

**UNIVERSITATEA BABEȘ-BOLYAI  
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**TEZĂ DE DOCTORAT**  
**Summary**

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**Veres Stelian**

**Cluj-Napoca**

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**UNIVERSITATEA BABEȘ-BOLYAI  
ȘCOALA DOCTORALĂ ECUMENE**

## **TEZĂ DE DOCTORAT**

**Preoții parohiei „Sfântul Mihail” din Cluj  
în secolele XVIII–XIX.**

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**BABEŞ–BOLYAI TUDOMÁNYEGYETEM  
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**A kolozsvári Szent Mihály egyházközség  
plébánosai a XVIII–XIX. században**

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## Content

Abbreviations.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Introduction.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
0.1. Theoretical basis .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
0.2. Former research and the necessity of this thesis .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
0.3. Resources and methods.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
0.4. The hypothesis and the structure of the thesis .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
1. The priests of the Sant Michael's Parish in Cluj in the XVIIIth Century	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
1.1. Kolozsvár/Cluj: Civitas primaria Transsylvaniae...	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
1.2. A short history of the Cathlic Church in Transylvania in the XVIIIth Century	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
1.3. The parish priests of the St. Michael's Church in the XVIIIth Century .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
1.3.1. Mihály Szabó (1716–1739).....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
1.3.2. János Bíró (1739–1759).....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
1.3.2.1 The side altars of the St. Michael's.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
1.3.2.2 The pulpit.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
1.3.2.3 The monstrancy .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
1.3.2.4. The tower of the St. Michael's Church in the the XVIIIth Century .	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
1.3.3. Ferenc Balló (1760–1764) .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
1.3.4. János Lukács (1764–1770) .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
1.3.5. Mihály Benkő (1770–1782/1783).....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
1.3.6. Péter Gál (1784/1785–1793).....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
1.3.7. Br. József Apor (1793-1813) .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
1.3.7.1. The pastoral activity of Br. József Apor ..	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
1.3.7.2. The homilies of Br. József Apor .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
1.4. Ecclesiastical institutions and spirituality movements in tte XVIIIth Century	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
1.4.1. Marian cult in Kolozsvár/Cluj .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
1.4.2. The lay Franciscan order.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
1.4.3. Lay religious associatiations .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
1.4.3.1. Marian associatiations.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
1.4.3.2. The Holy Trinity Associatation .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>

- 1.4.3.3. The Association of Johannes Nepomuk....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 1.4.3.4. Dissolution and new start of the religious associations **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 1.4.3.5. Excursus: a priestly association in Kolozsvár/Cluj. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

2. The Parish priests of the St. Michael's Church in the XIXth Century till 1864.... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

- 2.1. Religious life in Transylvania and Kolozsvár/Cluj at the end of the XVIIIth and the beginning of the XIXth Century .....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 2.2. The parish priests of Kolozsvár/Cluj in the XIXth Century **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
  - 2.2.1. János Szabó (1813–1819) .....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
    - 2.2.1.1. The tower of the St. Michael's.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
    - 2.2.1.2. Catholic aspects of the founding of the Karolina hospital**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
  - 2.2.2. Károly Ivuly (1819–1826) .....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
  - 2.2.3. János Eschenbach (1826–1830).....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
  - 2.2.4. István Kedves (1831–1864) .....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
    - 2.2.4.1. Biography of István Kedves.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
    - 2.2.4.2. The election of István Kedves.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
    - 2.2.4.3. Liturgical, cultural and theological activity**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
    - 2.2.4.4. Architectural achievements of István Kedves**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
    - 2.2.4.5. The donations of István Kedves.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
    - 2.2.4.6. The parish in the middle of the 1848–49 events..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
      - 2.2.4.6.1. The diocesan synod.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
      - 2.2.4.6.2. Personnel changes in the parish .....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
    - 2.2.4.7. István Kedves as episcopal vicar.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
  - 2.2.5. The chaplains of the St. Michael's church in the XIXth Century**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

3. Parish priests at the St. Michael's Church from 1864 to 1905**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

- 3.1. Ferenc Lönhart (1864–1875) .....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
  - 3.1.1. The biography of Ferenc Lönhart .....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
  - 3.1.2. The election of Ferenc Lönhart.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
  - 3.1.3. The pastoral activity of Ferenc Lönhart.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
  - 3.1.4. Restauration of the church and building the main altar**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
  - 3.1.5. Renewing the liturgical, church music.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
  - 3.1.6. Education in time of Ferenc Lönhart .....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

- 3.1.7. A story of a friendship: Ferenc Lönhart and Lajos Haynald **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.1.8 Excursus: interdenominational tensions ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.1.9. Excursus: The „Szent László” Association and the csángó mission ... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.2. Károly Veszely (1875–1881)..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.2.1. A short biography of Károly Veszely ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.2.2. Literary and editorial activity of Károly Veszely **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.2.3. The election of Károly Veszely ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.2.4. The pastoral activity of Károly Veszely ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.2.5. Károly Veszely’s debts and their consequences **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.2.6. Excursus: religious (mass) foundations at the St. Michael’s parish ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.3. Károly Éltés (1881–1890)..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.3.1. The short biography of Károly Éltés..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.3.2. The election of Károly Éltés ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.3.3 The pastoral activity of Károly Éltés ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.3.4. Károly Éltés and the architectural achievements of the parish **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.3.5. Károly Éltés as parish priest ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.3.5.1. Károly Éltés and the liturgical life ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.3.5.2. Károly Éltés in the public life of the city.. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.3.5.3. The books of Károly Éltés ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.3.6. Education of Károly Éltés ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.3.6.1. Károly Éltés and the foundation of the educational board **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.3.6.2. School enlargements, school foundations. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.3.6.3. Augusteum ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.3.6.4. Excursus: The lessons of a school annuary **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.4. Béla Bíró (1890–1905) ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.4.1. The short biography of Béla Bíró ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.4.2. The literary activity of Béla Bíró ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.4.3. The election of Béla Bíró ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.4.4. The pastoral activity of Béla Bíró ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.4.5. Béla Bíró Béla and the liturgical life of the parish **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.4.6. Changes in the parish lay leader personnel ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.4.7. The social activity of the parish ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.4.8. Education ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.4.8.1. The mixed school in Kőkert..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.4.8.2. The Schütz school in Hidelve ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 3.4.8.3. The school in Kolozsmonostor ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

3.4.8.4. Kindergartens administrated together with the city	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
3.4.8.5. The Stasitzki foundation .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
3.4.8.6. School festivities for the millennium.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
3.4.8.7. School festivities celebrating Pope Leo XIII	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
3.4.9. Life of the lay associations .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
3.4.9.1. Living Rosary instead of a Marian association.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
3.4.9.2 St. Imre Association.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
3.4.9.3 The St. Anthony association for the poor ..	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
3.4.9.4. The association of Roman Catholic school teachers	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
3.4.9.5. The Association of Women Restaurating the Church	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
3.4.9.6. The Association of Catholic Men in Kolozsvár/Cluj	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
3.4.10. Béla Bíró and the architectural achievements of the parish	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
3.4.10.1. Arranging the Main Square around the St. Michael's Church.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
3.4.10.2. Restaurating the church inside .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
3.4.10.3. Renewing the parish building .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
3.4.10.4. The construction of tenement houses („palaces”).	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
3.4.10.5. The project of a nes church (Kőváry district)	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Closing remarks .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Appendix.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Bibliography .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
English Summary.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Romanian Summary.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>





## SUMMARY

### **The Parish Priests of the St. Michael Parish in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-Century**

In my dissertation, I examined the history of the Saint Michael's parish of Cluj in 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries with a special interest for the parish priests and their activity. I tried to approach and process this topic, which covers a large time frame and includes many events, by presenting the activity of outstanding vicars leading the parish, by exploring their work as institutional and community leaders. I intended to explore and show, on one hand, how the work of these vicars contributed to the development of the Catholic religious and cultural life in Cluj, and on the other hand, how the parish was integrated into the life of the city as a whole, and what the nature of the relationship and the interaction between the religious and civil sphere was.

Over time, Cluj became the most important city in Transylvania due to the coincidence of several favourable conditions, and the central church of Cluj, the Roman Catholic parish of St. Michael, which had survived the tempestuous history and the waves of the Reformation, once again became in this aforementioned period a prominent venue for historical and Catholic religious events. Due to its favourable geographical position and the privileges granted to the city by the Hungarian kings and Transylvanian princes, the city had constantly developed, only occasionally being set back by unfavourable historical events. The construction of St. Michael's Church had been completed in 1444 in Cluj, and merely twenty years later, in 1466, the first parliament was held here; the population of Cluj in 1453 was 5,400, which is not negligible on a European level. The city and the church housed 37 parliaments in the era of the independent Transylvania, and it was the scene of several princely elections, which shows its unique significance.

Exploring, examining, and presenting the past of the Roman Catholic parish of St. Michael's Church in Cluj, the pastoral, ecclesiastic, and community work carried out by its clergy is a personal interest of mine due to my profession and ministry, as I am a pastor of this parish, but I am also interested in and moved by history itself, the history of this parish and its associated churches. When I celebrate Mass in St. Michael's Church or even in the Piarist Church, when I have introduced the church and the parish to various groups over the years, including the Áron Márton pilgrimage, I have always wondered how everything that can be seen here came into being, what the antecedents of a side altar, a statue, a picture, a stunning ostensory arriving here could have been. Especially now that St. Michael's Church is being renovated and the experts unearth many interesting details during the work, an insight into the

restoration work reveals the history of the church, written on the walls and decorations, I am even more interested, I would like to find out even more about what is behind the reality we see today.

Entering the church, I always admire the beauty of the liturgical space, and this has always stirred me: when and how these various church furnishings were made, how the church was renovated in earlier times, how did they manage to build the tower, how the vicars were able to use their influence to make Cluj's main square into the sight we see today, and to make St. Michael's Church fill its worthy place and role there. As I see and experience all that is happening here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it constantly preoccupies me to find out how my predecessors have done this work, what it could have been like to be the pastor or parishioner of this parish in the context of the whole city, what this parish offered this city, how this community has been integrated in the wider local society, how the parish contributed to building the Roman Catholic community of the city. After discussing with experts, looking for answers in the literature, I concluded that this age, the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century history of the Roman Catholic Church of Cluj is a yet unexplored slice of our common local past.

Another reason to examine this relatively large time frame was that I had been convinced that the 19<sup>th</sup> century marked the period of flourishing and maturation of St. Michael's Church and parish. However, it would have been impossible to write the 19<sup>th</sup>-century history of the parish without constant historical references and knowledge of the aspirations of the preceding century. At the beginning of my research, I affirmed that I could not understand or interpret archival primary sources and collections without the knowledge of the in-depth historical framework of the epochs within the examined topic, without studying the literature about the general socio-economic and cultural development, without having an introspective view into contemporary statistics, population censuses, economic and social development of the city. That is why, in order to successfully carry out my work, I studied historical bibliographies, basic works on the social, church, and art history of Transylvania, and the specific literature discussing these centuries. Only then I began to examine of the previously unprocessed core material of the Cluj Archive Collection's material linked to this period.

My initial working hypothesis was that by studying the sorted, but not yet completely systematized archival material, I would be able to form an accurate picture of the activities of the vicars of the period, the principles and activities shaping the religious community, the main areas and directions of activity, and by this, I could also unfold how the Roman Catholic Church was connected to the circulation of the city, how the Catholic community was involved in shaping the image of the city. My basic question: how did the vicars lead the parish in the 18<sup>th</sup>

and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, what were the main emphases of their field of activity? How could this church, which was restored in 1716 after a long Protestant rule, be once again made suitable for Catholic religious life? How could these vicars lead the parish and the community in the midst of continuous construction, restoration, and beautification? What concerned the vicar of St. Michael's Parish of Cluj-Napoca in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries? Who could he lean on, how did he work, how did he prioritize his issues? How did the parish of St. Michael's Church fit into the life of the city, how did it shape the culture and life of the city in the 19<sup>th</sup> century?

In the research, the main body of the most important sources has consisted of written materials, records, correspondence, documents related to the administration, management, construction, repairs of the parish and the activities of the vicars. In addition, volumes of Church Council minutes reveal larger processes and guide us through the issues that have occurred in the details. The series of these documents also emphasises the close relationship between the parish and the higher ecclesiastical forums, the episcopal office in Alba Iulia, as well as the cooperation with the city, the civic and state institutions.

In addition to the archives of the St. Michael's Parish, my research led me to the Cluj-Napoca branch of the State Archives, to the Batthyaneum in Alba Iulia, to the archives of the Roman Catholic Status, to the University Library of Cluj-Napoca, to the Archdiocese's Archives in Alba Iulia. In addition to exploring primal sources, I have greatly benefited from the local and national denominational, social, and political press materials. I emphasize this fact because, in many cases, the materials published in the press have adapted, supplemented the gaps in the information that presented themselves in the archival material, all of which have significantly aided the interpretation. This is not a coincidence, as it was Bishop Mihály Fogarasy of Transylvania who, during his former teaching period in Pest, had founded the present-day St. Stephen's Society to publish and distribute good and affordable Catholic literature. As bishop of Transylvania, in the wake of the First Vatican Council, he also stated that in addition to following the official church standpoint, the priests should also monitor the development of public opinion in newspapers. It is no coincidence that several parish priests of Cluj, in addition to being educated ecclesiastical figures, proficient in public affairs, had also founded and edited high-quality, culturally prominent, culture-creating press products – such as Károly Veszely, Károly Éltés, and Béla Bíró.

In order to be able to approach the issues raised at the starting point, following the chronological order proved to be the most suitable; this has been the most effective in this case, as I had to review and present a relatively long time interval to select the most relevant topics from the many available primary sources. Then I interpreted them in a broader context. Within

the chronological order, I considered it most expedient to present the Catholic life of Cluj through the exploration and presentation of the work of the vicars that have been decisive in shaping the St. Michael's Church and the parish. This approach is also the most suitable for the reader, since it is easier to follow the events in chronological order: the life of the parish, each vicar's efforts to, among others, beautify the church.

Among the difficulties of my work, I would like to point out that in several cases, I had almost no starting point, as I mostly found only short biographical data, dates of birth, ordination, and death in schematisms about the priests serving in St. Michael's Parish. There are only thirteen boxes in the Cluj archives about the priests and parish life in Cluj in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, on the basis of which I had to compile a picture of Catholic life in Cluj. That is why I decided to map the lives of individual, prominent personalities, and then, in addition to the proliferating data, I managed to form and draw a more abundant picture from the parish protocols, correspondence, and notes linked to the administration. It has also been trying that there are many valuable documents, correspondence, and minutes in the archives of Cluj, but the archivists collecting and organizing the documents clearly and unanimously state that the *domus historia* for the period under study is missing, and in the absence of this, it is difficult to review the events and to form a picture of the pastoral work of the parish. The parish minutes, letters, and rescripts helped me orientate within the events of the period and the most important measures of the individual vicars. After reading through the materials found in more than a hundred archival boxes, I selected the topics to examine in detail, of which all the activities related to the renovation and beautification of the church stand out, and also, the work on the image of the main square of the city, which was carried out by the administrative body of St. Michael's Church, together with the city administration, as it has been customary from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. As part of this process – the opening and arrangement of the square –, the foundation of the Matthias statue was laid in 1896 (this is also linked to the celebration of the millennium), and in 1899, the relocation of the early 18<sup>th</sup>-century baroque gate in front of St. Michael's Church was carried out to St. Peter's Church, belonging to St. Elizabeth's Concession House, where it still stands today. All these plans, developed in a constant hassle and consultation with the city administration, caused a lot of headaches for the church council of St. Michael's Parish, who, according to the minutes, have discussed these topics for years.

From the archival material, I placed an outstanding emphasis on educational issues, as it was common for Cluj vicars to pay special attention to all aspects of religious education, from setting up kindergartens to Sunday school for masters at all levels. During the period in

discussion, the construction of schools for the religious education of children living in different quarters of the growing and expanding city has started, to which the wealthier members of the parish made various donations, from offering land to making foundations providing salaries for teachers. They did not fail to support the poor either; vicars paid attention to this, and the parish council has proved to be their excellent partner in this matter, who themselves provided scholarships for less fortunate students with foundations, one-time, or regular donations, and established shelters for those in need (such as the Augusteum, today known only as a school, but which, in fact, has always played a central role in supporting the indigenous impoverished as well). Mass foundations as endowments prescribed masses for the salvation of the founder and his family, but several founders intended to provide for the poor. In some cases, the difficulties of interdenominational relations were revealed – although I myself did not examine the issue of interdenominational marriage, it may be the subject of further research focusing only on this –: from the service time of vicar Ferenc Lönhart, I have found documents about serious bickers, some of these are presented in a chapter of my dissertation. These would help researchers who specifically aim to examine this topic toward a realistic picture of the interdenominational relationships of the time.

In the course of my research, I have also found materials related to the topic, but not closely linked to the activities of one or another parish priest, such as documents about various societies that were important parts of the spiritual life of the era, related to the religious life at St. Michael's Church, I presented these in a separate subchapter. There was a strong break in the activity of the societies at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the decree issued by Joseph II severed their operation, prohibiting not only the functioning of monastic orders, but also the operation of religious associations and societies. These were able to regain strength in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In some cases (e.g., János Bíró, István Kedves, Károly Veszely), a work had already been written earlier examining the entirety or part of the work of the parish priest in Cluj: in these cases, I was able to nuance, complete, or in some cases, adjust the previously drawn image with thorough and detailed archival research.

In my dissertation, in addition to the pastoral work of the vicars, I also discussed cultural and public manifestations in general, as there are many such documents and references in the archival materials, and on the other hand, the contemporary press also constantly dealt with this topic: there are mentions of Béla Bíró's membership in the Transylvanian Hungarian Public Cultural Association (EMKE); accounts of Károly Éltés's public speeches; István Kedves is not only present in the newspaper columns with his tower-building activities, but

also with his speeches and writings; all of their sermons were memorable, and several moments of their liturgical activity ranged from enriching liturgical equipment to paying attention to church music.

The structure of this dissertation consists of three large units: after a brief introduction, the first large chapter bears the title of *The pastors of the St. Michael parish in the 18<sup>th</sup> century*; this presents the location, drawing up the historical background and the vicars of St. Michael's Parish in Cluj in the first century of the Gubernium (the 18<sup>th</sup> century; the second chapter introduces the 19<sup>th</sup>-century vicars up until 1864; finally, the third chapter presents the vicars of St. Michael's Parish from 1864 to 1905.

The first chapter is made with the intention of mapping the historical background and it summarizes, among others, the most important events presented in the bibliography about the period under study; it shows the treasured city along with its economic and demographic aspects.

This chapter also expands the timespan of the historical background, placing 18<sup>th</sup>-century Roman Catholic priests in Cluj, the vicars of St. Michael's Parish in this frame. Here, my attention was mainly focused on the "great church on the market", which was restored to the Catholics again from the Unitarians in 1716, the way in which vicar János Bíró, through his strenuous work and with considerable financial sacrifice, made the church a suitable liturgical place for practicing Roman Catholic religion, not to mention the outstanding artistic sophistication. During his two decades of service, János Bíró has created the most exquisite liturgical framework for the renewed, flourishing, strengthening Catholic faith in the centre of Cluj, and I managed to map and present the details of his work. I affirm that, from today's point of view, he created real artistic value; his orders offered the most outstanding artists of the age the opportunity to create – it is no coincidence that the altars and sculptures ordered by him and later put into disuse were placed in the Museum of Ecclesiastical Art in Cluj, established by St. Michael's Parish at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In the two chapters dealing with the history of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century parish, I highlighted five prominent vicars. In each case, my first and most important task had been compiling their biographies, after which I dealt with various outstanding moments of their service in Cluj. Among the parish priests of Cluj-Napoca in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, I gave emphasis to the work and activities of these five vicars because, on the one hand, a sufficient amount of data was available about them, and on the other hand, their work was decisive in the life of the parish.

In the case of István Kedves, I managed to shed light on the details of the tower construction, and to offer novelties, formerly unknown details, but I also shed new light on his

role in the events of 1848/49 – when he had been serving as deputy bishop –; I offer a different view on his approach of the revolution (also, the Catholic clergy's of Transylvania, or at least of Cluj-Dăbâca) on the basis of the documents I have uncovered, a contrasting perspective to what previous research has shown on this subject about his views of the Szeklerland clergy. Among the church ceremonial speeches in the box containing István Kedves' personal legacy are his speeches from 1848/49, which clearly show his condemnatory views on the war of independence.

Similar to his successors, István Kedves was a trained priest who excelled in scientific work and writing; he responded to a multi-part work, written by H. K. in 1843, intitled *Something to present Cluj*, published as an appendix to *Past and Present*, based on documents found in the archives; his article is an important source not yet presented for the founding and history of the Carolina Hospital in Cluj.

The parish work of Ferenc Lönhart, the later bishop of Transylvania, in Cluj, and its details were largely unknown. His period as vicar of Cluj (which followed his years as director of the office in Alba Iulia near Lajos Haynald) shows, in the wake of my research, that there and then he was an excellent, accurate, conscientious high priest with an outstanding work ethic. One of the top achievements of his Cluj period is the renovation of the church building, the arrangement of its surroundings to a certain extent, the development of the liturgical and musical life of the church, and the masterpiece of his work: the neo-Gothic main altar of St. Michael's Church. In his case, I found an interesting addition that points to his friendly relationship with his former bishop, Lajos Haynald, despite the physical distance, and to the fact that Bishop Haynald, later Archbishop of Kalocsa, had not only supported him in his parish work and asked for his advice in sensitive issues, but also, levelled his later priesthood. Ferenc Lönhart, already known as the parish priest of Cluj-Napoca, was a prestigious high priest; he was approached on the issue of the St. Emeric Society's mission outside the Carpathians, too, which is a proof that he communicated well in several languages: not only in Hungarian, German, and Latin, but also, in Romanian. This is why he was asked in 1886 on a mission trip, which he was unable to undertake due to the restoration work of the St. Michael's Church, recommending his later successor, Károly Veszely, instead.

The next three vicars, Károly Veszely, Károly Éltes, and Béla Bíró, have been similar characters in many respects: their common literary, editorial, and scientific interests linked them. Károly Éltes and Béla Bíró were good friends, too. I supplemented the Cluj chapter of the monograph on Károly Veszely published by Sándor Ferenczi with data, references, letters that nuance the overall picture of the unfortunately short Cluj service of the talented Veszely

with other aspects besides the issue of money and debt; these provide a further explanation of how and why Károly Veszely could not properly progress as a vicar in Cluj.

Károly Éltés served as a vicar in Cluj for nine years, and his untimely death ended his otherwise vigorous and promising priestly career. In addition to his attention to school activities and religious education, similar to his great predecessors, during his parishage, negotiations were carried out on the arrangement of the main square and the organisation of the space around St. Michael's Church. By analysing his book bequest, I provide an insight into the interests of a contemporary high priest from Cluj-Napoca, drawing and better highlighting the contours of this spiritual image.

Béla Bíró, who followed Éltés, continued the work and direction of his predecessor; during his service, all aspects of the planning of the Main Square became final, the structure mostly preserved until today was formed: the fencing of the church, its separation from the main square, as the general endeavour of the period demanded from a city with the character and needs of Cluj. In the time of Béla Bíró and at the request of the St. Michael's Parish, the modern so-called Status Houses were built next to the Bánffy Palace on the east side of the Main Square. At the same time, Béla Bíró, like his direct predecessor, was an active member of cultural associations, not only in religious matters, but also, as an active participant in the social life of the city, who worthily represented the Catholic Church in speech and in writing.

An interesting issue that I encountered and dealt with in my dissertation on several occasions is the secular leadership of St. Michael's Parish in Cluj: the church council had considerable independence and influence in the affairs of the parish, I can clearly state this on the basis of the minutes, but they also played a major role in who the next vicar would be, for the Roman Catholic parish of Cluj had and exercised the right to elect a vicar. Although the bishop clearly had to appoint the vicar of Cluj, he made his decision based on the three most voted candidates nominated by the Council: in the period in discussion, this right was more than once debated between the bishop of Transylvania and the Cluj Church Council. There was one case when the council only nominated one candidate (1826) or argued with the bishop that he should choose the candidate the council wishes (1890). The latter case is also interesting because it was precisely Bishop Lönhart arguing with the Church Council of Cluj, who had previously reformed its entire structure: after his appointment as vicar, in 1864 he first supplemented and then in 1866 substantially reformed the representative body. The issue is also emphasized in the case of Lönhart precisely because he had not received the most votes, he was only referred to the High Authority in second place, but he was appointed – perhaps



this is why he insisted on the bishop's right to freely appoint a parish priest to Cluj, even overruling the local community's vote and right to elect.

By the mapping of the archival sources, I managed, on the one hand, to sketch and present the life of the St. Michael's Church and Parish of Cluj in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, to gain insight into religious life, Catholic schooling and education, to show certain aspects of the relationship between the vicars and the city, to summarize an extremely diverse story as a whole, to find its essential nodes and to present persons and events grouped around them. In each case, I supplemented the archival material with additional data obtained from the examination of the contemporary press materials, and I was able to draw a more comprehensive and accurate picture by comparing the two sources. Based on all this, an image emerges: a prototype of the vicar of Cluj, formulating a portrait, a complex system of criteria that is a benchmark for the high priest serving in this parish of Cluj. After all, the city is represented at the episcopal level by all other denominations, which is why this parish is of paramount importance today, and the system of expectations already formulated in the 18<sup>th</sup> century is perhaps even more valid today. At the same time, it is interesting to observe what was once said by Bishop Sándor Rudnay of Transylvania, quoted in the minutes by the Church Council of St. Michael's Parish in Cluj, referring to the formerly set principles, which, over the decades, has been supplemented with newer expectations integral to the original system of criteria in the election of vicars, which essentially really fits and expands on what was formulated by Bishop Rudnay: "Your Parish cannot settle for a man of ordinary qualities; you are waiting for a Vicar with perfect knowledge, kind lecture, multilingual, gentle in conversation, not bothered with the miserable burdens of old age, eager to work as a taskmaster." – along with this description, Bishop Rudnay recommended Károly Ivuly as vicar to the representants of the Cluj parish, as recorded in the minutes of the church council of March 14, 1819. Later, when Ferenc Lönhart was appointed in 1864, the then (chapter) deputy bishop, János Ráduly, explained his choice in a letter (since he did not appoint the priest who received the most votes, but the second candidate as a vicar in Cluj): "Since the parish in Cluj is the most outstanding in the diocese of Transylvania, the renowned Transylvanian Head Pastors have always declared that »a person with ordinary qualities is not enough for this laudable, useful, and salutary rule«, moreover, the decree on the parish visits held under the late Bishop Rudnay firmly states »that the parish of Cluj should, at all times, be provided with a priestly individual who is either in the Chapter or can enter there immediately«; the County, having expressed, in its meeting held on 23 July of the current year, wishes to »provide the Cluj Parish with an individual who holds both the confidence of the ecclesiastical authority, and the love of the flock of Cluj, whose spiritual

intellect, kindness of conversation, and love of justice should provide sufficient guarantee to be able to awaken cohesion and self-confidence in Catholic believers.” Some principles have been preserved over the decades, especially that due to the nature of the St. Michael’s Parish in Cluj and the multifaceted and complex nature of the service to be performed there, only after careful consideration can it be decided who the vicar of this parish should be. An important role in this deliberation was played by the citizens of Cluj, a representative body elected from among the members of the Roman Catholic parish, which was a very important plenum: its opinion was decisive in the election of the vicar, as the decision was made by voting (this is the case even if the Bishop had the final word in choosing between the three candidates, and even if during the time of Bishop Lönhart, who himself had reformed the parish council, there was a serious debate in the election of Béla Bíró and about the way of exercising this right to vote / appoint). The vicar of Cluj had to meet many criteria, and these included more than just ecclesiastical considerations. Due to his role in the city, the vicar of the St. Michael’s Parish in Cluj must be estimable, well-informed, respectable in his appearance and speech before the city leadership, other denominations, the authorities, and the intellectuals.

