the operation of such church council but also will not obstruct its decisions. The church of Pápa included the town and the garrison as well, therefore in the presbytery soldiers and citizens were present in equal numbers plus four extraordinary presbyters were elected.¹⁸ Presbyterian church government was made obligatory for all churches of the Transdanubian church district by the synod of Pápa in 1630 in combination with the establishment of presbyteries in church counties and church districts. In the garrison of Kiskomárom¹⁹, where János Kanizsai Pálfi took on the pastorate after his exile from the Batthyány court, the board of presbyters was inaugurated. Its records, mainly church disciplinary issues are unique remained source from the 17th century.²⁰ The local presbytery in Kiskomárom quickly gained such respect that even the town council consulted them in respect of tightening the morals. There is a letter from 1650 written by the successor of Kaizsai Pálfi,²¹ that these consistories and presbyteries were in actual operation. Sources prove that consistories or some kind of church councils were in operation in the major urban centres (Pápa, Győr) and in military garrisons (Kiskomárom)²² but otherwise, in particular in the

¹⁸ POKOLY, 1901, p. 211-212.

¹⁹ Now Zalakomár in southwest Hungary

²⁰ Original first published by, RÉVÉSZ, Kálmán, A presbíterium legelső nyomai hazai ref. Egyházunkban, *Protestáns Szemle*, IV, (1892) pp. 427-446. Also see Graeme MURDOCK, Church Building and Discipline in Early-seventeenth Century Hungary and Transylvania, in: *The Reformation in Eastern and Central Europe*, ed.: Karin MAAG, Aldershot, Ashgate, 1997, p. 147

²¹ The letter of Balázs Nagy-Maráczi to Zsuzsanna Lórántffy. Révész, 1892, pp. 422-424.

²² In order to stop the Turkish expansion the Habsburg military had recruited mercenary troops from many countries. Significant number of them being protestant they enjoyed religious freedom in their garrisons. In the early 18th century as a result of the liberation of the country, mercenary troops were replaced by the royal Habsburg army thus freedom of religion was abolished in the garrisons and the surrounding towns, too.

rural areas there is no sign of local consistory until the end of the 18th century.²³

In Pápa the Protocollums before 1720 were lost in the early 18th century. The ban of protestant worship in town between 1752-1783 did not cease the operation of the presbytery. Though the protestants were not allowed to have public meetings in town, in 1755 the presbytery was re-elected and the statutes of 1660 were confirmed. Even the title on the protocollum has no reference on the prohibited status of the church. The supreme curator was entitled to call the meetings. The presbytery continued its operation until Protestant worship was allowed again in 1783. The presbytery primarily dealt with financial issues, however the two elected sextons 'egyházfi' had the duty to support the ill and needy Calvinists.²⁴ In the city of Győr the first Protocollum was started in 1730.²⁵ On the first page it records the meeting of the presbytery where the 1699 rules for consistory were modified. We do not know the beginning of its operation; however in the first decades apparently no written document was produced. It seems strange taken the fact into consideration that the church had a school as high as that of Pápa and the presbytery had elected various officials: inspector (to watch over the work of the pastor and school teachers) curator, perceptor and gazda. The presbyters in Győr never called themselves presbyters but 'honourable members of the Holy Church' ("Szent Ecclesia érdemes tagjai") and their board was called convent. Protestant public worship was prohibited between 1749 and 1783. However some noble members of the former Reformed congregation and later their sons regularly met as "convent" to discuss the status of the Protestant citizens. They guarded and increased the money of the congregation. Also the

²³ HUDI, József et al, „*Processus Visitationis*”: Torkos Jakab egyházlátogatása 1747-ben. Pápa, 2011, p. 48.

²⁴ Dunántúli Református Egyházkerület Levéltára (DREL): 2nd Protocollum of the Reformed Church of Pápa. Analysed profoundly in TÓTH, Endre, *A pápai református egyház története*, Pápa, Főiskolai Könyvnyomda, 1941. pp. 197-202.

²⁵ Győri Református Egyházközség 1.sz. Protocolluma. (Kept in loco.) Parts published by PATAKY, László, *A győri református egyház története*, Győr, 1985, pp. 90-93.

supported financially remained Reformed congregations, in particular the one in Győrszemere the closest where Reformed worship was allowed and Schools and students on their way to Western European Reformed Universities, too. Moreover, they organized an illegal Reformed school in a rented room a decade before the edict of tolerance was issued by the emperor Joseph II in the early 1780's.²⁶

In most cases local presbyteries were not called presbyteries and their members presbyters until the late 18th century. In Pápa they were often called „előjáró uraim” in other places like Kiskunhalas „ecclesia assessorai”, and their meeting „ecclesiai gyűlés” or „consistorium”.

In Eastern Hungary and Transylvania the creation of local presbyteries had an entirely different road mainly due to the political differences. There the promoters of presbyterianism were those who studied in England and in Holland in the 1630' and became the Hungarian representatives of the puritan spirituality. They aimed for the completion of the Reformation in Hungary including re-ordering church services in particular the way of the Lord's Supper and establishing Presbyterian church government. The first leader of the puritan movement in Hungary was János Tolnai Dali, who aimed for a rapid and profound change in the church life. The wrath of the supporters of the existing order flowed on him. Unfortunately only few of his writings were preserved to today's age. Tolnai's successor, Pál Medgyesi produced substantial writings²⁷ in favour of presbyteries in all local congregations. His main argument was first Biblical: he regarded the Presbyterian church government as God's command to the churches.²⁸ Second the ineffectiveness of the existing ways of

²⁶ PATAKY, 1985, pp. 147-173.

²⁷ MEDGYESI, Pál, *Dialogus Politico-Ecclesiasticus*, Bártfa, 1650. (Two original copies are accessible in Budapest, in the Ráday Gyűjtemény of the Reformed Church); MEDGYESI, Pál, *Rövid tanítás a presbitériumról*, Sárospatak, 1653.

²⁸ Medgyesi devoted the first part of his book to give fourteen evidences (Biblical references underlined with references to theologians) that the Presbyterian church government was ordered by Christ himself. MEDGYESI, 1650, pp. 12-81

church discipline²⁹, which was sought to be improved by the board of local presbyters. Reformed clergy of the seventeenth century was committed to church discipline regardless to their relation to puritanism. However according to Medgyesi their words had little authority and they often received curses or inadequate response to their efforts. The task of the presbytery would have been to provide support to the pastors and authority to put the decisions in effect.³⁰ In spite of their enthusiasm and the Biblical argument of the puritans most of the pastors took a stand in objection to Presbyterianism. Similarly most of the nobility disagreed with them unwilling to sit in the same board with citizens without noble status or even serfs.³¹ In addition news came about the English revolution which made the prince of Transylvania György Rákóczi I. to be very cautious about presbyteries.³² Later his son, György Rákóczi II. regarded the puritan preachers as a direct threat to his rule, especially after the execution of Charles I in 1649.³³ Thus in his collection of law he banned all church reforms unless it gained full

²⁹ In most cases church discipline was exercised by the pastor in close co-operation with the community leaders. However it had its tight limits: First the pastor's office (and living) depended on the annual vote of the community leaders. Second, noblemen did not accept the authority of a pastor of non noble origin to carry out church discipline against them. Major offences were to be promoted to the leadership or assembly of the church county ('tractus') Third, though the annual visit of the senior (archdeacon) of the church county did examine church discipline matters, then and there he could only deal with the outstanding issues. See more: MURDOCK, 1997, pp. 148-151. And ILLYÉS, Endre, *Egyházfegyelem a magyar református egyházban (XVI-XIX. sz.)*, Debrecen, 1941, p. 79-80. Also Kiss, Réka, *Egyház és közösség a kora újkorban. A külkülli református egyházmegye 17-18. századi iratainak tükrében: Néprajzi tanulmányok*, Budapest, Akadémiai kiadó, 2011

³⁰ MEDGYESI, 1650, pp. 179-180.

³¹ LADÁNYI, Sándor, Az Egyházi szervezet változásai, in: *Egyháztörténet 2. 1711-től Napjainkig*, LADÁNYI, Sándor – PAPP, Kornél – TÖKÉCZKI, László eds, Budapest, Református Pedagógiai Intézet, 1998, p. 51.

³² ZOVÁNYI, Jenő, *Puritánus mozgalmak a magyar református egyházban*, Budapest, Magyar Protestáns Irodalmi Társulat, 1911

³³ Eg. see the dispute between Isaac Basire and János Apáczai Csere in Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia) in 1655. BÁN, Imre, *Apáczai Csere János*, Budapest, Akadémiai kiadó, 1958, p. 434.

approval from the wordly magistrates and patrons.³⁴ The 'side-effect' of the puritan movement was the first "National"³⁵ Synod of Szatmárnémeti in 1646. The statements of the synod, later called "Geleji-canon", were phrased and published by the Reformed bishop of Tiszántúl, István Geleji Katona.³⁶ In the XCIX canon he acknowledged the positive nature of presbyteries, however considered it as not apt for the Hungarian social and political structures. One could hardly miss the above mentioned political pressure from Rákóczi behind it. In spite of this the political settings have changed after the removal and death of George Rákóczi II. The third and fourth generation of puritan preachers however managed to establish presbyteries in some of the towns, but there is no known continuous record of any of them.³⁷

Medgyesi did not regard the ius patronatus as objection to presbyterian church government. However he urged the patrons that in all decisions, especially in the dismissal or appointment of the pastor should consult the local presbytery.³⁸ A different issue was when the landlord used his or her patronage to promote the establishment of presbytery. The town magistrates of Sárospatak regarded the Presbytery as it had been forced on them by Zsuzsanna Lórántffy and the presbyters had been appointed by her without their consent.

³⁴ *Approbatæ Constitutiones*, Várad, 1653, Art. No. III. http://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/fs2/object/display/bsb10000565_00012.html Download: 16/06/2017

³⁵ It was attended mainly by Reformed clergy from Eastern Hungary and Transylvania.

³⁶ Geleji Katona István: *Egyházi Kánonok, melyet részint a magyarországi részint az erdélyi régi kánonokból egybegyűjtött és a kor kívánatahoz képest több másokkal is bővített és kissé jobb rendbe szedett Geleji Katona István az erdélyi igaz hitű egyházak püspöke 1649*, Ford.: Kiss Áron, Szatmárnémeti, Szatmári Református Egyházmegye, 1875. p. 70 (XCIX.) <http://palheidfogel.gportal.hu/gindex.php?pg=29456369> Access: 26/04/2014 18:30

³⁷ NAGY, Géza, *A református egyház története 1608-1715*. I-II. Gödöllő-Máriabesnyő, Attraktor, 2008. pp. 274-275.

³⁸ MEDGYESI, 1650. p. 223-224.

When Zsófia Báthori became the landowner they asked even the Roman Catholic patroness to bring the presbytery to an end.³⁹

Records of local presbyteries are few and far between from the 17th century. This is in part result of the oral culture that was widespread even two centuries after the Reformation. The synod of Kocs in 1713 which ordered the establishment of Presbyteries in the Felsődunamelléki church district also ordered the congregation to purchase a Protocollum book to record the ecclesial issues.⁴⁰ In the town of Szabadszállás, the presbytery ordered to produce a written document of all decrees only in 1782, after decades of operation.⁴¹

We do not know of any writing from the 18th century that tried to give an argument for presbyteries like Medgyesi did a century before. The establishment of presbyteries was more driven by practical reasons. As a summary the main cause for establishing presbyteries in the 17th century was the church discipline. This function of the presbyteries remained in the 18th century however the religion policy of the Habsburg emperors, in particular Charles VI and Maria Theresa caused the Reformed towns to use the local presbytery as a mean of self defence. From the 1750's bans of Protestant worship (and capture of Reformed church buildings) decreased. Instead, as a mean of soft reformation Roman Catholic migration to the Protestant towns and towns was encouraged. Soon these inhabitants were included in the senate of the towns.⁴² This threatened the churches of those places that were previously governed by the local municipality. As sign of the strong connection between church and town oaths the town officers

³⁹ PÉTER, Katalin, A jezsuiták működésének első szakasza Sárospatakon, in: PÉTER, Katalin, ed, *Papok és nemesek. Magyar művelődéstörténeti tanulmányok a reformációval kezdődő másfél évszázadból*. Budapest, 1995. p. 197.

⁴⁰ THURY, Etele, *A Dunántúli Református Egyházkerület története I-II.*, Pozsony, Kalligram kiadó, 1998, vol. I. p. 314.

⁴¹ Jegyzetkönyv No. 1. of the Reformed Church of Szabadszállás (Kept in loco) p. 3.

⁴² The number of Roman Catholic senators encreased significantly even in Debrecen. RÁCZ, 1997, p. 92.

had to take were often recorded in the church registry books.⁴³ Thus the presbytery that before had been considered unnecessary and only the cause of turbulence then became a way to protect the Reformed church from the influence of Roman Catholic senators of the town.

In the town of Nagykőrös presbytery was only created in the end of the 18th century, the town council decided in all ecclesiastical issues. The whole town being Calvinist, the town council regarded themselves as naturally the leaders of the church, too. This included the maintenance of schools, appointment of teachers and pastors, the election of curator (usually among themselves) and the egyházi (usually an ordinary citizen). Church discipline issues were decided by the town's court⁴⁴ as part of the sentence.⁴⁵ In towns like Nagykőrös or Cegléd presbytery was thought to be unnecessary as the town council of operated as a presbytery. However its membership was very narrow as the members of the town council often came from the same families, often related to one another. Naturally their personal religious devotion was not a criteria for becoming a council member.

Similarly the town council of Debrecen called themselves 'Reverend Council' ("Tiszteletes Tanács") and made final decisions in all issues of the Reformed church, including liturgy, school statutes and supporting the poor as well.⁴⁶ Even Medgyesi in the 17th century acknowledged that the way church discipline and appointment of pastor had been done in Debrecen, in the city council and the pastors joint meeting was a some kind of remnant of presbytery.⁴⁷ The first written record of the consistory is from 1739, and the first statutes are from 1749. However it was officially finalised only at the synod of Buda in 1791. The Roman Catholic Church was re-established in 1716, however the municipal council did not interfere in the

⁴³ Jegyzetkönyv No. 2. of the Reformed Church of Szabadszállás (Kept locally) pp. 2-15.

⁴⁴ Often the court consisted of local senators and two or three invited Calvinist senators from the nearby Cegléd and Kecskemét)

⁴⁵ Pest Megyei Levéltár Nagykőrösi Fiókleveletára. I. Városi Tanács Jegyzőkönyvei

⁴⁶ NAGY, 2008, vol. II. p. 419-420.

⁴⁷ MEDGYESI, 1650. p. 189.

appointment of the Roman Catholic priest.⁴⁸ The reason for establishment was to create an autonomous board of church leadership to protect the church from conflict between the city and the Roman Catholic emperor. However the members were the whole city magistrates, pastors, the professors of the college and the city doctor. The chairmen were the mayor of the city and the senior pastor.⁴⁹

The Reformed towns of the Jászkun district could keep their confession even in the period when their freedom was suspended and were possession of the German Knights and the Invalides order until 1745. The town of Kiskunhalas was completely Protestant until a Roman Catholic chaplain was sent to the local garrison in 1761. Soon the number of Roman Catholics moving in the town started to increase. Until then the town council dealt with the employment of pastor and also church discipline issues. In 1764 Presbytery was formed in order to prevent the church from Roman Catholic influence. However, the municipal council kept the right to decide on the pastors and school teachers' office until 1770. Their decisions were copied into the church's protocollum. The church meeting or consistory (as they called themselves) consisted of the pastor, the mayor of town, the notary of the town, four senators and two "honourable" citizens. In 1771 every (Protestant) member of the town senate and four representatives of the citizens were included.⁵⁰ There is no reference to any model or even to Biblical passages about presbytery. When the presbytery was first formed it was also reasoned that the church matters give too much occupation to the senators of the town.⁵¹ The members of the presbytery were elected at the first time (the "honourable citizens by the whole community) and it was a

⁴⁸ RÁCZ, 1997, p. 96-97.

⁴⁹ BARÁTH Béla Levente – OROSZ Adrienn: A presbiteri egyházkormányzás kálvini értelmezése és hatása Magyarországon, *Debreceni Szemle* 2009 (XVII) 3-4. p. 371.

⁵⁰ Ráday Levéltár D 87 Kiskunhalas Református Egyházközség Protocolluma Vol. 1/2. p. 67.

⁵¹ Ráday Levéltár D 87 Vol. 1/2. p. 15.

lifelong duty. If anybody died or the numbers were to be increased the presbytery followed the usual pattern of that age in Hungary⁵²: they themselves decided the candidates and in the next round they voted on them. In terms of church discipline there was a clear continuity after the establishment of presbytery. The (in)famous shame stone was kept in use until the end of 18th century. The local town laws strictly punished immorality, however it may not functioned perfectly because on the very first meeting of the presbytery in 1764 the members devoted themselves to strengthen the church discipline. The presbytery in its first years was mainly occupied with moral issues. From the mid 1770's the majority of the discipline issues were the immorality of the teachers of the local Reformed school. In 1778 the personal responsibility of presbyters in not ignoring sin was underlined, however no actual decision was recorded.⁵³ The agenda of the presbytery was becoming more filled with financial and school matters.⁵⁴ The way the consistory operated and the members were elected in Kiskunhalas (and also in other localities) clearly followed the pattern of town councils of their time. It is no surprise, because that was the only model of a self-government body that they could model in practice.

The Presbytery in Reformed church of Szabadszállás, another town of the Jászkun district was established in 1758 with eight members from the town senate and six members from the community. Here the founding page is full of Biblical references and followed by a detailed description how they should watch the good order and the morals of the church. A list of offences was also recorded for which the presbytery had to reprove the sinner twice and if there was no change of behaviour public penitence was effectuated.⁵⁵

⁵² KÓSA, László, *Egyház, társadalom, hagyomány*, Debrecen, 1993, p. 93.

⁵³ Ráday Levéltár D 87 Vol. 1/2. p. 115.

⁵⁴ Ráday Levéltár D 87 Vol. 1/2. p. 123.

⁵⁵ Jegyzetkönyv No. 2 of the Reformed Church of Szabadszállás (kept in loco) pp. 45-49.

In the town of Kecskemét uniquely the Roman Catholic and Reformed community have lived side by side since the 1564 agreement between the two congregations.⁵⁶ By the mid 18th century the number of Roman Catholic inhabitants significantly exceeded the Calvinists.⁵⁷ Though they lived under the lordship of the devoted Roman Catholic Koháry family⁵⁸ it seems that the town council, which consisted of both Roman Catholic and Calvinist senators tried to be balanced in supporting both churches. Presbytery was established in the mid 17th century⁵⁹ however records start only from the 18th century. Prior to that the town's magistrate decided on church discipline including public penitence (ekléziakövetés)⁶⁰ for major sins such as adultery or blasphemy.⁶¹ In fact church discipline was part of the sentence. From the 18th century, when disciplinary issues were decided by the presbytery the close link remained between church discipline and the town's arbitrary decisions. The presbytery did not investigate but accepted the investigation of the town's court or the landlord's court and decided on a complementary ecclesiastical sentence.⁶² Even so the magistrates' court referred to the law of Moses in the Bible in some cases, e.g. when they asked the landlord to execute some persons who committed adultery in 1692.⁶³ The first remained decisions of the presbytery date between 1715 to 1718 are rather notes written down by the pastor on the blank pages of the church matricula. He

⁵⁶ Original is kept in the archives of the Reformed Church in Kecskemét (Kecskeméti Református Egyházközség Levéltára, KREL)

⁵⁷ IVÁNYOSI-SZABÓ Tibor: Kecskemét története 1686-1849. In: BÁRTH János (szerk.). In: Kecskemét története 1849-ig. Kecskemét monográfiája I. Kecskemét, 2002. 567-568. p.

⁵⁸ In the 17th century the Koháry family has supported the jesuit mission in the Roman Catholic diocese of Eger. MOLNÁR, 2005, p. 154.

⁵⁹ NAGY, 2008, vol. II. p. 292.

⁶⁰ This was the condition to being restored for Lord's Supper. In Kecskemét it was done by standing on the „shame stone” for a certain period. KREL I/1 Anyakönyv p. 69-70

⁶¹ Eg.: int he case of Szőke Jánosné for cursing in 1665. IVÁNYOSI-SZABÓ, Tibor ed., *A kecskeméti magisztrátus jegyzőkönyveinek töredékei*, vol. I. 1591-1711. Kecskemét, Bács-Kiskun Megyei Önkormányzat Levéltára, 1996. p. 105.

⁶² KREL II/1. Protocollum

⁶³ IVÁNYOSI-SZABÓ, 1996, vol. I. p. 144.

only recorded issues that deserved the standing on the shame stone, most of which was adultery. After some decades of silence the presbytery was re-organized in 1755.⁶⁴ Apparently according to the significant number of arbitrary issues recorded that year the magistrate of Kecskemét was concerned about the moral status of the town.⁶⁵ The presbytery met in three subsequent days. On the first day they re-established the statutes of presbytery and decided on liturgical matters. On the second day the presbytery decided the general rules of church discipline. On the third day decisions were made on specific issues.⁶⁶ Church discipline became much more differentiated, not only focused on the public penitence but on the reconciliation also. Such issues were the majority of the agenda in the 1750' and 1760's. Later moral issues became more rare until ceased completely from the records of presbyters's meetings in the 1780's. The presbytery of the late 18th century Kecskemét consisted of both citizens of the town and nobles living in town. The presbytery elected the church officials (clergy, teachers and laity: curator and egyházfí).

The establishment of presbytery in the town of Hódmezővásárhely in 1757 was considered necessary because of the negligence of town council members towards church business. But it caused a real tension between the church and the town council. The town leaders were not present in any of the meetings. In spite of the support of the landlord and his Protestant bailiffs the first attempt to establish Presbytery failed after two years.⁶⁷ In 1768 the visiting archdeacon George Szikszai urged the town that the ecclesiastical matters should be considered by a board meeting in the vicarage rather than by the town council.⁶⁸ The next record of coonsistory meeting is from 1778.

⁶⁴ KREL II/1. Protocollum p. 19 - 20.

⁶⁵ IVÁNYOSI-SZABÓ, 1996, vol. I. p. 6.

⁶⁶ KREL II/1. Protocollum p. 19 - 20.

⁶⁷ Protocollum No 1 of the Reformed Church of Hódmezővásárhely-Ótemplom (kept in loco) pp. 27-36.

⁶⁸ SZEREMLEI, Sámuel, *A hódmezővásárhelyi református egyház története. Tekintettel az egyház és a vidék egyházi állapotára és főbb eseményeire.* (published by Tereh, Gyula) Hódmezővásárhely, Roth Antal Könyvnyomdája és Kiadója, 1927, p. 199.

This meeting was chaired by Benjámin Szőnyi, local senior pastor and that time archdeacon of the Békés county. The members of the consistory were the two pastors and the town magistrates who that time did take part in the meeting. They decided on the person of the curator and on financial matters, and stated they should meet regularly amplified with representatives of the ordinary citizens. However there is no record of any consistory meeting until 1790. Meanwhile the town's magistrates had brought a suit against pastor Szőnyi. Church matters again had been recorded in the registry of the town council. The third attempt under the leadership of the new pastor, Andreas Kiss was proved to be successful. Meetings of the local Presbytery were held regularly complemented with the representatives of the ordinary citizens. However the distinction remained between the 'outside leaders of the church' ("eklézsia érdemes külső elöljárói") i.e. the town magistrates and the ordinary members.⁶⁹

So far it seems that the establishment of presbyteries was connected to the Reformed towns. Medgyesi in regard to the uneducated status of serfdom suggested that presbyteries should have been established in major towns, and then the light of these would spread to other areas.⁷⁰ Does that mean also that this strengthens the link between the Hungarian town and Protestantism?

In the case of Gyöngyös the town council was involved in the financial issues of the Roman Catholic Church as well as in the appointment of the new priest or school teachers in the same way as in the Reformed towns of Hungary.⁷¹ The town council was open only for Roman Catholic citizens thus sometime the town interfered in church matters. In the 16th and 17th centuries the town council often protected the Roman Catholic church properties or Jesuits in suits or from the anger of the Turkish authorities. In the late 17th century the Roman

Catholic priest successfully tried to reduce the dominance of the town's magistrate on church economics.⁷² When the Jesuits entered in the town of Gyöngyös, the first thing they organized was the religious education, which seemed to be successful.⁷³ This function of the Jesuit order clearly resembles the emphasis put on education by the Protestantism. The finances of the Roman Catholic parish and the Franciscan monastery was run by lay "egyházfi" or syndicate similar to the two curators' office in the Reformed church. According to Molnár these go back to the late medieval office of *vitricius* which was widespread in the towns and cities in Hungary.⁷⁴ The syndicate of the Roman Catholic parish was elected by the town council, thus they had some control of the church's finances, which often caused conflict with the priest. These syndicates were usually citizens with nobility showing the high esteem of the office.⁷⁵ The finances of the Jesuits in Gyöngyös was based on will and donations from landlords and the bishop of Eger, similarly as of the Protestant Church. The curators of the Reformed church were usually nobles as well. In the years of ban of Protestant worship between 1711 and 1783 the Calvinist noblemen living in town met every year, wrote down an inventory of the preserved belongings of the Reformed church and elected two caretakers who would keep these for the following year.⁷⁶ Molnár's conclusion is that the administration by lay people of both the Roman Catholic and Reformed churches was the development of late medieval town administration and it was only the result of the minority status of the Calvinists that their administration was not done by the town's magistrates but by elected curators.⁷⁷ Also free royal towns under Roman Catholic magistrates such as Szeged, Győr, Pest, etc. had the right to appoint their own Roman Catholic

⁷² MOLNÁR, 2005, p. 100-101.

⁷³ MOLNÁR, 2005, p. 140-141.

⁷⁴ MOLNÁR, 2005, p. 99.

⁷⁵ MOLNÁR, 2005, p. 105.

⁷⁶ Protocollum of the Reformed Church in Gyöngyös (kept in loco)

⁷⁷ MOLNÁR, 2005, p. 101-102.

⁶⁹ Protocollum No 1 of the Reformed Church of Hódmezővásárhely-Ótemplom (kept in loco), part II. pp. 1-18.

⁷⁰ MEDGYESI, 1650. p. 201.

⁷¹ MOLNÁR, 2005, p. 215.

priest until the late 19th century.⁷⁸ However presbytery as an autonomous board of church members gathering in particular to discuss ecclesial matters with representatives from the community also was absent from the Roman Catholic towns and cities of that time. If there was any difference between the two confessions in terms of function than it was the presbytery and especially its focus on church discipline.

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⁷⁸ RÁCZ, 1997, p. 105.