

Joseph II's Reforms of the Piarist Order with Particular Regard to the Hungarian Province

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Abstract:

The aim of the study is to show the consequences for the Hungarian Piarist Order stemming from the ecclesiastical reforms of Joseph II. (r. 1765–1790). Both Maria Theresa (r. 1740–1780) and her son, Joseph II wanted to restructure and re-regulate the relationship between church and state. The wide-ranging reforms introduced during their reigns affected social, economic, cultural, judicial and legal life, as well as education. The Church and its different branches like the religious orders (*ordo regularis*) were the cohesive elements of this program: as a kind of supranational institution, it was the responsibility of the ecclesiastical administration to introduce, operate and control it. Without the state-church structure, the system as a whole would have remained dysfunctional. In fact, in relation to the objectives of Maria Theresa and Joseph II, we should not speak primarily of church reform, but of the modernization or centralization program of the multi-ethnic Habsburg monarchy. The Piarists are considered the most committed supporters of the 18th-century reform spirit, who, as a teaching order, also incorporated the new scientific achievements of the time into the education of the youth. The activities of the Piarists received great support from Maria Theresa and Joseph II, who entrusted them with the creation of many new educational institutions. Paradoxically, this relationship of trust almost led to the dissolution of the Order in the Josephine decade, when the Emperor sought to exploit the Piarists by dissolving the Order and employing its members in the state. This was ultimately hampered by scarce financial resources, but the existential fear of dissolution and the loosening of the order's ties led many religious (lat. religiousus) to leave the community and continue their careers as diocesan priests or lay teachers.

Keywords: state; church; enlightened absolutism; Joseph II; Piarist Order; religious; reform

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1. Josephinism

Da kam Joseph, mit Gottes Stärke,
riss das tobende Ungeheuer weg,
weg zwischen Erd' und Himmel,
und trat ihm auf's Haupt (...).

BEETHOVEN: *Kantate auf den
Tod Kaiser Josephs II*¹

Although the principles on which the state's relationship with the Church had to be settled in the spirit of the new times had already been endorsed by Joseph II as heir to the throne, he was undecided about how he would choose the path to reform.² One of his most significant steps was to set up an ecclesiastical commission (*Geistliche Commission*) to select candidates for ecclesiastical offices, which mostly took into account the proposals of the Hungarian Chancellery (*Ungarische Hofkanzlei*) for the appointment of Hungarian archpriests. The Emperor considered the Church as a branch of the state administration, and would have left the Pope's power only in the area of dogmatic questions.³ The extent and impatience of this interference is shown by the fact that in the space of a few years, numerous decrees concerning the Church were issued, with urgent deadlines for implementation, often within weeks.⁴

Joseph II also made many other changes to the internal organization of the Catholic Church: he reintroduced the *placetum regium*⁵ and released his famous *nexus-decree*, in which all monastic orders under the Emperor's rule must sever all ties with any foreign monastic house, association or magistristerium, especially with Rome. This measure covers the following:

1. All monastic houses existing in the territories under the Emperor's rule and in the Austrian Hereditary provinces shall, absolutely, unconditionally and for all time, cease

¹ "There came Joseph, with God's strength, flung the raging monster away, away between earth and heavens, and crushed his head."

² In more detail: VALJAVEC, F. *Der Josephinismus*. München: Oldenbourg, 1945, pp. 34–121. MÁLYUSZ, E. *Iratok a türelmi rendelet történetéhez* [Documents on the History of the Tolerance Decree]. Budapest: Magyar Protestáns Irodalmi Társaság, 1939, p. 127. FEICHTINGER, J. – UHL, H. (eds.). *Habsburg neu denken*. Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2016, pp. 96–103. VALJAVEC, F. *Der Josephinismus*. München: Oldenbourg, 1945, pp. 34–121.

³ As formulated by Ferdinand Maaß briefly, but utterly accurately: "Die schrankenlose Einflussnahme des Staates auf alles kirchliche zu begründen und zu rechtfertigen" [To Justify the Unrestricted Influence of the State on Everything Church-Related]. In: MAAß, F. *Der Josephinismus. Quellen zu seiner Geschichte in Österreich*. Vol. I. Wien, 1951, p. XVII. 1. DUCHHARDT, H. *Barock und Aufklärung*. München: Oldenbourg, 2007, pp. 144–146.

⁴ MEZEY, B. – GOSZTONYI, G. (eds.). *Magyar alkotmánytörténet* [History of the Hungarian Constitution]. Budapest: Osiris, 2020, p. 257.

⁵ This royal privilege was introduced in Hungary by King Sigismund of Luxembourg (r. 1387–1437) in 1404. In practice, this meant two things: without the monarch's consent the papal conferments of benefices were invalid and the enactment of putting all papal provisions under the monarch's control. TUSOR, P. – NEMES, G. (eds.). *Documents of Papal Consistories*. Budapest – Rome: Research Institute of Church History at Péter Pázmány Catholic University, 2011, pp. 284–285.

all passive contact and all obligations with foreign monasteries, convents and religious orders of countries and provinces not under the Emperor's rule and with the magistrates residing there.

2. The houses (monasteries) of the monastic orders in the territories under the Emperor's rule may either form a separate independent body or unite to form a monastic association, but they must notify His Majesty of their intention to do so within two months.
3. The Emperor orders that in the future no monastic house shall have any connection with the general (*generalis*)⁶ or any other foreign house, neither jurisdictional nor disciplinary, still less material (monetary), and in general no relationship of any kind, but be under the provincial leadership of the archbishops and bishops, residing and sitting in the territories under His Majesty's jurisdiction, and under the supreme authority of the Governor's Council (as a royal legislative body). The archbishops and bishops are empowered to exercise these rights.
4. Religious living in the territory under the Emperor's rule are not allowed to attend any foreign or general chapters (*capitulum generale*)⁷ or other such gatherings. Furthermore, the so-called visitators or any other individuals sent by foreign magistrates are not allowed to be received.
5. Only a native or naturalized citizen can be elected as a superior. For this reason, chapters must always be held within the boundaries of the territory of the country or of the Austrian Hereditary provinces, where the ordinary internal affairs are conducted and the provincial governor and other superiors are elected. Orders of religious residing in Hungary and in the neighboring territories are obliged to ask for permission from the Governor's Council to hold chapters, since they can only hold them with the permission of the Council. The decisions taken at chapters must be separated in three: spiritual, material (monetary) and external disciplinary matters. The last two must be submitted separately for approval.
6. A religious may not travel abroad or to Rome on religious business, nor may he reside there permanently for the same purpose, since there is no longer any need for him to do so.
7. The purchase of any book of divine worship – missal, breviary, or other such thing – from abroad, or the exportation abroad of even the smallest sum of money, without the permission of the Emperor, is not permitted.

This was the content of the decree, which was drawn up in the Bohemian and Austrian chancelleries and which the Emperor – for the sake of uniformity – extended to Hungary, so that it could be applied to religious there. He also ordered that it should be promulgated at the same time everywhere.⁸

Apart from the nexus-decree, Joseph II abolished religious orders deemed useless for society. What happened to the huge material acquisitions that came from the religious orders? He used the dissolved monasteries' assets to enrich the Religious Fund

⁶ The supreme superior in religious orders, whose seat is in Rome.

⁷ The general chapter is attended by the whole religious order, with representatives from all countries of the world. (Author's note)

⁸ PALLMANN, P. *A magyar piaristák II. József uralkodása alatt* [The Hungarian Piarists During the Reign of Joseph II]. Kolozsvár: Stief nyomda, 1914, pp. 18–20.

(*Religionsfond*),⁹ and to establish new parishes, which were provided for by this fund. It is not surprising that the dissolution act entered into force, since he himself wrote about monasticism in a letter to the Archbishop of Salzburg in 1781:

The rule of the religious in Austria has gone too far: the number of foundations and monasteries is now out of all proportion. The governments have hitherto, according to the special regulations of these people, had no right of disposal over their members; and these are the most dangerous and most useless subjects of every state, and they appeal to Rome, the Pontifex Maximus, at every opportunity (...) When I have lifted the veil from the monastic institution, when I have banished the Andromache's veil of their ascetic doctrine from the cathedrals of my universities, and have transformed the purely contemplative friends into working citizens, then I shall wish some of the zealots to reason over my reforms. I have cut my axe into a great tree: I must decimate the army of religious. From the fakirs I must make men, of those before whose shaven heads the people kneel in homage, and who have secured for themselves a more powerful dominion over the souls of the citizens than anything else that can impress the human soul.¹⁰

From 1782 onwards, each year he abolished more and more monastic houses. At the beginning, he was careful to abolish primarily the contemplative, small, financially unviable, badly managed and morally reprehensible monasteries, but later he also took a close look at the rich and financially well-ordered ones. What do the numbers show? Most writers agree that one third of the monasteries were dissolved, with numbers ranging from 700 to 800. In Hungary, 134 male and 6 female houses were forced to give up their religious community life, their members numbered 1484 male and 190 female religious. The way in which the dissolution was carried out resulted in a great loss of material and artistic assets. However, it is also true that great amount of money received by the Religious Fund were used for pastoral activities. But far greater and more lasting than the material and cultural damage was the suffering of individuals, the spiritual breakdown of the faithful and the crisis of priestly and monastic spirit and the lack of new vocations which lasted for decades.¹¹

The two main features of Josephinist church government were: on the one hand, the curtailment of all internal jurisdiction and discipline; on the other, the direct (state) regulation of recruitment, training and employment. The corresponding provincial office and the bishopric (*dioecesis*) have supervisory authority over the monasteries. From now on the

⁹ The Religious Fund came into existence when Charles VI (r. 1711–1740) created a special fund in 1733 called the *cassa parochorum* to help parish priests with lower incomes. Maria Theresa developed the Religious Fund by annexing the estates of certain dissolved monastic orders and dissolved monasteries. The income of the Religious Foundation was used exclusively for Catholic ecclesiastical purposes. KLUETING, H. *Der Josephinismus*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995, pp. 280–282. CSIZMADIA, A. *Rechtliche Beziehungen von Staat und Kirche in Ungarn vor 1944*. Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, 1971, p. 189. BEALES, D. *Europäische Klöster im Zeitalter der Revolution 1650–1815*. Wien: Brill Österreich, 2008, pp. 195–203.

¹⁰ SUPKA, G. *II. József válogatott levelei* [Selected Letters of Joseph II]. Budapest: Olcsó Könyvtár, 1913, pp. 37–38. In more detail: BENDEL, R. – SPANNENBERGER, N. *Katolische Aufklärung und Josephinismus. Rezeptionsformen in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa*. Köln: Böglau Verlag, 2015.

¹¹ VANYÓ, T. *A bécsi pápai követség levéltárának iratai Magyarországról 1611–1786* [Archives of the Papal Embassy in Vienna on Hungary 1611–1786]. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1986, pp. 53–54.

term of office of provincials¹² is uniformly three years. The aim of the government is to eliminate monastic differences and to create a unified clergy. The main instrument in this endeavor is the establishment of so-called central, state general seminaries (*seminarium generale*). These institutes are outside the jurisdiction of the bishops, i.e. they were directly under state supervision. “I will see to it, – wrote the Emperor in a letter – that the building I am constructing for the future will be permanent; the central seminaries will be the hotbeds of priests of my spirit, and the pastors we train here will bring a purer spirit into the world and will implant it in the people’s soul with correct teaching.”¹³

Although the Piarist Order avoided the dissolution act, it could not exempt itself from the new freshly introduced seminary system.

2. The direct impact of the Josephinist reforms on the Piarists of Hungary

The imperial act of the new clergy training dealt a severe blow to the Piarists because the novitiate had to be closed. This was a crisis for the order, not only because the number of necessary younglings was rapidly reduced and the shortage of young teachers doubled, but there was another, no less serious, disadvantage of this measure, namely: clerics who had already been ordained but had not yet taken their vows (*vota sollemnia*) were in a state of embarrassing uncertainty as to the future of the Order. Their attachment to the order and their vocations were in many cases weakened or even lost altogether, which led to dissatisfaction and even moral decline, but also to mass departures from the Order: while in 1782 there were 418 members of the order, in 1790 there were only 329 Piarists, 57 of the members sought a living outside the order.¹⁴

The provincial of the Piarists, – just as the other provincial leaders – sent a reply to the Governor’s Council¹⁵ after receiving the imperial decree, which was then forwarded to the Chancellery. In his referral, the Piarist provincial wrote about the great poverty of the Hungarian province, which could barely support its younglings¹⁶ in the religious houses of the province itself. He also declared that he was unable to cover the costs of the students’ educations in the newly erected seminary. He has two requests: financial support from the court, and a concession to hire new recruits to the order.¹⁷ Interestingly, the Governor’s Council supported the provincial’s request because the circumstance was considered true. In fact, the Council asked the monarch to suspend the decree or to postpone its

¹² A government unit bringing together the religious houses of a larger area, headed by the provincial governor. (Author’s note)

¹³ SUPKA, G. II. *József válogatott levelei* [Selected Letters of Joseph II], p. 40. ARETIN, K. *Deutsche Geschichte*. Band 7. Berlin: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980, pp. 28–29.

¹⁴ FORGÓ, A. (ed.). *A Piarista rend Magyarországon* [The Piarist Order in Hungary]. Budapest: Szent István Társulat, 2010, p. 134.

¹⁵ Its official name is *Consilium Regium Locumtenentiale Hungaricum, Ungarische Königliche Statthalterrat in German*. The establishment of the Royal Hungarian Governor’s Council was decided by the Diet of 1722–23. However, it only started its actual operation the following year, in 1724. It functioned as Hungary’s supreme governing body until 1848. MAROSI, E. (ed.). *Auf der Bühne Europas. Der tausendjährige Beitrag Ungarns zur Idee der Europäischen Gemeinschaft* [On the Stage of Europe. Hungary’s Millennial Contribution to the Idea of the European Community]. Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2009, p. 339.

¹⁶ Those who are studying to be full members of the Piarist Order, but only with a temporary vow (*vota temporaria*).

¹⁷ PALLMANN. *A magyar piaristák II. József uralkodása alatt* [The Hungarian Piarists During the Reign of Joseph II], pp. 61–62.

implementation on the Piarists. But there was no supportive response from the monarch. Following repeated lengthy requests, Joseph II finally recognized the legitimacy of the appeal and he allowed the provincial to accept twenty new members to the order. This did not solve the shortage of teachers, but the official response justified the thin number by saying that the reform of the order was imminent anyway, so it was unnecessary to recruit new members.¹⁸ What exactly was this reform? We will come back to it later.

In another decree – issued in 1784 –, the ruler dismantled the province into small pieces. The decree stipulated that each religious house (*domus*) should elect its own direct superior (*rector*) by absolute majority, or by a relative majority in the case of a third vote. The election is conducted by the deputy head of the house (*vicerektor*). The provincial's right over the houses is reduced only to confirm the election or, in the event of manifest incompetence, to annul it. The right to hold the office of deputy head of the house and other minor offices of the order was now vested exclusively in the head of the house. However, while the decree thus gave the head of the house almost unlimited power in his own house, it also took care to diminish the power of the provincial of the order to practically nothing. It stipulated that the provincial could henceforth only transfer members of the order (*dispositio*) from one house to another if there were very compelling reasons; similarly, he could only visit or make a visitation (*visitatio*) when and where an important event or circumstance made his presence absolutely necessary.¹⁹

Another serious blow was inflicted on the national and Piarist school network when Joseph II abolished the noble convents (*convictus nobilium*)²⁰ on 20 September 1784. The abolition of the money-losing and inefficient noble convents was not an isolated step, but went hand in hand with the introduction of a new system of tuition fees and scholarships. Poorer students with good grades could continue to study free of charge, and even receive – at three levels – annual scholarships of 260, 200 and 160 forints, which compensated for their attendance at the convict. This was partly covered by the convict funds and partly by the new tuition fees. There is no doubt that the Piarist order was severely affected – both financially and in terms of the number of students – by the closure of the noble convents it had managed in Debrecen, Kisszeben (Sabinov), Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca), Nyitra (Nitra), Rózsahegy (Ružomberok), Szentanna (Sântana) and Trencsén (Trenčín). Some of the Piarists in Cluj were forced to leave, leaving the monastery without a superior for six years.²¹

The enlightened emperor – contrary to the principles of the Piarist Order – introduced tuition fees in schools: in 1785 Joseph II decreed that free education shall cease in all gymnasiums, lyceums and universities, and students shall pay a moderate tuition fee.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 64–65.

¹⁹ BALANYI, G. – BÍRÓ, I. – BÍRÓ, V. –TOMEK, V. (eds.). *A magyar piarista rendtartomány története* [History of the Hungarian Piarist Order]. Budapest: Kiadás éve, 1943, p. 132.

²⁰ A significant part of the Catholic youth in Hungary was educated in the boarding schools developed by the Jesuits and then run by the Piarists after their dissolution. They were usually called noble convents. The majority of the students were indeed of noble origin, but many were also drawn from other social classes. VARGA, I. (ed.). *A magyarországi katolikus tanintézmények színjátásának forrásai és irodalma 1800-ig* [The Sources and Literature of Drama in Catholic Schools in Hungary until 1800]. Budapest: Argumentum, 1992, p. 195. SCHINDLING, A. *Bildung und Wissenschaft in der Frühen Neuzeit 1650–1800. Enzyklopädie deutscher Geschichte, Band 30*. München: Oldenbourg, 1994, p. 80.

²¹ KOSÁRY, D. *Művelődés a XVIII. századi Magyarországon* [Civilization in 18th Century Hungary]. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1980, pp. 441–442.

Those who do not pay tuition fees – except for students with outstanding grades from poor backgrounds – can only receive a private notification of their academic progress, which does not entitle them to apply for scholarships or state employment. The introduction of tuition fees was a watershed moment for students: in addition to the hundreds and hundreds of penniless students, many poorer noble youths were deprived of the opportunity of higher education. The attendance of schools had dwindled alarmingly, almost halving within five years: in 1784, a total of 8356 pupils attended grammar schools and academies in Hungary, while in 1788 only 4629.²² However, it is also true that the new system was also of supportive of the needs of poor students, and the introduction of tuition fees itself was aimed against the tax exemption of the nobility (*immunitas*). From 1785 onwards, the less good students paid 12 forints a year for the gymnasium, 15 for the philosophy faculty and 30 forints a year for the faculties of law and medicine. In the school year of 1785/86, 38.5 thousand forints were collected, of which 25.6 thousand were distributed to new scholarship holders and the rest was used for supporting schools in need. In the following year 1786/87, scholarships worth 86.3 thousand forints were distributed among talented students.²³

How did this new tuition fee system affect the number of students in Piarist schools? The Piarist schools suffered greatly. The number of pupils was so low in some institutions that they were in danger of being completely depopulated. According to the official reports in 1790/91 the Gymnasium of Kalocsa had only 58, Kecskemét 36, Nyitra (Nitra) 211, Rózsahegy (Ružomberok) 58, Selmecbánya (Banská Štiavnica) 85, Trencsén (Trenčín) 110, Vác 139, Kiszseben (Sabinov) 90, Podolin (Podolíneč) 194, 118 in Sátoraljajjhely, 45 in Debrecen, 93 in Nagykároly (Carei), 142 in Szeged, 63 in Máramaros (Sighetul Marmăției), 43 in Temesvár (Timisoara), 68 in Nagykanizsa, 102 in Kőszeg, 51 in Tata and 70 in Veszprém.²⁴

The difficulties were compounded by the Emperor's language decree in 1784. He wanted to make German the overarching language of the Habsburg Empire, and one important means of achieving this was to make German the language of education in domestic secondary schools. The Emperor declared German to be the official language of government offices, counties, courts and schools – replacing Latin – leaving a very short period of time for the changeover. According to this decree, only pupils with an elementary knowledge of German would be admitted to the first class of the gymnasium for the next school year. A later decree of the Governor's Council pushed the deadline further back: after three years, this requirement would be enforced for first-year pupils. Another decree was issued: after three years, all subjects, including Latin, would have to be taught in German in the lower and upper secondary schools. However, the conditions for this had not yet been established in the following years, but the monarch's harsh decree was transmitted by the Governor's Council to the schools: from the 1787/1788 school year the language of education in all secondary and higher schools would be German. But in 1787, the officials

²² BALANYI – BÍRÓ – BÍRÓ – TOMEK (eds.). *A magyar piarista rendtartomány története* [History of the Hungarian Piarist Order], pp. 147–148.

²³ KOSÁRY, D. *Művelődés a XVIII. századi Magyarországon* [Civilization in 18th Century Hungary], pp. 441–442.

²⁴ BALANYI – BÍRÓ – BÍRÓ – TOMEK (eds.). *A magyar piarista rendtartomány története* [History of the Hungarian Piarist Order], pp. 148.

instructed the directors of the school districts to start teaching in German only in the lowest classes of the grammar schools in the autumn of 1787, and to move up one class per year.²⁵

The Council of Governors had already decreed that secondary school teachers who did not know German would be obliged to learn it perfectly in three years in order to be able to teach in German. Naturally, in the German-speaking towns of the Empire the transition from Latin to German did not cause any problems – although no textbooks in German were available for secondary schools. The complication was even greater in the secondary schools of other towns, where most of the teachers – and especially the pupils – did not speak German. In most of these cities, the nationalist-minded headmasters and teachers refused or at least delayed the implementation of the language decrees, citing various reasons.²⁶ Interestingly, it was the language decree which caused disapproval of the Piarists. They were not really defending Latin, but wanted to make Hungarian more widespread among the population through education. András Dugonics (1740–1818), one of the most famous Piarist of the time, thought this way about the importance of the Hungarian language:

The Emperor ordered that Hungarian children should be taught only German, and that Latin and Hungarian should be abandoned. The German language crunched in their mouths, they could not get used to it. I resisted this attempt, and published algebra and geometry in Hungarian only to show the country that the German language is never as useful as the Hungarian language in explaining the sciences (...) The country can best be preserved if the dress and language are preserved.²⁷

With each passing day the situation worsened: the Hungarian Piarist Province was threatened by the simultaneous danger of internal collapse and external disintegration. Given the large number of its schools, it was in the interest of the state to prevent this. For this reason, Emperor Joseph repeatedly declared that he did not intend to abolish the order, but quite to the contrary, wanted to reorganize it. His reform plan was not long in coming. Already at its meeting, the Governor's Council had sent it to the provincial of the order, Joseph Königsacker.

3. The radical reformative reorganization plan

As a result of the crisis described above – which was largely caused by the Emperor's decrees – the future of the Piarist order was increasingly discussed at the Court Commission of Studies (*Studienhofkommission*)²⁸ in Vienna. During the council meetings, the abolition of the Order, the secularization of its assets or, more precisely, the merging of all its assets into the Study Fund (*Studienfond*) were considered. Another proposal argued

²⁵ KANN, R. *A History of The Habsburg Empire 1526–1918*. London: California Press, 1974, p. 185. MÉSZÁROS, I. *Középszintű iskoláink kronológiája és topográfiája, 996–1948* [Chronology and Topography of Our Secondary Schools, 996–1948]. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1980, p. 55. BENDA, K. *Emberbarát vagy hazafi?* [Philanthropist or Patriot?]. Budapest: Gondolat, 1978, pp. 385–386.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

²⁷ SZINNYEI, J. (ed.). Dugonics Andrásnak, Kegyes Oskolabeli szerzetes papnak különféle gondolatai és történetei [Thoughts and Stories of András Dugonics, a Piarist Priest...]. In: *Dugonics András feljegyzései* [Notes by András Dugonics], 1883, p. 16.

²⁸ It was founded by Maria Theresa in 1760. (Author's note)

that the order should be transformed into a secular teacher training institute, which could be under the supervision of the Court Commission of Studies. Historical sources show that – even before the provinces were officially informed about the planned changes – the Piarists were increasingly concerned about the future of their order and feared that their institution would be dissolved just like the others. A climate of uncertainty prevailed in the Order, which discouraged many young people from applying to become religious, priests and teachers in the Piarist Order.²⁹

Two documents in the archives testify to the decision not to abolish the order, but to reorganize it. One document is a copy of the original German text, transcribed by the Piarist Father and archivist Keresztély Kácsor (1710–1792), and the other is a Hungarian translation of the text, which does not exactly reflect the essence of the original text. These documents can be found in the archives of the Hungarian Piarist Order, in one of the so-called *Intimata Regia*, which volumes contain the official documents from state. Below is the English translation of the original German version of the reform plans:³⁰

With regard to the Piarist Order, His Majesty has declared himself in the most gracious terms by a supreme decree, which will be published first, and which will be communicated to the three provincials³¹ in the Imperial-Royal Hereditary Lands.

They should accept candidates, train them as teachers in the lower German and Latin schools, as well as teach them the philosophical and mathematical sciences, and then employ them in schools. At the age of 24 they should take the profession³² and take the minors³³, which would make them Clerici Regulares³⁴ and distinguish them from the laity. Those who wish to become priests – it is not necessary for all of them to become priests – go to the general seminaries at their own expense and study the theological sciences. Teachers in the Order should be supported by the School Fund³⁵ and live well. Also, after a well-done school service, they shall receive remuneration for all the dignities of the Order, as well as being promoted to district school directors, university pulpits, etc.

His Imperial and Royal Majesty has, by virtue of subsection 19 and praesentato 22 of this decree on the proposals of the Austrian and Bohemian Piarist Provincials with regard to the future reception and education of their candidates for the Order, deigned to make the following provisions, according to which this institute could be transformed into a mere nursery school of competent teachers³⁶ for studies hitherto undertaken by these Orders, and to open up their future intentions essentially in the following.

²⁹ RIEDEL, J. *Bildungsreform und geistliches Ordenswesen im Ungarn der Aufklärung. Die Schulen der Piaristen unter Maria Theresia und Joseph II.* [Educational Reform and Religious Orders in Enlightenment Hungary. The Piarist Schools under Maria Theresa and Joseph II]. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012, pp. 302–303.

³⁰ Central Archives of the Hungarian Province of the Piarist Order, Archivum Provinciae Hungariae Vetus, *Intimata. Regia. IV, Ab Anno 1786 Ad Annum 1787.* Nr. 12, 26. Januar 1786.

³¹ Namely to the Austrian, Bohemian and Hungarian provincial leaders. (Author's note)

³² It refers to the solemn profession. (Author's note)

³³ The minor orders are as follows: *clericus*, commonly called cleric; *ostiarus*, commonly called doorkeeper; *lector*, commonly called reader; *exorcista*, exorcist; and *acolytus*, acolyte. The major orders are subdeacon, deacon, priest, bishop, and archbishop. (Author's note)

³⁴ Regular Clergy.

³⁵ Probably the text refers to the Schulfonds (School Fund). Its Property and funds are for the public education.

³⁶ Originally: "eine bloße Pflanzschule tüchtiger Lehrer".

- 1) All those parishes which are now served by Piarists, even in their own houses, should be taken over by the Religious Fund, and the clergy of the Piarist Order, who are unfit for the teaching ministry, should receive the endowment of the Religious Fund, like all others in the same position, according to the extent to which they can be used as pastors or cooperators in one place or another, without the Piarist Fund contributing anything to this.
- 2) The Piarists who become disabled during the course of their lives are to be provided with a pension in the monasteries or outside the Piarist houses in accordance with general regulations, and should not be a burden on them.
- 3) The Piarists should only accept candidates in the year they consider most useful. They should receive the education necessary for teachers. The Order should dismiss without further ado those who are incompetent, who have been educated for the teaching ministry and have reached the prescribed age of 24 years, but since they do not enter the Piarist state ad ordines majores and therefore cannot administer the sacraments, it is not necessary for them to hear theology. Consequently, it was also not necessary for them to be brought to the general seminary. However, if one of them wanted to pass on to the major orders afterwards, he had to undergo the instruction in the general seminary without indulgence and apply for a *titulum mensae*.³⁷ Since the Order should not support him either there or in the future.
- 4) However, in order to ensure that the Order's entire foundation income, which in the future will be part of the Study Fund, is not wasted by the young people admitted to the Order leaving before they have reached the age prescribed for the vows,³⁸ they shall be free to leave the Order if they do not wish to take the vows, They are free to resign from the Order, but they must then either compensate the Order for the costs incurred in their education, or serve as secular schoolteachers according to their ability until they have done so, for which purpose they are to be indulgently restrained by the public authorities.
- 5) Since the Piarist Order is intended solely for the teaching ministry, and those who devote themselves to the spiritual state are to be completely separated from it, then, to begin with, the superiors must abolish everything that is too monastic, such as fasting except for the time when it is also to be accomplished by laymen, all monastic dungeons and excessive begging must be abolished, but a better diet must be served and a noble freedom granted: because the future members are to be mere minorists³⁹ and bound by vows only like the Maltese.⁴⁰
- 6) According to the extent to which the members of the Order will excel in the teaching profession, they shall receive annual remunerations from the Study Fund, and be assured of lifelong provision in the event of their infirmity, as well as of their ability and

³⁷ Lat. *titulus mensae*: It developed in German territory, and was prompted by the need to have more clergy serving in large parishes, or in other, e.g. teaching, professions, but no benefices were attached to these offices. A modest sum was then provided for the clergyman's maintenance. (Author's note)

³⁸ The religious vow, *vota sollemnia*. (Author's note)

³⁹ Namely the will have only the minor orders. Cf. 32. footnote.

⁴⁰ It is not clear what the Emperor had in mind by endowing certain members of the Piarist Order with vows similar to those of the Order of Malta. (Author's note)

zeal to be promoted to school directors and visitatores, as well as to offices of authority in the Order.

- 7) Finally, it is self-evident that those who are now employed in the teaching ministry, even if they are priests, can remain so, and that this disposition is for the future.

Since the government has now been instructed to make these measures known to the Austrian provincial of the Piarists without delay, to request from him the statement of what he finds to remember about them and then to accompany his expert opinion to court: these measures are opened to him with the instruction to submit his statement to the government by means of an expert opinion report.

Thus, according to the plans described above, the primary aim of the Piarist Order was to train teachers for the public-school system. Consequently, it was not in the interest of the Emperor that members of the Order should receive higher ordination and become priests in the long term. From the point of view of the state, the priestly vocation was not a requirement for the teaching professions, so theological studies were almost superfluous, since the pastoral ministry was not the main concern of the Piarists.

One of the main questions, of course, was: if the priesthood was taken away from the diocese, what would remain? It is, after all, a religious order whose very name says *expressis verbis clericis regularis*.⁴¹ The separation from Rome, the curtailment of the rights of the provincial governor, or the language decree itself, cannot be said to be as drastic as this move promised. From the point of view of the state, it might indeed have been useful, in theory, to take all the property of the Order and turn it into a state teacher training college. Would such a transformed Order have been attractive to young people to choose this brand-new Piarist vocation? The questions remained unanswered, as Joseph II abandoned his radical plan. Why did he decide to do so, and how did the provincial governors react to the restructuring?

The short answer to the latter question is that one would rightly expect the leaders to have protested vehemently, but that is not what we read in their official letters of reply. The Austrian provincial agrees on the whole with the points concerning the restructuring of the Order, or at least he is very cautious in his criticism. He particularly liked the suggestion that the state should take over the costs of the members of the Order (salaries, pensions). The only thing the provincial governor did not want to give up was some sort of jurisdiction over the members of the order, which is rather questionable and unclear in this new system.⁴²

The Bohemian provincial also endorsed the introduction of state salaries for the care of members of the Piarist Order. For retired teachers, he suggested that the state should allow them to spend their old age even in parishes. Compared to his Austrian colleague, he questioned the restrictions on granting the major orders to the young candidates, as proposed in the Emperor's reform plans. In his view, this would in the long term jeopardize the recruitment of new priests. In addition, the state would lose a reliable ecclesiastical ally who preached both the Gospel and Enlightenment doctrines to the people. If the Piarists were to fall out of the system, they would have to be replaced by the Emperor in the same

⁴¹ To be exact: *Ordo Clericorum Regularium Pauperum Matris Dei Scholarum Piarum* (Order of Poor Clerics Regular of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools).

⁴² RIEDEL, J. *Bildungsreform und geistliches Ordenswesen im Ungarn der Aufklärung* [Educational Reform and Religious Orders in Enlightenment Hungary], pp. 315–316.

way. It is also worth considering the need for priests in schools to administer the sacraments to the students.

The Bohemian provincial also sees a difficulty in the fact that the time spent in the general seminaries is too long for the Piarist candidates, which is not necessary as they have a good education and should therefore be reduced to two years. Another problem – as he writes in his letter of reply – is that many parents are deterred by the introduction of a requirement that those who decide to leave the Piarist vocation should be reimbursed for the full cost of their education. It is true that the wealthier applicants could be asked for an advance payment, but the majority of applicants are poor and lack the necessary financial resources.⁴³

After informing the Austrian and Bohemian provincial governors, the Emperor also informed the Hungarian Piarists of his plans and asked the provincial governor for his opinion on the matter. Of the three replies from the provincial chiefs, the Hungarian one is the shortest and least critical. He considers the seven points on which the Emperor wrote to be well thought out, which is why the Order's main aim of educating youth remains at the heart of its vocation. He believes that it is important that those who are already priests in the Order remain in that status. Retired members of the Order should be reassured that they will spend their retirement years in one of the Piarist houses. According to him, there should not be much fear of quitting, because no one is so ungrateful as not to pay some compensation to the Order for the cost of training. The Hungarian provincial also thinks it would be a good thing if the restructuring plans were accompanied by a new constitution for the order under which everyone would be included.⁴⁴

The Emperor considered the proposals of the provincial governors, and in 1787 he and his advisers abandoned the attempted reorganization. The main reason for this is not the unrealistic nature of the plans prepared, but the financial situation of the Piarist Order. If the Order were to become fully integrated into the state, the financial consequences would be unforeseeable. It was likely that neither the existing schools could be financed, nor would it be possible to establish a secular teacher training institute with the scarce financial resources of the Order. The plans for the reorganization of the Piarist Order did not seem to be appropriate to the circumstances and raised a number of problems that had not yet been resolved. Therefore, the Piarists, with their foundations and their present endowments, should be left undisturbed and other means should be considered for the training of teachers suitable for the future.⁴⁵

4. A Josephinist Piarist?

From the above, one might think that the members of the Piarist Order were unanimous in their rejection of Joseph II's reforms. Not quite. Károly Koppi (1744–1801), a Piarist priest, historian and a university professor, was a so-called *Josephinist*, a person among others who supported the Emperor's actions to a certain extent.⁴⁶ Why did these enlightened thinkers support the monarch? Basically, for two reasons. Firstly, the reformist ideas of this intelligentsia at this time were generally not very far ahead of Joseph's actual

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 317–318.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 319–320.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 321–324.

⁴⁶ EVAN, R. *Austria, Hungary, and The Habsburgs*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 52.

ideas, so they could really see in him the realization of their own plans. The other was that who else could they rely on? The nobility shied away from the idea of reform. The citizens were weak and inactive, and the serfs were incapable of political action. And because they were weak as well, they had only one ally: the enlightened monarch.⁴⁷

One of the most important focal points for the Josephinist groups were the Masonic Lodges. Koppi was also undoubtedly a Mason. It is not known when and which lodge he first joined, it is possible that during his short stay in Vienna he came into contact with the *Zur wahren Eintracht* lodge there, of which Count János Fekete was a member, but it may be that he only joined the Masonic camp in the 1780s.⁴⁸ There is nothing extraordinary about Koppi being a Mason. Not only did almost all the members of the intellectual group associated with him belong to the movement, but among the members of the lodges – despite the repeated papal ban⁴⁹ – we find many other churchmen, such as the Piarist priest Lipót Schaffrath, the Piarist provincial head Imre Perczel, the canon (*canonicus*) Ferenc Splényi, a counselor of the Governor’s Council and a canon Dániel Mittelspacher and many others. It is well known that in 18th century Europe, Masonic Lodges were everywhere the forums of economic, social and political debates among reformist intellectuals. This is true especially in the German-Roman Empire, because several princes belonged to them, including Maria Theresa’s husband, Francis I, Holy Roman Emperor – albeit only in secret.⁵⁰

The main aim of the Hungarian masonic ideas was the elimination of social inequalities and it defined the tasks of the masons in the different fields for the improvement of socio-political conditions. They would be the most enthusiastic in welcoming the accession of the reform-minded Joseph II to the throne, his edicts of tolerance and serfdom, but they would also be the most severe critics of Joseph II’s Josephinist policy, especially in its late stages – including the Piarist Koppi. Joseph’s 1785 Freemasonic decree, which severely restricted the operation of the lodges, played a part in this, of course. The general observation about the political activity of the Masonic intelligentsia and its change of direction is also well reflected in the work of Károly Koppi.⁵¹

⁴⁷ BENDA, K. *A magyar jakobinus mozgalom története* [History of the Hungarian Jacobin Movement]. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1957, pp. 18–20.

⁴⁸ REINALTER, H. *Freimaurer und Geheimbünde im 18. Jahrhundert in Mitteleuropa* [Freemasons and Secret Societies in Central Europe in the 18th Century]. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1989, p. 40. FORGÓ, A. Koppi Károly szerepe a 18. század végi nemesi-értelmiségi reformmozgalomban [The Role of Károly Koppi in the Noble-Intellectual Reform Movement of the Late 18th Century]. In: FORGÓ, A. (ed.). *A Piarista rend Magyarországon* [The Piarist Order in Hungary]. Budapest: Szent István Társulat, 2010, p. 129.

⁴⁹ This regulation was also included in the later ecclesiastical code: Can. 2335. *Nomen dantes sectae massonicae aliisve eiusdem generis associationibus quae contra Ecclesiam vel legitimis civiles potestates machinantur, contrahunt ipso facto excommunicationem Sedi Apostolicae simpliciter reservatam* [Those who give their name to Masonic sects or to other associations of the same kind which plot against the Church or the legitimate civil authorities, automatically contract the excommunication reserved to the Apostolic See]. In *Codex Iuris Canonici 1917* [online]. 25. 02. 2024. Available at: https://www.intratext.com/IXT/LAT0813/_P81.HTM.

⁵⁰ FORGÓ. *Koppi Károlyszerepe a 18. század végi nemesi-értelmiségi reformmozgalomban* [The Role of Károly Koppi in the Noble-Intellectual Reform Movement of the late 18th Century], p. 130.

⁵¹ FORGÓ. *Koppi Károlyszerepe a 18. század végi nemesi-értelmiségi reformmozgalomban* [The Role of Károly Koppi in The Noble-Intellectual Reform Movement of the Late 18th Century], p. 130.

The free-thinking Piarist began to engage with the political sphere during the reign of Maria Theresa, and started to examine the relationship between church and state. His first theoretical work – in which also expressed his political position – was written in the mid-1770s, entitled *Opinio circa regnum Hungaria* (Opinion on the Kingdom of Hungary). Its central idea was to increase the economic power of Hungary. The economic situation and the income of the kingdom were based on the tax-paying people. Therefore, the monarch must use all means to promote the increase in the number and economic strength of the tax-paying people, so that he can pay as much tax as possible to the treasury. Increasing the economic power of the tax-paying people can be achieved by creating employment opportunities, making the best possible use of working hours and converting the wealth produced into money. The wealth of the people must be guarded by the judiciary.⁵²

The amount of tax collected does not depend on the size of the land but on the number of people living on it, and therefore the multiplication of the taxpaying population is the most important precondition for economic growth. Koppi – strangely enough for a catholic priest and religious – proposed a surprising form of this: a reduction in the number of clerical people. He estimated that there were 30 000 clergy in the country, of whom he believed only a third were needed, the rest should be doing secular work. In particular, he saw a need to reduce the number of mendicant religious, who were the biggest burden on taxpayers. This task should be carried out by the His Apostolic Majesty of Hungary, following the French example. The estates of archbishops, bishops, abbots, provosts, but also of chapters and convents, should be inspected and only those should be left to them which they actually held legally or which were used for the activities intended by the founder.⁵³

In 1787, Koppi's second work on political issues, entitled *Praenotiones ad historiam ecclesiae Christianae necessariae* (Necessary remarks for the history of the Christian church) appeared in print. In this work, he deals with the concept of the Church and emphasizes that it is not a mere community, but a body of Christian believers, each member of which exercises the highest rights. In the Christian Church, the chief exercisers of power are the bishops, whose apostolic authority derives from God, but whose personal exercise of it is a matter for the people or the monarch to determine. It relativizes the power of the Pope and extends that of the secular ruler. In line with the Josephinist conception of the state, he also gives the right to govern the church to the prince. Koppi provides historical examples to show that rulers have interfered in the life of the Church since ancient times.⁵⁴

Besides his political writings, it is also important to mention his teaching career. Joseph II himself appointed Koppi professor of world history at the University of Pest in 1784.⁵⁵ His lectures were mainly characterized by the German school of state theory and the cultural history of Voltaire. After the French secular scholars of the seventeenth century had separated historiography from the aspects of theology and politics and established its scientific method, in other words, had elevated it from its former place in the theological

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁵⁴ FORGÓ. *Koppi Károlyzerepe a 18. század végi nemesi-értelmiségi reformmozgalomban* [The Role of Károly Koppi in the Noble-Intellectual Reform Movement of the Late 18th Century], p. 133.

⁵⁵ His aforementioned colleague, András Dugonics, was also a professor at the University of Pest at the same time. (Author's note)

sciences, it became necessary to define a new direction for historiography. This task is being carried out by the German Protestant school of history, which, influenced by the doctrine of the omnipotent supremacy of the state, developed into a scientific theory in the works of Bodin, Bossuet, Grotius, Puffendorf and others, seeks to find the state-political lessons to be drawn from it as the aim of historiography. Accordingly, history becomes part of universal political science. History, public law and geography are discussed in close connection with each other and are integrated into a single system. Thus, history, which in the preceding period was still the science of theology, is replaced by a new science, state theory, created by combining the political sciences. Koppi's concepts and teaching practices already show a kinship with this new school.⁵⁶

To conclude this paper, let's look at how Károly Koppi's understanding of Josephinism changed after the death of the Emperor. In 1790, he opposed the unconstitutional rule of Joseph II and joined the Hungarian national movement. In his *Ius electionis quondam ab Hungaris exercitum*⁵⁷, he opposed the omnipotence of monarchs, advocated the principle of the sovereignty of the people and used historical examples to show that the nation had always been free to choose its rulers. The time had come to reform the old Hungarian constitution and extend it to the serfs. In his opinion, the nation's treasures should be controlled by the people, and the military should swear an oath not to the ruler but to the people.⁵⁸ It is easy to see that the Piarist's ideas were well ahead of his time. We know that Joseph II was succeeded on the throne by his younger brother, Leopold II (r. 1790–1792), who made many concessions to Hungary. He will be succeeded by his son Francis I (r. 1792–1835), who was nothing like his predecessors: a narrow-minded, suspicious monarch, terrified of any change. It was during his reign that the conspiracy organized by Ignác Martinovics (1755–1795), in which Károly Koppi was implicated, was exposed. Although it was proved that he took no part in any conspiracy, he was deprived of his university professorship because his previously expressed views made him appear a free thinker of the Enlightenment, which had no place in Francis I's regime.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ HORVÁTH, A. *Koppi Károly működése* [The Work of Károly Koppi]. Szeged: Pázmány Péter-Tudományegyetem Történelmi Szemináriumának Kiadványa, 1944, pp. 40–41.

⁵⁷ The right to elections exercised by Hungarians.

⁵⁸ BENDA. *Emberbarát vagy hazafi?* [Philanthropist or patriot?], pp. 126–127.

⁵⁹ HORVÁTH. *Koppi Károly működése* [The Work of Károly Koppi], pp. 77–79.