

# Invest in Heaven

## The Religious Market of the Hungarian Parish in the Later Middle Ages

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“The friars [...] neglected the convent in terms of divine service as well as the number of friars so much, that only three, two or even one, occasionally not even one friar lived there. In this way, there was such a huge deficit of not only primes and other canonical hours, but holy masses, said or sung, too, that sometimes there was no mass celebrated at all [...]. If, by papal authority, the convent had not been provided for by introducing other friars of better life in place of the Augustinians, the convent would have totally and fatally devastated.”<sup>1</sup> The articles put against the Augustinian friars in the market town of Körmend were framed primarily in religious terms. They were designed to legitimize *post factum* the reform of the convent. In this case, the reform meant that the Augustinians were expelled and observant Franciscans took their place. In 1517, when the articles were formulated, observant Franciscan friars lived in the convent.<sup>2</sup>

The other set of arguments was morality, or rather immorality, which mirrored the familiar figure of the womanizing and drunkard friar, typical and central figures of contemporary common talk and literary genres of all sorts.<sup>3</sup> “In the taverns of the market town and villages the friars gorged and guzzled with peasants, just as they squabbled and quarrelled, and words often turned into fist-fights and blood [...]. They took bad women and women of ill repute into the convent and the refectory, where they conversed with them contrary to the rules

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<sup>1</sup> *The Register of a Convent Controversy*, ed. G. Erdélyi, *Collectanea Vaticana Hungariae*, Tom. I. Budapest-Rome 2006, 27.

<sup>2</sup> On the reconstruction of the process and related events see: G. Erdélyi, *Egy kolostorper története. Hatalom, vallás és mindennapok a középkor és újkor határán* [The Story of a Convent's Case. Power, Religion and Everyday Life at the Turn of the Middle Ages and Modern Times] Budapest 2005, 21–53.

<sup>3</sup> E. Fuchs, *Az újkor erkölcstörténete* [The History of Morals of Modern Times] 3 vols, Budapest 1926, I: The Renaissance; H. Horváth, ed., *Az apácafőkötő. Régi olasz novellák* [The Nun Hood. A Collection of Old Italian Short Stories] Budapest, 2003. On theological, legal and penitential literature see D. Elliott, *Fallen Bodies. Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages*, Philadelphia 1999, *passim*.

of religious life."<sup>4</sup> The agents of reform – Thomas Bakócz, the powerful cardinal-primate as well as local landlord, and his legal representatives – furthermore legitimized their interference in local affairs by referring to the interests of the laity. "Due to all this, parishioners were scandalized extremely, their devotion towards the church of the Virgin Mary dwindled and generated open contempt and disdain towards the clerical order and the clergy in general."<sup>5</sup>

The rhetoric of the agents of reform was echoed by the witnesses interrogated in the course of the process. They valued the Augustinians and their own reactions to the friars' behavior with similar phraseology. They represented the general attitude, the scandal, toward the friars as anxiety, anger and contempt. The discursive strategies of the agents of reform suggest that the reform of a convent could not be argued for with other than religious and moral themes. The narratives of the witnesses show that people understood and responded to this language and argumentation. Religion and morality were issues of great authority in the early sixteenth century. This study seeks to understand better the efficacy of the above rhetoric by reconsidering the nature of late medieval piety at parish level.

In order to make it more comprehensible to the modern mind what exactly worried the people – peasants and petty nobles, artisans, merchants – living in the market town and the neighboring villages, we must closely read the witness depositions. Their narratives suggest that first and foremost they called the Augustinians to account for not holding the prescribed divine services in the convent church. As rendered by one of the nobleman of Rádóc: "there were not as many services as there should have been in such an outstanding friary, due to which the people living here became so indignant, that many complained of how these magnificent buildings were lacking in friars and services."<sup>6</sup>

Considered that even without the friars, there were at least eight priests and numerous clergymen living in Körmend, then perhaps the indignation and despair of the town-dwellers is a little surprising. If they wanted to attend mass, they could have gone to the parish church dedicated to St. Elizabeth, or to the old parish church of St Martin in the north-western part of the town, where an altarist was employed. As the parish priest also employed a chaplain, and there were cleric students as well as a schoolmaster in the parsonage school, even public holy hours could have been sung at the laity's request.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, as well as the high altar, four side-altars and their altarists are also known. The question arises: why then parishioners were so attached to the friars and their services.

The article is divided into four main sections. First, I describe the religious supply in the town, focusing on the role of the parishioners in providing for the town clergy and the churches. It will be shown that there was an intense lay de-

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<sup>4</sup> Erdélyi, *The Register*, 28.

<sup>5</sup> Erdélyi, *The Register*, 28.

<sup>6</sup> Erdélyi, *The Register*, 97.

<sup>7</sup> An urban example for this lay demand: E. Mályusz, *Egyházi társadalom a középkori Magyarországon*, [Ecclesiastical Society in Medieval Hungary] Budapest 1971, 140.

mand for the clergy and the rituals performed by them, and parishioners were ready to invest financially in maintaining them, even if it involved considerable additional expenses obligatory church duties. Second, I seek to interpret their behavior as a symptom of the eucharistic and penitential devotional culture of the time, which was regulated in practice by the principle of intercession and the institution of good works. Then, in the third section, the potential offer of the mendicant convent will be mapped in the spiritual market of the town. In conclusion, I suggest that the divergent strands of late medieval religious culture generated a kind of “consumer mentality” of the sacred, which, in our specific case, meant that the religious rhetoric of the agents of convent reform was effective, since it coincided with the townsmen’s hope that the Observant friars would serve them with better and cheaper services.

In terms of Hungarian historiography, the early and splendid monograph of Lajos Pásztor on late medieval piety fulfilled the role of rehabilitating the state of Catholicism in the parishes in pre-reformation Hungary.<sup>8</sup> More recently, authors structure their narratives of late medieval piety along ritual lines. As a result, we have monographs on our hand dedicated to certain religious institutions: long-distance pilgrimages, pious donations, lay confraternities.<sup>9</sup>

Recently it has been comprehensively – and, to my understanding, convincingly – argued in an English context that late medieval piety was distinctive for its powerful image of the suffering Christ.<sup>10</sup> The image of Christ on the Cross occupied the central place taken in earlier centuries by Mary with the Child. In terms of religious behaviors and rituals, the Christocentric turn of late medieval piety is tangible in the growing emphasis and power of the ritual manifestations and manifold uses of the body of Christ – displacing from the focus the relics of saints –, among them mass attendance and the reception of the Eucharist. The eucharistic focus of late medieval piety is richly documented and discussed in the literature dedicated to the nature of late medieval piety.<sup>11</sup> Another strand of studies is dedicated to the sacrament of penance and the ritual of confession, primar-

<sup>8</sup> L. Pásztor, *A magyarság vallásos élete a Jagellók korában* [The religious life of Hungarians in the age of the Jagiellos] Budapest 1940. (reprint 2000).

<sup>9</sup> E. Csukovits, *Középkori magyar zarándokok* [Hungarian Pilgrims in Medieval Europe] História Könyvtár, Monográfiák 20, Budapest 2003. J. Majorossy, *Church in Town: Urban Religious Life in Late Medieval Pressburg in the Mirror of Last Wills*, PhD Dissertation, Budapest: Central European University, 2006. For confraternities see the latest article (with further literature): J. Majorossy, “A Krisztus Teste Konfraternitás a középkori pozsonyi polgárok életében,” [The Corpus Christi Confraternity in the life of the citizens of Pozsony’ (Bratislava)], in *Bártfától Pozsonyig. Városok a 13–17. században*, ed. E. Csukovits–T. Lengyel, Budapest 2005, 253–291. M. M. de Cevins, “Les confréries en Hongrie à la fin du Moyen Âge: l’exemple de la confrérie ‘Mere de Miséricorde’ de Bardejov (1449–1525),” *Le Moyen Âge* 106 (2000), 347–368.

<sup>10</sup> C. Peters, *Patterns of Piety: Women, Gender and Religion in Late Medieval and Reformation England*, Cambridge 2003, passim.

<sup>11</sup> The most comprehensive and recent work, with the earlier literature cited, on late medieval eucharistic piety: M. Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*, Cambridge 1991.

ily based on confessional manuals.<sup>12</sup> Due to the bottom-up perspective and problem-centered approach applied here, the eucharistic and penitential character of late medieval piety, traditionally represented separately, will appear here as an integrated whole.

### *The town's spiritual market*

The parish priest of Körmend seems not to have been chosen by the congregation, but the landlord presented his own candidate to the bishop of Győr.<sup>13</sup> Parish priest István arrived in the town at the time when Péter of Erdőd became its landlord, whom he called his patron at the hearing. Even so, maintaining the parish priest involved no insignificant financial burden for the parishioners. In simple parishes (not privileged) like Körmend, the incumbent received only a small part of the tithe – if he received any.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, paying him fell increasingly on members of the community, who owed him parochial tax and payment in kind or cash for liturgical services and special ceremonies (weddings, funerals, baptisms).<sup>15</sup> Over and above this, however, the majority gave voluntarily and generously, in the form of pious donations and legacies, to have masses said for family members' and their own salvation, or for the maintenance of the church and parish buildings (*pro fabrica*).<sup>16</sup> The latter was motivated not by ecclesiastical, but

<sup>12</sup> The classical work is N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation*, Princeton 1977.

<sup>13</sup> The nomination of the parish priest was not included in the town's letter of privilege (1244). Zs. Bándi, *Körmend a középkorban* [Körmend in the Middle Ages] Körmend 1987, 14. The *ius patronatus* could occasionally be separated from the right to nominate the parish priest in case the patron conveyed this right to the congregation. A. Kubinyi, "Plébánosválasztások és egyházközségi önkormányzat a középkori Magyarországon," [The nomination of parish priests and self-government of parish communities in medieval Hungary'] in A. Kubinyi, *Főpapok, egyházi intézmények és vallásosság a középkori Magyarországon*, METEM Könyvek 22, Budapest 1999, 270.

<sup>14</sup> On the contest between the middle and the lower clergy over the tithe in the diocese of Győr and elsewhere see Mályusz, *Egyházi társadalom*, 49–53. In the second half of the fifteenth century the chapter of Vasvár and of Győr litigated over a part of the tithe of the market town Vasvár and the surrounding villages. P. Kóta, *Regeszták a vasvári káptalan levéltárának okleveleiről* [Extracts of the diplomes of the archives of the chapter Vasvár (1130) 1212–1525] Vas megyei levéltári füzetek 8, Szombathely 1997, nos. 414, 605.

<sup>15</sup> On the incomes of parish priests see F. Kollányi, *A párbér jogi természetéhez* [On the legal character of 'párbér'] Budapest 1908. Mályusz, *Egyházi társadalom*, 138; I. Szabó, *A középkori magyar falu* [The Medieval Village in Hungary] Budapest, 1969, 200–204; L. Solymosi, "Egyházi és világi (földesúri) mortuarium a 11–14. századi Magyarországon," [Ecclesiastical and secular (manorial) mortuarium in Hungary in the 11–14th centuries] *Századok* 121 (1987), 547–562.

<sup>16</sup> Among the legacies of testators in Sopron the ones „zum paw” were the most frequent. K. Szende, "A soproni középkori végrendeletek egyház- és tárgytörténeti tanulságai," [The church- and object historical lessons of medieval wills of Sopron] *Soproni Szemle* 44 (1990), 269. On votive masses see below.

primarily by communal customs and expectations. In market towns and villages alike, these funds were administered – separately from the parish priest’s revenues – by churchwardens (*vitricus*) elected by the parishioners.<sup>17</sup> In Körmend, we know of such an official in the convent church: it was Pál Nagy who “because of his office and by the will of the townsmen, as he was the churchwarden,” directed the construction works of the convent, which was covered by donations of the people.<sup>18</sup>

This suggests that the town community probably laid claim on the administration of pious donations in the other churches, too. Therefore, the parish priest’s welfare, alongside the revenue from his farming, was dependent to a large extent on the fees in return for the performance of liturgical services. In turn, this depended to a large extent on lay demand for sacraments and votive masses. The employment of a chaplain (or chaplains) also depended to a great extent on the laity’s liturgical needs, sometimes even stipulations. Chaplains shared the fees for these services with their parish priest, which was regulated by contract. In Körmend, the employment of chaplains seems to have been regular. Father Illés of Morác, who was parish priest of Csákány village in 1518, had previously been employed as chaplain in Körmend.<sup>19</sup> When prior to this, Illés had been a student in the Körmend school, as he related in his deposition, “for want of friars, from time to time he had sung mass with his fellow students on high days in the convent.” Another onetime student, father Miklós of Szecsőd, parish priest in his native village, had similar memories about his student years. The career of Balázs of Gyarmat differed only slightly from his schoolmates: after his studies, he served in Körmend as schoolmaster before taking on his shoulders the pastoral care of the villagers of Szentkirály.<sup>20</sup>

As the schools in Körmend, parsonage schools in market towns and villages fulfilled several functions. On the one hand, the basic education of the children of Körmend and surroundings was carried out within its walls (reading, writing, arithmetic and religious instruction). The senior students, then, who were preparing for a career as priests, together with the head of the school, were assistants to the parish priest: while they shared with the chaplain a portion of the sum received for the ceremonies, their task was to enhance the grandeur of the divine services. Besides this, they rang the bells, and on feast days they organized mys-

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<sup>17</sup> Kubinyi, “Egyház és város,” 295.

<sup>18</sup> Erdélyi, *The Register*, 157.

<sup>19</sup> Erdélyi, *The Register*, 116. Joannes de Halogy, an altarist in Körmend in 1562 was previously also a chaplain. Haus- Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Familienarchiv Erdődy, Kt. 96, fasc. 8, no. 15. According to Mályusz, the living conditions of chaplains developed in the later medieval period due to the increase of lay liturgical demands. Mályusz, *Egyházi társadalom*, 142.

<sup>20</sup> Erdélyi, *The Register*, 116 (father Illés Moráci); father Miklós Szecsődi: “*Dicit etiam testis habuisse conversationem cum dictis fratribus, quoniam etiam ibidem cum aliis scolaribus propter defectum fratrum fuisset vocatus et cantasset missam.*” Erdélyi, *The Register*, 144. Father Balázs Gyarmati, Erdélyi, *The Register*, 135–139.

tery plays.<sup>21</sup> For instance, Ascension-day was made memorable in Körmend by their presentation of the ascension of Christ.<sup>22</sup> The cleric students, satisfying with a modest education and career, ended up as village priests of the region.

The altarists were also at the disposal of the parishioners. Five altarists ministered in Körmend, whose income was provided by donations from the laity. They operated in relative independence from the parish priest, under the patronage of their founder, who, however, may have entrusted either the parish priest or the congregation to nominate the incumbent. The foundation of altars and chapels presupposed the availability of considerable disposable (i.e. acquired as opposed to inherited) real estates.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, even the urban elite of free royal cities could seldom afford it,<sup>24</sup> while the beneficed altars in Körmend, with perhaps one exception, were founded by the magnate landlords of the town. We are best informed about the foundation of the altar to the Virgin Mary in St. Elisabeth parish church: Barbara of Szécs, the widow of landlord Bertold Ellerbach, in exchange for one tenth of the income from a Körmend and a Szecsőd mill, requested in 1485 that a mass to be said every day by the altarist. However, the parish priest may have retained for himself, since later on János Ellerbach, the son of Borbála of Szécs, summoned the parish priest to employ a priest for this benefice, supplemented with one tenth of the income from the other Körmend mill. The beneficiaries of the St. Catherine altar in the parish church (Albert of Nagyliszka) and of the altar to the dead in St. Martin's church (Lőrinc of Körmend), both heard at the interrogation, named Péter of Erdőd as their patron. These altars were therefore also founded by the landlord. No details survive, though, about the circumstances under which the Holy Cross and St. Nicholas altars were founded in the parish church.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> R. Békefi, *A népoktatás története Magyarországon 1540-ig* [The history of popular education in Hungary until 1540] Budapest 1906, 21–51.

<sup>22</sup> “*in oppido Kermend et in platea magna oppidi eiusdem in domo circumspecti Iohannis Zabo tunc iudicis dicti oppidi, ubi testis convenisset ad videndum representari per scolares et rectorem scole ascensionem Domini.*” Erdélyi, *The Register*, 134. Cf. J. Házi, *Sopron középkori egyháztörténete* [The ecclesiastical history of Sopron in the middle ages] Győregyházmegye múltjából VI, Sopron 1939, 240–243.

<sup>23</sup> For example a village with a mill and two meadows as an altarist benefice (in Illava, by the magnate Balázs Magyar, in 1489-ből) Mályusz, *Egyházi társadalom*, 147–149. For examples of chapel foundations see Pásztor, *A magyarság vallásos élete* 77, 90–91.

<sup>24</sup> The 80% of the medieval wills of the burghers of Sopron have donations *propter anime salutem*. Only a small part of them (18 persons) can afford the foundation of an altar, some of them for their own sons. The number of perpetual chantries (weekly masses) was higher than 81,6%). Szende, “A soproni középkori végrendeletek,”.

<sup>25</sup> On the altars to the Virgin Mary and to the Dead: Bándi, *Körmend a középkorban*, 71–72, 91, n. 120. On the incumbents of Holy Cross altar see: I. Gy. Tóth, *Jobbágyok, hajdúk, deákok. A körmendi uradalom társadalma a 17. században* [Peasants, Soldiers and Students. The social history of the Körmend manor in the seventeenth century] *Értekezések a Történeti Tudományok Köréből, új sorozat* 115, Budapest 1992, 140. On the altarist of the St. Nicholas altar see: Erdélyi, *The Register*, 45.

Urban communities and guilds of the free royal cities occasionally established a chapel and maintained them.<sup>26</sup> However, foundation of new benefices seems to have exceeded the financial means of the parishioners in a market town. Town-dwellers could augment their means of salvation by endowing existing beneficiaries with perpetual or temporal chantries.<sup>27</sup> In spite of this, it appears that the people of Körmend were not at all satisfied with their situation: alongside the eight priests and numerous clerical students, they insisted on the Augustinian friars' services, despite the financial burdens associated with this. In case they had managed to restore the convent community to its full size of twelve friars, the number would have amounted to around twenty priests (and numerous clerical students) for 650 town-dwellers. This results in a scale of one priest for every thirty two persons, which would have equaled the clerical provision of free royal cities in Hungary or even some western European cities.<sup>28</sup>

In general, it seems that the townsmen had a huge demand for the clergy and their liturgical services as well as a readiness to invest financially in maintaining them. Their indignation mixed with despair, when their expectations were frustrated and they waited in vain for the friars celebrating morning mass in the convent church.

### *The economy of the sacred*

For the late medieval mind, the manifestations of the sacred within the material world established the principle of order. Liturgical rites as well as the rites of passage of the individual's life-cycle regulated both the sacred and the social order.<sup>29</sup> Late medieval people could experience the sacred most regularly within the liturgy of the mass. In the mass, the emphasis fell on transubstantiation, the true presence of Christ in the host, which represented the most elementary manifestation of the sacred.<sup>30</sup> As the transformation could only be performed by a consecrated priest, the popular magical world and the Church's control were both evi-

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<sup>26</sup> The community of Pozsony (now Bratislava) raised a chapel to the honor of St. Sebastian at the time of the 1502 plague, and established a guild in the Franciscan church to maintain it. T. Ortway, *Geschichte der Stadt Preßburg*, II/4, Pozsony 1903, 526, 528. The city of Sopron in the second half of the fourteenth century also built a chapel, which was then maintained by the 'citizens' guild.' Házi, *Sopron középkori egyháztörténete*.

<sup>27</sup> For wills of town-dwellers and their pious donations see: Hungarian National Archives (=MOL) DL 46538; V. Bunyitay et al., eds., *Egyháztörténelmi Emlékek a Magyarországi Hitújítás korából* [Sources on Church History at the Time of the Reformation] 5 vols. Budapest 1902-1912, 1: no. 66.

<sup>28</sup> Sopron had 3,000 inhabitants with ten ecclesiastical institutions (with a Franciscan convent). Calculating with 100 clergymen (only in the parish church there were 20 side-altars) the ratio of clergy to laity was 1:30. Szende, "A soproni középkori végrendeletek," 270.

<sup>29</sup> The concept is constructed and discussed in detail by R. Scribner, "Cosmic order and daily life: sacred and secular in pre-industrial German society," in Scribner, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany*, London 1987, 2-16.

<sup>30</sup> Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 12-35, 83-107.

dent here. In the later Middle Ages, as historians argue, parishioners generally received the eucharist once a year, at Easter, after they had confessed.<sup>31</sup>

Official expectations in Hungary were conceived in accordance with the universal code: "during Lent, the people should be admonished to prepare for confession and the eucharist, so that everyone can confess and receive communion on resurrection day" – as the bishop of Veszprém directed his priests in 1515.<sup>32</sup> Our scanty data suggest that the Church registered what was in practice. During the days following the latest designated time for Easter confession (Holy Thursday), almost all (33 of the 36) the lay witnesses interrogated in course of the process in Körmend, declared they had "made confession and received the eucharist around Easter time." The constantly repeated remark of late medieval diocesan councils ("as the faithful usually receive the eucharist once a year") also suggest that the custom was to take communion once a year.<sup>33</sup>

It seems that confessions were heard during Holy Week, and according to local custom, the confessor was entitled to a *denarius* from men, and a loaf of bread from women.<sup>34</sup> People acted rationally: they went to confess as close to the time of receiving the eucharist as possible. The parish priests, though, had to exhort people to cleanse their conscience from their sins as early as possible during the period of Lent.<sup>35</sup> The diocesan council of Lőcse (Lečova, Slovakia) even provided the parish priests with the practical advice to ring the bells at an appropriate hour every day during the first half of Lent, thus inviting the people for confession. Early confession was urged first of all so that the priests could detect sins reserved for episcopal or papal absolution, a list of which was announced from the

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<sup>31</sup> The IV Lateran Council (1215) made Easter confession to the parish priest and communion obligatory. *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, ed. J. Alberigo et al., Bologna 1973, 245. On the practice of confession see: Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 70–82; V. Reinburg, "Liturgy and the laity in late medieval and Reformation France," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 23 (1992), 539–541.

<sup>32</sup> L. Solymosi, ed., *A veszprémi egyház 1515. évi zsinati határozatai* [The synodical decretals of the diocese of Veszprém in 1515] Budapest 1997, 98: line 1397–1399. The central role of communion is well reflected by the fact that the synod of Veszprém added the most detailed and lengthiest amendments to earlier decrees when describing the sacraments of confession and communion, and its liturgy in both kinds (!). (These amendments will be always signaled below in brackets). On earlier diocesan synods see: A. Szentirmai, "Die ungarische Diözesansynode im Spätmittelalter," *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, Kanonische Abteilung* 47 (1961), 266–292.

<sup>33</sup> Solymosi, *A veszprémi egyház*, 60: line 397–398.

<sup>34</sup> The general practice is revealed by the abuse of the greedy parish priest of Szentpéter and Nagyszentpál, who demanded more. Hungarian National Archives [MOL] Archive of Diplomes [DL] 14548 (1452). See moreover: Házi, *Sopron középkori egyháztörténete*, 334.

<sup>35</sup> See the exempla concerning confession in the sermon-models of Pelbartus de Temeswar. *Pomerium sermonum Quadragesimalium* [Pom. Quad.], I, 12, N. These sermons were designed for and used by the lower clergy in their preaching to the simple folk, therefore it makes sense to consider them as a source for the knowledge and behavior of the lower clergy.

pulpit each Sunday in Lent. In spite of this, many deferred confessing until the end of Lent. This is suggested by the fact that only those were punished who did not go to confession even then.<sup>36</sup>

Confession and communion, however, were not only the central sacramental rituals of the feasts commemorating the passion and resurrection of Christ. They were also inextricably linked to the individual's death. The practice can be approached via surviving records of extraordinary cases. It was the custom for the dying ill to bequeath something to the parish priest in exchange for hearing their confession. Certain insatiable parish priests tried to make a law out of the custom, and would not bury the dead until the heirs had paid out the usual amount. We read in a witness testimony commenting the abuses of the Nagyszentpál parish priest, that "due to the sensual idleness of the parish priest, one of the peasants departed from this world without either confession or the last rites", and because of such cases, the peasants are moving to other estates. The great significance attributed to last confession is also suggested by the fact that even in a legal report on a feud mentioned that an ill person who had been dragged out of bed, "departed without confessing his soul," whilst being threatened.<sup>37</sup>

However, the thesis which contrasts regular confession and communion widespread in the Modern Age with the annual practice in later medieval times must be slightly modified. Pilgrims setting out in crowds on the feasts of Christ, Mary and the saints, as well as on the anniversaries of the consecration of shrines, could only hope for indulgence for sins they had confessed. Partaking in the holy eucharist was also a precondition for indulgences.<sup>38</sup> Along with this, it is difficult to say how much the clerical admonition to repent and confess as often as possible above the obligatory minimum, struck a receptive chord among parishioners. The institution of private confessors, evidenced in a broad scale among the aristocracy and the urban elite, certainly allows for the assumption that many confessed frequently.<sup>39</sup> Even the Church itself, however, did not recommend regular participation in the eucharist, but just more than once, or perhaps two to four

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<sup>36</sup> C. Péterffy, *Sacra Concilia Ecclesiae Romano Catholicae in Regno Hungariae celebrata ab anno Christi MXVI usque ad annum MDCCXXXIV*, 2 vols., Posonii 1741-1742, 1: 193.

<sup>37</sup> MOL DL 14548; DL 14694 (1453); DL 105546 (1526). See moreover the expression of fear of sudden death, without taking the eucharist in manuscript prayer books. A. F. Molnár, "Két régi ima az oltáriszentségről," [Two old prayers on the eucharist] *Nyelvtudományi Értekezések* 148 (2000), 16-17.

<sup>38</sup> See the privileges of indulgence granted for churches under construction: MOL DL 15499 (1460), 14671 (1453). For further examples: Pásztor, *A magyarság vallásos élete*, 144-145. Csukovits, *Középkori magyar zarándokok*.

<sup>39</sup> Pelbartus de Temeswar, Pom. Quad., I, 35, *sermo de confessione frequenter facienda pro gratia amplianda*. Antoninus Florentinus (1389-1459), archbishop of Florence, in his very popular manual on confession (*Confessionale*), published also in Buda in 1477, recommended to confess monthly. *Régi Magyarországi Nyomtatványok* 3. [Old Hungarian Prints 3] For papal dispensations for private confessors: P. Lukcsics, *XV. századi pápák oklevelei* [Breves of fifteenth century popes] *Olaszországi Magyar Oklevéltár* 1-2, I-II, Budapest 1931-1938, passim.

times a year, on major feast days.<sup>40</sup> The ecclesiastical concern is well reflected by a decree of the council of Veszprém in 1515, admonishing the lower clergy to prevent people from taking the eucharist frequently through enhancing reverence for the host:

If we contemplate the greatness of the most holy body and the divine majesty, we could find nothing to evoke in us deeper reverence than this sacrament. In adoration and participation in this, we can fulfill the devotion necessary for our salvation; nevertheless, we may not omit anything of which we are capable by human effort. So let the priests be attentive and circumspect during administration of this sacrament and unification with the divine, that the irrational populace approach this sacrament, worthy of unconditional adoration, not only with piety, but also with fear. First and foremost, though, the priests must not present the living and heavenly bread to the Christian faithful broken and in pieces, but have them receive the eucharist in small, round form, which by care and devotion are more suitable for avoiding having women take communion too often.<sup>41</sup>

The final lines testify to the contemporary perception of women as being outstandingly devout.<sup>42</sup> As has been plausibly argued, the differentiation of religious practices of men and women was not, as traditionally assumed, recognition of an innate female religiosity. Gendered differences in ritual practice rather reflected the division of roles within the household, women having a considerable field of action in public religious rituals (e.g. rites surrounding birth and death).<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, the clerical concern rested on the traditional representation of women as lustful temptresses. Writers of pastoral advice summoned priests that women who came to confess often must be heard only briefly and publicly.<sup>44</sup>

Behind the clerically suggested attitude towards the eucharist of deference mixed with fear lie the manifold prescriptions that made it very difficult for parishioners to meet the requirements for worthy communion (strict fast and abstinence, perfect penitence and sacramental confession). As a result, ambivalence of desire and fear, of transmitting aid and – if taken unworthily – harm, surrounded the body of Christ. The process of popular appropriation of Church teachings generated a special cult. In the later middle ages, alongside the annual sacramental communion, the regular practice of spiritual communion became particularly widespread. While the Church attributed the effect of transmitting divine grace to the practice, parishioners expected first and foremost healing and protection

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<sup>40</sup> P. Browe, *Häufige Kommunion im Mittelalter*, Münster 1938, 28–29. Ecclesiastical literature stressed the importance of clerical communion on behalf of the laity. Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 50.

<sup>41</sup> Solymosi, *A veszprémi egyház*, 98: line 1388–1396 (amendment).

<sup>42</sup> C. W. Bynum, "Women mystics and eucharistic devotion in the thirteenth century," in C. W. Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption. Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*, New York 1992, 119–150.

<sup>43</sup> Peters, *Patterns of Piety*, 15–19.

<sup>44</sup> Florentinus, *Confessionale*, 24.

from looking upon the elevated host following the moment of transubstantiation.<sup>45</sup> It seems a reasonable argument that this kind of magical use of the eucharist influenced the layfolk to attend the ritual of the mass more frequently than expected by the Church on Sundays and feast days.<sup>46</sup> As becomes clear from the testimonies of the Körmend witnesses, attending mass formed part of people's daily routines: whoever came into town to attend to his affairs, would also drop into the convent church for mass. The zeal of nobleman Pál Nagy of Kemesmál is perhaps no exception: "he would go to the convent every day, when they were celebrating mass, and he visited the church regularly both before his being castellan and during his time, but also after he had been removed from office."<sup>47</sup> Of course, many just waited for the elevation of Christ's body, as Church ordinances forbidding premature departure would suggest.<sup>48</sup>

Alongside the body and the passion of Christ, late medieval devotional culture focused on the concept of purgatory. From being a transitional state between death and eternal bliss, by the fifteenth century it had transformed into a "third place" between this world and the next.<sup>49</sup> With the stress on the sinfulness of mankind in the face of Christ, the gulf between the human and the divine has increased.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, only those very few of saintly lives had no need to pay for their venial sins in purgatory and could get straight into the presence of the Lord. But for the majority, the purgatory was a place of transitional suffering. All who died in a state of venial sin, or who forgot to confess something, or who had not obeyed the commandment of love, had to stand the pains of the "cleansing fire"; however, if their mortal sins had been forgiven in confession and had received the eucharist on their deathbed, they could also be confident of their eventual salvation.<sup>51</sup> The underlying idea in this triple scheme - hell, heaven and purgatory - was, of course, the passion of Christ, which made the reconciliation of mankind with God, in other words, the redemption from original sin at all possible.

<sup>45</sup> Molnár, "Két régi ima," 26-28 (prayers for elevation). For the liturgy of elevation: Solymosi, *A veszprémi egyház*, 99-100: line 1432-1439 (amendment). Ch. Caspers, *The Western Church during the Late Middle Ages: Augenkommunion or popular Mysticism?*, Bread of Heaven. Customs and Practices surrounding Holy Communion. Essays in the History of Liturgy and Culture, ed. C. Caspers-G. Lukken-G. Rouwhorst (*Liturgia Condenda* 3), Kampen, The Netherlands 1995, 83-97; Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 62-73; Pásztor, *A magyarság vallásos élete*, 72.

<sup>46</sup> E. Duffy, *Stripping off the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580*, New Haven 1992, 95-102.

<sup>47</sup> For others testifying to the daily attendance of mass see: Erdélyi, *The Register*, 78-79, 108, 130.

<sup>48</sup> Pásztor, *A magyarság vallásos élete*, 71-72; Solymosi, *A veszprémi egyház*, 72: line 716-720 (amendment).

<sup>49</sup> J. Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, Aldershot 1984, especially 133-176.

<sup>50</sup> Peters, *Patterns of Piety*, *passim*.

<sup>51</sup> Duffy, *Stripping off the Altars*, 338-354 (The Pains of Purgatory); P. de Temeswar, *Pomerium de Sanctis, Pars Hyemalis*, 8: discussing the Last Judgement says that those of saintly life reach heaven at once, and only those end up in hell like Herod, Pontius Pilate and Judas and the like, meanwhile the rest of the souls suffer in Purgatory.

Humans could partake in the infinite treasure of merits gained by Christ on the Cross by their good works.<sup>52</sup> The most effective proponents of the religious culture organised around penance and good works, the pains of purgatory, the passion of Christ and the eucharist were the mendicant orders. Friars appeared in the early thirteenth century, the same time when the duty of annual confession was decreed to all Christians, and new teachings on purgatory and good works were formulated. As confessors and preachers primarily in urban settings, as well as instructors of the parish clergy as authors of pastoral manuals, they must have played a great role in spreading new teachings. As they were dependent on almsgiving, they must have been not only capable, due to their higher educational standards, but also interested in emphasizing the value of good works.

The three basic forms of satisfaction for temporal sins as well as of meritorious works (as also proclaimed by Franciscan preachers in Hungary), were - in order of their benefit - almsgiving, prayer or attending mass, and fasting or more generally abstinence.<sup>53</sup> As the opportunity for making satisfaction for temporal sins ended with death, to fasten the progress of the soul in purgatory was incumbent on family, relatives and friends, who could pray and have masses said for the souls of the departed, and in return the justified could intercede for the worldly happiness of the living. Although the Church emphasized the significance of personal life, good works and repentance in the economy of salvation as opposed to intercession,<sup>54</sup> the notion of purgatory and good works reinforced the institution of intercession.

The meritorious effect of good works functioned both ways: the poor who received alms, the dead helped by the masses, or the clergymen heaped with donations had to pay back their debts by further prayers for their benefactors.<sup>55</sup> The principle of reciprocity and intercession also prevailed in a broader sphere: Christians who founded a chapel or a chantry did not only have a share in the meritorious effects of the masses said by the altar priest, but also of the prayers of the congregation. By a new foundation the means of grace for the whole congregation increased significantly: they had gained a stipendiary priest, to whom they themselves could also give further commissions, and by attending his masses

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<sup>52</sup> Schütz, *Dogmatika. A keresztény hitigazságok rendszere* [Dogmatics. The System of Christian Truths of Belief] 2 vols, Budapest 1937, 2: 572-577 (indulgence) and 698-705 (Purgatory); R. N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215-c. 1515*, Cambridge 1995, 37.

<sup>53</sup> P. de Temeswar, *Pom. Quad.*, I, 48, *sermo de partibus satisfactionis et de pervalore earum ac dispensatione*, P. See moreover Pásztor, *A magyarság vallásos élete*, 18-19.

<sup>54</sup> P. de Temeswar, *Pomerium de Sanctis, Pars Hyemalis*, 3, L: "all Christians will be finally judged according to good works of piety"; *Pom. Quad.*, I, 5, U: "God has more mercy on a true penitent than for the intercession of all saints. If someone in the state of mortal sin refuses to confess his sins, God will not forgive him, even if asked by the Virgin Marx and all saints."

<sup>55</sup> P. de Temeswar, *Pom. Quad.*, I, 48, *sermo de partibus satisfactionis et de pervalore earum ac dispensatione*, U: "alms have the merit of prayer and fasting [...], deserves more grace, since the one, who receives it, is obliged to pray for the benefactor."

they could promote their earthly and heavenly welfare alike.<sup>56</sup> A married couple, citizens of Nagybánya, "attempting to avoid the final hazard to their souls, the end of their lives, by means of good works", in their testament dated 1475 made the following provision: the chaplain they have employed should hold a mass every Thursday in honour of the Body of Christ, and in such a way that "the miraculous sacrament [...] be graciously presented to the gaze of the parishioners", and "the miraculous body of Christ' be carried round in a procession to be held once a month preceding the mass."<sup>57</sup> The chantry's beneficiaries were the altarist and the magistrates of the city, Kassa (Košice, Slovakia), which suggests that it was a contribution to the funds and ceremonies of the Corpus Christi confraternity active in the city. Most of the confraternities organized by townsmen in late medieval Hungary dedicated themselves to the cult of the body of Christ:<sup>58</sup> Besides their regular Thursday masses and processions, they played an important role in augmenting the glamour - and the intercessory powers - of the Easter liturgies and of Corpus Christi Day of the whole parish.<sup>59</sup>

### *The friars' spiritual offer*

Besides the merits deserved by almsgiving to the Augustinians, the daily ceremonies in the convent which supplemented the official high masses of the parish church would have constituted an enormous advantage. The presence of the friars provided a better opportunity for festive masses with singing and more numerous assistance, which was considered by the laity to be more efficacious. Moreover, with the friary, the clerical capacity needed for votive masses and anniversaries paid by parishioners increased significantly. This was important, since officially it was prescribed that a priest could perform only one mass a day.<sup>60</sup> The votive masses at the side-altars or those celebrated every weekday morning in the convent, in comparison with the Sunday meetings held in the parish church, constituted a special experience in yet another regard: whilst the latter were community observances, the former with their simple ceremony and few participant could perhaps more easily become occasions for an encounter between the individual and God.<sup>61</sup>

Parishioners particularly depended on mendicant friars for an increase in the secular grandeur and other-worldly effectiveness of the liturgy in memory of the

<sup>56</sup> On C. Burgess, *The Parish, the Church and the Laity in Late Medieval Bristol*, The Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, Local History Pamphlets 80, Bristol 1992, 4-6.

<sup>57</sup> Békefi, *A népoktatás története*, no. 141.

<sup>58</sup> For a list of Corpus Christi confraternities see: Pásztor, *A magyarság vallásos élete*, 23-27.; A. Kubinyi, "Vallásos társulatok a késő középkori magyarországi városokban," [Religious confraternities in late medieval Hungarian cities], in A. Kubinyi, *Főpapok, egyházi intézmények és vallásosság a középkori Magyarországon*, METEM Könyvek 22, Budapest 1999, 346, 350.

<sup>59</sup> Majorossy, "Corpus Christi," 268-272.

<sup>60</sup> Pásztor, *A magyarság vallásos élete*, 75-93; N. Szijártó, "Egy középkori misekönyvünk," [A medieval Hungarian Missal] *Theologia* 3 (1936), 162-169, 167; Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 50.

<sup>61</sup> For a similar interpretation see Duffy, *Stripping off the Altars*, 109-116, 125-127.

dead and other post mortal ceremonies. Paradoxically, it was for this particular reason that the friary in Körmend stood empty from time to time: according to András of Csut, for instance, they would be left without a mass in the town, when “the friars were invited to other churches to pay final respects to the departed by celebrating the funeral ceremonies.” Father Lőrinc of Körmend also related that the “friars or a friar would be invited to the villages together with secular priests to bury the dead, or to hold a memorial,” and the altarist must have gone with them at such times.<sup>62</sup> The cemetery by the convent indicates that many chose to be buried there. Miklós Borsos, a peasant from village Sál, explained to the judges that he went to the convent because he brought a small donation to the Körmend friars to have a mass said – perhaps to shorten the sufferings of some departed relative on the anniversary of his death.<sup>63</sup> It is comprehensible, therefore, that it was a cause for indignation when the Augustinians slept through the time for morning mass and got up at noon, as witnessed by the fellow students of Benedek Sibrik, or at times they did not celebrate mass for days on end. When Ferenc of Nádasd found neither friar nor mass in the convent, he was told by town-dwellers that he might even have waited for a week in vain.<sup>64</sup>

A further duty of the friars was to pray for parishioners at their public holy hours, in contrast to the private offices performed by the parish clergy. The Augustinians friars – as witnesses argued – neglected these offices too. Their laxity, beside the recurring complaints of the people, is demonstrated by the case of friar Blasius, who drank away his breviary containing the daily order of prayers in the village tavern of Ják. The rare pledge, worth several florins, had to be redeemed from the innkeeper by the prior – as a petty noble from village Rádóc recalled the story.<sup>65</sup> The parishioners were worried about the negligence of the holy hours, since they wanted to participate in these, especially in the early morning and evening prayers. The castellan of Körmend said for example that “he often visited the convent to hear mass, but he never participated in the morning hour, but sometimes in their vespers.”<sup>66</sup> The testimonies of witnesses altogether reflect that the parishioners often visited the convent. They spontaneously spoke about the buildings in detail: mentioned the belfry, the ambulatory, the organ-loft, kitchen, the inner court, the upper house next to the friars’ rooms.

Their knowledge of convent space reflects beyond ritual activities informal uses of space. “He had met the friars very often in their convent for different reasons [...], sometimes to hear mass or canonical hours, other times to converse and

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<sup>62</sup> Erdélyi, *The Register*, 166–167 (András Csuti), 172 (Lőrinc Körmendi). P. Berta, “A túlélők teendői. A posztmortalis szolgálatok rendje későközépkori városaink vallásos közösségeiben,” [The obligations of survivors. The order of post mortal service in late medieval Hungarian urban congregations] *Századok* 132 (1998), 782.

<sup>63</sup> Erdélyi, *The Register*, 50.

<sup>64</sup> Erdélyi, *The Register*, 76 (Benedek Sibrik), 125 (Ferenc Nádasdy). Simon Rosos, citizen of Körmend also „knew for sure that in different periods though, but the friars did not celebrate mass for many days in the convent church.” Erdélyi, *The Register*, 152.

<sup>65</sup> Erdélyi, *The Register*, 96.

<sup>66</sup> Erdélyi, *The Register*, 108.

eat together with the friars" – as an old and well-to-do citizen, Simon Rosos remembered.<sup>67</sup> His convivial relationship with the friars derived from his status of *confrater*. In other words, he was a member of the confraternity of the Augustinians. Another citizen, Pál Nagy also declared at the interrogation that "since he was their *confrater*, he often visited them in their convent [...] in order to hear mass and to manage their affairs."<sup>68</sup> The admission of a layperson into a mendicant confraternity brotherhood usually meant a peak of a longstanding relationship, manifested in pious donations or patronage of a house or order. Lay-brethren, then, shared in the merits of the friars' liturgical acts, and had the right to be buried in the convent. This is another example of lay religious activity in spheres earlier limited to the clergy, which was practiced – beyond the aristocracy – by urban and market town elites.<sup>69</sup>

The presence of the Augustinians provided the parishioners with the opportunity to choose whether to go to their parish priest for confession,<sup>70</sup> or to one of the friars. Several of the interrogated witnesses took advantage of the latter choice. Lukács Mindszenti of Hollós, earlier castellan of Körmend, related that "he would keep company with the Augustinian friars from time to time, sometimes dropping in to talk to them, at other times to make a confession." Miklós Pondor from the nearby village of Nádálja also recalled that "sometimes he attended mass in the convent, in other words, when there was mass, and sometimes he went to make his confession there too."<sup>71</sup> I would suggest that they were both talking about occasions above the obligatory, annual confession. Their confession seems not to have been reckoned any more extraordinary than going to mass, or popping into the convent in the afternoon for a little chat. The complaint was heard several times at the hearing, that friar Anthonius would hear confessions even though he was not yet ordained.<sup>72</sup> This reinforces the assumption that the parish clergy could not satisfy the penitential needs of the laity. Their voluntary confessions on weekdays under quiet and peaceful conditions, cannot be compared with the prescribed confession as a condition of participation in the collective Sunday communion in the scramble of Holy Week, performed in the sight of all. In this respect, the mendicant convent in the town carried the poten-

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<sup>67</sup> Erdélyi, *The Register*, 153.

<sup>68</sup> Erdélyi, *The Register*, 157.

<sup>69</sup> For more examples see: F. Karácsonyi, Szt. Ferencz rendjének története Magyarországon 1711-ig [The History of the Order of St Francis in Hungary until 1711] 2 vols, Budapest 1922–1924, 345, 351, 355, 357, 381, etc.; K. Szovák, "Meritorum apud Dominum fructus cumulatorum. Megjegyzések a 14. század főúri vallásosságához," [Notes on fourteenth century aristocratic religiosity] in R. Várkonyi Ágnes *Emlékkönyve*, ed. P. Tusor, Budapest 1998, 82.

<sup>70</sup> The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) prescribed confession to the parish priest, but added: "if someone has a good reason to confess his sins to someone else, he should first ask and receive permission from his own priest." *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, 245.

<sup>71</sup> Erdélyi, *The Register*, 108 (L. Mindszenti), 112 (M. Pondor).

<sup>72</sup> Erdélyi, *The Register*, 120, 136, 159, 174, 189.

tial of individual and voluntary spheres of lay devotion and religious activity beside the official, communal and prescribed forms of parish piety.

The maintenance of preaching positions or the provision of occasional preachers, in order to supplement the Sunday and feast-day sermons of the parish priest, was a considerable financial burden for congregations. The Augustinian convent and friars in Körmend, provided a good potential for this service at a very low price.<sup>73</sup> The parishioners of Körmend, in quite an exceptional manner, chose an altar, or maybe even founded one for their confraternity in the Augustinian's church, rather than in the parish church. On the one hand, their choice may reflect the community's desire for an independent sphere of religious action from the parish priest. Autonomy and responsibility went hand in hand: the members of the confraternity collected money and restored the convent church themselves, instead of giving it to the negligent friars.<sup>74</sup>

On the other hand, their choice was very practical: the citizens attempted to exploit the excess of priests offered by the convent. The employment of the friars for the masses and funeral ceremonies of the confraternity was probably a good deal cheaper and perceived as more efficacious.<sup>75</sup>

### Conclusion

While Mary and the saints were the celestial intercessors for men in the scheme of salvation, the ordained priesthood served as intercessors on earth. In the formulation of contemporary synodical books: "Priests are intercessors between God and Man, preaching to the people the commandments and turning to God with the supplications of the people."<sup>76</sup> In the later middle ages, the intercessory role of the clergy intensified in course of the eucharistic turn of devotional culture, since they were defined as the only legitimate administrators of the eucharist.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, the anger against the Augustinians in Körmend was primarily aimed at the intercessors who neglected their duties, because this way the friars disturbed the economy of the sacred, jeopardizing the spiritual and physical security of the community. What is more, they did this at a time when parishioners wanted to take part in the duties of the clergy in ever more varied forms (masses, canonical hours, confraternities) in order to make a share of their merits. The friars' conduct disappointed the people all the more as the mendicant convent should have rather provided them with serious advantages. The rivalry of a mendicant convent

<sup>73</sup> For urban preaching positions see Mályusz, *Egyházi társadalom*, 317–319. Reference to the preaching of the Augustinians in Körmend: Erdélyi, *The Register*, 110.

<sup>74</sup> The restoration work was mentioned by several witnesses, for example: Erdélyi, *The Register*, 157.

<sup>75</sup> The confraternity in Körmend was unknown before. Cf. Kubinyi, "Vallásos társulatok," 346.

<sup>76</sup> Solymosi, *A veszprémi egyház*, 63: line 477–480.

<sup>77</sup> This process is described as a strategy of clerical elites in order to maintain authority over the access to the sacred by C. Zika, "Hosts, Processions and Pilgrimages: Controlling the sacred in fifteenth-century Germany," *Past and Present* 118 (1988) 25–64.

with a parish church for their favors and investments could have created the opportunity of choice.

The increased role of the ordained clergy in the economy of the sacred ran opposite the growing autonomy of individuals and communities in spheres of religion. The profound pastoral and jurisdictional changes within the Church in the twelfth-thirteenth centuries came fully to fruition at the parish level – with the mediation of mendicant friars – in the generations immediately before the protestant reformation. The religious and moral rhetoric of the agents of reform in Körmend functioned well, since religion was not any more the responsibility of the clergy, but of all. People readily invested – financial offers counted as acts of good work – in maintaining a stipendiary clergy and consumed on grand scale their religious rituals, but also brought to book for it. Liturgy had thus become a service of a fixed price.

The Augustinians words also reflect this kind of “consumer mentality”. The parish priest of Körmend, in accord with other witnesses, remembered as follows: “He has often scolded the friars for neglecting their convent and for their scandalous way of life, but they answered that they were not adequate in themselves to amend these things because they were getting so little alms as would not sustain enough of them to live there to be able to administer all offices and canonical hours.”<sup>78</sup> Lay and clerical interests and interpretations strengthened one another. The clergy was less eager to serve without substantial dotations, the laity paid only for good services. In Körmend, the townsmen hoped that the Observant friars would serve them with better and cheaper services.

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<sup>78</sup> Erdélyi, *The Register*, 160.