

RELIGIOUS CONFLICT IN NYÍREGYHÁZA – THE DIFFICULTIES OF AN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY SLOVAK SETTLEMENT

The resettlement of wide areas of Hungary, and especially those in peripheral areas, in the years following the end of the Turkish occupation is a large and complex subject. This particular study introduces the 18th century settlement of Nyíregyháza, a long and painful process in which it was the religious identity of the Slovak Lutheran settlers which was the dominant issue rather than their ethnic origin.

We deal in some detail with those conflicts which developed between the settlers' landlord (Count Ferenc Károlyi) and the bishop of Eger (Count Ferenc Barkóczy) over the settlement itself. These conflicts were closely related to the re-catholicisation process in Hungary which played an important role even in the mid-18th century.

Keywords: resettlement of Hungary, minorities, ethnicity, religious identity

VERSKI KONFLIKT V NJIREGIHAZIJI - PROBLEMI SLOVAŠKEGA NASELJA IZ 18. STOLETJA

Ponovna poselitev večjega dela madžarskega ozemlja po koncu turške okupacije, še posebej obrobni območij, je obsežno in zapleteno vprašanje. Članek obravnava poselitev Nyíregyháze v 18. stoletju – boleč in dolgotrajen proces, v katerem je bila etnična identiteta slovaških naseljencev manj pomembna od njihove luteranske veroizpovedi.

Podrobno obravnavamo tudi spor med veleposestnikom (grofom Ferencem Karolyijem) in škofom v Egru (grofom Ferencem Barkoczyjem) glede same naselitve. Ta spor je bil tesno povezan s procesom rekatolizacije, ki je bil v 18. stoletju na Madžarskem zelo pomemben.

Ključne besede: Madžarska, ponovna poselitev, manjšine, etničnost, verska identiteta

Among the most important factors which determine or shape the existence of traditional or historical minorities, *ethnicity* and *religion* are paramount, and both are critical to the process of determining the basic types of minority.¹ In terms of linkage, it is clear that there are numerous possibilities: the main feature of their minority character may clearly indicate some form of inter-definitive relation,² or, on the contrary, their tendency to alter or metamorphose one another may predominate.³ However, there are minorities which, during the process of becoming a nation, think in such a continuity in which religious identity is characterised by some form of 'pre-era' attribute.⁴

In this paper I am attempting to show an 18th century settlement process – namely, that of Nyíregyháza, which – as *pars pro toto* – harmonises with the above to the extent that the denominational identity of the Slovak Lutheran settlers became dominant over time.

It may sound incredible to a reader today, but, after existing for several centuries, in the middle of the 18th century Nyíregyháza faced the danger of extinction – more precisely, (from a settlement-historical point of view, by the decline of the town to an area of sparsely-populated heath-land. Among the many reasons for this are the Turkish invasion, repeated Tatar attacks and the Kuruc movements, as well as the hardships caused by the Great Plague.

In this period Nyíregyháza was part of the Ecsed domain (Éble 1898: 4) – which had been bought by the Károlyi family. Prior to this, Ecsed had had several owners in parallel. The total estate, which embraces an area of some six counties (!), had been so awkwardly distributed in 1728 that three totally barren plots were excluded from one parcel of land, and so it was not surprising that the landowners at that time would have loved to rid themselves of such properties which promised only a minimal income.

However, as emerged during the process of distributing estates and organising settlements after the Peace of Szatmár, for the Imperial Court the religious denomination of the new landowner was quite irrelevant. It was the same with the Ecsed domain, when one of the owners, the Imperial Court, contacted Count Sándor



1 A UN study was made in 1949 entitled 'The Determination and Classification of Minorities', which differentiated among seven basic types of minority: racial, linguistic, ethnic, national, religious, native and emigrant. For this typology see: Szarka 2005: 159–160.

2 István Szabó, for example, deals with the connection between 'nationality' and 'religion' – with reference to a specific historical example – in a very similar way (Szabó 1937: 47–49).

3 It is the context of 'religion' and 'ethnicity' from which, for example, Jenő Szűcs's ideas on medieval national identity, in connection with 'genteelism', can be interpreted (Szűcs 1997: 12–97). A summary of the 'perennial' and 'modernist' views of nationalism is provided, for example, by Smith 1995: 12–19.

4 Concerning this see, for example, Anderson 2006: 25.

Károlyi. The Count was not very enthusiastic about the idea of the purchase, as is shown by a letter which he wrote to his son, in which he stated quite forcefully that neither his body nor his soul longed for the estate of Ecsed, moreover, he was also bored with all his other estates since “it is a hundred times easier to find and buy stock than to get farmers to take care of it” (Éble 1898: 12). The Count, on the other hand, would not have been one of the most imaginative major landowners of his time⁵ if he only had considered religious factors, entirely neglecting the economic propriety, political ones.

Eventually, the purchase did take place, although its history (including the accompanying litigation) lasted nearly thirty years from 1730 to 1758. The Károlyi family – Sándor and his son, Ferenc – paid nearly 400.000 forints for Ecsed.

A total lack of interest in the estate is clearly shown by the fact that nobody wished to buy the estate auctioned by the Court (Éble 1898: 20), but in this way Nyíregyháza came to belong to the Károlyi family through the purchase of the Ecsed estate, which encompassed four counties – Szatmár, Szabolcs, Outer Szolnok and Bihar – which then belonged to Szabolcs County.

The organisational work, however, produced serious difficulties. When the Károlyi family took the estate, as the historian said, the “real landowner was ... harsh nature herself hiding in the marshes” (Éble 1898: 37). The situation is clearly illustrated by one piece of data from the census held in the middle of the 18th century, namely that only 24 landlords and one serf lived on the land which came into the ownership of the Károlyi family (Éble 1898: 38), and also by the fact that, in 1752, Károlyi offered Nyíregyháza as a gift to his brother-in-law – but in vain: Demeter Rácz did not accept it! Ferenc Károlyi then started to implement his father's old idea – *settlement*.

If we follow events chronologically, we should first look at Károlyi's ideas. He also wished to follow his father's example by initially wishing to populate Nyíregyháza with Catholics but he did not find such a population even though his representatives had been searching abroad. Eventually he decided that he would populate Nyíregyháza with Slovak Lutherans (referred to as ‘Tót’ people in Hungarian-speaking areas). He consoled himself with the thought that members of two other denominations – Orthodox and Lutheran – were already living on the estate (Éble 1898: 39).

Károlyi did not have the slightest idea what dangers were lurking in the fact that he himself, as a Catholic landlord, was settling Lutherans on his own estate. Who would have thought that this seemingly ‘innocent’ case of the settlement of



5 Concerning this, see, for example: Éble 1893: 82–89, but especially: Kovács 1988: 171–210.

Nyíregyháza would set into motion secular institutions starting at county level, but rising through the Chancellery and the Governor's Council to the level of the Imperial Court in Vienna – as well as clerical institutions from the local Episcopal Court to the Holy See itself!

Károlyi, at that time knowing nothing, started pre-arrangements for the settlement. First of all, he wished to obtain the support of Szabolcs County. At the beginning of 1753 he had already agreed with the County that all settlers would enjoy a three-year tax holiday.⁶ On obtaining this agreement, he issued his Charter on the 23rd of May 1753 in which he invited people to settle in the area of Nyíregyháza and on the barren land of Cserkesz. After the three-year tax holiday all landlords were to pay one gold coin to the County – “they shall be golden” (Éble 1898: 41), that is, they would not have to bear other taxes imposed by the County. Károlyi had promised a sufficient amount of timber for building houses, and, furthermore, he was also planning to rent neighbouring estates if required, were the settlers not to have sufficient land on their plots. According to the terms of the Count's invitation, the settlers were allowed to build churches and have their own priest. Károlyi himself only wanted to practise his rights as a landed squire over the settlers after the three-year “waiting period” had passed (Éble 1898: 41).⁷

Following this, the process of settlement could be carried out, but, even before the Charter was issued, Slovaks from Békés were willing to make the move and, eventually, from that area 214 landowners who had the right of free movement settled in Nyíregyháza. Settlers, however, did not only arrive in Nyíregyháza from Békés County, 44 landowners came from Zólyom, 28 from Borsod, 20 from Gömör and Nógrád Counties and 25 landowners from Hont (Éble 1898: 42–43). According to the census held at the end of 1754, including family members, a total of 2,485 people arrived.⁸ Even without precise data, historians claim it proven that the settlers were ‘mostly’ Slovak native-speakers and of the Lutheran faith.

Parallel with the arrival of the settlers, however, the earlier inhabitants of Nyíregyháza dispersed, or, more precisely, Károlyi's stewards expelled them.⁹ The ‘logistical’ prearrangements of the settlement were carried out distinctly in an organised way since, by the summer of 1754, 200 large houses had been built (Éble 1898 : 43).



6 Originally Károlyi had asked for a six-year tax-free period (Éble 1898: 41).

7 Éble published the whole text of the Charter: 1898: 145–146.

8 According to Éble's data, there were 561 farmers, 523 wives, 798 sons, 561 daughters and 42 servants (Éble 1898: 43).

9 Unfortunately Éble did not deal with the reasons for the dispersal and dismissals.

However, by settling ‘mostly’ Slovak native-speakers, the map of Nyíregyháza in respect of its minorities did not really become more varied since – as we have seen – the inhabitants living there prior to this had already left the settlement, and so, in his own words, Károlyi considered it worth mentioning that he allowed a Russian priest to reside there “in solitude” (Éble 1898: 43).

The conflicts which followed did not arise from problems relating to ethnicity but rather to religion, since it was the movement of clergy which signified real danger to those Catholic priests who were not happy to witness the settlement of so many Lutherans.

Based on earlier experience, Károlyi could not reasonably have expected this danger, but he still tried hard to consult with all possible local and central secular forums in relation to the settlement process – and he received a positive reaction from all. However, by the time that the Empress herself had come to deal with settlement affairs, those against the settlement process had reported Károlyi to the Court, specifically complaining that he had carried out the process in an unlawful way (Éble 1898: 47–48).

It was mainly those who envied Károlyi as well as Count Ferenc Barkóczy, the bishop of Eger and the bishop’s confidant, Antal Gerstocker, the incumbent of Fény, who were behind the denunciation. (The piquancy of this situation is intensified by the fact that Károlyi, through his mother, was related to the bishop as well as to Count Imre Barkóczy, the County Head (= Lord Lieutenant) of Szatmár County – and, to cap it all, the latter two were also related to each other.)

The whole point of the accusation was that, firstly, Károlyi had allowed inhabitants with no permission to move (meaning the serfs of other landlords) to settle, secondly he had tempted serfs with the promise of a tax-holiday and, thirdly, he had promised the Lutheran settlers the free practice of their religion. The bishop also raised a query as to whether Károlyi had expelled the serfs of the Calvinist, Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic faiths from Nyíregyháza prior to the process of settlement, and he had “exclusively” settled Lutherans in their place (Éble 1898: 51).

Károlyi’s position which had previously been strong now changed dramatically, since the bishop openly demanded the banning of the settlers’ right to practise their religion freely, the demolition of the oratory which they had built, extremely severe punishment for those who broke the law and, finally, that the settlers to be driven back home, to their previous habitat (Éble 1898: 51–52).

In his plea submitted to the Governor’s Council Károlyi did not react to the accusations of the bishop, although those would have been easy to attack; rather he dealt with the circumstances of the settlement process (Éble 1898: 52). On the one hand he made it clear that settlement is a legal act, and, on the other, that he

had only given the right to settle to those who had the right of “free migration”. (He further strengthened his claim by pointing out that no other landlords had submitted any complaint against him) in two respects, however, the Count was on the defensive, and with little result. He had to admit that he had indeed promised a three-year tax-holiday to his settlers, something which he only could have done on the basis of his rights as a landed squire, although, as he argued, without such a concession no-one at all would have wished to settle. He also admitted, in respect of the free practice of faith, that the settlers “from their own ignorance had forgotten to ask for permission concerning the practice of faith” (Éble 1898: 52) from the Empress, and so Károlyi placed the responsibility with Maria Theresa. Károlyi’s defence did not convince the Governor’s Council since the Count had admitted his own errors, and the County was, therefore, obliged to examine the case in April, 1754. The County Head, although he did not oppose this, did not object to the aims of the County to do all it could to save the new settlement. The sympathy of the County towards the settlement cannot be better illustrated than by the fact that the Deputy County Head (Comes Curialis) Szunyoghi *himself had worked out and written an impressive petition addressing those in Nyíregyháza* and had submitted it also to the general assembly of the County (Éble 1898: 56). After a heated discussion, the County Head (Comes Supremus) accepted the plea of “the people of Nyíregyháza” and they were freed from the military levy (to “pay for soldiers”) (ibid). The action of the Comes Curialis, however, was denounced by someone and he was punished.

Meanwhile, the bishop also took steps, and, after consulting with the County he turned to the Court in Vienna – in fact, to the Empress herself, who then began to oppose the settlement process in Nyíregyháza despite the fact that, earlier, it had been supported both by the Lord Palatine and the Chancellor.

The bishop’s visit to Vienna had its consequences: in October, 1754 a further inspection was imposed on the County, and, moreover, it was compelled to expel the Lutheran priest from the County, to forbid him, on the pain of arrest, to return and have the meeting-house built by the religious settlers dismantled (Éble 1898: 60).¹⁰

At this point Károlyi decided to on a serious step – that he himself would demolish the meeting-house (Éble 1898: 61). He ordered the Imperial Captain, Szaplanczay, to carry out his will. Szaplanczay did, in fact, appear in Nyíregyháza, had the meeting-house “obliterated completely” (Éble 1898: 62) but made the Lutheran priest visit him, convincing him to hide, not to lose contact with his com-



10 Reacting to Károlyi’s request the Governor’s Council had earlier obliged the county to keep a record of all those Catholic, Ruthenian and Calvinist inhabitants who used to live there but had moved elsewhere on news of the settlement process (Éble 1898: 58).

munity of believers but to report all newly emerging problems to him. Although the believers hid the meeting-house bell, the good-natured Szaplanczay had to forbid them to practise their religion. The desire of the incumbent of Fény to have the Lutheran priest “solemnly” driven away from Nyíregyháza was not realised (Éble 1898: 62) but, nevertheless, the right to free religious practice of Lutheran believers had been severely damaged.

With this act the Károlyi family fulfilled the Governor’s Council’s wish concerning religion and it seemed as though the case had ended. In the meantime, however, some ‘good soul’ had sent Károlyi’s Charter concerning the Settlement Process to the Governor’s Council and this ‘bulletin’ caused yet more complications (Éble 1898: 62–63).

The Governor’s Council’s complaint now was that this Charter had been promulgated even though it was unlawful, and it now required the County to serve the interests of the state. It obliged them to tax the settlers immediately and to interrogate the leader of the settlement to determine who it was who had ordered the Charter to be promulgated in order to tempt the serfs to Nyíregyháza (Éble 1898: 63).

The situation of the settlers worsened still further. Even though the County did not levy the customary tax, the County Head, now more loyal to the Court and the bishop, did so. The serfs of the neighbouring landowner also prevented them from working efficiently in the fields, and, in respect of the military levy (“paying for soldiers”) they felt that “this would drive them straight to ruin” (ibid). All of their difficulties were simply crowned by the fate of their absent¹¹ chaplain (Márton Wandlik), who, despite his difficult circumstances, tried hard to keep the faith for his flock.

Inevitably, the community of settlers began to disperser. There were some who found it so hard to believe that anything positive could happen that they simply stopped building their houses and prepared to leave at any time.

Their anxiety turned out to be justified. In the name of the Empress the bishop,¹² in his letter addressed to the County, rejected the legitimacy of private religious practice, and then in 1755 the reaction of the Governor’s Council also arrived. In this a detailed examination was once more demanded and communal taxes, in addition to the military levy, were also imposed on those living in Nyíregyháza. With this development our story has reached a whole new chapter.



¹¹ The vicar was hiding in Debrecen where he was living on assistance received from Károlyi (Éble 1898: 70).

¹² Barkóczy was of the opinion that the Lutheran settlers were heretics (Éble 1898: 65).

In his plea to Maria Theresa, Károlyi asked Her Majesty to allow those four hundred Lutheran families, as “a plain act of mercy,” the “private practice of religion” (Éble 1898: 72–73). In his appeal he explained in detail how much effort his forebears had devoted to the Catholic Church - for example, creating more than twenty churches, monasteries and parishes.

In the meantime the bishop wrote a letter to Károlyi informing the Count of his own ideas for Nyíregyháza. In the light of earlier events, the action of Barkóczy is not easy to understand, since he had managed to accomplish nearly all that he had been originally fighting for. Nevertheless, he did not write in a conciliatory fashion, which would have matched the actual situation, but laid out his latest plan, namely that *he wished to send a Catholic priest to Nyíregyháza* (Éble 1898: 73). According to the historian, what lay behind the notion (which seems absurd in the light of earlier events), was the bishop’s hope that “a clever priest could easily win over a flock deprived of its shepherd to the Catholic Church” (ibid). In his answer Károlyi warned Barkóczy that the appearance of a Catholic priest would merely create the danger of the settlers dispersing (Éble 1898: 75). However, the bishop had made the mistake of despatching the priest to Nyíregyháza for a “preliminary tour of inspection” without waiting for the Count’s answer to arrive (Éble 1898: 77).

This ‘preliminary tour of inspection’ resulted in the Catholic priest taking over the house of the ‘Russian priest’ and his appearance alarmed the settlers. The situation worsened when the parish priest of Fény reported to the Comes Curialis that the Lutheran priest was ‘lurking’ in Nyíregyháza and, defying the ban, also acting as a priest there. The investigation, however, revealed only that the old Lutheran preacher did indeed go around the settlement, but only to beg for his living. The official wanted to interrogate the priest and so he sent soldiers who eventually picked him up. The public feeling which this generated is well illustrated by the fact that, according to the notary public of Nyíregyháza, “... if four of five men had been there, *the soldiers would surely have been killed*” (Éble 1898: 79).

Once again, Károlyi turned to the Court where, by this time, they had had enough of the quarrel. The placement of the Catholic priest in Nyíregyháza was suspended and the bishop was asked to make concessions to Károlyi (Éble 1898: 81). The bishop immediately reacted in a conciliatory fashion and suggested a personal meeting. This brought about the meeting in which the bishop did indeed make concessions.¹³ He abandoned the immediate ‘placement’ of the Catholic



13 According to Éble these were the following: “1. The installation of the pastor *will be suspended* during this Spring so that the settlers will have time to carry out the spring planting and hay-making. 2. At Easter the Lutheran pastor may visit them and carry out his duties for three days. 3. To the same end and from now onwards, he may spend *three days* there *three times annually*. 4. The residents may meet for prayers and they

priest, and, moreover, accepted the practice of the Lutheran faith; the Lutheran pastor himself could carry out his duties to some extent, ensuring that the flock would not stay without its shepherd. Károlyi himself too ‘only’ objected to the bishop’s concessions in that he wished to delay the installation of the pastor until the settlers had finished building their houses and planting the vineyards – and until tempers had settled. Károlyi’s other wish was that he, as a landlord, would be allowed to give the settlers an appropriate building to celebrate their ‘Mass’, whilst, in return, he would have given the old Calvinist church to the Catholics. The count even promised to try to find Catholic settlers also (Éble 1898: 82). Even though, at that point, no formal agreement had actually been drawn up, on the 24th of March, 1756¹⁴ the agreement was concluded by the mediation of the Court.

Instructions had been sent directly to the Catholic priest, and in these he was forbidden to indulge in any abuse of power and to compel any members of other dominions to attend Catholic religious ceremonies. Were he to ignore these instructions, he would lose his entire income and would also face punishment (Éble 1898: 83).

However, even with this agreement, which represented a rather poor result for Károlyi, the *Via Dolorosa* of the unfortunate people of Nyíregyháza (and that of Károlyi personally) had not come to an end. The County Head (Comes Supremus) once more raised taxes imposed on the settlers, and the parish priest of Oros held a procession through Nyíregyháza to show that he would act in the same way again in the future.

In the situation which had evolved, the Lutheran settlers asked help from the Calvinist preacher. This was revealed to the parish priest of Fény and he informed Barkóczy accordingly. The bishop asked the County, in keeping with the ordinances, to ban this way of practising religion. Although the *Carolina Resolutio* clearly prohibits ecclesiastical duties being carried out by a Calvinist pastor, the Comes Curialis still announced the news that the royal ordinances to which references were being made “had not been found by my distinguished lordships”... (Éble 1898: 85). Even Károlyi’s captain, the amiable Szaplanczay, had the opinion that the count could not keep “those unfortunate Tóts” (ibid).

may appoint someone to lead the prayers together with a precentor to lead the singing. 5. The Catholic priest will take up his position as soon as the spring plantings come to an end” (Éble 1898: 81).

14 The agreement contains the following points: 1./ The believers in Nyíregyháza may appoint only a prayer leader who is not allowed to carry out priestly duties. 2./ The Lutheran pastor may spend three days in Nyíregyháza three times a year – at main holidays – and he may carry out his duties concerning the souls. 4. The Catholic priest may only “occupy his office” on the name day of István and he must carry out his priestly duties without fee. 4./The Calvinist church “will be taken back” for the use of the Catholics, since there are hardly any Calvinists left in Nyíregyháza. 5./ Károlyi, as a landlord, will do his utmost to have Catholic settlers come to Nyíregyháza (Éble 1898: 83).

This fear was proved correct. When the settlers learned about the installation of the Catholic priest they were even ready to move in midwinter, and, moreover, thirty people left within one single week (Éble 1898: 85). The emotional state of the settlers is clearly illustrated by the fact that those Lutherans who so far had been enduring events stoically now assaulted the Ruthenian (Slavic) priest who was working in the fields (Éble 1898: 84–85). The offenders were caught and severely punished, which of course aroused further passions. The situation changed only after Károlyi had sent them the Royal agreement and had sent the Lutheran pastor, who was hiding in Debrecen, to Nyíregyháza for the Easter holidays which were approaching. He was welcomed with great joy by his followers (Éble 1898: 85–86).

As is easy to imagine, the bishop was far from happy with such turns of events but Károlyi also appeared determined. So arrived, – to put it highly stylistically – the last stage: the Holy See of Rome, since this was the only forum which the case had not yet reached. The Count, with the bishop's knowledge, presented the case to the Pope himself.

In his written report Károlyi tried to introduce the case in a historical context. He went back as far as the beginning of the Reformation and tried to show that Catholicism, the 'ancient religion' had almost completely disappeared in the regions beyond River Tisza, and that the seat of the episcopate in Eger had been occupied by the Turks.

Based on the Acts of 1691 and 1687 the free practice of religion had been perpetuated in the areas beyond the Tisza, where almost all of the "churches" were in the hands of Lutherans (Éble 1898: 88). Quite significant data were used by Károlyi in respect of the situation which had developed when he stated that there were altogether only three Catholic priests working in the whole area beyond the Tisza – and even they were in totally different counties (ibid).

It was this situation, clearly hugely unfavourable for the Catholic Church, which the Károlyi family wanted to change through the process of settlement and church organisation. Sándor Károlyi "in a thoughtful way and by gentle means" (Éble 1898: 89) recovered more than 26 parishes and churches from "those of other faiths" and the result of his settlement policy was that, whilst in 1718 there were only 85 Catholic believers, by 1748 their number had risen to 6,000. He could only count this as a success mainly among those of the Lutheran faith, since, according to the opinion of the count "the obstinate, coarse and barbaric Calvinists ... made him unable to persuade them" (ibid).

That was the point at which the bishop intervened. He, who not only did not welcome the settlers, but did all he could to try to cause them to 'disintegrate' and wished to deprive them of their right to practice their religion freely as well as to

deprive them of their pastor and their meeting-house (Éble 1898: 90). He did all this despite the fact that those concerned living in this specific region of the country were simply practising their own rights as guaranteed by law (ibid).

The Pope had his most outstanding theologians handle the case, and these, in their verdict, unanimously stated that the count was right. Thereafter the bishop no longer dealt with Nyíregyháza, and, what is more, he even cancelled the installation of the Catholic priest (Éble 1898: 86).

The chronicler of Nyíregyháza, Gábor Éble, explained the events which had happened as partly due to the personal traits¹⁵ of bishop Barkóczy, although he mainly quoted the erroneous acts of the parish priest of Fény¹⁶ as the key factors. Other sources, however, provide information about events relating to Barkóczy's behaviour and which cannot really be used in order to put the blame on the parish priest of Fény.¹⁷

It would be a mistake, however, if we were to regard these personal factors relating to the case as being of paramount importance. The events can be primarily traced back to more deeply-rooted, *structural causes*. The re-catholicisation of the 17th century was better able to show more positive results in the area of the Kingdom of Hungary. In the area in question and in Transylvania the Reformation was on firm ground.

A *new situation* arose, however, after the Turks had been expelled and after the Rakoczi uprising had been defeated. The Catholic Church did not only aim at revitalising the struggling congregations (Hermann 1942/4: 428–429) wishing to create new institutions, it also wished to repossess its “beach-heads” which it had lost due to the spread of the Reformation. These aspirations aimed at stabilising the Catholic faith were supported by the state itself also. One of the well known

15 According to Éble the bishop did respect the Count but “... *in regard to religion implacable strictness* and a firm willingness taken to extremities characterised him” (Éble 1898: 49). Barkóczy was not only praised by the chronicler of the Károlyi family but, for example, Jakab Rupp also, who, in his three-volume work dealing with ecclesiastical institutions, listed the bishop's major accomplishments also (Rupp 1872/2: 27–28).

16 According to Gábor Éble, Antal Gerstocker was known as a violent, coarse and pugnacious person, who “... on top of all, was the very perfection of impatience and prejudice regarding religion” (Éble 1898: 50).

17 Between the bishop and the town of Eger, for example, a several-year-long conflict had broken out. The background of the quarrel was the problem of which religions were allowed to be practised freely by the believers, or which denomination members were allowed to purchase property in the town (Szederkényi 1893/4: 241). Perhaps it is also not irrelevant to know that one of those who tried to make peace between the town and the bishop was Ferenc Károlyi himself (ibid). There had also been conflict between the Greek-Catholic bishop of Munkács and the bishop of Eger. The reason for the conflict was that, at that time, the episcopate of Eger had had authority over that of Munkács, the influence of Eger continually grew, and the relationship between the two bishops, Barkóczy and Mihály Olsavszki became extremely bad. Eventually it was Maria Theresa herself who went to consult the Pope in Rome to argue in favour of a Greek-Catholic episcopate being established in Munkács, an act rewarded by success (Hodinka 1910: 598–599, 608 and 768).

examples of this was the so-called 'impopulation', the process of making people settle a deserted area (Wellmann 1942: 22–34), during which the landlords themselves also made a primarily Catholic population settle in the areas which lacked landlords. The settlement of those of other faiths also occurred, however. It was not only Catholics who wished to settle from neighbouring countries, and, likewise, it was more important for the landlords, the counties in question and, even more, for the Court itself, to turn the neglected lands into productive fields, thereafter taxing the people in order to increase state income than to worry about the religious denominations of the settlers.

For the Catholic Church of course 'power over the souls' was important and wished to continue the practice from the 17th century to the extent that they had not given up the hope of suppressing the Protestants (entirely) (Mályusz 1939: 7).¹⁸

This attitude is notably expressed in that *ideological paradigm-shift*, during which the identifying topos of the 'Strength of Christianity'¹⁹ was replaced by that of the 'Regnum Marianum'. In the light of these processes the Reformation itself was also considered as a period of decline for the Hungarian nation – almost to the same degree as the Turkish era – and the periods of decline were ascribed to a turning away from Mary (Wellmann 1942/4: 99). However, in respect of the future of the Hungarians, it has been said time and time again that we are guarded by 'the Grande Dame', the Patrona Hungariae, who, on the other hand, wishes all Hungarians to return to the ancient Catholic faith (Hermann 1942/4: 430). It is, therefore, not surprising that this late²⁰ *re-catholicisation* – towards which the



18 It was also bishop Barkóczy himself who carelessly told the scared Protestants of Bátfia on the occasion of the *canonica visitatio* that their freedom of practising their religion exists "for now" – meaning temporarily – but depends on the goodwill of the Monarch (Mályusz 2002: 294).

19 In his dissertation János Győry, who studied one of the segments of the topos, emphasises that, although the "notion of the Strength of Christianity" gained its permanent version in Hungarian only in the Zrinyász, still, it also appeared in the works of the French, whom the "Turkish disaster" did not directly concern, in the 16th century already (Győry 1933: 3). Thus, for example, Győry deals with *Historie des troubles de Hongrie*, the "lengthy volume" of Martin Fumée, which was published in Paris in 1594. The punishment element appears in the Fumée work referred to also, meaning that the "Turkish disaster" struck Hungary as a punishment, since the Hungarian nation at that time had been "so arrogant, idle and lacking bravery," as no other nation on the whole wide world (Győry 1933: 45).

20 In his socio-historical work, R. Collins draws attention to the fact that the scientific 'shift', which characterises natural sciences and had taken place in the 16th and 17th centuries, appeared to be far from easy to be carried out in the field of the emerging social sciences, for of ideological reasons. These ideological reasons were connected primarily with the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation and, in general, with religious clashes as such. "Even though natural science – thus Collins – could relatively stay non-ideological, social science could not" (Collins 1994: 13). Thus, such propagandistic writings were able to appear in the fields of social science and historical science which were either serving the Protestant or the Catholic side (*ibid*). It is in the Reformation where Collins sees that intellectual movement, with the help of which the world of religious clashes can be survived. If we apply Collins' idea to Hungarian circumstances, then we may say that, in the period

Court was not indifferent ²¹ – decided to concentrate on the religious identity of the given minority at critical times. leaving ethnic identity, which, incidentally, was activated specifically via impopulation, to its own devices.

We cannot affirm however, even in the light of these structural factors, that the bishop had behaved in a way which accorded with the current aspirations of the Catholic Church, since he did not succeed in carrying out his wish, and his stubbornness had led to the deepening of the conflict. Secondly, it was in fact the Reformation itself which could have taught Barkóczy that violent conversions do not really produce good results.²²

The bishop, however, probably did not contemplate long on the story of Nyíregyháza as he soon became a primate of the church.²³ We also know that around a quarter of a century had to pass before that very ‘ecclesiastical-political paradigm-shift’, which, with the help of the waiting period regulation had irrevocably come into being.

What happened to *Nyíregyháza*? Slowly but surely, it thrived, and the Károlyi family’s settlement survived.²⁴ In his work published at the end of the 18th century András Vályi mentions it only as “the populous Hungarian village” in Szabolcs County which is inhabited by “Catholics, those of the Orthodox fate and Lutherans” (Vályi 1799 [2003]/2: 694). From Elek Fényes we even learn that the town which was narrowly saved from ruin had already acquired a population of 18.000, mainly Slovaks (Fényes 1851 [1984]/2: 153).²⁵

These developments draw attention even today to the relevance of Lajos Kossuth’s thoughts: “... monarchs come and go but people and nations stay.”

when the case of the settlement process in Nyíregyháza was being investigated, in the 1750s, the Reformation had not yet fully evolved in Hungary, and, moreover, its traces were not easy to find either (Kosáry 1980: 271).

21 According to Henrik Marczali, for example, during the reign of Maria Theresa alone almost two hundred “Protestant churches and schools” had been occupied by landlords and authorities (Marczali 1898: 331).

22 Of course, he was not the only 18th century Hungarian ecclesiastic who had done so. The bishop of Veszprém, Márton Padányi Bíró, for example, chose rather to throw his Protestant serfs to the winds than to give a chance to the “heretic blight” (Mályusz 1939: 3).

23 As we could see, Ferenc Barkóczy was a controversial personality and was not favoured by many for his implacable and obstinate personality. In several cases his opinion was of a kind which had led to conflict, and it was not only once that Maria Theresa herself had to resolve these problems – even by opposing Barkóczy. All this, however, did not mean that Barkóczy was not one of those loyal to the Empress (Marczali 1891: 159).

24 Thriving, however, did not occur without problems. Regarding this see: Éble 1898: 100–111. In addition, the legal complications concerning the Ecsed property lasted a long time, and it was only in 1861 (!) when “all those kinds of trials that started because of the Ecsed property were closed permanently” (Károlyi 1911/1: 32).

25 Éble has published data concerning the 19th century inhabitants of Nyíregyháza: 1898: p 114 as well as Borovszky: year not given: pp 118–128. The latter work discusses the revitalisation of Nyíregyháza appreciatively. Regarding this see: Borovszky 1896: 77–78.

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