

The Lower Clergy and Popular Culture

Introductory Remarks to a Current Research Project¹

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Abstract. The aim of this paper is to examine the role of the Christian lower priesthood in local communities in eighteenth–twentieth century Hungary and Transylvania in cultural transmission. The author intends to map out the complex and changing conditions of the social function, everyday life, and mentality of the priests on the bottom rung of the clerical hierarchy. Particular emphasis is placed on the activity of priests active at the focus points of interaction between elite and popular culture who, starting from the second half of the eighteenth century, often reflected both directly and in a written form on the cultural practices of the population of villages and market towns. The theoretical questions and possible approaches are centered around the complex relations of the priest and the community, their harmonious or conflict-ridden co-existence, questions of sacral economy, stereotypes of the “good priest” and the “bad priest” as shaped from above and from below, the subtleties of “priest-keeping”, the intentions related to preserving traditions and creating new customs, and the different temperaments of priests in relation to these issues.

Keywords: popular culture, lower clergy, local communities, cultural transmission, power relations, Hungary, Transylvania

Introduction

It does not promise to be an easy job to outline the complex set of relations connecting the lower clergy and popular culture with regard to any historical period. The difficulties of this far-from-enviable task only increase if one wishes to position this exploration in the Carpathian Basin, an area renowned for its denominational versatility. The hopelessness of the enterprise is ultimately driven home when one realizes that the subject area is fairly unexplored, sources that lend themselves to translation into data and to qualitative analysis have not been identified, and the

1 This paper is based upon an introductory paper in Hungarian by the author: Báráth, “Alsópapság és népi kultúra,” 9–42. After 2018, I carried out that research within the frames of MTA–ELTE Lendület Historical Folkloristics Research Group (Project LP-2018-10: *The lower clergy in eighteenth–twentieth century local communities in Hungary and Transylvania*).

present paper is limited to a certain length. When in spite of all of these disheartening conditions I venture to outline the research trends, possible models and future research perspectives of this subject area, I commit myself to face all the customary difficulties of such review papers, their proneness to contingency, shortcomings and occasionally the researcher's subjective influence.

I must advance that the following review is based largely on the experiences of my own research, mostly into eighteenth century (early modern) subject matters, and only occasionally am I able to add nineteenth- and twentieth-century data. At the same time, due to the character of the subject matter, the two and a half centuries between 1700 and 1950 allow for an unbroken thread of investigation into several key matters which may be captured with relative accuracy at least on the level of formulating questions. As regards the representation of various denominations, there may be a slight imbalance in favor of the Roman Catholic lower clergy due to my base of research sources. I am not in a position to discuss all the major denominations present in Hungary with equal weight. I do, however, intend to draw certain conclusions of general relevance to practically all trends of Western Christianity present in Hungary throughout the eighteenth–twentieth century. Indeed, with certain reservations, they may bear some relevance to the widely different religious practice of Jewish and Orthodox Christian believers. Examining the relationships of the latter denominations would be the long-term task of a specifically dedicated paper constructed from the angle of comparative religion.

It goes without saying that in the introduction of a paper it is crucial to clarify the basic concepts of the title. Both “the lower clergy” and “popular culture” are concepts that, contain a dichotomy in their nature: they define themselves in relation to their counter-pole. It might seem that defining the lower clergy is the easier job. According to the generally accepted interpretation, this category in social history is a collective term for clerics positioned on the lowest rungs of the clerical hierarchy. It is an accepted term mainly in the case of the Roman and Greek Catholic churches, which may also be extended to the priests of the major Protestant denominations active in Hungary (Calvinist, Lutheran and Unitarian) and of the small churches of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the case of the Catholic lay clergy, the category mostly covers the clerics active at local parishes (vicars and chaplains), while at the opposite pole we find the top echelons of the clerical hierarchy (bishop, ordinary, vicar general, diocese officials, cathedral priesthood, canons, etc.). How we would class the middle stratum which plays an intermediary role is debatable—while the bishop overseeing the parishes in his diocese often rises from the ranks of the lower priesthood through appointment, and his job is to comply with and execute instructions coming from above, the archdeacon was in many places invested with privileges and functions almost equal

to those of a deputy bishop, and could take an active part in clerical leadership. As regards the monastic clergy, it is even harder to delineate various strata of clerical society based on its internal hierarchy. Insofar as (non-leading) members of the monastic clergy lived in close proximity with the local communities of towns or villages, engaging in everyday interaction, naturally they deserve our attention, even if this attention must inevitably be narrowed down. Within the complex internal power structure of the Protestant churches, we simplify the question and explore the relations of the pastors serving in local parishes. If we generalize and clarify this distinction, one that is far from rigid and would normally require case-by-case judgement, we may declare that the central category in our present investigation is *the clerical stratum which bears direct influence on local society and culture*.²

An even more complex problem is that of defining *popular culture*, even though we may be spared a detailed discussion by the existing summaries of the subject. As regards the early modern period, an apt definition useful even today was provided from the quarters of the historical disciplines by Peter Burke, who outlined what he call popular culture.³ This partly contains a general definition of culture⁴, and partly a detailed description of the social groups that carry the culture. The latter was one that broadened the previously common notion equating *the people* with *the peasantry* by including a broader range of culture-mediating groups (urban artisans, craftsmen, students and itinerants)⁵ in the domain of popular culture. Burke was also intrigued by the mediating role and double cultural identity of priests, pastors, and preachers active in local communities. In the text that follows we shall use this definition in our approach to the popular culture of the eighteenth century which was to undergo complex changes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries best conceptualized through the processes of the rise of the middle classes and acculturation. Accepting the prevailing ethnographic definitions, we shall look for the popular culture of the past two centuries primarily in the society of the village and the small market town, i.e., in peasant communities. Some of these issues of ethnographic interest may be extended, with some reservations, to the urban middle classes.

2 Cp. Bárh, *Alsópapság*.

3 Burke, *Népi kultúra*, 11–12.

4 Burke, *Népi kultúra*, 11.

5 Burke, *Népi kultúra*, 45–110.

Main trends in the socio-cultural study of the lower priesthood

It is not the purpose of the present review to survey the breadth and depth of the literature of the available extensive European research history concerning the connection between the culture of the lower clergy and local communities. The bibliography containing the works referenced in the present work does not aim for completion either. Within European research, I will mostly refer to works written in German, English and French, which may be seen as fleeting examples and serve to demonstrate the versatility of existing approaches. Even the review of the considerably more modest Hungarian explorations falls short of totality, and merely aims to indicate research trends. Clearly, it is within the historical studies of the various denominations that we need to look for forerunners of a systematic study of the subject. Both Catholic and Protestant clerical history have always considered it their mission to study the basic stratum of clerical society, but similarly to the political historical approach on general historiography, major summaries and monographs mostly feature the history of the leading institutions and clerical leaders, while the single historical agent from the lower clergy is rarely accorded close observation. A significant shift in attitude came in this respect after the appearance of clerical history inspired by the social sciences (sociology, anthropology and ethnography), which in Western Europe pointed attention partly toward the “social history of the church”, and partly toward the everyday life of ordinary people. It is in this spirit that a line of spectacular “bottom view church histories” have emerged with a range of geographic and thematic focuses. Besides, stepping past the denominational orientation, surveys deploying the latest approaches in historical writing also devoted some of their attention to this subject. In France it was on the fringes of the *Annales* circle, in the English-speaking areas the trends of historical anthropology, while in Germany in the field of new social history and *Alltagsgeschichte* that examinations appeared highlighting the cultural mediating role of the lower clergy and covering the time span from the late Middle Ages to the present day. Added to all of this was the influence of the micro-historical perspective adopted after the shift in historical scale taking place over the 1980s.⁶ This resulted in the publication of a considerable number of monographs, dissertations, thematic volumes and case studies, from which I will point out a few as we go along.

An important work rarely quoted in Hungary in the context of the late mediaeval mentality of the English clergy is Eamon Duffy’s seminal monograph.⁷ Written over two decades ago, *The Stripping of the Altars* was the first to point out that the church in pre-reformation England had not been nearly as decadent and defunct as it was later made to appear. The Irish historian presents the everyday clerical life of the age as a

6 For a comprehensive description of these tendencies, see: Burke, *New Perspectives*.

7 Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*.

comprehensive and functional system of piety among the common folk. If we shift our attention to the introductory chapter of Keith Thomas's monograph (*Religion and the Decline of Magic*), deservedly seen as an indispensable primer, we find that the image it presents does not differ considerably even if the historian's interpretation is different: it interprets the same late-mediaeval clerical practice as a form of "white magic".⁸

In Thomas's survey, the basis for a harmonious coexistence of medieval priesthood and believers came from the system of mutual service, whereby the community physically sustained its priest, and the priesthood served the needs of the community, primarily through such means as benediction, exorcism and the *sacramentalia*. A classic of English historical anthropology, Alan Macfarlane's book introduces the life of a seventeenth-century vicar, Ralph Josselin, and his entire family and world view based on his diary.⁹ British historians have shown increasing interest in the area since the 1980s, which is indicated by the collection of papers that placed the local vicarage in the center in order to offer approaches to the lay religiosity of the four centuries between 1350 and 1750.¹⁰ In his PhD dissertation written around the turn of the century, one of the authors, Donald A. Spaeth, laid an important milestone in providing an understanding of the relations of the lower clergy in the Church of England and the local communities.¹¹ He describes the period of 1660–1740 as a perilous age, and provides a model-like outline of the conflicts between the priests and their parishioners, the various clerical character types and the manifestations of popular religiosity. His work deserves the attention of researchers, regardless of denomination.

Selecting representative examples from the extensive French-related material is an even more daunting task. 1971, the year when Thomas's monograph was published, also saw the appearance of a classic on the history of Catholicism in the sixteenth–eighteenth centuries by Jean Delumeau, an outstanding representative of the rejuvenated French historiography.¹² In presenting the structural constitution, institutionalization, and internal reforms of Catholicism at the time when it became a world religion, Delumeau places great emphasis on the way the church handled manifestations of local religion, and on the history of the influence of the lowest levels of church leadership. In his comprehensive work published three decades later, Bernard Hours asks the same questions on a similarly broad time scale of three centuries but with an exclusive focus on the French Catholic Church.¹³ In his wide-ranging survey, Hours relies on works of social history produced by the

8 Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 25–50.

9 Macfarlane, *The Family Life*.

10 Wright, *Parish, Church and People*.

11 Spaeth, *The Church*.

12 Delumeau, *Le catholicisme*.

13 Hours, *L'Église et la vie religieuse*.

enlivened French clerical history of the late twentieth century. Outstanding among them is the oeuvre of Bernard Plongeron, particularly his book on the everyday life of eighteenth-century French priesthood.¹⁴ Starting in the 1960s, crucial sources are explored regarding the same subject matter by Dominique Julia.¹⁵ In his book describing “the man of the enlightenment” Julia offers a portrait of “the priest”.¹⁶

Besides French historians, English researchers have also produced considerable scholarship concerning the French priesthood of the eighteenth-century. In his gigantic two-volume work published at the turn of the millennium, John McManners summarizes several decades of research. In terms of structure, types of questions raised and conclusions drawn, the book may serve as a model for examining any other region in Europe.¹⁷ Investigating the lower clergy in the decades preceding the Revolution in France also attracted the attention of Timothy Tackett in the early phases of his career. Focusing on the life of the parishes in a single diocese between 1750 and 1791, Tackett’s 1977 book arrives at important conclusions of a social and political historical nature.¹⁸

The literature available to us on the German Catholic and Protestant lower priesthood is also fairly extensive. Due to German clerical historians with an interest in *Volksfrömmigkeit* and ethnographic studies perceptive of historical questions, we could start this survey in the interwar period.¹⁹ However, only in recent decades has methodical thematic research gained strong impetus. This is partly thanks to innovative trends in German historiography, which went back to the concept of popular or folk culture, already “retired” in ethnography by that time, and aimed to shed light on the life of the lowest strata of society. Joining the strand of research termed “historical cultural studies”, in the 1980s Rainer Beck published a number of seminal studies on the subject, one of which was also translated into Hungarian, turning Hungarian scholars’ attention to the subject.²⁰ In spite of the fact that neither Beck’s work nor its reception were free of apologetic tones concerning ethnography, his insights based on early modern sources regarding priestly personalities and their role in the local communities are highly instructive for us. On behalf of German ethnography, the Würzburg school led by Wolfgang Brückner and the related yearbook (*Jahrbuch für*

14 Plongeron, *La vie quotidienne*.

15 Julia, “Le prêtre au XVIII^e siècle,” 521–34.

16 Julia, “Der Priester.”

17 McManners, *Church and Society*.

18 Tackett, *Priest and Parish*.

19 See e.g. Veit, *Volksfrommes Brauchtum und Kirche*; Veit and Lenhart, *Kirche und Volksfrömmigkeit*.

20 Beck, “Der Pfarrer und das Dorf”; Beck, “Népi vallásosság.” See also, contemporaneously: Peters, “Das laute Kirchenleben.”

Volkskunde) appear to be of outstanding significance.²¹ Several of Brückner's papers analyze overarching processes of the early modern period, and the relationship between the clerical leadership and popular religion.²² One block in the 1988 volume of the annual is dedicated entirely to "the priest and the people in the nineteenth century."²³ Continuity of interest is reflected, among other things, by papers in the volume written in the 1990s²⁴ and published in 2002. Most outstanding among them is the achievement of Professor Walter Hartinger from Passau.²⁵ Further papers by clerical historian Andreas Holzem²⁶ and Werner Freitag²⁷ indicate that despite the supposed opposition between historians and ethnographers, their fields of interest show considerable overlap. After his book on pilgrimages of the early modern period, which met with mixed reception,²⁸ in 1998 Freitag wrote one of the best monographs on the present subject. He studies the parishes of a small area throughout the four centuries between 1400 and 1803, examining the various aspects of the local role of the church.²⁹ In a famous series produced by the "new critical social history" movement hallmarked by Jürgen Kocka and Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Götz von Olenhausen published an excellent analysis concerning the forms of behavior exhibited by the Catholic priesthood of the Freiburg archbishopric in the nineteenth century.³⁰ Frank Fätkenheuer focused the lens of his micro-historical investigations on northern Bavarian priests and pastors in the early seventeenth century, and their role in their communities.³¹ At the same time, clerical history, which is less of a social historical perspective in the German-speaking areas, has also produced a line of monographs associated with close geographical areas that paid some attention to the lower clergy, varying in depth according to their criteria.³² Similarly to the French examples, examining the influence of the clerical

21 Typically, the subject attracted the attention not only of purely religious ethnographic research. A chapter on the priest and his vicarage was an inevitable part of the seminal reviews of the Marburg school of custom research: Weber-Kellermann, *Landleben*, 91–97.

22 Volume 10. of the series summarising these research efforts is of significance in this respect: Brückner, *Frömmigkeit*.

23 Particularly the case study on Würzburg County is one interest in this context: Weiß, "Wandel von Rolle."

24 Besides Brückner and Hartinger's paper, primarily: Dippold, "Klerus und Katholische Reform."

25 Hartinger, *Religion und Brauch*; Hartinger, "Weltliche Obrigkeit."

26 Holzem, "Westfälische Frömmigkeitskultur."

27 Freitag, "Religiöse Volkskultur."

28 Freitag, *Volks- und Elitenfrömmigkeit*.

29 Freitag, *Pfarrer, Kirche*.

30 Götz von Olenhausen, *Klerus und abweichendes Verhalten*.

31 Fätkenheuer, *Lebenswelt und Religion*.

32 E.g. Baumgartner, *Die Seelsorge*; Schlögl, *Glaube und Religion*; Haag, Holtz and Zimmermann, *Ländliche Frömmigkeit*; Bünz and Lorenzen-Schmidt, *Klerus, Kirche und Frömmigkeit*.

enlightenment on the priesthood is seen almost as an independent research question.³³ Besides Catholic monographs, hefty tomes have been dedicated to the changes in the role the Lutheran priest and parish experienced over the eighteenth–twentieth centuries.³⁴ In the most recent manual on religious history, Tobias Dietrich offers a synthesizing summary of the entire subject area.³⁵

The research history of this subject area has followed a very similar course in Hungary. Although interest in this theme was obvious in ethnography, for a long time it was not explicit. As regards the role the lower clergy played in village communities, it has mostly been researched by social ethnography—a branch of the discipline relatively late in its inception.³⁶ The scientific history of folklore studies has not examined this subject area separately; instead it mostly considers the role of the parish priesthood in nineteenth-century folklore collection as self-evident. Neither has religious ethnography devoted separate papers to it. However, thematic chapters of monographs, particularly those which offer in-depth soundings of small localities, have paid a varying amount of attention to the relations of this social stratum.³⁷

Hungarian clerical history has also paid a certain degree of implicit attention to the lowest strata of clerical society. One of the leading figures of the “Pannonhalma school” active in the interwar period, Tihamér Vanyó, produced an excellent monograph on the methodology of writing histories of local parishes,³⁸ a book of considerable value and relevance to this day. His obvious intention was to contribute to the professionalization of research into local clerical history.³⁹ In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the same author, along with other scholars under Benedictine supervision,

33 Müller, *Fürstbischof Heinrich von Bibra*; Gottschall, *Dokumente zum Wandel*. For an exemplary analysis about a representative of “Gegen-Aufklärung”, see: Midelfort, *Exorcism and Enlightenment*. Another American historian discusses the relationship of the priests of Saxony of the Reformation era with their local community: Goodale, “Pfarrer als Außenseiter.”

34 Greiffenhagen, *Das evangelische Pfarrhaus*; Schorn-Schütte and Sparn, *Evangelische Pfarrer*.

35 Dietrich, “Klerus und Laien.”

36 A chapter in a relevant manual quotes some of the sporadic and occasionally sweeping conclusions of research conducted before World War II: Jávör, “Az egyház,” 792–96. Interestingly, in Hungarian ethnographic custom research, there is hardly any mention of the local social aspects of ordination and the subsequent first mass. Cp. Bálint, *Népünk ünnepei*, 49–51. Excellent and mutually complementary German monographs in this respect are: Kania, “*Geistliche Hochzeit*”; Haunerland, *Die Primiz*.

37 E. g. Bálint, *Népünk ünnepei*, 47–51; Bartha, *A hitélet*, 98–99; Bárh, “A katolikus magyarság,” 355–56; Bárh, *Jézus dicsértessékl*, 96–102; Bárh, *Szentgyörgy megyéje Alcsíkban*, 329–55.

38 Vanyó, *A plébániatörténetírás módszertana*.

39 For an excellent example of parish history from the angles of social and cultural history, see: Hoss, *A kaposvári plébánia története*.

offered excellent examples of “bottom view clerical (diocesan) history”.⁴⁰ The 1950s brought a predictable halt in this strand of research, which was not continued at quality standard until after 1989.⁴¹ What gained impetus about this time was the research of visitation documents—a change partly fueled by ethnographers’ interest in clerical sources.⁴² Inspired partly by the achievements of scholars in other countries, and partly by the inherent dynamic of Hungarian clerical history, this is also the period when István Fazekas completed his important dissertation. Ever since 1993, when its monograph version came out, this work has served as a model of its kind.⁴³ Fazekas presented the problematic of the lower clergy based on source material from 1641–1714. These time boundaries were marked out based on church visitation records as his primary source. The study contains chapters based on both quantitative and qualitative research. We see numerical accounts of the distribution of the lower clergy according to mother-tongue, age, and place of birth; their levels of education are classified according to region and degree. Fazekas describes the normative sources that give us an idea of the culture and education these priests possessed. He also juxtaposes their passages with listings of books owned by the priesthood or possibly of books they had written. A separate chapter is dedicated to the relationship of the priests and feudal lords, the friars and chaplains serving at parishes, and the types of career options available in the age. Particularly significant from our point of view are the chapters that account for the relations of the priest and the village, as well as the priest and the higher clerical authority (the *visitor*), which include concrete case studies and a whole line of general conclusions.

Paradoxically, István Fazekas’s pioneering publication seems to have discouraged for a while, rather than encouraged, the younger generation of clerical historians to develop an interest in this direction. Excellently written, the work probably produced the illusion that the subject had been exhausted, even though the author repeatedly emphasized that the handful of case studies were intended to serve as a collection of samples and models. Over a decade had to pass before the second Hungarian monograph of the lower clergy was produced, preserving the same basic questions and working method but focusing on another diocese and a later period. Tamás Dénesi’s doctoral dissertation about the clerical leadership and pastoral practice of the Veszprém diocese in the eighteenth century is one of the best examples of

40 E.g. Vanyó, *A katolikus restauráció Nyugatmagyarországon*; Csóka, *Sopron vármegye*; Piszker, *Barokk világ*; Jánosi, *Barokk hitélet*.

41 For one example, see: Molnár, *Mezőváros és katolicizmus*.

42 Tomisa, *Visitatio Canonica*; Tomisa, *Katolikus egyház-látogatási*.

43 Fazekas, “A győri egyházmegye.” See the same study in the context of other thematic papers: Fazekas, *A reform útján*.

diocese histories in Hungary.⁴⁴ The author's intention was not to produce a monographic account of this diocese in the eighteenth century; not even to give a detailed description of the emergence of the institutional structure, but much rather to focus on the background intentions of this emerging structure, as well as on the channels of communication available to the top echelons of the church and the lower reaches of leadership. Most instructive from the perspective of our subject matter are the chapters that describe the personality, education, attitudes, and day-to-day struggles of parish vicars through concrete examples.⁴⁵ In the years following the 2006 completion of this excellent dissertation, there seem to be signs of enlivening interest in the subject among young clerical historians. This is most palpably represented by the Pécs atelier of clerical history, which studies the third largest diocese of the Transdanubian area. Zoltán Gőzsy and Szabolcs Varga have recently produced papers of seminal interest in this field.⁴⁶ Our present volume also gives reason for hope regarding Hungarian clerical historians' continued interest in the subject and the ongoing exploration of the conditions of dioceses located the east of the Danube.

As regards similar investigations among Protestant congregations, once again, interest goes back several decades. Local strands of Protestant clerical history have always placed considerable emphasis on preserving the memory of their pastoral forebears; general summaries covering larger geographic spans and relying on a broader base of sources were produced relatively early.⁴⁷ Particularly important for us are the case studies which present the life, culture and motivations of an eighteenth- or nineteenth-century pastor, embedded in the context of social history.⁴⁸ Réka Kiss defended a dissertation comparable in its methodological precision to that of István Fazekas, and covering a small area based on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century visitation records. Recently published in the form of a book, her monograph⁴⁹ is dedicated not only to pastors, but the relevant chapter is one of its central sections.⁵⁰ Kiss's work is the first monograph in Hungary to align questions posed by ethnography with those of historical anthropology in its investigations concerning the network of relationships between the church and local communities based on a broad base of early modern source material. Besides investigations of

44 Dénesi, *Alsópapság*.

45 Separate attention must be paid to his pioneering remarks concerning archbishop's tiaras, which also appeared in a separate paper: Dénesi, "Esperesi koronák."

46 Gőzsy and Varga, "A pécsi egyházmegye"; Gőzsy and Varga, "Kontinuitás és reorganizáció"; Gőzsy, "Az alsópapság helyzete."

47 Kósa, "Protestáns egyházas," 454–56.

48 E.g. Kósa, *Művelődés, egyház*, 267–88; Szigeti, "Tizennyolcadik századi lelkészsorsok."

49 Kiss, *Egyház és közösség*.

50 Kiss, *Egyház és közösség*, 146–200.

a historical nature, over the past three decades we have seen major ethnographic and anthropological research efforts focusing on the relations of priests and the local community in the recent past and the present. Due to their political historical dimensions, in this part of the world studies in this subject area have presented an extremely complex problematic.⁵¹ A similarly complex and extensive area of examination is the scholarly approach to the priesthood of Transylvania and, within that, particularly of Moldavia after the post-communist transition.⁵² Fortunately, we can report promising and laudable initiatives in all these fields.

From this brief review of the foregoing research trends, it can be seen that the question has distinctly appeared both in the historical and the contemporary perspective in the international literature and in related Hungarian scholarship in its wake. Nevertheless, the literature review also points at areas of shortcoming. I wish to point out merely two possible further directions. On the one hand, it would be extremely useful to add new research findings to the rather short list of bottom-view diocese histories.⁵³ On the other hand, there is still a relatively small number of case studies focusing on individual priestly personalities and their local conflicts, applying the scale-changing methodology of micro-history.⁵⁴ Naturally, all of this would require usable sources. Thus, we cannot avoid taking a brief look at the range of possible sources to use.

Quantitative and qualitative source types

It is a basic characteristic of this subject area that it does not allow for drawing up a complete and exhaustive source typology, since its source base may be extended ad infinitum. Research to date has, however, outlined the most relevant types of sources. First and foremost of these are the records of clerical visitation tours.⁵⁵ Indeed, one of the most important goals of these visitations was to check on the personality, culture, pastoral activity, and last but certainly not least, the private lives of priests. This promising and broad vista is over-clouded only by the occasional monotony of the documents and the fact that they use repetitive clichés.⁵⁶ Even though these

51 Lovas Kiss, "Pap, közösség." Sociology of religion also boasts considerable achievements in this field. E.g. Kamarás, *Egyházközség-építők*.

52 Kinda, "Hagyjátok el"; Kinda, "A protestáns pap."

53 Recent excellent examples in Hungarian: Hermann, *A veszprémi egyházmegye igazgatása*; Mihalik, *Papok, polgárok, konvertiták*.

54 Cp. Bárh, *Exorcist of Sombor*.

55 For more on this source type, see: Zeeden and Lang, *Kirche und Visitation*; Tomisa, *Visitatio Canonica*; Tomisa, *Katolikus egyház-látogatási*.

56 Bárh, *Esküvő*, 32–35.

records employ a similar structure throughout the country and are almost exactly identical in their focus, when measured by a longitudinal yardstick of the period, they in fact substantially vary in standard when it comes to the specific data of interest. We can be fairly confident that we will find data about the age and place of birth of the vicar in question, also (less commonly) about his social background, studies, earlier places of service, “proper and moral conduct”, and other details. They may indeed constitute indispensable data when a schematic historical overview of a period is required.⁵⁷ From the point of view of our subject area, however, those descriptions deserve distinguished attention where besides the constantly repeated stereotypical phrases, the eager and conscientious visitor goes into more detail about the position of the vicar and his parish, and their relation to the local community. Quite often they go into lengthy accounts of the vicar’s grievances (*gravamina*), most of which are related to the *communitas*. (The vicars would write a list in advance.)

Some of the best records contain the names and transgressions of public culprits, as well as the punishments they had been accorded. As for the grievances of the village against the priest, in my experience they seem to have been rarely discussed in detail in the records but were instead sent to the highest clerical authorities in the form of private letters. In general, from the point of view of quantitative analyses, records of church visitation tours may be pronounced to constitute the largest, most outstanding and most homogeneous body of source material.

Scholarship recognized and exploited this quantitative goldmine fairly early.⁵⁸ The extent to which these sources allow for qualitative analyses depends on how closely they approach the specific cases and conflicts.

A long-known and much researched group of sources concerning the church norms that the visitation tours aimed to control were the normative regulations (synod books, statutes, circulars, manuals, etc.) which carry a varying degree of relevance for our subject.⁵⁹

Without some familiarity with these documents, it would be hard to capture the intentions and requirements of the top leadership concerning the lower clergy, and it would also be impossible to interpret the various forms of transgression. By examining these normative regulations we can track the expectations⁶⁰ strictly aimed at the priesthood (and their continuous changes), as well as the ways in which the church exerted its influence over the habits, customs, religious practices and

57 Cp. Lakatos, *A Kalocsa-Bácsi Főegyházmegye*; Ferenczi, *A gyulafehérvári (erdélyi) főegyházmegye*.

58 For a few of the many possible examples, see: Freitag, *Pfarrer, Kirche*; Fazekas, “A győri egyházmegye”; Goodale, “Pfarrer als Außenseiter.”

59 Cp. Bárh, *Esküvő*, 19–32; Bárh, “Statuta Generalia”; Freitag, *Pfarrer, Kirche*, 133–37.

60 On the notion of the ideal priest as formulated at the Council of Trent, see: Gárdonyi, *A papi élet*.

everyday life of their believers, which the lower clergy, more than anyone else, were expected to mediate.⁶¹ Thus, our expectations may be complex and multi-layered when we turn toward the clerical regulations of the early modern and modern period (coming from Rome, the clerical province, the diocese, the archdeacon's district or the parish),⁶² whose exploration and use have a considerable tradition both in clerical history and in the various branches of ethnography. These may be particularly relevant to scholars of popular culture regarding periods and thematic areas where on certain phenomena these normative sources are the only source of data. When it comes to source criticism, however, it is important to take into consideration the specific characteristics of this type of source (particularly as regards the secondary reflection of reality), but even in the worst case, they are bound to offer posterity a faithful reflection of the basic directions and intentions of the clerical leadership.⁶³

Depending on the data organizing method of various parish archives, it is common practice all over Europe to store the documentation of all former vicars of the given parish in a separate document batch. Creating such a FOND of so-called "personal documents"⁶⁴ renders researchers' job considerably easier when they wish to examine how specific priestly personalities acted and behaved. Occasionally, with the exception of last wills and death-related papers, other documents pertaining to the given person (e.g., papers from the Holy See and the parish) are also transferred to this FOND. Even the quantity of these batches of personal documents relative to others may be telling concerning conformist and more conflict-prone priests.

The only document type which allows for a truly qualitative analysis is the so-called *ego-documents* which contain the personal self-expressions of historical agents.⁶⁵ This category, as it is understood in the wake of German historians,

61 Cp. Rooijakkers, "Ecclesiastical Power"; Bárth, "Statuta Generalia." See also eighteenth- and nineteenth-century data on defining the date of a wedding in Hungary, which was a trend most clearly observable on the levels of the lower clergy: Bárth, "A katolikus magyarság," 355; Bárth, *Esküvő*, 52.

62 Variants of regulations on the parish level regulating the religious and moral conduct of the community are described by: Imreh, *A törvényhozó*, 99–120. A comprehensive survey of the "county" of Ciucsângeorgiu (Csíkszentgyörgy) and its priest, based on a recent exhaustive exploration of sources, is discussed in: Bárth, *Szentgyörgy megyéje*.

63 The degrees of normative sources are also discussed in my book on the levels and attitudes of clerical leadership: Bárth, *Esküvő*. For more on primary intentions, see the examples of the priest of Kolut: Bárth, "Szokás és hatalom."

64 See e.g. in the archives of the Archbishopric of Kalocsa: Lakatos, Lakatos, and Szabó, *A Kalocsai Érseki Levéltár*, 175–258. For a use of these: Götz von Olenhusen, *Klerus und abweichendes Verhalten*.

65 Schulze, *Ego-Dokumente*; Göttisch, "Archivalische Quellen."

includes diaries, journals, letters and confessions.⁶⁶ A special clerical version is the house histories of parishes. *Historia domus*, which in larger quantities may sometimes be suited for qualitative analyses, may compare in individual relevance to the personal diaries of parish priests.⁶⁷ Depending on the given priest's degree of a graphomania, these books may be sources of varying relevance but must certainly not be bypassed. Clearly, correspondence is also a highly diverse genre which does not lend itself to sweeping statements. Nevertheless, it is obvious that letters represent a vital document type in the context of the lower clergy's mentality and culture, and their occasional local conflicts.⁶⁸ A special but extremely valuable source material for personal utterances is the *interrogation minutes* drafted in the context of the most varied cases of jurisdiction and inquest, whether one is reading the hopefully faithful accounts of self-expressions of the accused or the witnesses. As witness statements are the sources that occur most frequently and in the largest numbers, their value has long been pointed out by historical ethnography.⁶⁹ However, with respect to the lower clergy, research has not sufficiently exploited this source type, particularly in Hungary. Documents about priests' transgressions are most commonly available in the minutes of the diocesan holy see and, a fact of decisive importance for us, in the vast collections of single-sheet documents attached to minutes. The reticence of former research in this direction is partly due to the fact that for a certain period, documents of the holy see were classified, and partly to a cautious, somewhat shy attitude particularly noticeable amongst the internal circle of clerical historians.⁷⁰

66 For an example on the way these diaries were utilized, see analyses by e.g., Macfarlane, *The Family Life*; Fätkenheuer, *Lebenswelt und Religion*. It is rare in this subject area to come across analyses of priests' memoirs; one excellent example from Hungary is the paper discussing the intellectual world of an eighteenth-century Franciscan friar, Pater Antonius Hueber: Dusnoki-Draskovich, *Nyitott múlt*, 186–308.

67 For examples of meticulous analyses of parish house histories, see: Csáky, "A népi erkölcs"; Bárh, *Tiszaalpár* (particularly: 123–42); Lovas Kiss, "Pap, közösség."

68 Beck, "Népi vallásosság," 42–43.

69 Göttisch, "Archivalische Quellen"; Fuchs and Schulze, *Wahrheit*.

70 Most recently, historian Gabriella Erdélyi, a scholar blessed with a laudable interest in matters of folk culture, has described the possibilities inherent in a particular source document from the Vatican concerning priestly transgressions in the late Middle Ages. Her analysis highlights the everyday life and mentality of Hungarian clerical society in greater depth than any other writing before. Moreover, it relies on a surprisingly early source (within the early modern perspective). Erdélyi, *Szökött szerzetesek*, (particularly: 115–59).

Theoretical questions and possible approaches

After reviewing the most important types of sources, let us outline the theoretical aspects that emerge in the light of previous investigations, with a particular view to future research in Hungary.

1. We have seen that the lower clergy may be placed in the focus of examinations as a social group in their own right. It is possible to statistically describe their origins, education, the languages they spoke or their financial position in a particular historical period and in a particular region. The same parameters can also be examined on the level of the historical actors in a changed-scale analysis, where we “zoom in” on the lower clergy’s mentality and way of thinking, as well as on their everyday life in the closest sense.⁷¹ By examining more extensive data lines, we may also be able to track the changes they underwent in their history.⁷² Certain other sources can, in turn, take us closer to the issue of the clergy’s self-interpretation.⁷³

2. We can unquestionably extend the above described perspective to the relations between the lower clergy and the ecclesiastical leadership. Normative regulations mostly recorded expectations toward the priesthood; compliance with them was controlled by the visitation tours, while sanctions were dealt out in procedures conducted at the forums of the Holy See. Further investigations are required to establish how the system of the church leadership’s expectations changed in as little as a single century; how the image of the *pastor bonus* was transformed, and how related factors were reflected in the mechanisms of leadership.⁷⁴ Special situations arising from the breach of norms (“priests in front of the clerical courts”) also take place against the backdrop of official expectations. These data can be quantified if we inventory the types of transgressions that resulted in priests being accused and summoned to the Holy See of their bishops or archbishops. It is clear that these breaches of norm also have their historical and regional dynamics. A survey of the lower clergy of Transylvania, which is analyzed in my paper currently under publication, shows that the most prevalent breaches of norm were drunkenness, verbal and

71 E.g. Dusnoki-Draskovich, *Nyitott múlt*; Midelfort, *Exorcism and Enlightenment*; Bárh, “Szokás és hatalom.”

72 Delumeau, *Le catholicisme*; Tackett, *Priest and Parish*; Götz von Olenhusen, *Klerus und abweichendes Verhalten*; Freitag, *Pfarrer, Kirche*; McManners, *Church and Society*; Spaeth, *The Church*.

73 See investigations conducted on the basis of sermons, with regard to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: Dürr, “...die Macht.”

74 Cp. Bárh, “Statuta Generalia”; Freitag, *Pfarrer, Kirche*, 286–302. For more on the concept of the “bon curé” in late eighteenth-century France, see: Tackett, *Priest and Parish*, 166–69; McManners, *Church and Society*, vol. 1, 358–83.

physical aggression,⁷⁵ forbidden sexuality,⁷⁶ excessive material greed and neglect of pastoral services (masses, sermons, baptisms, confessions, extreme unction for the dying, etc.). In addition, we frequently encounter swearing, gambling (cards), smoking a pipe or dancing in public. In the context of some of these breeches of norm, besides the interests of the clerical authorities, those of the local community were also hurt. Therefore, sustaining a balanced relationship between the priest and his congregation was an important consideration and a vital duty from the perspective of the church leadership.⁷⁷

3. The third aspect of outstanding importance is to explore the complex set of relations between the *lower clergy and the community*.⁷⁸ Characteristics of the various attitudes shown by priests are usually summarized based on how they behave to their local parishioners. A crucial decisive factor is whether the vicar, when occupying his new posting, chooses the path of integration or resistance.⁷⁹ Does he accept the local community's established system of norms (religious and profane habits, legal customs, and tacit collective "laws") or does he oppose them? All this may well be connected with his personal attitude: is he a natural conformist or much rather a unique personality?⁸⁰ The priest's behavior in these respects would usually shape the reaction of the community which, in its turn, will either accept him as God's local servant or oppose him to the last.⁸¹ In each case, it depended on local conditions how the image of the "good pastor", a fairly changeable perception, was shaped in a bottom view. This model, built on the basis of collective norms, is not necessarily in line with the pastor bonus model of the church leadership, but particularly in the Catholic context, the two were in constant correlation.⁸² Exploring their mutual relations and discrepancies only becomes accessible through micro-level analysis.

75 Cp. Erdélyi, *Szökött szerzetesek*, 143–59.

76 Of the rich literature of this subject area, see a study on early modern instances of the concubines of Catholic and Protestant clerics: Labouvie, "Geistliche Konkubinate." An excellent analysis based on source material from the second half of the nineteenth century: Götz von Olenhusen, *Klerus und abweichendes Verhalten*.

77 On contemporary Protestant parallels to breaches of norm by clerics, see: Kiss, *Egyház és közösség*, 170–200.

78 Cp. Tackett, *Priest and Parish*, 151–221; Weber-Kellermann, *Landleben*, 84–97; Beck, "Der Pfarrer"; Freitag, *Pfarrer, Kirche*, 303–45; McManners, *Church and Society*; Spaeth, *The Church*.

79 Cp. Goodale's statements on the outsider status of priests: Goodale, "Pfarrer als Außenseiter."

80 Beck, "Népi vallásosság"; Spaeth, *The Church*, 155–72.

81 Cp. the conclusions drawn from the case study on Kolut: Bárh, "Szokás és hatalom."

82 Cp. Beck, "Der Pfarrer," 138; Beck, "Népi vallásosság"; Kósa, "Protestáns egyházias," 454–55; Kinda, "A protestáns pap."

4. There are several focal points that emerge if we examine the relations of the lower clergy and the local community. Primary of these is the dimension of power. Before the middle of the twentieth century, the lower clergy usually appeared in communities among the local representatives of the existing social-political establishment.⁸³ They were relying on the symbolic capital flowing from their education and cultural standards. In terms of their financial well-being, priests were closely dependent on the local community and the local feudal lord. This three-sided set of relationships (priest – *communitas* – local lord) is thrown into relief most sharply in the case of conflicts. The structure of local power resulted in an even more complex formula.⁸⁴ Elected leaders of the *communitas*, members of the local intelligentsia (notary, teacher, doctor, etc.), local representatives of feudal power, the local influence of county-level officials, and others produced a highly complex force-field, particularly during the feudalistic period, and subsequently this pressure only increased. Priests were expected to find their place in this complicated formula in a way that in the meanwhile they made the best use of their symbolic power.⁸⁵ In conflict situations, we can observe that the *communitas* was not necessarily united, as it consisted of groupings and cliques that had emerged based on kinship or other social foundations, demonstrating widely different attitudes to the priest, depending on their interests, sympathies and temperament.

5. A study of a specifically narrow focus will be required to examine the role of the parish as an institution in the local society.⁸⁶ Such case studies will offer an insider's view of this crucial element. We do possess some stereotyped preliminary notions of the way in which the parish was one of the most important scenes of literacy or the field of (unpaid) farm labor. But what additional role did this institution play in the life of villages? And how did the community see from the outside the everyday life of the vicar and the members of his household? What did they expect of him? Regarding family life at the vicarage, where was the threshold on the scale between "decent" and "outrageous"?⁸⁷

6. The parish and the priest (together with the teacher, the sacristan, and the bellringer) represented a significant economic hub in the community. The keeping of a priest by the community and the services that he offered in return constituted

83 Beck, "Der Pfarrer," 115–16.

84 Rooijackers, "Ecclesiastical Power," 46–47.

85 For exemplary case studies of the subject, see analyses of South German examples: Sabeau, *Power*, particularly 113–73. See also: Tackett, *Priest and Parish*, 170–93. On the influence of lay tendencies on vernacular religious practice, see: Hartinger, "Weltliche Obrigkeit."

86 Cp. Greiffenhagen, *Das evangelische Pfarrhaus*; Wright, *Parish, Church*; Beck, "Der Pfarrer," 115–16; Petke, "Die Pfarrei"; Freitag, *Pfarrer, Kirche*.

87 Cp. Labouvie, "Geistliche Konkubinate."

a complex economy, which took a different shape in each historical period, and is still waiting for a detailed exploration.⁸⁸ Thanks to the existence of priest-keeping contracts and the minutes of visitation tours, which controlled that the regulations should be respected (or occasionally recorded or renewed), this research can be carried out with great safety on a local scale. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, both on the Catholic and the Protestant side, we find that donations in money and in kind appear together. The most important elements of parish revenues (*lecticale, sedecima* and *deputatum*) may be reconstructed for centuries. As to the hidden motivations of those involved, they are most palpable in the documentation of conflicts where the most common cause appears to be a clash of financial interests.⁸⁹ A further economic aspect, beyond the circumstances of priest-keeping, was the role of the parish and its kitty as a local credit-institution in the community.⁹⁰ The most emphatic feature in sources dating from modern and early modern Hungary is that *the local community was responsible for the keeping of its priest*.⁹¹ Consequently, the priest would also have a vested interest in a good harvest; he too, would keep fingers crossed for a benign season, and would express his heart-felt condolences if natural disaster or any other factor should bring a bad harvest. Occasionally this most prosaic anxiety is noticeable among the motivations of parish priests making meteorological notes in their *historia domus*. A similarly important consequence is that this way the priesthood had an interest in tax collection (and to some extent, fell to its mercy). Priests would often solicit the help of higher clerical and lay authorities to lend their support in opposing the magistrates of the local community, who were sometimes tardy or reluctant to collect the revenues due to the priest in the required quality or quantity. In such cases, however, there was a genuine danger that church superiors or members of the community might charge the same priest with “excessive material greed”.⁹² This ambivalent situation obviously resulted in the relatively common image of the aging priest fatigued by unending struggles and finding solace only in the odd laconic remark he scribbled on the pages of the house history.

7. In return for his keep, God’s servant *provided services to his parishioners* following systems that varied with denomination, age and region.⁹³ In the Catholic

88 Beck, “Der Pfarrer,” 117–20; Beck, *Unterfinning*, 460–72; McManners, *Church and Society*, Vol. 1, 330–46. A pioneer work in Hungarian: Bárh, *Paptartás*.

89 Cp. Bárh, *Tiszaalpár*, 128–36; Bárh, “Statuta Generalia,” 151–53.

90 Beck, *Unterfinning*, 468–72; Seider, *Und ist ihme dargelichen worden*. The subject has barely been discussed in Hungary.

91 For more on this subject, see: Imreh, *A törvényhozó*, 105–8; Bárh, *Szentgyörgy megyéje*, 342–55; Bárh, *Tiszaalpár*, 131–35; Bárh, “Szokás és hatalom”; Kiss, *Egyház és közösség*, 165–69.

92 Cp. Beck, “Népi vallásosság,” 43.

93 On exchange relations, see: Beck, “Népi vallásosság,” 46.

context, the priests not only delivered the common sacraments (baptism, confessions, marriages and extreme unction), but also served the needs of the people through *sacramentalia*. In addition, serving mass, offering religious instruction, and holding various occasions of worship were the central tasks of the priesthood. Throughout most of the period we are looking at, the priesthood also supervised local schools.⁹⁴ On the Protestant side, services complete with sermons, religious instruction and rituals related to the turning points of the human life-cycle (baptism, confirmation, weddings, visiting the sick, and funerals) constituted the majority of a priest's duties.⁹⁵ Besides these common activities, members of the given community often demanded the priest to observe a number of local customs which the official clerical leadership regarded in varying lights, ranging from tolerance to prohibition. One good example is provided by the so-called "votive days", which were still common all over the Catholic regions of the country in the last century of feudalism,—usually certain days of the summer which were not only work-free, but also entailed processions complete with flags and large crucifixes, as well as a festive mass.⁹⁶ Customs of this kind, usually tied to some ancient vow dating back to the remote deep-strata of local tradition (often preceding or following a disaster) faced a new priest wishing to integrate into the community as an unquestionable circumstance. Anyone who resisted was at the risk of losing his acceptance. It was similarly risky if, mostly fueled by a zest for moral edification, a priest chanced to interfere too deeply with the tacit internal rules and mores of the locals. Communities were particularly intolerant if a priest threatened to wield what was practically his only weapon— withholding the sacraments and *sacramentalia* (mostly confession, the Eucharist or burial).⁹⁷ A priest who would preach from the pulpit against any of his parishioners (occasionally by name) acted in a way that was unforgivable in the eyes of the entire community.⁹⁸ If a priest should attack youthful gatherings and merriment, and condemn them with jealous rigor, he could easily become the target of collective hatred.⁹⁹

94 From the second half of the eighteenth century onwards, this circumstance resulted in a multitude of conflicts with the community of parents loath to send their children to school (particularly in the summer season). Cp. Bárth, "Szokás és hatalom."

95 On the complete system of services offered by priests, see: Delumeau, *Le catholicisme*; Scribner, *Popular Culture*, 1–16; Hartinger, *Religion und Brauch*; Freitag, *Pfarrer, Kirche*; McManners, *Church and Society*, Vol. 2; Hours, *L'Église et la vie religieuse*, 1–46; Hersche, *Muße*; Bárth, *Benedikció és exorcizmus*; Kádár, *Jezsuiták*, 303–58.

96 Cp. Beck, "Népi vallásosság," 43; Freitag, "Religiöse Volkskultur," 18–21.

97 Cp. Csáky, "A népi erkölcs," 440.

98 Cp. Beck, "Der Pfarrer," 137; Beck, "Népi vallásosság," 43; Sabeau, *Power in the Blood*, 114; Fazekas, "A győri egyházmegye," 122.

99 Cp. Rooijackers, "Ecclesiastical Power." On struggles of this kind experienced by János Fábian, vicar of Dolné Semerovce (Alsószemeréd), see: Csáky, "A népi erkölcs," 437–38.

Groups of the congregation or leading figures of the *communitas* fairly often resorted to the weapon of “telling on” their priest: letters of complaint would stream toward the church leadership in which they would itemize their grudges against the vicar (or chaplain or teacher, etc.). It would probably prove a most instructive exercise to subject the larger, coherent corpus of these letters to profound analysis, exploring not only the structural connections and argumentation techniques of these accusations but also their semantic field.¹⁰⁰ Even on superficial perusal, it is noticeable that the order and weight with which the community lists their grudges is determined by the clerical leadership’s supposed or veritable preferences. If, say, a local custom was violated or (as is most often the case) there was a purely material dispute in the background, the letters of complaint would start with the failings most sorely reprimanded by the church’s official leadership and the list of transgressions of its norms (e.g., the priest’s neglect of the sacraments or masses).¹⁰¹

8. In-depth investigations into the stories behind breaches of norm by priests could be highly instructive from other perspectives as well. As noted earlier, the church’s system of norms and the community’s expectations never fully coincided. There were priestly failings (of character) that would have provoked merciless punishment from above had they come to the top leadership’s awareness. But the community’s tolerance operated in a nuanced and relative fashion. As long as the priest concerned fell into the “good priest” category owing to a balanced flow of services and counter-services, people would usually turn a blind eye to their pastor’s minor frailties. If, however, for some reason this harmony broke, God’s local servant (or, as many people looked on him, “the servant of the village”)¹⁰² could easily find himself in the “bad priest” category, which was likely to have drastic consequences. Before long, the community would launch its letter of complaint, which would then result in a shower of the full inventory of all of his past failings up to the insult at the given moment. If he ever mounted the altar slightly tipsy, if he ever took part in a wedding party or some other public dance, if he ever left the village for a few days in order to visit his relatives, etc.—the community that now turned upon him would ruthlessly level against him charges of drunkenness, improper behavior with the ladies, or neglect of clerical service commonly referred to as “roaming about.”¹⁰³ The stereotype of the “bad priest” automatically attracted an entire string of moral and material grievances.

100 See e.g. Sabeau, *Power in the Blood*, 113–43.

101 Cp. e.g. Beck, “Der Pfarrer,” 120–24, 127; Fazekas, “A győri egyházmegye,” 122; Bárh, “Szokás és hatalom.”

102 Beck, “Der Pfarrer,” 143; Beck, “Népi vallásosság,” 45.

103 Cp. Kiss, *Egyház és közösség*, 178; Szőcsné Gazda, *Erkölc és közösség*, 161–65.

The “bad priest” who broke local norms was also a morally misguided individual and, most importantly, instantly lost the affection of his parishioners. *When order and balance are broken, this also jeopardizes the functioning of the sacral economy.*¹⁰⁴ The reason is that a breach of norms by the priest questions the effectiveness of his sacral activity. This effectiveness, in turn, was a key requirement for the life of the community—his ability was vital in intervening in the case of natural disasters (thunderstorms, hailstorms, floods, fires, etc.) or, similarly, with regard to exorcisms of a healing intent related to the practice of blessings and curses.¹⁰⁵ A priest losing his sacral effectiveness usually resulted in having his clerical role curtailed.¹⁰⁶ Since there was a rather keen competition in the market of magical service providers, parishioners could easily turn elsewhere to find solace against their troubles.¹⁰⁷ Needless to say, a bad priest does not deserve to be kept. As an eighteenth century letter of complaint put it in rather drastic terms, “It is we who keep the priest, so when we choose to, we can discard him.”¹⁰⁸ This example perhaps also retains some of the memory of the ancient Transylvanian Catholic tradition of elected priests and priest retention—a system which survived there up to the middle of the eighteenth century.¹⁰⁹ At this time, growing numbers of parishioners were already complaining about the breach of their rights. The deteriorating relationship between the priest and the community (occasionally after as many as ten years of peaceful coexistence) sometimes caused the community to turn their backs on the priest even if he was allowed to stay posted in the location. There were instances when a renegade group of parishioners would refuse to go to mass or, in extreme cases, converted to other denominations. On rare occasions, matters would reach the point of using physical violence against the priest.¹¹⁰

9. As indicated in the title and introduction to my paper, from an ethnographer’s point of view, relations between the *lower clergy* and *popular culture* represent an outstandingly important research aspect. Owing to the discussion of such key concepts as *local society* and *local community*, which we summoned above, we have already been addressing the subject area of those relations. Essentially, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most priests carried out their work

104 Cp. Beck, “Der Pfarrer,” 140–41; Beck, “Népi vallásosság”; Scribner, *Popular Culture*, 1–16; Labouvie, “Geistliche Konkubinate.”

105 Bárth, *Benedikció és exorcizmus*.

106 Cp. Beck, “Der Pfarrer,” 131–32.

107 Labouvie, “Wider Wahrsageri.”

108 Archives of the Archbishopric of Alba Iulia (Gyulafehérvár), documents of the Holy See, 33/1804. (box No. 31) Complaints against the vicar of Beu (Székelybő).

109 Imreh, *A törvényhozó*, 105–6; Bárth, *Szentgyörgy megyéje*, 330–32, 339–42.

110 On the prevalence of such cases in Bavaria Cp. Beck, “Der Pfarrer,” 113–15; Beck, “Népi vallásosság,” 44.

in an environment that may be considered to have conveyed popular/folk culture. Scholars employing the dichotomy of “elite” and “popular” culture as a matter of course, as well as critical pieces highlighting the difficulties of these concepts have emphasized the importance of the channels that mediate between the two cultural traditions (the “great” and the “small” tradition).¹¹¹ Channels of cultural mediation emerged most visibly in the early modern period when, in line with Burke’s well-argued theory, the two cultural traditions split away from each other.¹¹² The fact that priests and pastors active in the local communities play a mediating role has been obvious for a while, but in Hungary we are still lacking the concrete deep-drilling research to explore the essence of this process through case studies, although such a narrowed perspective promises to open hitherto unfathomed depths of cultural history. Here let me give the single example of an early-eighteenth-century vicar in the village of Sükösd in southern Hungary who entered more than a dozen blessing and curse texts into the local registry book in Hungarian, unaware of the large-scale cultural historical impact which the translation of the original Latin exorcisms into the local vernaculars and their “popular” use was to have, as evidenced by the verbal charms of the peasantry of the early modern period.¹¹³ A similarly good example of a mediating role is another eighteenth-century vicar of Ciucsângeorgiu who deployed the complete arsenal of exorcism available to the mediaeval church in the interest of a supposedly possessed woman, and considered her visions genuine.¹¹⁴

Mediation by the lower clergy is far from being a one-sided process: besides a top-down culture transmission, which is more common and easier to grasp, bottom-up processes are equally significant. It is enough to think of the church’s role in early modern common poetry or the two-way relations of church processions.¹¹⁵ The individual clerics involved in them, and the patterns of thought and behavior that play a part in them can only be discerned through biographies on a microscopic scale. It may be disputable in a methodological sense but is obvious from the perspective of content that these investigations can be connected to the various macro-historical factors. Whenever we examine this two-way cultural transmission, we should bear in mind that through their strivings, mentality, attitudes and activities, the lower clergy of any particular period were always closely connected to the paradigms of intellectual history, which allows us to broaden the interpretative horizon of specific narratives in the eighteenth–twentieth centuries.

111 Cp. Burke, *Népi kultúra*; Freitag, *Volks- und Elitenfrömmigkeit*; Beck, “Népi vallásosság.”

112 Burke, *Népi kultúra*, 245–85.

113 Bárh, *Benedikció és exorcizmus*, 69.

114 Bárh, “Exorcism and Sexuality.”

115 Küllös, *Közköltészet*; Tüskés and Knapp, *Népi vallásosság*, particularly: 320–32; Freitag, *Volks- und Elitenfrömmigkeit*.

10. While it is clearly impossible to list each of the periods and paradigms in question, I merely cite a few characteristic examples from two and a half centuries ago. It is a special consequence of the conditions in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Hungary that the crystallization of the various denominations was somewhat belated compared to countries to the west of us, happening mostly in the first two thirds of the eighteenth century, particularly in areas of former Turkish occupation. According to the sources available, during the period of confessionalization,¹¹⁶ the Catholic lower clergy acted as a branch of the local representatives of the clerical and, to some extent state power structures, also contributing to their construction.¹¹⁷ This was also the time when clerical structures around Protestant pastors were consolidated. The period is excellently suited for in-depth studies of the specific role the lower clergy of both denominational blocks played in the areas inhabited by mixed populations. This could perhaps help scholarship go beyond the often schematic and stereotyped premises of clerical history distorted by denominational bias.¹¹⁸

From the last third of the eighteenth century onwards, a new attitude among priests becomes increasingly palpable: they began to see themselves as reformers of local lay and religious habits and customs. The most noted such figure known to ethnography is Sámuel Tessedik (also a forerunner of ethnographic research), but in fact hundreds of priests were very similar in terms of their thinking and behavior.¹¹⁹ Most of them inevitably came into conflict with their parishioners, and, fortunately for the scholars of posterity, these clashes usually resulted in written material.¹²⁰ A close and meticulous examination of the documents on matters of this kind (letters, interrogation minutes, etc.) could contribute not only to the best possible reconstruction of events, but also, and this is in fact more important for our purposes, to understanding individual motivations.¹²¹ It remains a question how far we can stick the label of “clerical enlightenment” on the tangible shift in mentality in the period, but for want of a better label, this is what we are going to employ.¹²²

116 About the context associated with German historians, see: Reinhard and Schilling, *Die katholische Konfessionalisierung*; Reinhard, *Ausgewählte Abhandlungen*; Schilling, *Ausgewählte Abhandlungen*; Holzem, “Westfälische Frömmigkeitskultur,” 29–37; Molnár, *Mezőváros és katolicizmus*, 9–14; Kiss, *Egyház és közösség*, 21–24.

117 For a most instructive case study from Bamberg, see: Dippold, “Klerus.”

118 E.g. Peters, “Das laute Kirchenleben”; Brückner, *Frömmigkeit*, 324–82; Freitag, “Religiöse Volkskultur”; Holzem, “Westfälische Frömmigkeitskultur”; Molnár, *Mezőváros és katolicizmus*; Kiss, *Egyház és közösség*.

119 E.g. Beck, “Der Pfarrer”; Beck, “Népi vallásosság,” 53.

120 Beck, “Der Pfarrer,” 132–37.

121 Cp. an attempt in this direction: Bárth, “Szokás és hatalom.”

122 For more on this question Cp. Freitag, *Pfarrer, Kirche*, 346–54. From the ample literature of the connections between clerical enlightenment and the activity of the lower clergy among local

It requires further research, however, to clarify the points where we can detect the influence of Josephinism with regard to the lower clergy; it appears even more challenging to form a detailed view of the transition between internal reform inside the church and the early stages of clerical enlightenment.¹²³ These last questions are key to the analyzing the relations of the lower clergy and popular culture (particularly vernacular religion) in the eighteenth century.¹²⁴ Writing about this group, Sándor Bálint bemoans that the “outgrowths” of Baroque religiosity were nipped in the bud. He refers to the lower clergy with the somewhat simplistic term “the Josephinist priesthood” in what appears to be a reprimanding tone. The activity of this group was not in fact limited to a single decade but had commenced before 1780 and radiated its mentality well into the first decades of the nineteenth century. Not much later, this “distancing” from popular culture was actually the precondition for the same priesthood to take an active part in “discovering folk culture.”¹²⁵ We know from the history of ethnography that the lower clergy enthusiastically dedicated themselves to the goals of the *romanticist* period and played a remarkably serious role in providing descriptions of regions and their peoples, collecting folk poetry and creating the resulting positivist corpuses.¹²⁶ In relation to the emancipation efforts of the very peasantry which carried this folk culture, an area of special interest is the way in which the 1848–1849 Revolution and freedom fights were experienced at the grassroots levels and the ambivalent evaluation they provoked amongst the clergy.¹²⁷

communities, see: Goy, *Aufklärung*; Kimminich, *Religiöse Volksbräuche*; Schlögl, *Glaube und Religion*; Siemons, *Frömmigkeit im Wandel*.

123 Cp. Winter, *Der Josephinismus*.

124 Cp. Plongeron, *La vie quotidienne*; Brückner, *Frömmigkeit*; Freitag, *Volks- und Elitenfrömmigkeit*, 317–57; McManners, *Church and Society*, Vol. 2; Hartinger, “Aufklärung.”

125 Cp. Burke, *Népi kultúra*; Weiß, “Wandel von Rolle.”

126 Weiß, “Wandel von Rolle.”

127 While the participation of the lower clergy in the war of liberation has been fairly thoroughly researched in Hungary (Cp. Zakar, “Forradalom az egyházban?”, describing the reactions and attitudes of the parish priesthood is still waiting to happen. Particularly instructive from this point of view are the records of the various “*historia domus*” documents. The house history of the parish of Verőce includes a most deprecating record by the vicar: “One notable event of this year is the sad day of the 15th Martius, upon which day Lajos Kossuth and his fellow-conspirators declared ‘liberty, equality, fraternity’ with regard to Hungary—which subsequently led to most terrible internal warfare, pillage, destruction and various illegal cases of capturing and execution of people and other manners of cruelty, particularly against the R. C. priesthood (to the eternal disgrace of Hungarians). I mention this only briefly, hoping that Hungarian historians will describe the outbreak of these liberties along with all their sorry consequences in detail and in all their circumstances.” (Archives of the Parish of Verőce, *Historia Domus* III. 1800–1890). For the sake of accuracy, it must be added that the vicar’s view of the events was clouded over by a row that broke out in the village in the wake of the laws of April during

As regards issues of religious history, somewhat paradoxically, the question that most fascinated the best scholars among the ranks of the priesthood was the ancient faith of Hungarians. The line stretches from Dániel Cornides through János Horváth to Arnold Ipoly. In the late nineteenth century, Kabos Kandra testifies to well over a century of sustained interest in the matter.¹²⁸ In the area of folk poetry, a collection of outstanding value among many large textual corpuses was compiled by János Kriza, who coordinated the collecting activity of dozens of collectors in Transylvania, most of them Unitarian pastors and teachers. Exploring the motivations, education and cultural practices of people belonging to or close to the church within local societies is an imminent task. Lajos Kálmány, considered the greatest collector of folk poetry in the first decades of the twentieth century, also devoted some attention to the problem of our pagan religion.¹²⁹ Having served at a number of different locations and experiencing several conflicts with his superiors and the local communities, he was almost destined to conduct representative studies of the lower clergy of the age. His figure occasionally fell victim to re-interpretations by the history of scholarship in line with current political and ideological trends, e.g., when a priest working in one of the villages south of Szeged where the population had streamed out was made to appear as an agrarian-socialist (or even communist) figure because of his emphatic sensitivity to the poverty of the agricultural working class.¹³⁰ It is beyond doubt, however, that it would require separate studies focusing on individual cases to understand how ideas of *Christian socialism* appearing at the turn of the twentieth century trickled down into the social attitudes of the lower clergy active in the villages.¹³¹

It was in the interwar period that the movement of *domestic mission* appeared as a response to secularization, the second great challenge of the period, and was gradually gaining momentum in Hungary. The initiative of the domestic mission took place practically simultaneously in the Catholic and the Protestant denominational blocks, using such methods as were in harmony with their respective pastoral practices. Its primary goal, to consolidate religious practice on the level of local

which many of the local (liberated) serfs questioned the legality of free labour to be performed on the vicar's plough-lands. The vicar complained in a string of letters that the customary spring ploughing had been neglected. People in the village were repeatedly heard saying that "they owe no such thing anymore" and "they are not going to plough or do any other work for the priest ever again." (Archives of the Parish of Verőce, *Historia Domus* III. 1800–1890)

128 Cp. Voigt, *A magyar ősvallás kutatás*.

129 Ortutay, *Írók*, 277–89.

130 In this context, see the Preface to the volume *Történelmi énekek és katonadalok* [Historical Songs and Soldiers' Songs] published in 1952 from Kálmány's legacy and the "ideological" debate which unfolded in its wake (in the 1952 and 1953 issues of *Ethnographia*).

131 Gergely, *A keresztényszocializmus*.

society, relied particularly on local priests and pastors. Naturally, it could not be taken for granted that they would be active participants. Once again, the responses of the various clerical personality types would require local investigations.

What renders this period particularly exciting from an ethnographic point of view is that it was the age of great ethnographic research, when folk culture, still alive but in its famous “final hour”, was still accessible, but was also in a position to exert influence through the retroactive effect of academic constructs. It is no accident that this was also the period when the activist branch of ethnography, now an institutionalized discipline, also gained ground, particularly manifest in the emergence of the village research movement. Another emphatic example of the church focusing attention on the villages was religious ethnography, which emerged in the interwar period with an ulterior motive of a pastoral nature (“to understand village people’s customs and practices of piety”). The initial idea of this movement came from Germany, and in both cases it essentially relied on the lower clergy’s activity and pragmatically attuned scholarly interest.¹³² The change Eastern Europe’s political climate after World War II interrupted this wave of interest and radically rearranged the social force field on the local level. In brief, in the second half of the twentieth century, the dominant anti-religious ideology and the political dictatorship built on its foundations demanded that the clergy demonstrate markedly different attitudes and forms of behavior from those characteristic previously. These highly intriguing factors appear laudably from a range of different perspectives and in varying contexts in the post-communist historical, clerical historical and, more recently, ethnographic literature.¹³³ A nuanced and complex understanding of this subject area can provide work for social scientists interested in the field for decades to come.

The range of research aspects that I have flagged in my introduction based on my subjective research interests naturally represents only a narrow segment of the possible approaches to the lower clergy from perspectives of clerical history, historical ethnography, and anthropology. It is hoped that over the coming years and decades, more extensive research of the area will unfold in Hungary. As long as the above review of previous achievements and source types, theoretical key points, possible directions, and perspectives of research can contribute to those future efforts, my paper has attained its objective. Correcting possible errors and shortcomings will be the prerogative of future scholarship.

132 Cp. Bartha, *A hitélet*, 5–12.

133 Lovas Kiss, “Pap, közösség”; Schorn-Schütte and Sparn, *Evangelische Pfarrer*, 185–98.

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