

Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai
Facultatea de Teologie Romano-Catolică
Școala Doctorală Religie, Cultură, Societate

Catholic Life in Háromszék [Trei Scaune] during the Dualist Era

A Summary

Candidat:
Pénzes Loránd-István

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The present study examines the situation of the Catholic population residing in Háromszék County during the existence of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. While monographic in nature, the research incorporates not only aspects of ecclesiastical history but also elements of political, social, and economic history related to Catholics organized within *the Deanery of Barcaság and the archdeaconries of Sepsi-Miklősvár and Kézdi-Orbai*. The choice of topic is underpinned by several factors.

Having worked as a church archivist for over fifteen years, I have personally encountered the lack of research and scholarly treatment of archival sources pertaining to Háromszék from the period of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Although ecclesiastical historical research in the region gained renewed impetus in the early 2000s, the church history of the Dualist era remained largely

outside the scope of scholarly attention – a striking neglect given that the period had a decisive impact on the developmental trajectory of Catholic life in the archdeaconries under investigation well into the 21st century. It is also worth noting that the events in these two archdeaconries can be regarded to some extent as representative of developments within other archdeaconries of the Transylvanian (from 1927, Alba Iulia) Diocese, as all ecclesiastical-administrative units were subject to the same church policies, moral-theological directives, and legal frameworks. Therefore, this dissertation may also be regarded as a case study of the archdeaconries within the Catholic Diocese of Transylvania.

The central question of this study is: What opportunities for the development of the Catholic faith were available in Háromszék County during the period of 1867–1918? In addressing this question, I examined institutional and church-political contexts, the governance activities of the bishops, the involvement of laypersons in ecclesiastical administration, infrastructural conditions, denominational education, foundations, and quantifiable indicators of spiritual life – all based on both scholarly literature and primary sources. My research first and foremost relied on documents from parish and archdeaconry archives preserved from the late 18th century onwards, but it also included relevant materials from the Archives of the Archdiocese of Alba Iulia and from the Roman Catholic Status of Transylvania. The investigation of the archdeaconry archives was complicated by administrative practice, whereby the office of the archdeacon was held successively by priests from different localities. Consequently, within the Kézdi-Orbai Archdeaconry, the archives were relocated multiple times – to Kézdiszentlélek [Sânzieni], Bereck [Brețcu], and Torja [Turia] –, necessitating its initial separation from the broader collections of the respective parish archives. By contrast, the seat of the Deanery of Barcaság-Sepsi-Miklósvár became permanently established in Brassó [Brașov] from the late 18th century, which allowed the deanery archives to be preserved alongside the parish archives in a single location, thereby facilitating their research.

In exploring the development of the Catholic Church in Háromszék, I adopted a deductive methodological approach – moving from the general to the specific. Accordingly, I first presented national and diocesan regulations before addressing the events, conditions, and phenomena specific to the two archdeaconries. Through the exploration of themes delineated in each subchapter, I sought to identify the key focal points of religious life in Háromszék, offering a cross-sectional representation of its evolution. The most critical and extensive part of the research was

the collection of sources, the initial step of which process involved familiarization with the secondary literature and securing access to available online databases. In the early phase, I applied the so-called ‘snowball method’, tracing the academic apparatus and authors related to the subject area and conducting topic-based research. Indispensable to my work were the *Gyulafehérvári (erdélyi) főegyházmegye történeti papi névtára* [The Historical Clergy Register of the Alba Iulia (Transylvanian) Archdiocese] compiled by Sándor Ferenczi, and the historical overview of the deaneries of Barcaság and Sepsí-Miklósvár written in 1815 by József Lamásch, abbot priest of Brassó, and published in 2010 in translation by Béla Szirmai. Once the literature review was complete, I undertook the systematic examination of primary sources, including dozens of linear metres of unbound archival documents and volumes. The sources contemporary with the period under investigation were categorized by their semantic content as either explicit (bearing direct meaning) or implicit (conveying concealed or secondary meaning). For example, inspection reports by state school supervisors documented the status of ecclesiastical educational institutions, but the tone of the records also revealed the attitude of state authorities towards the Church. Among the studied sources, normative documents and correspondence between ecclesiastical and state offices predominated, although narrative documents were also encountered in substantial numbers. Source collection was supplemented by a review of *Közművelődés* [General Education], considered the most important organ of the Transylvanian ecclesiastical press, through which I could access ecclesiastical news, Church-related legislation, and reflections on societal, economic, and ethnic issues as penned by contemporary authors.

The next research phase involved the critical analysis of the sources. As the majority were primary documents, authenticity was not in question; instead, the documents had to be assessed for accuracy, consistency, and objectivity. Naturally, there existed a risk of accepting the author’s views as objective facts or of dismissing certain claims that were contested at the time. However, I sought to minimize such errors through the cross-comparison of multiple sources. A few examples will suffice herein: episcopal rescripts and records of diocesan assemblies reveal that the Catholic Church clearly regarded the enactment of ecclesiastico-political laws as detrimental to its own interests, yet it failed to recognize that the separation of Church and State had become inevitable as an accompanying development of the process of bourgeois modernization. In protracted debates regarding the ways of redeeming the *kepe*,¹ both clergy and parish communities

¹ A form of ecclesiastical tax paid in kind (typically in agricultural produce).

repeatedly called for state-funded redemption, while largely neglecting the possibility of treating the *kepe* as a personal obligation, thus to be redeemed individually or communally. Upon the passage of the 1868 Eötvös Education Act, the establishment of municipal schools (the so-called nationalization) was viewed by the Church as a restriction of its role in education, but it failed to notice that the development mandates within the law also incentivized the modernization of denominational schools. Following this, I undertook the process commonly referred to among historians as ‘carding’, aiming to compile thematically relevant information from the research. Selection was of central importance: the information gathered from the documents was categorized according to predetermined thematic headings. Even though not all collected data were used directly, the information acquired significantly contributed to the development of my insight into the essential aspects of the subject. This phase also brought methodological challenges: source scarcity on certain topics contrasted with excessive or distorted information in others, requiring rectification in subsequent phases. The culmination of the research was the interpretation and synthesis of events and processes, enabling the identification of underlying causal links and, ultimately, the formulation of a historical narrative about the strengthening of Catholicism in Háromszék during the Dualist era.

This research aimed to demonstrate that Catholic life in Háromszék experienced significant consolidation during the period of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. This was evidenced by extensive ecclesiastical construction projects, a flourishing of religious and moral life, and the active participation of laypersons in Church affairs. The following provides a structural summary of the region’s Catholic development, based on the layout of the dissertation.

The developmental curve of Catholicism in Háromszék is outlined in two main chapters. The first one explores ecclesiastical developments between the 14th and 17th centuries as a prelude to the Dualist era, while the second one analyses Church developments during the period of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, structured into five subchapters.

During the period of the Kingdom of Hungary, the settlements of Háromszék belonged to the Diocese of Transylvania subordinated to the Archdiocese of Kalocsa. Of the settlements listed in the papal tithe register from the period of 1332–1337, seventeen belonged to the Archdeaconry of Kézdi, and twenty-eight to the Deanery of Sepsí, which operated as part of the Archdeaconry of Fehérvár [Alba Iulia]. The parishes of Brassó and its surrounding area were organized into the Deanery of Barcaság, which in the early 13th century fell under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of

Milkó and later came under the oversight of the distant Archbishop of Esztergom. In the wake of the Reformation, the Catholic faith survived only in the territory of the Archdeaconry of Kézdi and in the settlement of Barót [Baraolt]. During the era of the Principality of Transylvania, efforts to preserve the faith were primarily undertaken by leading Catholic nobles, who maintained monastic chaplains at their courts, and by István Szalainai, a missionary and papal visitor active in Transylvania on behalf of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (*Propaganda Fide*). His reform attempts aimed at the moral renewal of married priests and laymen in ecclesiastical service, referred to as licentiates. The Habsburg expansion into Transylvania marked a period of restoration for Catholic parishes and ecclesiastical structures. The provisions of the *Diploma Leopoldinum* concerning religious life enabled Catholics to reclaim previously lost churches and to establish new mother parishes that in the 18th and 19th centuries carried out successful missionary activity in surrounding settlements. From the mid-18th century, parish foundations continued even on the peripheries of the counties: new parishes were established in Bodzavám [Vama Buzăului], Felsőtömös [Timișu de Sus], Hídvég [Hăghig], Kézdikővár [Petriceni], Kőhalom [Rupea], Málnás [Malnaș], and later in Mikóújfalu [Micfalău], Ojtoz [Oituz], Sepsiszentgyörgy [Sfântu Gheorghe], and Töröcsvár [Bran], all of which became part of the Archdeaconry of Háromszék. Monastic communities also played a significant role in the spread of the Catholic faith – specifically, the Franciscan monastery in Brassó, the Pauline monastery in Illyefalva [Ilieni], and those founded in Esztelnek [Estelnic] and Kanta [Canta] in the late 17th century.

In the second main chapter of the dissertation, I looked into Catholic conditions during the Dualist period, assessing the impact of national developments on the life of local parishes. In this context, I first explored the ecclesiastico-political background, within which I could identify the fault lines that led to a new self-understanding of the Catholic Church. Following the Compromise of 1867, the Catholic Church lost its former status as a state church but, like other denominations, strove to attain autonomy. Delegates from Háromszék and Brassó also participated in the meetings of the national autonomy movement launched with the support of Minister of Culture József Eötvös. However, due to conflicting interests among the episcopate, the state, the laity, and liberal factions, the statute ensuring ecclesiastical self-governance was not adopted. In Transylvania, however, the reinstatement of the reorganized Status had a beneficial effect on the strengthening of Catholicism.

In the process of Hungary's bourgeois transformation, the separation of powers between Church and State had begun. Indicative of this were the ecclesiastico-political laws enacted during this period, including those on the organization of public elementary education (1868), the regulation of mixed marriages (1868 and 1894), civil marriage (1894), and the introduction of state registration of births, marriages, and deaths (1895), which the clergy interpreted as attacks on the Church and on Christianity itself. Conflicts between Catholics and Protestants most frequently arose over the baptism of children from mixed confessional backgrounds – disputes which, in Háromszék as well, repeatedly led to court proceedings. The implementation of the ecclesiastico-political laws also prompted lay Catholics to take action. Many found in the Catholic People's Party (*Katolikus Néppárt*), established in January 1895 under the presidency of Count Nándor Zichy, a means of preserving the Christian character of society. In the spirit of the *Rerum novarum* encyclical, the party also presented a social programme; its representatives outlined their aims at mass rallies organized in Upper Háromszék. Nevertheless, the party failed to achieve significant political support in parliamentary elections around the turn of the century.

With the enactment of the ecclesiastico-political laws, the state achieved its goals, wherefore subsequent governments sought to maintain good relations with the Catholic Church, which continued to represent a significant social and political force. High-ranking prelates retained their public offices, county authorities regularly received bishops on official visits and confirmation tours, state celebrations continued to include official religious services held in Catholic churches, and the lower clergy were also present at the installation ceremonies of lord-lieutenants (*főispán*).

In the next subchapter, I went on to summarize the measures of ecclesiastical governance taken by the bishops. The episcopal governance of Mihály Fogarasy (1864–1882), Ferenc Lönhárt (1882–1897), and Gusztáv Károly Majláth (1897–1938), who were active in Transylvania during the Dualist era, was characterized by efforts to adapt to the new constitutional framework and ecclesiastico-political laws, to preserve denominational schools, and to support associational life. The development of the diocese was supported by the Roman Catholic Status of Transylvania, which functioned as an institutional background under episcopal leadership. Fogarasy – often referred to as ‘the bishop of schools’ – ordered the establishment of parish councils in 1869 and school boards in 1876 to support the development of parishes and Catholic primary schools. He

convened general assemblies of the clergy to discuss diocesan matters, supported the ecclesiastical press, created a relief fund for poorer parishes, and introduced a self-taxation scheme to strengthen the clergy pension fund. His successor, Ferenc Lönhárt, known as the ‘pastoral bishop’, devoted particular attention to pastoral care. During his episcopate, Status assemblies were convened on a regular basis, the construction of churches and schools accelerated, and he advocated for the improvement of clerical remuneration. He promoted the celebration of historical events as tools for religious and national education and made the use of the Hungarian language official in ecclesiastical administration. During his illness, Gusztáv Károly Majláth arrived in Gyulafehérvár with the right of succession. Through his far-reaching reform initiatives across various areas of Church life, he left a rich legacy to his successors. His episcopate marked the golden age of the Transylvanian diocese, although it also coincided with a difficult period for the Szeklers. The lack of industrialization and the impossibility of subsistence on fragmented plots of land forced many Szeklers to migrate. The bishop sought to alleviate this through the establishment of social and economic associations, workers’ clubs, and youth societies. To promote moral and religious life, numerous devotional associations and congregations were formed among the faithful. For the clergy, he founded Regnum Marianum and the diocesan missionary society. His confirmation tours were regarded as triumphal processions. He established the popular diocesan newspaper *Közművelődés* to report on Transylvanian Catholic affairs. He played an active role both in national and international Church life, frequently travelling to Rome and mediating between the Hungarian state and the Holy See regarding the acceptance of the *Ne temere* decree. He used his private wealth to support schools, parishes, and priests.

The leaders of the archdeaconries played an important role in guiding local Catholic communities, which made it necessary to examine the jurisdiction of the archdeaconry offices. In 1867, the Archdeaconry of Kézdi-Orbai, the Deanery of Barcaság (including the parishes of Lower Háromszék and Erdővidék [‘Timberlands’] extending into Brassó County), and the Archdeaconry of Sepsi-Miklósvár comprised a total of 30 parishes: 13 in the vicinity of Brassó and 17 in the Kézdivásárhely [Târgu Secuiesc] area. Demographic changes led to the independence of filial parishes in three settlements and the dissolution of such parishes in five others. Parish appointments occurred in two ways: a minority of parishes under patronage had the right to elect their own parish priests, while the majority were subject to episcopal nomination (*libera collatio*). The Kézdi-Orbai Archdeaconry was predominantly Catholic in population, whereas the parishes

of the Barcaság-Sepsi-Miklósvár Archdeaconry functioned in areas of religious and ethnic dispersion. Over the half-century of the Dualist period, the Catholic population of the investigated districts exhibited steady demographic growth.

The events of the First World War brought a profound rupture in the lives of the inhabitants of the archdeaconries. For the civilian population remaining in the hinterland, life became increasingly untenable due to military conscriptions, economic restrictions, mandatory requisitions, and even the confiscation of church bells and organ pipes. The devaluation of war bonds – originally acquired as capital investments by ecclesiastical foundations – further undermined parish assets. Yet the most serious disruption was brought about by the Romanian military incursion of 1916, which transformed Szeklerland into a theatre of war and forced residents of the border regions into nearly six months of displacement and flight. Parish priests fled from numerous locations, while others became military chaplains, and there were instances in which retreating Romanian forces took ecclesiastical figures hostage, leaving entire parishes without pastoral leadership. The final year of the war ushered in sweeping political transformations. Following the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the extension of universal suffrage, and the loss of the war itself, social movements imbued with anti-Church and anti-state sentiment gained momentum. In Bereck, these even led to the expulsion of the parish priest. By February 1919, Háromszék and Brassó counties had already been integrated into the Romanian state through the replacement of both military and civil administrations, marking the beginning of a new era in the life of the parishes.

The archdeaconries were administered by archdeacons, who functioned as the executive organs of diocesan authority in ensuring the implementation of episcopal directives, acting as intermediaries between parish offices and the Diocesan Chancery, and organizing clergy assemblies – known as diocesan assemblies – for the priests under their jurisdiction. Their work was supported by parish priests appointed mostly as deputy archdeacons.

During the period under examination, three active archdeacons-parish priests presided over the Barcaság-Sepsi-Miklósvár Archdeaconry: the German-born abbot priests Ede Möller (1857–1900) and József Meisel (1910–1916; 1918–1919), as well as Manó Fejér (1900–1910), parish priest of Sepsiszentgyörgy, who had Armenian roots. In the Kézdi-Orbai Archdeaconry, eight parish priests held the office of archdeacon – typically while also overseeing prominent parishes: István Elekes

in Gelence [Ghelința] (1850–1856), then in Kézdiszentkereszt [Poian] (1856–1871); Ferenc Lemhényi in Futásfalva [Alungeni] (1869–1874); Károly Bálint, abbot priest of Kézdiszentlélek (1874–1887); László Bálint in Bereck (1887–1902); Ferenc Balázs in Altorja [Turia de Jos] (1902–1910); Antal Markaly in Kézdiszentlélek (1910–1911); Mihály Bagoly, acting archdeacon in Kézdiszentkereszt (1911–1913); and, finally, Dániel Oláh in Kézdiszentlélek (1913–1931). Oversight of parish administration was exercised through episcopal visitations – linked with the conferral of the sacrament of confirmation – and the annual archdeacon’s visitations.

The work of the clergy in representing religious interests was supported by Catholic laypeople who held leading roles in county and local public life. Members of the social elite served as patrons or benefactors of parishes, held the office of chief curator, or acted as founders, presidents, or board members of religious institutions, associations, and organizations. In the towns, their ranks were joined by Catholic members of parliament, county officials, and the directors of seminaries and grammar schools, whereas in rural areas by members of the Catholic aristocracy, who often inherited the role of chief curator along with the estate itself. An important organ of parish autonomy was the annually convened general assembly, which, in parishes possessing patronal rights, elected the parish priest and supervised the activities of the church council, whose authority extended to school and church employees’ claims for remuneration, assessment of aid requests, the repair and construction of church buildings, the leasing of real estate and agricultural land, and the investment and yield management of parish capital placed in various funds. Alongside men, Catholic women also had the opportunity to support the Church’s mission. They left a lasting legacy as founders of charitable institutions, leaders of altar societies and spiritual movements, as ceremonial sponsors of flag consecrations, supporters of orphans and domestic servants, and organizers of women’s associations. Among them, Countess Stephanie Szentkeresztty of Zágón founded in Kézdivásárhely the Erzsébet Home for Orphaned Girls, an old people’s home, a hospital, the Kézdi-Orbai branch of the Red Cross Association, and the Kézdivásárhely Altar Society. In Lower Háromszék, Countess Ludmilla Kálnoky became known as a major benefactor – in Sepsikőröspatak [Valea Crișului], she established the Count Félix, Ludmilla, Imre and Pál Kálnoky Institute – which included a kindergarten and elementary school for girls – using her own private funds.

The system of patronage determined the manner in which parishes were filled. In Háromszék, 65% of parishes fell under patronage; of these, 23% had the right to elect their parish

priests (e.g. in Brassó, Barót, Gelence, Kézdiszentkereszt, Kézdiszentlélek, Lemhény [Lemnia], and Torja), while 29% exercised their patronal duties without the right of election. The remaining 13% consisted of the chaplaincies in Bodzavám, Felsőtömös, and Törösvár and those of the quarantine stations in the border villages of Ojtoz–Sósmező [Poiana Sărată], which were under the patronage of the treasury, though episcopal appointment prevailed in these as well. Thirty-five percent of the parishes were under episcopal nomination (*libera collatio*), yet even in here political communities or village communes (*communitas*) were the ones to build and maintain churches, rectories, and other ecclesiastical buildings, and ensured the provision of church benefices. From the second half of the 19th century onwards, political communes increasingly sought to rid themselves of patronal obligations. In several cases – such as in Nyújtód [Lunga], Kézdisárfalva [Tinoasa], Barót, Lemhény, and Futásfalva – this led to litigation.

Parishes' financial needs were generally covered by the *kepe*, revenues from real estate, and interest from various ecclesiastical funds and Mass endowments. The establishment of such funds was at all times adapted either to the needs of the local community or to the wishes of the benefactors. Except in the chaplaincies serving quarantine stations, all parishes had Mass endowments, funds for the maintenance of churches, and school funds to support denominational education. Additionally, some funds were temporary and served specific purposes – such as tower construction, rectory repair, organ or bell purchases, or assistance for the poor –, and were dissolved once their purpose had been fulfilled. The parish of Kézdiszentlélek had the highest number of foundations, with 172, while at the opposite end Mikóújfalu had only one pious foundation. By the end of the 19th century, with the emergence of loan banks, private lending from church capital funds had declined significantly. Parish capital was increasingly deposited in banks or invested in the popular war bonds during the First World War. These bonds lost their value after the change of sovereignty, while the church estates themselves fell victim to land reforms and the nationalization of 1948, greatly complicating the financial support and remuneration of clergy.

In addition to church services, denominational education played a key role in shaping Catholic identity. It aimed not only to foster the intellectual and moral development of citizens but also to strengthen their attachment to the Church and to transmit religious knowledge. In order to modernize public education, Parliament adopted Act 38 of 1868, which established state- and municipality-run elementary schools but at the same time gradually introduced state oversight even over denominational schools, which formally retained their autonomy.

By the mid-Dualist period, in the 1892/1893 academic year, of the 153 elementary schools in Háromszék, 30 were Roman Catholic confessional institutions employing 54 teachers, mostly in the Catholic-dominated settlements of Upper Háromszék. In Lower Háromszék, Catholic schools existed in Sepsiszentgyörgy, Sepsikőröspatak, and Szentivánlavorfalva [Sântionlunca]. Additionally, the parochial schools of Brassó and Türkös [Turcheș] also belonged to the Barcaság-Sepsi-Miklósvar Archdeaconry.

While state schools had an average of four teachers and municipal schools two, half of the Catholic schools were staffed by a single teacher, leading to a decline in educational quality. School maintenance placed a significant financial burden on the denominations, and throughout their existence, Catholic schools constantly struggled to employ a sufficient number of teachers to match pupil enrolment. Although the Catholic Church maintained 20% of the elementary schools in Háromszék, 32% of the pupils in the county were Roman Catholic, meaning that one-third of Catholic students predominantly attended municipal schools. Denominational elementary schools were often supplemented by high(er)-level institutions in towns within the archdeaconry. In Kanta, which was merged with Kézdivásárhely, a Catholic lower grammar school had operated since 1697, which was elevated in 1899 to a full grammar school maintained by the Catholic Status to receive pupils from Upper as well as Lower Háromszék. In Brassó, a lower grammar school founded in 1837 by parish priest Antal Kovács was elevated to full grammar school status in 1872. The Franciscan Sisters also maintained a girls' secondary school in the city. In Sepsiszentgyörgy, in 1915, the Sancta Maria Institute for the Education of Girls and Orphanage was opened, incorporating a Catholic kindergarten and elementary school for girls, maintained by the Mellersdorf Franciscan Sisters. In the surrounding villages, the institute in Sepsikőröspatak founded in 1892 by Baroness Ludmilla Kálnoky and operated by the Sisters of Mercy from Satu Mare enjoyed great popularity.

Public school examinations held at the end of the academic year offered a reliable opportunity to assess the quality of education, and so too did the annual inspections conducted by state school inspectors. The selection of teachers fell under the remit of the school board, which convened under the chairmanship of the archdeacon acting in his capacity as inspector; however, teachers could only be appointed with episcopal approval. By episcopal decree, the Roman Catholic Teachers' Association of Kézdi-Orbai was established in 1877, while in the Barcaság-Sepsi-Miklós district, where there were fewer denominational schools, a similar association was

not formed until 1913. Teacher pensions were provided for by the Pension Fund for Roman Catholic Cantor-Teachers of Transylvanian Counties. The founding and maintenance of schools depended on the financial capacity of each parish. To this end, school boards relied on the financial contributions of parishioners, grants from political communes, state subsidies intended to supplement teacher salaries, and, in some cases, support from the Bishop of Transylvania or the Catholic Status.

School maintenance was made more difficult by a range of state requirements, the most onerous of which concerned the physical condition of the buildings used for education. In the 1870s, seventeen Catholic elementary schools in Háromszék failed to meet legal standards. Neglecting to modernize these facilities risked not only the withdrawal of state aid but, ultimately, the reorganization of such institutions into communal schools – a process known as nationalization.

During the Dualist period, the spiritual life of the faithful was grounded in participation in the Holy Mass, the sacramental life, and active involvement in religious associations. These associations, which came to serve as indicators of the vitality of religious life, reinforced a sense of belonging to the universal Church among their members, cultivated awareness of social issues, but they also served as vehicles for cultural and intellectual development in the Catholic Church's public representation in society. Nationally centralized religious associations and confraternities were also active in Háromszék. Among the most popular were the Altar Societies and the Rosary Confraternities. Men typically participated in choirs, the League of Nations, and the Saint Ladislaus Association, while students joined the Marian Congregations. The leader or patron of each association was generally the parish priest or assistant curate, while in towns the bishop was often invited to act as honorary protector. Participation in associational life among the faithful of the two archdeaconries ranged from 14% to 20% in towns and from 5% to 12% in rural areas. Due to the rhythm of seasonal labour, associational activity peaked in late autumn and winter, with women proving particularly active in this period. In villages, typically only one devotional association operated, whereas in towns multiple societies addressing social and cultural needs offered avenues for engagement in church life. Outstanding among these were the Altar Societies, whose primary purpose was to promote adoration of the Eucharist and to supply poorer churches with liturgical furnishings. The most active society in Háromszék, based in Kézdivásárhely, even organized a Eucharistic Congress. At the other end of the associational spectrum stood the city of Brassó, also serving as a bulwark of the Hungarian population in Brassó County. Here, in addition

to associations dedicated to deepening Catholic piety, there were societies aimed at advancing culture and carrying out social functions – such as the Charitable Women’s Association (later the Orphanage Foundation), a Home for Domestic Servants (i.e. a girls’ society), the Altar Society, Marian Congregation, Rosary Confraternity, Catholic Circle, Saint Ladislaus Association, and the League of Nations, the latter gaining attention throughout the Transylvanian Catholic world for its role in public education and culture. Taken together, these examples demonstrate that participation in associational life strengthened the faithful’s connection to the Church and at the same time encouraged the more affluent Catholic bourgeoisie to assume social responsibility.

At the conclusion of the research, I can confirm that the historical narrative outlined in the introduction holds true: for the Catholics of the two archdeaconries, the Dualist period was indeed an era of consolidation, as the Compromise of 1867 created a legal framework within which the Church was able to mobilize its internal resources and, over time, secure state support as well. We may consider in this context state subsidies aimed to improve clerical remuneration, the state’s role in maintaining denominational schools, and ecclesiastical construction projects supported by the Roman Catholic Status of Transylvania. State support, however, did not mean uninterrupted development for the Catholic Church, as liberal opposition remained strong, keeping both clergy and laity alert in Háromszék. Indeed, the ecclesiastico-political laws enacted in the wake of the *Kulturkampf* prompted Catholics to engage in resistance, self-organization, and internal consolidation. After a prolonged period of protest, they ultimately had to adapt to the changed ideological and social environment. By the first decade of the 20th century, at the diocesan assemblies, the priests of the district even began to support the Christian Socialist movement. The bishops regularly reminded them of their exemplary role as guiding lights, and exhorted the faithful to live a morally upright religious life. Following the completion of the research, I could establish that the period between 1867 and 1918 was marked by sustained development in the spiritual life of Catholics. This was evidenced by the steady growth in the number of associations, confraternities, and societies within the parishes. Commitment to the Church was also expressed through the founding of Mass endowments and the increasingly active role played by laypeople in supporting Church affairs.

During the existence of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the Church too was compelled to adapt to the rapidly changing political, economic, and social conditions. New approaches emerged regarding the burden of the *kepe* borne by the inhabitants of Szekler villages, the institution of

patronage, and the associated obligations. The role of the Church began to be reinterpreted: through its associations, press, and political organizations, it took on not only educational but also cultural, economic, and even political tasks. Traces of these developments can be detected in the religious life of Catholics in Háromszék, as attested by the archival sources consulted.

In the light of subsequent historical developments, the period between 1867 and 1918 can be regarded as a golden age: the founding of new parishes, the continuous increase in the number of the faithful and their integration into ecclesiastical life, the growing use of the vernacular in liturgy and church administration, the proliferation of associations and confraternities, and the increasing financial strength of parishes all testify to the Catholic community's vitality in the region. While the 1868 Eötvös Education Act contributed to the decline of denominational schools, the education laws and ministerial decrees regulating instruction ultimately led to improved educational quality in Church-run institutions as well – by the end of the 19th century, the state was actively involved in supporting their maintenance.

Although the abundance of sources would have allowed it, the present dissertation, due to limitations of scope, did not undertake to explore the processes by which filial churches achieved independence, to catalogue construction projects carried out by parishes using their own resources, or to study interdenominational relations within local communities. Owing to a lack of sources, summarizing the advocacy work of Catholic members of parliament and Status assemblies from Háromszék was also omitted, as was a more detailed account of the office-holding activity of the archdeacons of Kézdi-Orbai. In the absence of comparable studies on other ecclesiastical administrative units in Transylvania, a broader comparison was not possible. Nevertheless, I believe that this work has successfully provided a representative cross-section of Catholic life in the two archdeaconries. The research methodology outlined in the introduction proved effective: the systematic collection of primary and secondary sources, their critical analysis, and then thematic categorization led to the accumulation of a substantial body of data, which, in turn, enabled me to carry out a foundational level of research and analysis – one that earlier historians had not yet attempted. I trust that this exploration of half a century of Catholic history in Háromszék and Brassó counties will contribute to a fuller understanding of the Dualist-era history of the Transylvanian diocese, grounded in historical sources.

In conclusion, it may be stated that the Dualist period provided a favourable opportunity for the consolidation of Catholicism in Háromszék and for the deepening of the faithful's moral

and religious life. The ecclesiastical transformations brought about by the process of bourgeois modernization also reached Háromszék County along the eastern border of the country. Yet due to its relative isolation, the Church continued to serve as the primary source of cohesion and spiritual identity for the rural population. The inhabitants of Catholic settlements remained devoted to their faith, as evidenced by their sacrifices to maintain their own schools, the founding of Mass endowments, and active involvement in associational life. Over the more than fifty years of the Dualist period, the Catholics of the two archdeaconries succeeded in accumulating sufficient intellectual, spiritual, and material reserves to withstand the trials of the twentieth century.