

Further Contexts of a Writing Practice. Alternative Protestant Newspaper Culture in Transylvania in the First Third of the 20th Century¹

Dezső Bonczidai was a Calvinist minister in Kide (Chidea)² who for three years between 1932 and 1935 wrote handwritten circular letters to his congregation under the title of *Lelkipásztori levél* [Pastoral Letter], which fulfilled the function of a congregational newsletter. I found his letters accidentally during my very first ethnographic fieldwork in the village (summer of 2007) as a BA student. At first glance it did not catch my attention at all, I was rather interested in folklore, the village and the villagers; just like folklorists of earlier paradigms I ignored the role of the local elite and nearly everything that was not “pure” orality. After my university years I returned to the topic and began to research the Minister’s life and his letters.³

- 1 The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Research Council under the European Union’s Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007–2013) / ERC grant agreement № 324214.
- 2 Dezső Bonczidai born in 1902 Szilágyballa (Borla) and died in 1946 Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca). The events described in this chapter relate to the Hungarian minority in Transylvania, Romania, therefore all place names are given in both Hungarian and Romanian. When first referred to, the Hungarian version of a place name appears first followed by official Romanian in parenthesis. In subsequent references only the Hungarian name appears.
- 3 Ilyefalvi 2012; 2016. I managed to find 107 letters altogether, but of these only 40 are different. It means that there are letters, which have survived in several copies. The letters are from three sources: I found 24 in the village of Kide from four different local people; then I found 22 further letters in the Archives of the Transylvanian Calvinist Diocese in the city of Kolozsvár. Letters with number 2–23 and posters advertising religious and foreign mission soirée, from the file *Kide község vegyes ügyei* [Miscellaneous issues of Kide] (1927–1946) in the Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület Levéltára [Archives of the Transylvanian Calvinist Diocese] (hereafter: EREL) in the Kolozsvári Egyházmegye Levéltára [Archives of the Diocese of Kolozsvár] (hereafter: KEL) but most of the *Pastoral Letters*, 61 in number, were found in the town of Székelyudvarhely (Odorheiu Secuiesc, România), which are owned by Dezső Bonczidai’s distant relatives. To imagine the volume of these 40 different letters, they are approximately 150 pages transcribed into a WordDoc text file with single spacing. For the diplomatic transcripts of all the *Pastoral Letters* see Ilyefalvi 2012, 75–141.

According to the well-defined, general interpretative framework of Francophone research on writing (Roger Chartier, Henri-Jean Martin, Martyn Lyons etc.) and new Anglo-Saxon literary studies and anthropology of writing (David Barton, Mary Hamilton, Niko Besnier, Cushla Kapitzke etc.), literacy is a social practice, which always reflects its own social, historical, and cultural contexts; moreover, it can only be interpreted in relation to these.⁴ From this scientific aspect my previous approach to the material involved processing Dezső Bonczidai's letters; this included placing and understanding the source material in its immediate social context, first by studying the life course of the minister, second, by exploring what life in Kide was like between the two world wars, and third, by analyzing the content of the *Pastoral Letters*.⁵ Viewed thus, the initially unusual, bizarre and unique writing style,⁶ perfectly suited its environment; the minister's motivations became clear and the purpose of what he wrote made perfect sense. However, the method of execution still appears to be due to the ingeniousness of Bonczidai as author and the strange graphomania of this individualist. The initial focus of the study, which was the Calvinist religiosity of a Transylvanian village between the two world wars, the relationship between the lower clergy and the villagers, the new type of religiosity that put the ideals of a Home Mission into practice, and the conflicts that accompanied this process – left no space to place the early, congregational journalistic practice of the minister from Kide in its context as regards the history of writing.

The present study sets out to explore and understand a collective writing custom in order to better understand the writing activity of Dezső Bonczidai as the continuation and the reproduction of earlier, existing patterns. Moreover, it will show that it is a phenomenon closely related to simultaneously existing writing habits which form a network; this phenomenon is influenced, defined and regulated by these other writing customs and is far from being unique. At the early stages of research, the singularity of the *Pastoral Letters* was manifested: (1) in their being handwritten, (2) in the idea of a village/congregational newspaper, (3) in the phenomenon of a one-man editorship and the resulting tone of the newspaper, and (4) the problem of the genre chosen by the minister, that is, a newspaper in the form of a letter. This study takes on the contextualization of the first item on this list (being handwritten), thus pointing out the traditions and parallels in the history of writing that can be associated with Dezső Bonczidai's writing practice.

4 Keszeg 2008, 153; Barton 1991, 1; Kapitzke 1995, xv; Barton & Papen 2010, 9. On the points of connection and the common questions between the two disciplines and different national research traditions in detail see Barton & Papen 2010.

5 Ilyefalvi 2012; 2016.

6 This form of communication was unique in Transylvania and also in Hungary at that time, because no similar pastoral activity has been found. The village was very small, consisting only of two streets, with 388 Calvinist believers; and although all the people had daily connections, the minister chose a new form of communication.

A newspaper in handwriting

Dezső Bonczidai wrote handwritten congregational newsletters, which he duplicated manually with a hectograph in approximately 100 copies and gave a copy each to groups of four or five neighboring families. The handwritten form immediately raised the question of why the minister took the effort to write and edit a congregational newspaper by hand in the 20th century. Why make such an effort? Why was the printed religious press no good or not good enough? Why did the Calvinist congregation in Kide need a separate newspaper in 1932? All this constitutes an interesting problem considering that the Transylvanian press, and especially the Transylvanian religious press, evolved substantially after the Paris Peace Treaty following the First World War, with press organs targeting various audiences appearing one after the other: neither Calvinist nor other Protestant religious reading material was in short supply in the 1930s.⁷ The focal question of this study joins the discourse of international research on handwritten newspapers that explores the motivations behind handwritten press production in an age after the appearance of printing. Why do the authors of these newspapers resort to handwriting? Why would they not use the already existing technology of printing? How does the type of the medium influence its content? Is handwritten content the same as its printed equivalent?⁸

The primary motivation behind Dezső Bonczidai's *Pastoral Letters* was to convey an active, vital Christian way of life in accordance with the "Home Mission"⁹ and to implement it, to transmit the mission mentality, the

7 Sipos 2002, 28–30; Fleisz 2005, 117, 183; Györfy 2014, 102. The Paris Peace Treaty (commonly referred to among Hungarians as Trianon) was concluded on 4 June 1920. One of its main consequences was that approximately 1.5 million Hungarians became a minority in Transylvania. For comparison at that time 2.85 million Romanians and 550,000 Germans and other minorities lived in this region. Fischer-Galați 1985, 194. The new Romanian constitutions (1923, 1938) did not acknowledge ethnic minorities, only religious minority ones. Bárdi 2008b, 91. In this minority context the Hungarians and the former Hungarian institutions were discriminated against by the Romanian authorities in several ways. Primarily they attempted to abolish the usage of the Hungarian language, and education in Hungarian (e.g. Romanian authorities closed Hungarian elementary schools), and banned Hungarian cultural and civil associations. Thus, all important political, cultural and economic activities could only take place within the Hungarian historical churches (Catholic, Calvinist, Lutheran and Unitarian). This is one of the reasons, why the Hungarian church press flourished in this period. See in detail the section entitled "The situation of the Hungarian press between the two world wars" of this chapter. For further information about the Hungarian minority in Transylvania in the interwar period and the realignment of the institutions see Bárdi 2008a; 2008b; 2008c; Bíró [1989] 2002; in English Bíró [1975] 1992; with further references Fischer-Galați 1985, 190–215.

8 Salmi-Niklander 2006, 110; 2013, 76.

9 According to Réka Kiss's definition "Home Mission is primarily the sum of religious-ecclesiastical renewal efforts under the new urban conditions of capitalism, especially the actions and the intellectual impact of the 'father of the German Home Mission' F. Johann Heinrich Wichern (1808–1881)." Kiss 2006, 1344. Although the

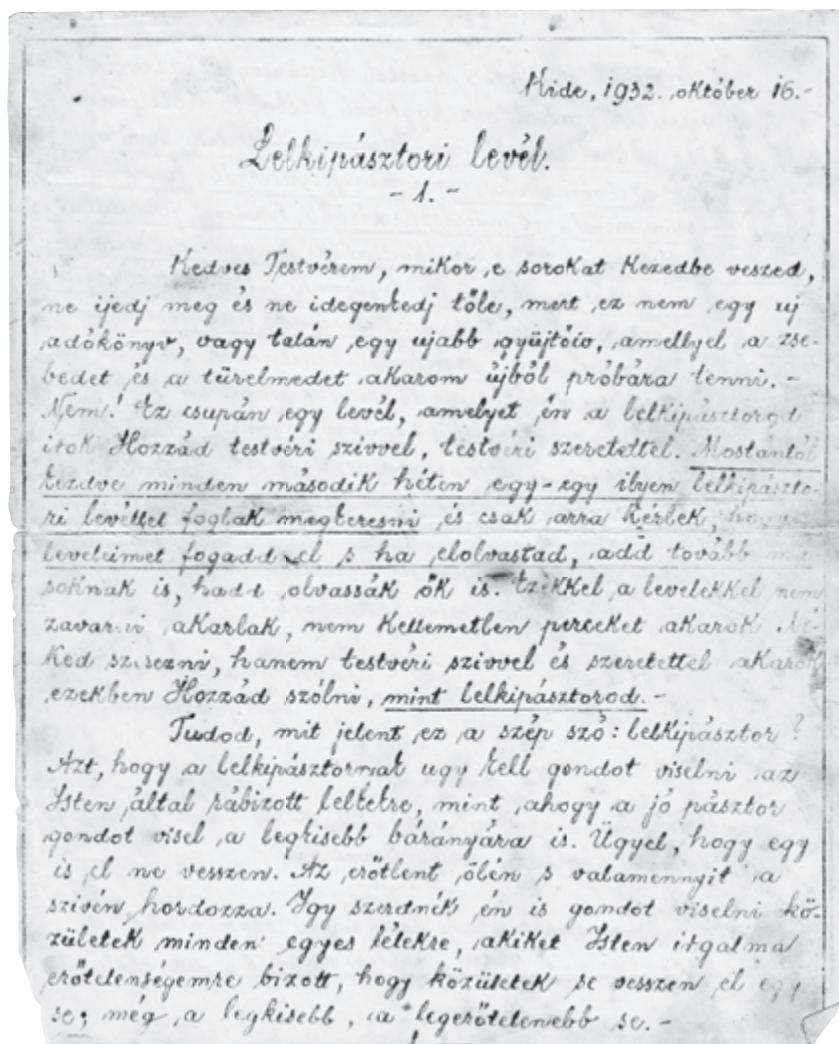


Figure 1. Lelkipásztori levél [Pastoral Letter] No. 1. Kide, (16 October 1932), page 1.

history of the Hungarian Home Mission in the late 19th and early 20th centuries can be traced back to various roots (American, Scottish, English, German, Swiss, etc. impacts), whose influence allowed the Home Mission to profit from several renewal concepts; it can be established in general that all of these currents and their leaders accepted and embraced the following areas of activity in the framework of different societal or associational work programs: the education of children and youth (Sunday School Society); the mission among servants; missions to the poor and to orphans; the mission to addicts, especially alcoholics (Blue-Cross Society) and to prostitutes (White-Cross Society); the Jewish mission; missionary publications; the foreign mission; public education. The main manifestations of the Home Mission are as follows: Bible circles, home religious services, prayer communities, religious social events, love feasts, conferences, camps, society meetings, journalistic publications. Hereafter in the study, Home Mission refers to these activities in a broad sense.

message that encourages “real” conversion to Christianity, urging in writing that the “right/true/believer” lifestyle be followed.¹⁰ In order to uncover the context relating to the history of writing that explains the functionality of the handwritten form, I searched for parallels, primarily among handwritten or homemade newspapers and subsequently among printed alternative newspapers that are somehow related to the 20th-century Transylvanian Protestant Home Mission movements, the target audience of which was not religious leadership, but a wider public: laymen, urban and rural inhabitants, and students.¹¹ So far, I have been able to identify two handwritten newspapers from this period, both in Transylvania, also duplicated with a hectograph.¹² One of them is the *Evangéliumi Munkás* [Evangelical Worker], launched in 1921 Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca).¹³ The other is the newspaper of a youth conference in Sáromberke (Dumbrăvioara) organized in 1926, *Tábortűz* [Campfire].¹⁴ In order to understand why these two newspapers were published in handwriting it is necessary to outline the most important characteristics of the Transylvanian Home Mission’s religious publication efforts, and to describe the circumstances and possible options of the Hungarian minority press between the two world wars. Therefore, in what follows, I will discuss these two contexts.

Home Mission and missionary publications

One of the most important instruments of the Home Mission was the press, which had already started to rapidly evolve in this period¹⁵ and which manifested itself in the distribution of missionary publications. At the beginning of the 20th century the various religious clubs and conventions

10 Ilyefalvi 2016, 122.

11 Since the 18th century, a variety of examples and types of handwritten newspapers are known in western European Protestant religious and intellectual circles. For this cf. for instance the German journal of the “Moravian (Herrnhut) brotherhood” *Gemein-Nachrichten*, or the journal of Lutheran minister Abraham Achrenius (1706–1769). Kirsti Salmi-Niklander refers to further Swedish and Finnish examples with reference to the research of Ilkka Mäkinen and Martti Ruuth. Cf. Salmi-Niklander 2013, 77. In the Transylvanian context we can mention the handwritten journal *Egyházi Lap* [Ecclesiastic Newspaper], edited from 1860 by Unitarian theology students. Gaal 2011, 175.

12 The difficulty of discovering sources is that the often short-lived handwritten journals and newspapers without a continuous institutional background were not entered at the time (or in many cases later, either) into a library. They have either been destroyed, ruined, lost or lie hiding in private collections, religious archives, or personal manuscript collections. I stumbled on the issues of the two newspapers described in this study accidentally while researching the Transylvanian Home Mission.

13 There is only one single copy of the newspaper (vol. 1, no. 3) in the library of the Protestant Theology Institute in Kolozsvár. Reference number: F 380.

14 Archives of the Transylvanian Calvinist Diocese, Archives of the Diocese of Kolozsvár (hereafter: EREL KEL), legacy of Dezső László.

15 Kristóf 1938; Monoki 1941; Fleisz 2005.

produced countless press products – of varying quality, scale and target audiences – with the aim of distributing and propagating the work of the Home Mission. In Transylvania, one of the most important publications was *Kis Tükör* [Little Mirror], edited by István Kecskeméthy Csapó.¹⁶ This “illustrated, family weekly paper,” published from 1892, established its base in Kolozsvár when Kecskeméthy moved there, and the paper thus became known all around Transylvania.¹⁷ Although, as a professor in theology, Kecskeméthy was a member of the religious elite, he, as an evangelical, was in constant conflict with the representatives of the dominant liberal theological views prevailing at the time, especially with Gerő Szász, chief diocesan notary. Tensions escalated to a point where, on one occasion, liberal supporters ripped a copy of the *Kis Tükör* out of the theologian’s hands,¹⁸ and the bishop was forced to close down the Sunday school movement.¹⁹ Although *Kis Tükör* ceased publication in 1907 (mostly because of the attacks on Kecskeméthy’s person and activities), by the 1910s there were numerous other press products that distributed the ideas and objectives of the Home Mission within the Austro-Hungarian Empire: *Mustármag* [Mustard seed], *Diákvilág* [Student world], *Ébresztő* [Wakening], *Élet és Munka* [Life and Work], *Hajnal* [Dawn], to name just a few.

The important role of the missionary publications and the surge of new (printed) newspapers founded in the 1910s is well demonstrated by the lesser known, monthly home missionary edition of *Gyertyafény* [Candle light] launched by the Calvinist minister, Miklós Torró,²⁰ in 1914

16 István Kecskeméthy Csapó (1864, Paks–1938, Kolozsvár) theology professor, religious author. For more see Molnár 1996. Kecskeméthy arrived in Transylvania on the invitation of Domokos Szász, bishop of Transylvania; he was posted first to Nagyenyed (Aiud) in 1894 to the Department of Old Testament Theology; then in 1895 he started to teach at the newly established Department of Theology in Kolozsvár. From the very beginning of holding services in Kolozsvár, Kecskeméthy started to organise the organs and societies of the Home Mission. (Evangelical Society, Sunday school, White Cross Association). Szász 2007, 970.

17 For the short description of *Kis Tükör* see Ibid., 994–995. From 1905 for three years (basically until the paper was cancelled) *Kis Tükör* had an annexe for the young called *Napsugár* [Sunshine], also edited and written by Kecskeméthy. Biró 1939, 3.

18 Nagy 1937, 217–219; Szász 2007, 971.

19 Following this incident Kecskeméthy organised the Sunday school session at his apartment for a while but the schools officially banned the children from attending. Meanwhile the Church organized services for children, but according to Kecskeméthy it was unable to fulfill its original function. Szász 2007, 971, 987–988.

20 Miklós Torró (1886, Brăila?–1928, Szilágypanit (Panic)) studied Calvinist theology in Sárospatak, then until 1912 he was a curate in Újcsanálós in Miskolc District. Between 1912 and 1915 he served as the Calvinist minister of Pókafalva (Păuca) of the Alba Iulia diocese, and between 1915 and 1921 he was the minister of Ikafalva (Icafalău) in Háromszék (Trei Scaune) County. Between 1921 and 1928 he worked for the diaspora Mission among the Regat Hungarians in Brăila. From 1928, he was the minister in Szilágypanit, where he suddenly passed away from illness after four days in service. Cf. K. G. [Géza Kádár] 1928. He was a founding member of the *Vécsi Szövetség* [Vécs Society] (1921), see Fekete Jr. 2011, 584. In the 1910s he published works such as *Korszerű bibliamagyarázatok* [Modern Bible

in Pókafalva.²¹ In the first number of the journal the editor himself asks the question: What justifies the foundation of a new journal if there are countless other existing and accessible publications that have similar defined goals? Torró claims that the specificity of *Gyertyafény* is that it promotes the cause of the diaspora mission;²² this is what distinguishes it from the rest, because it wants to show the readers how a diaspora mission can and should be implemented and how the work of the Home Mission and saving the nation can and should be carried out in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious settlement in Hunyad County (Județul Hunedoara), and thereby, obviously, evangelize the most readers possible. Torrós – almost obsessively performed – duty to produce missionary publications and to maintain this activity under all circumstances becomes conspicuous when he is forced to flee his post as a minister with his entire family when the Romanians enter Transylvania, and the newspaper “flees” with him. Despite the hardships of the First World War, Torró published his newspaper regardless of place or circumstances.²³

In the journals associated with the religious awakening of the early 20th century, besides discussing Home Missionary goals and ideals, the followers of the movement often criticized the activities of conservative ministers who represented liberal theology and the ecclesiastical leadership of the official religious elite. They also often published news describing how the local leaders of the Church hindered the work of the Home Mission and the various activities of religious awakening. For instance, Miklós Torró published a news piece in *Gyertyafény* from Zemplén County about a woman who was threatened with prison by a local minister for hosting Sunday school

Interpretations], in 1915 *Brassay Zoltán jogász úr kálváriája. Inkább diákoknak és a köznép fainak* [The calvary of Mr Zoltán Brassay, attorney. Rather for students and the public]. See its critique: “Kritikus” [Critic] 1916.

- 21 Pókafalva (Păuca/Törnen). According to the estimates of Miklós Torró, including the diaspora, there were 116 Hungarians, 513 Saxons, and 768 Romanians living in this settlement in 1914. *Gyertyafény*, vol. 1, no. 8, 13.
- 22 “Diaspora” here refers to Hungarian minorities in Romania before 1914, outside what were the “borders” of Transylvania as it was defined before the Paris Peace Treaty.
- 23 After a long and adventurous journey – which Torró describes later in the columns of *Gyertyafény* – he first settles down in Nyírkarász with minister Sándor Keresztessy Jr., therefore he asks the readers in vol. 3, no. 9 to send the manuscripts and their letters to that address. On the cover of this issue the usual header depicting the Calvinist church of Pókafalva and a lit candle is missing – Torró even kept the header after moving to Ikafalva – because it was destroyed in the printing press when the Romanians took over Transylvania. The first number of volume 4 was published in Pribékfalva, which was also where he awaited subscriptions; the second issue of this volume was published in Gyula. In this issue Torró indicated to his readers that due to the lack of paper supply because of the war he would only be able to produce the newspaper every other month, or half an issue a month. The fourth number of the fourth volume of *Gyertyafény* is issued in Ikafalva again, after which the newspaper is forced to be in intermission for five years. In 1923, already as the minister of Brăila, he restarts *Gyertyafény*, which by this time is promoted as the only Hungarian home missionary and literary monthly journal of the Regat.

in her home;²⁴ and three issues later the author commented on the following Transdanubian story: “X.Y. a Lutheran dean said to an acquaintance of mine: The Evangelist Christian student movement is poisoning the core of the student youth. – Well, well, has anyone heard a darker declaration, especially from the mouth of a priest, and no less a dean!”²⁵

Even though “religiosity, the exercise of piety, the impediments to observing religion, and participating in a religious experience has incited people, for centuries, to express themselves in intensive writing practices,”²⁶ the phenomenon of how the new media (the press) became the new instrument for this practice and how it conquered the public sphere can be considered as specific to this age. In the first half of the 20th century both the Home Mission ideologies and its instrument of choice (that is, the press) had to become legitimate. From the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century we encounter attitudes which considered newspapers and magazines to be unsuited to religious communication. For instance, the first edition of *Kis Tükör* published a story in 1892 about an English priest who read out loud an excerpt from a London newspaper during his sermon. This provoked a negative reaction from some of the readers: “Thank God we have not yet resorted to reading the paper from the pulpit.” However the editor of the magazine commented: “And we say, thank God that there are still newspapers from which one can read out loud, even from the pulpit.”²⁷ In 1914, in the columns of *Gyertyafény*, Miklós Torró also felt the need to point out the Christian and positive aspects of modernity, while also acknowledging its disadvantages: “[...] but really, can the workers of God’s land neglect the useful achievements of our age? Just because the winged wheels (the train) has brought sin to many isolated territories and taken the livelihood of thousands of poor people (namely the smallholders working as carters in the Székely land), should I not ride on it if I want to take an important message to a distant place?”²⁸

By the 1920s, however, the ecclesiastical press (and simultaneously the alternative religious press) not only became a legitimate instrument, but it practically became a Christian duty to write, edit, read and promote these media in the widest range possible. This new duty is well captured in a catchphrase by László Ravasz, which encouraged people to buy press products and was used as a slogan in several newspapers: “The press is a pealing bell, the press is a church, and whoever supports the Church press, builds the Church.”²⁹ The visual representation on the front page of *Református Naptár* [Calvinist Calendar], a picture depicting a Calvinist family the members of which all hold or read some type of newspaper or religious publication, conveyed the same message.

24 *Gyertyafény*, vol. 1, issue 5, 15–16.

25 *Gyertyafény*, vol. 1, issue 8, 13.

26 Keszeg 2008, 157. For the short overview of the relationship between literacy and religion see Kapitzke 1995, 22–54.

27 *Kis Tükör*, vol. 1, no. 2, 8.

28 *Gyertyafény*, vol. 1, no. 4, 13.

29 This slogan by László Ravasz was used in Calvinist newspapers between the wars as an advertisement to buy more Calvinist religious publications; see, for example, *Református Ifjúság* [Calvinist Youth] 1936. III (9–10), p. 76.



Figure 2. Cover page of the Református Naptár [Calvinist Calendar], 1933.

The situation of the Hungarian press between the two world wars

Behind the sense of duty to produce ecclesiastical and religious press in Transylvania and to promote press culture there was more than just the innovative religious ideas described above. The Paris Peace Treaty transformed the situation of the Transylvanian press completely and since the system of press institutions was the first to recover after the war, “public space became the main internal power of self-organized society and also the primary actor of a self-defense struggle.”³⁰ The quick restoration of the press was facilitated by the fact that establishing new newspapers was relatively simple because the interests of the Romanian government were to completely separate the Hungarians annexed to Romania as fast as possible from any type of Hungarian institution.³¹ As regards the freedom of press,

30 Gyórfy 2014, 98.

31 Ibid., 98.

the picture was not so positive. Although the 1923 constitution ensured the freedom of press in principle, in reality the institution of “temporary” censorship established during Martial Law continued to prevail between the two world wars.³² Censorship targeted the prevention of articles that (1) referred to the strengthening of solidarity among Hungarians (or to the explicit organization of some sort of resistant Hungarian group); (2) discussed national consciousness or praised the Hungarian people; and (3) cast a favorable light on Hungary or published photographs in relation to Hungary.³³ The Calvinist Church took on the cultivation of the minority Hungarian national culture, because in such a situation “religion and religious life are re-evaluated and become parts of ethnic culture, they become the single practical form and institution of survival.”³⁴

Evangéliumi Munkás [*Evangelical Worker*] (1921)

When the *Evangéliumi Munkás* was established in 1921 the press had become an accepted new mass medium and the Home Mission had become an accepted, new type of religious concept; moreover, despite their minority circumstances the infrastructure for establishing the newspaper was also present. Why was the *Evangéliumi Munkás* still issued in handwriting? According to the front page of the newspaper it was meant to be “a home missionary journal to aid in evangelizing work,” published by the *Evangéliumi Munkások Erdélyi Szövetsége* [Transylvanian Alliance of Evangelical Workers] (hereafter EMESZ). EMESZ was founded in 1918 in Kolozsvár by István Kecskeméthy, its predecessor being *Evangéliumi Szövetség* [Evangelical Alliance] (1896), also founded by him, which basically laid down the groundwork for CE Societies in Transylvania. The *Christian Endeavour Society* (CE) is a movement initiated in Boston in the 1880s, the primary initial goal of which was to maintain the faith of young Christians; later, however, they basically embraced all the work associated with the Home Mission.³⁵ In terms of its operations it was supra-congregational; but its members were also members of one or another of the Christian congregations and churches. The movement spread rapidly: by 1902 there were approximately 52,000 societies with more than 3.5 million members around the world. In 1906 an organization encompassing the European

32 Although censorship was dropped between 1928 and 1933, the continuous harassment of the editors and journalists of Hungarian newspapers and journals and the practice of press trials did not stop. Gyórfy 2014, 106.

33 Bíró [1989] 2002, 428; Gyórfy 2014, 113.

34 Keszeg & Becze 2001, 16.

35 CE is an abbreviation of something different in every country; in Hungarian it stands for *Célegyenest Előre* [Straight ahead] or even more commonly the expression *Pro Christo et Ecclesia* [For Christ and for the Church]. Cf. Szász 2007, 966. Footnote 1. For an overview of the history of Transylvanian CE Societies between the two world wars see Szász 2007. Also see Buzogány & Jánosi 2011, 88–91.

societies was established, followed by the establishment of the CE Society.³⁶ In Budapest the CE Bethánia Association was created in 1903, led by Aladár Szabó, its vice-president being Kecskeméthy. The first significant CE Societies in Transylvania at the beginning of the 20th century, besides Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca), were in Zilah (Zalău), Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureș) and in the Zsil (Jiu) Valley.³⁷ The broadly-defined home missionary efforts, and, within them, the work of the CE Societies, initially provoked fervent resistance from the religious leaders representing the views of the former, liberal theology. For them the warriors of the Home Mission were too pious, pietistic, socialist, etc. They criticized their elitist seclusion, their declaration of being “more vivacious”, “more believing” Christians, and the fact that they grouped the most zealous workers of the Church into a separate system of societies with their separate charters. Among the continuously recurring accusations was that there were too many laymen fulfilling ecclesiastical functions. They attacked societies – such as CE Societies – which they imagined to be organized into a supra-congregational structure, for being unfaithful to the Church and anti-nationalistic.³⁸

The editor of the *Evangéliumi Munkás* was Arthur K. Tompa,³⁹ who had filled the position of secretary and travelling secretary within the EMESZ since the beginning and, after Kecskeméthy's death, became the president of the EMESZ until his death in 1944. K. Tompa contributed to the efforts of the Home Mission and especially that of the Transylvanian CE from the very beginning; mostly by promoting the missionary publications. Before the *Evangéliumi Munkás*, he had been the responsible editor of *Remény* [Hope], from 1912 until its cancellation in 1917. This was the monthly journal of *Kék-Kereszt Egyletek Reményszövetsége* [Hope Society of the Blue Cross Organizations] in Krasznahorvát (Horoatu Crasnei) in Szilágy County (Județul Sălaj), aimed at the leaders of the society whose mission included fighting alcoholism. It is important to mention that the first volume of *Remény* was also published in handwriting, one of the reasons for which might have been that initially the grassroots society did not have sufficient financial resources for print production. The subscription fee for *Remény* was a “fraternal prayer,” which meant that the reader could access the journal for free, and the editor tried to cover distribution costs from donations.⁴⁰

36 Szász 2007, 966–967.

37 *Ibid.*, 971. The society was outlawed in 1947 by the Romanian State; however, it continued its operations illegally until 1990; since 1990 to the present day it has continued to carry out missionary work. Kiss 2003, 55–56; Szász 2007, 974.

38 Szász 2007, 997–1022; Kiss 2003.

39 Arthur K. Tompa (1872, Kolozsvár–1944, Kendilóna (Luna de Jos)): for more on his biography see Szász 2007, 973. Footnote 29.

40 The National Széchényi Library in Budapest has only a few issues of this journal from its second volume, which was also the basis for the description of the journal, which also confirms its initial handwritten form. We also know about the non-printed production of the first volume from the first issue of the second volume, which includes an article from the editor informing the readers that thanks to donations from supporters *Remény* will be printed in five more copies. The support was extended to include the newspaper *Fecske* [Swallow], which was founded for

K. Tompa had wide-ranging experience in distributing publications, he knew exactly the working mechanism and he even had the network for it. In 1921, in the same year that he launched the handwritten *Evangéliumi Munkás*, he also became the co-editor of *Fölfelé* [Upwards], the newspaper of Transylvanian students edited by Andor Járosi, printed at the Minerva press in Kolozsvár.

The launch of the *Evangéliumi Munkás* was justified by the establishment of EMESZ, since the independent society required its own official news outlet.⁴¹ At the 1918 foundation of the society, Kecskeméthy sent its charter to be registered at the Hungarian Royal Ministry of Interior; this, however, was never completed because Transylvania was annexed to Romania under the Paris Peace Treaty. The charter translated into Romanian was eventually accepted by the new Romanian government in 1923 and, thus, EMESZ was registered as a legal entity.⁴² Hence, underlying the reasons for the handwritten publication of the *Evangéliumi Munkás* one can detect the uncertainty of a newly established structure. In 1921, when compiling the first issue, EMESZ was essentially legally non-existent. Furthermore, the organizational restructuring after the Paris Peace Treaty did not eliminate the tension between the CE and the official Church; on the contrary, it further complicated matters. It was not only the CE society that had to be reorganized, but the Calvinist Church as well, which quickly started to operate as the missionary “people’s Church” [*népegyház*] of the Hungarians, who now found themselves in the minority in Romania after the Treaty. The Calvinist Church became one of the central organs of self-organization and resistance.⁴³ In order to maintain this central unity, on 24 November 1923, the Transylvanian Diocese led by Bishop Károly Nagy dissolved every society within the Church, because they believed that the societies and organizations were weakening the central role of the Calvinist Church.⁴⁴ EMESZ, however, continued its autonomous activity, since it was a legal entity outside the Church.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the CE Society was mostly criticized precisely because of its organizational independence.⁴⁵ At this point the Transylvanian

Sunday school teachers, and could be sent out to every subscriber. The subscription fee remained a “fraternal prayer” even after it was published in print, the readers’ attention was drawn to the necessity of financial donations. *Remény*, vol. 2, nos. 1–2, 1–2.

41 Earlier, because of Kecskeméthy and the *Kis Tükör*, the Transylvanian CE Societies had been in close contact in their missionary publication efforts with the Bethánia Society of Budapest. Szász 2007, 971.

42 Szász 2007, 972.

43 Bíró [1989] 2002, 347. About the organizational transformation of Transylvanian churches between the two world wars and about the problem of an only theoretical religious freedom see Bíró [1989] 2002, Chapter III: *A magyarok egyházi helyzete Nagy-Romániában* [The ecclesiastical situation of Hungarians in Great Romania], 322–350. For more on the system of institutions of the Transylvanian Calvinist Church between the two world wars see Sipos 2002.

44 Nagy 1995, 175; Szász 2007, 972.

45 Szász 2007, 1004–1006. For a sociological and phenomenological analysis of the organizational conflict between the CE and the Calvinist Church see Kiss 2003.

Calvinist Church wished to organize all Home Mission activities concerning every target group and every aspect of life from within the Church.⁴⁶ The relationship between the CE and the official Church was further complicated when a new group of Calvinist ministers enthusiastically fighting for the Home Mission established the *Vécsi Szövetség* [Vécs Alliance] in 1921.⁴⁷ The “alliance” imagined themselves as a new alternative offering a middle ground, as opposed to the previous groups of ministers, namely the Association of Ministers, which had focused too much on material issues and ecclesiastical politics, and EMESZ, which put piety and universalism too much in the centre, was rather indifferent towards ethnic issues and had autonomy from the official Church, which they criticized sharply.⁴⁸ As regards their operations, the Vécs Alliance showed great similarities with the CE Society (they even overlapped, since the Vécs Alliance did not exclude their members from also being members of the CE Society: one such person was Miklós Torró); however, they carried out all of their activities as part of the official Calvinist Church. Although initially they also had to fight their battles with the current religious leaders, gradually the Vécs Alliance developed their own press organs (*Az Út* [The Way], *Kiáltó Szó* [Exclamation], *Kálvinista Világ* [Calvinist World]); and as the founding members gained more and more influence within the ecclesiastic leadership, their goals became the general objectives of the Church.⁴⁹

Due to the differences of opinion, and to the fact that by then CE was a movement looking back on a two-decade history of its own, they were understandably reluctant to be officially integrated into the Church, even in light of their minority position; they considered their supra-congregational, independent and autonomous nature to be crucial for the success of their mission. In order to have their own missionary publications they first had to be established officially. Following their 1923 registration, the society

46 Nagy 1995, 172–173; Bíró [1989] 2002, 347. The Calvinist Church’s own home missionary commission the *Belmissziói Tanács* [Home Mission Commission] / *A Kolozsvári Lelkészek Társasága* [Society of Pastors from Kolozsvár] was established in 1922. Buzogány 2000, 13–16; Szász 2007, 986. About the debates see the articles of Géza Nagy in the *Református Szemle* [Calvinist Review] and the replies of Kecskeméthy and others CE ministers published in the pages of *Kis Tükör*. Szász 2007, 998–1000. Furthermore, lectures on the legitimacy of CE were often among the topics of the CE conferences in the 1930s. Szász 2007, 983–985. In 1928, the Board of Directors of the Transylvanian Diocese conducted an inspection and asked their ministers to report on the activities of CE members and on local circumstances. The reports paint a mixed picture, depending on whether the given minister was in support of the CE, perhaps even a member of it, or against the CE movement. For more on the conflict see also the abstracts of the reports of the CE travelling secretaries. Szász 2007, 1007–1022. Nonetheless, in many cases the CE and the official Church were able to successfully cooperate, as for instance when the Calvinist Church Community of Kolozsvár asked the EMESZ to help in the work of the Home Mission in the following fields: Sunday school, servicing the poor, missionary publications, visiting patients. Cf. Szász 2007, 998.

47 Nagy 1937, 227; Fekete Jr. 2011.

48 Nagy 1995, 151–152; Fekete Jr. 2011, 591.

49 Fekete Jr. 2011, 589–590.

immediately launched their independent publishing office in Trefort Street, Kolozsvár, under the name *Evangéliumi Misszió* [Evangelical Mission], led by K. Tompa, and complemented by a bookstore in Nagydisznód (Cisnădie). After this the *Evangéliumi Munkás* was produced and distributed in print. As part of the CE's missionary publications, also edited by K. Tompa, a children's newspaper (*Vasárnapi Iskola* [Sunday School]) and the CE newspaper in Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureș) (*Örömhír* [Good News]) were launched in 1924. The *Evangéliumi Munkás* was probably cancelled when Kecskeméthy re-launched *Kis Tükör* after a nineteen-year hiatus in 1926, now as the official newspaper of the CE Society, which was published until 1933, the time of the Great Depression. After its second cancellation, it was replaced by the CE journal *Keresztény Élet* [Christian Life], which became the official newspaper of the Transylvanian CE Society from 1936.⁵⁰

In terms of content and style, the handwritten copies of the *Evangéliumi Munkás* were not different from any other earlier or parallel printed home missionary newspaper of the age.⁵¹ The editorial started with a sermon based on a Bible text, which was followed by articles on accepted Home Mission topics. It published Sunday school guidelines and short instructive stories, quoted letters written by readers from the countryside and encouraged other members to send their stories; they also launched a prayer group and published information on its program and on how to pay for membership. In terms of appearance, the *Evangéliumi Munkás* is a four-page A4 format newspaper with densely filled, difficult-to-read writing; its journal-like appearance is given by its hand-drawn cover. Furthermore, the editor of the journal did not make any effort to resemble printed format and style, already accepted in the 20th century, such as columns; he simply divided the segments with an underlined title. He paid no particular attention to its appearance; rather, one could observe strategic considerations regarding how to use up the space in the most efficient way.

As we have seen above, Arthur K. Tompa had substantial experience in editing journals, and was well aware of the various typographical practices. However, he did not try to replicate those practices in the *Evangéliumi Munkás*; it is as if he was trying to indicate and proclaim that conveying the message, reinforcing the relationship among brothers (the CE Society members) and maintaining the practice were more important than the format of the medium. The significance of publishing the *Evangéliumi Munkás* in handwriting is well demonstrated in the following reader's letter:

I have received the second issue of the *Evangéliumi Munkás* to the great joy of my heart and soul. Lord knows the strength, relief and rejuvenation it has given me and my weary, faint soul in my solitude. It has been a long time since I received anything from my brothers and I felt left alone. I am living under difficult

50 Szász 2007, 995–996.

51 I have not been able to gain access to the later, printed version of *Evangéliumi Munkás*. There are no copies in the National Széchényi Library in Budapest, the Ráday Library and Collection of Budapest, the Library of the Protestant Theologian Institute of Kolozsvár or the BCU (Biblioteca Centrală Universitară “Lucian Blaga”) in Kolozsvár.

circumstances; Lord only knows how much trouble I have. I have ever awaited the next letter; awaited the calendar of the prayer week to arrive, because I did not know that of the previous year; and now that the paper has arrived it feels like water slaking my great thirst. Thank you, my brother, for not having forgotten about me. I ask that I shall not be forgotten in the future either, not be left alone.⁵²

The editor underlined the CE Society's sense of belonging to an international brotherhood by publishing the entire text of the letter written by the Swiss Blue Cross Society's president in the *Evangéliumi Munkás*. Another example of the importance of taking up the fight, of informing the members of the society and of strengthening the sense of belonging to a community, is the letter of CE Society member Mrs. J. M., which took up the discourse about the previously described conflict with local religious leaders who were hindering the Home Mission. The reader of the *Evangéliumi Munkás* complained about a local Calvinist minister who had deprived her of the possibility of holding Sunday school services, which he justified by saying that there were already Bible classes and children's masses at school, therefore her work was redundant. Mrs. J. M. claimed that "they did not welcome that [she] was meddling with their work," namely that she had criticized the activities of the society of confirmed girls. She observed damaging shifts of emphasis in their activities: they organized a charity fair for the poor, but as a result they did not have Bible classes for six weeks. The outcome of her criticism was that she was no longer welcome in the Bible circle.⁵³

Tábortűz [*Campfire*] (1926)

Considering the above-discussed newspaper-founding frenzy, it is perhaps no surprise that at a several-day-long Calvinist camp the participants created another, new handwritten newspaper. *Tábortűz*, which means campfire, was founded by students of the *Iffúsági Keresztény Egyesület* [Christian Youth Association]⁵⁴ during a conference in Sáromberke (Dumbrăvioara) in 1926.⁵⁵ Beyond its interwar socio-historical context, described above (Home Mission and the minority status of Hungarians), the newspaper of the Sáromberke conference was also an integral part of the tradition of the history of writing, because it fitted well into the newspaper culture of Transylvanian high school and college students.⁵⁶

52 *Evangéliumi Munkás*, vol. 1, no. 3, 5.

53 *Ibid.*

54 IKE was founded in 1921; its first chairman was István Kecskeméthy, followed by Lajos Imre in 1924. It is possible that making a handwritten newsletter or newspaper was common practice in IKE camps; I have not found any reference to or data on this so far.

55 It was preserved in the legacy of Dezső László (1904–1973), the former director of EREL and later Calvinist dean. At the age of 22, Dezső László was a participant in the conference himself. EREL KEL, legacy of Dezső László.

56 The practice of editing handwritten newspapers in Transylvanian Protestant colleges dates back to the late 1820s. Through their various book clubs and study

Although the life of students, the school system and the whole of society changed significantly in the course of the 20th century, the colleges remained faithful to the tradition of editing handwritten newspapers throughout it, though with transformed content, appearance and function. Student papers fulfilled an important function in the 1920s among the Hungarians forming a minority in Romania, a social role going beyond the college.⁵⁷ Seventy high school students participated at the Sáromberke conference in 1926, coming from among other places Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureș), Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca), Székelyudvarhely (Odorheiu Secuiesc), Nagyegyed (Aiud), Nagyvárad (Oradea), Dézs (Dej) and Szászrégen (Reghinul Săsesc).⁵⁸ Handwritten student newspaper publications had a great tradition in almost all these cities, and especially their Protestant colleges.⁵⁹

What were the topics that were written about and why was it necessary to launch a newspaper during a student conference? The primary functions of *Tábortűz* were to publish short summaries of conference events⁶⁰ as well as various advertisements –: for instance, one could buy or trade foreign stamps in color from László Makkai; Sándor Babos gave swimming lessons in Kolozsvár – and to give information about the upcoming events of the week. Besides the important ideological message (encouraging evangelical sermons, giving a Christian evaluation of the First World War, stressing the importance of the self-organization of Transylvanian Calvinist youths as a “Hungarian cultural interest,” etc.) and transmitting practical information, the newspaper also continued the facetious, witty tradition of student newspapers⁶¹ and published funny dialogues and scenes from the conference. This humorous content typically captured slips of the tongue and comical situations of the seniors, theologians and young ministers leading the students.

groups the students of the Reform Era played an important role in conveying new ideas. For instance, the primary goal of their handwritten newspaper was initially to cultivate literature and art in the Hungarian language, thereby protesting, first against the usage of the Latin language, and secondly, after the repression of the 1848 Hungarian independence uprising, against the usage of the German language. Also cf. Gaal 1981; 1974; 2011. In Finland, 19th-century handwritten newspapers can also be mostly associated with secondary school groups, study groups, book clubs and societies. Salmi-Niklander 2013, 77.

57 Gaal 1981; 1974; 2011.

58 *Tábortűz*, Last volume, no. 4, 3. Further participants at the conference were as follow: three secondary school students, two merchants, fifteen theologians, two university students, nine assistant and deputy pastors, five ministers, three teachers of religion, two theology teachers. Including the secondary school students, there was a total attendance of 110.

59 Gaal 1974.

60 Lecturers at the conference included such leading figures from the Vécs Alliance and the Calvinist Home Mission as Sándor Tavaszy, Lajos Imre and Ottó M. Nagy.

61 In 1931, the first newspaper of the Calvinist girls' high school (*Lányok lapja* [Girls' paper]) was ridiculed in the satirical newspaper, *Contra*, by the students of the boys' high school. For more on the short (only a few pages long) handwritten satirical, parodying, humorous magazines of early 20th-century colleges see also Gaal 1974, 275–276.

Tábortűz defied the rhetorical rules of the standard newspaper genre, or rather exaggerated them, and used a more informal style to communicate its message, which resulted from the atmosphere of the young students and the summer camp. For instance, on its front page, instead of “Volume 1” it said “Last volume,” which facetiously referred to the temporary and paradoxical situation of the newspaper, since in their case their first volume was indeed their last. The authors and editors used various nicknames, pseudonyms, and abbreviations (owner of the newspaper: “eagle” “A.” “T”, “Sentinel”, etc.); even the most information we can find about the editor is that it was “edited by the editor.” The readers are also encouraged in the first issue to write: “Editor’s message: Please write, because otherwise I will!”⁶² However, the newspaper was presumably edited by more than one student: the total of three issues of the paper were written in various handwritings, which suggests a collective journalistic and editorial practice, which is also why real names were not really important.⁶³ Unlike the editors of the *Evangéliumi Munkás*, the students of Sáromberke considered it important to have their newspaper look exactly like real printed press materials. The authors tried to reproduce the exact same typography on the A5-sized pages as seen in the printed press: they drew the frame, and a different cover for each issue, the editorial article was all in capitals, and the advertisements were edited in columns.

The medium of duplicating with a hectograph proved to be quick, feasible, necessary, and important, and a handwritten paper was such an indispensable element of secondary school student culture that even the temporary context of the summer camp was sufficient to justify its existence. The students executed the publishing obligations of the Home Mission and of the minority Hungarian press employing their own means and following their own traditions. The main purpose of the camp newspaper was to diffuse the camp discussion content. It is thanks to *Tábortűz*, that the events and the message of the conference were recorded in writing and thus became suitable for further distribution. The students took the newspaper home with them, where they could show it to their parents and to the members of their Bible circle, and they could lend it to their fellow students. They could later revisit these pages to find a summary of the camp, as a spiritual guide, or to recall the good memories from the camp.

Writing under all circumstances

Is there any additional meaning in the handwritten format? Why did Arthur K. Tompa, Dezső Bonczidai and the participants of the Sáromberke conference produce newspapers in handwriting? The answer seems obvious: out of necessity, since the *Evangéliumi Munkás* switched to print production as soon as it had the chance; Dezső Bonczidai stopped writing the *Pastoral Letters* in Kide after three years; he did publish one exceptional letter in 1942,

62 *Tábortűz*, Last volume, no. 1, 4.

63 For the early 20th-century parallels from Finland see Salmi-Niklander 2013, 83–84.

but he wrote it with a typewriter. Handwriting was not a voluntarily chosen form in any of the cases, but the only possible way, forced by necessity. However, there are further reasons underlying the handwritten format: the changing and uncertain infrastructure at the time of the launch of the *Evangéliumi Munkás*; the attempts to preserve its autonomy; its battle for legitimacy against the official Church; the passive attitude and the financial situation of the target audience of Dezső Bonczidai's *Pastoral Letters* (if people did not buy official religious press, then he would create a free congregational newspaper himself). The justification for *Tábortűz* being in handwriting is its temporary nature and its traditional student newspaper aspect (in the context of a three-day youth conference). Despite their different features, the three handwritten newspaper editions are driven by the same motivation, which is the strength and the faith attributed to missionary publications, embraced and promoted by the Home Mission, which, in the case of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania, was further bolstered by the new role taken on by the press.

A newspaper published in handwriting in the age of printing was often a means of protest against an oppressive power.⁶⁴ On the basis of the few handwritten newspapers presented above, which can be associated with the awakening movements of the period between the two world wars, it would be an exaggeration to talk about open resistance; however, the Home Mission's newspaper culture did define itself against and in opposition to several things from the very beginning. It fought against 20th-century secularization and empty religiosity, as well as against the secularized, rigid, official ecclesiastical structure. It stood up against the damaging consequences of urban modernization; against the world wars and the oppression of the Hungarian minority culture in Transylvania that followed. The Home Mission evangelized through its resistance, which was maintained at any cost. When there was no other means for survival, it resorted to an earlier, existing and established practice: the medium of the handwritten newspaper.

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