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# A Failed “Spin-Off”: The Hungarian Catholic League of Nations of America



## ABSTRACT

During the second half of the 19th century in the majority of *Europe* decreased the social and political influence of the churches. *In Hungary* the Catholics refused to just stand by and watch the unfavorable developments. An essential part of their struggle was strengthening relations between the clergy and the congregations by establishing religious social organizations. One of such was the *Catholic League of Nations*. This organization was generally considered to be a success story by Hungarian Catholics. The success was probably what partially inspired the idea that a similar organization should be established among the Catholic Hungarians living in the *United States of America*. *In Hungary* they had unreasonably high hopes about the potential of the economic, political, and national renewal of their fellow nationals who emigrated to the New World. Yet, as time went on, they were left to desperately witness their compatriot's accelerating spiritual detachment from the old country.

## KEYWORDS

Roman Catholic Church, Catholic League of Nations, social associations, American Hungarians

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## INTRODUCTION

During the second half of the 19th century, the role religion played in everyday life decreased in the majority of Europe, thus reducing the social and political influence of the churches. In Hungary, due to the denominational distribution of the population, this phenomenon affected the *Roman Catholic Church* the most. During the establishment of the liberal state, the government curtailed the secular influence of the churches with laws at the end of the 1890s. In Hungary, while there was no culture war similar to that in, for example, Germany, Catholics still refused to just stand by and watch the unfavorable developments. An essential part of their struggle was strengthening relations between the clergy and the congregations by establishing religious social organizations. One of such was the *Catholic League of Nations*, an idea first proposed in 1894.<sup>1</sup> The national organization was finally established in 1907, although by 1906, local groups were already forming en masse. The statutes of the *Catholic League of Nations* were approved by the Minister of the Interior on 28 January 1908.<sup>2</sup> The founders could draw inspiration from several successful European examples. Similar movements developed in the 1880s and 1890s in the Netherlands and Germany, as well as during the early years of the 20th century, for example, in Austria, Italy, and Switzerland. The aim of the Hungarian *Catholic League of Nations* was to promote, protect, cultivate, nurture, and organize the religious, moral, economic, and social developments of the people, and to enforce Catholic ideas in public and private life against anti-religious and anti-government aspirations.<sup>3</sup> The *League of Nations* held meetings, offered courses, printed pamphlets and newspapers, and established information offices throughout the country. It also received political help during its foundation. The organization was carried out with the support of the *Catholic People's Party*, and the *League's* first leaders were chosen from amongst their ranks as well.<sup>4</sup> The organizational efforts caused a dramatic surge in numbers for the members of the *League of Nations*. Alas, the statistics are largely known from the association's own reports, which is cause for caution. Although the *League of Nations* existed until 1946, it gradually lost its importance after 1919, despite repeated attempts to reform it. Despite that, the *League of Nations* was generally considered to be a success story by Hungarian Catholics, and its merits were also recognized by the Hungarian church leadership. The initial success was probably what partially inspired the idea that a similar organization should be established among the Catholic Hungarians living in the *United States of America*. Two attempts were made when the influence of the Hungarian *League of Nations* was still at its peak. However, the third and last attempt came only in the 1920s. There is little to no doubt that the American Hungarian Catholic priests took the idea of an *American League of Nations* with them either directly from the motherland, or they came up with the idea upon seeing the events unfold there. They also received some moral support from Hungary for the foundation. Where at first, they had unreasonably high

<sup>1</sup> *Religio* 21 November 1894.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of the Interior Regulation 9.564/1908.

<sup>3</sup> BEKE 2018.

<sup>4</sup> <http://lexikon.katolikus.hu/K/Katolikus%20N%C3%A9psz%C3%B6vets%C3%A9g.html> (11 May 2023.)

hopes about the potential of the economic, political, and national renewal of their fellow nationals who emigrated to the New World. Yet, as time went on, they were left to desperately witness their compatriot's accelerating spiritual detachment from the old country. Indeed, the association of the American Catholic Hungarians was nothing more than a failed "spin-off" for several reasons.

## I.

The Hungarians who came to the *United States* did not primarily turn to religion, but to practical solutions when developing their quality and safety of life. First, they established peer support and self-help groups on a regional-national basis. Since the first decade of the 20th century, various associations of local groups had formed, but only a small proportion of them were formed on religious grounds.<sup>5</sup> Thus, what can be established right from the start, as indicated by the data provided by *Béla Várdy*, is that it was the nationality, rather than the religious bond, that was the primary factor in the foundation of the association.<sup>6</sup>

Contrary to the situation in the motherland, Hungarian Catholics had significant difficulties organizing themselves in the *United States*. For example, while the *American Hungarian Reformed Federation*, founded in 1896, became the third largest Hungarian association by 1920, a Catholic organization of a similar size had not even emerged yet.<sup>7</sup> *The American Hungarian Catholic League* was formed much later, in 1945.<sup>8</sup> Within the Hungarian parishes, various congregations dedicated to Mary, altar and other religious associations kept on emerging, as well as social and women's clubs and scout groups. However, these were mostly bound to their own parishes, and the framework of their operation could not be physically extended. The same was true for small Catholic newspapers.<sup>9</sup> Organizing was difficult even in *Cleveland*, the city that held the largest Hungarian Catholic community. This is illustrated by the case of the *Hungarian Catholic Association of America*. Although many different sections of the organization, established in 1894, operated throughout the Diocese of Cleveland in the 1910s-1920s, it could not expand its boundaries. In fact, it was constantly struggling with internal crises and only found contact with more distant Hungarian communities by the 1940s.<sup>10</sup> This all helps showcase that the *Catholic League of Hungarians in America* was attempted to be established under rather unfavorable conditions and during a very unfortunate period. The blame, however, should not rest with the initiators, as their aim was specifically to remedy the unfavorable situation.

## II.

The works mentioning the *Hungarian Catholic League of America* count two foundation attempts. In actuality, there were three, although there is no doubt that data is severely lacking on the first one. What little there is must also incite some criticism as it comes from a strongly anti-church

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<sup>5</sup> VÁRDY 2000.

<sup>6</sup> VÁRDY 2000.

<sup>7</sup> VÁRDY 2000.

<sup>8</sup> TÖRÖK 1978.

<sup>9</sup> SHIPMAN 1910.

<sup>10</sup> TÖRÖK 1978.

source. *Előre*, edited in New York, was a communist, or at the very least radically left-wing, newspaper of the American Hungarian working class. More than once, it deemed the attempts to establish the *League of Nations* to be an American Hungarian clerical “*Okhrana*”.<sup>11</sup> In 1919, the newspaper claimed this clerical “*Okhrana*” to be controlled by white terrorists from Hungary.

In August 1916, *Előre* reported that Hungarian Roman Catholic parish priests in the Midwest founded the *Catholic Hungarian League of Nations in America* at *Youngstown* Parish in *Ohio*. The report fiercely attacked the initiative, worrying about the state of denominational peace. At the same time, it criticized the newspaper called *Szabadság* in *Cleveland*, which welcomed the creation of the *League of Nations*. *Előre* also cited the goals of the organization from *Szabadság*. The association “(...) wishes to serve the Catholic Hungarians by means of social, cultural and public education. Since ecclesiastical organization also facilitates the organization of the Hungarian people and the service of their general duties, the Hungarian character of the Association emerges not only in the name but also in the goals, this important movement of the Roman Catholic Hungarian parish priests will also benefit American Hungarian public life.” The left-wing newspaper summarized its opinion on the development in one sentence: “Business! That’s all!”<sup>12</sup>

What had been reported by *Előre* is not enough to compare the goals of the organization with the statutes of the *Catholic League of Nations* in Hungary. From the few of the objectives presented in the newspaper, as well as from the shared names, it can be assumed that the American Hungarian Catholic clergy kept the domestic principles in mind. *Előre* mentions a priest named *Várlaky*, sans a first name, as the spiritual leader behind the initiative. It could be *Sándor Várlaky*, who was a parish priest in *Youngstown* at that time.<sup>13</sup> *Előre* also assumed that the foundation of the *League of Nations* was in part a response to the action of *Viktor Kubinyi*, a Catholic priest from *South Bend*, who had proclaimed himself a bishop and founded the church of national Catholics, opposing celibacy and other teachings.<sup>14</sup> The newspaper is certainly not mistaken in the fact that the protection of Catholicism was one of the objectives of the *League of Nations*.

Additional data on the 1916 founding attempt is not yet available. In connection with the attempt three years later, a more extensive source material can be relied on. The organization was officially established on November 27, 1919, in *New Brunswick, New Jersey*. The organizational work was undertaken by *Kálmán Kováts*, the parish priest of *Meckeesport*.<sup>15</sup> He became the ecclesiastical president of the *League of Nations*. The Bishop of the Diocese of *Trenton*, about 20 priests, and 1,500 believers from all over the country were present at the inaugural meeting. *József Reményi*, a journalist of *Szabadság* in *Cleveland*, *Béla Pogány*, the publisher of *Kereszt*, and former independence MP *Pál Nessi* received secular leadership positions. The *League of Nations* had two media outlets. One was the *Amerikai Katholikus Magyar Népszövetség*

<sup>11</sup> *Okhrana* was a secret-police force of the *Russian Empire* in the late 19th century and early 20th century.

<sup>12</sup> *Előre*, 10 August 1916 6.

<sup>13</sup> DUDÁS 2020.

<sup>14</sup> *Előre*, 18 August 1916. *Kubinyi*’s secession from the Catholic Church caused divide even amongst his followers. The pastor first became a member of the Old Catholic Church and then of the Episcopal Church. (DUDÁS 2020.)

<sup>15</sup> Under the supervision of *Kálmán Kováts* (1863-1927), the church of *McKeesport* was built in 1901, using mostly loans. It was the largest and most expensive Hungarian Catholic church in the *United States* at the time. *Kováts* had regularly taken stances on political issues. He repeatedly and vehemently criticized *Franz Joseph*, the secular aristocracy in *Hungary*, and acted against the Pan-Slav propaganda that also appeared in the *USA*. He often quarreled with his fellow priests. Before 1919, he rarely participated in the joint movements of American Hungarians. (Vasváry Collection K6:79–82.)

*Értesítője* edited by *Nessi*. The other, considered to be the official newspaper, was the *Katolikus Zászló* previously founded by *Kováts*.<sup>16</sup>

*Előre* kept up with the 1919 founding as well. It listed the Catholic priests who, according to their report, were organizing in a hotel. Some of their names were inaccurately published and information regarding the management was misleading.<sup>17</sup> It claimed that, apart from *Reményi*, the operators of the *League of Nations* were all priests. At the inaugural assembly, *Kálmán Kováts* presented the goals of the *League of Nations*. First, he mentioned the unification of Catholic Hungarians, religious communities, and associations living in *America* under a common flag. He aimed to cultivate a national feeling, fight against the Bolshevik doctrines, solve the workers' issue on religious grounds, support the motherland, unite the Hungarians against the planned mutilation of Hungary, and to help lapsed believers return to the church.<sup>18</sup> This short listing is what remains after weeding out the tendentious comments of *Előre*. It clearly shows that the *American League of Nations* had set goals that were in line with the one in Hungary. In the same manner, it emphasized the importance of Catholicism, the establishment of public opinion based on Catholic grounds, the protection of Hungarian national interests, and the fight against views unacceptable to the Church.

The circumstances of the founding rally and the presence of the Bishop of *Trenton* could have even foreshadowed the image of a successful organization. However, looking at the details, it soon becomes clear that this was not the case. According to *Anita Máté's* research, the following days after the League's foundation, local ethnic federation groups were organized in 14 Hungarian Catholic communities. Not all of these were parishes, in many cases this only includes Hungarian churches. At that time, there were 21 Hungarian parishes in the *United States*, but the number of Hungarian churches reached 60.<sup>19</sup> The organization noticeably omitted *Cleveland, Ohio*, the center of Catholic Hungarians with two parishes, and the city of *New York*, where most Hungarians lived. It should also be noted that in Hungary, thousands of people usually gathered at the demonstrations of the *Catholic League of Nations*, and even tens of thousands in *Budapest*. By contrast, in November 1919, 1,500 Hungarian Catholics gathered in *New Brunswick* from all over the *United States*, although by this time their over-arching number was roughly 185 times that.

The failure of the *American League of Nations* was hardly the fault of the organizers and leaders. In February 1920, the faculty of Hungarian episcopate, the Prince Primate, and the state leaders of Hungary were notified of the establishment via letter. In the same letter, the League also offered their support in rebuilding the country. Their request for the *League of Nations* to be notified about the needs of the motherland and collection initiatives was never fulfilled. In turn, they kept searching for individual parish priests from the old country.<sup>20</sup> One of the reasons for this may have been that only a small part of the Hungarian Catholic communities in *America* were connected to the *League of Nations*. However, the organization did not remain invisible. In March 1920, following the appeal of *János Csernoch*, Archbishop of *Esztergom*, aimed at

<sup>16</sup> MÁTÉ 2011.

<sup>17</sup> *Előre*, 14 October 1919.

<sup>18</sup> *Előre*, 30 November 1919; *Előre*, 5 December 1919. According to the report of December 5, *Reményi* refused the title of secular president because he was not even aware he was a candidate.

<sup>19</sup> MÁTÉ 2011; MIKLÓSHÁZY 2008.

<sup>20</sup> MÁTÉ 2011.

the Hungarian Catholics living abroad, the organization sent a thousand dollars' worth of food vouchers to Hungary.<sup>21</sup> In October, the *League of Nations* collected a so-called *St. Stephen's fund*, of which it donated 100,000 crowns to the poor of the *National Catholic Women's Protection Association*.<sup>22</sup> In 1921, it also supported the *National Child Protection Work Association of Christian Love* with one hundred thousand crowns.<sup>23</sup>

The Prince Primate also called on Hungarian Catholics abroad to protest against the planned country mutilation. The *American League of Nations* tried to take part in that as well. Already at the inaugural meeting in November 1919, *Elemér Eördögh*, the parish priest of Toledo, Ohio, proposed that the *League of Nations* join the movement called "*Nem, nem soha*".<sup>24</sup> At the same time, *Kálmán Kováts*, the ecclesiastical president of the *League of Nations*, complained shortly afterward that their action had almost no reverberating effects in the *United States*.<sup>25</sup> The *New Brunswick* parish priest's conclusion is corroborated by what happened in *Washington D.C.* on March 29, 1920. The editor of the owner of the *Amerikai Magyar Népszava*, *Géza Berkó D.*, announced a protest demonstration against the dismemberment of Hungary on this day. It was a clumsy attempt even down to the level of organization.<sup>26</sup> On the Catholic side, *István Cserniztky*, the parish priest of *Bridgeport*, preached in English. At the end of the meeting, *Kálmán Kováts* also wanted to inform the participants about the *League of Nations*, but this failed due to the shouts of the Protestants and the "measure taken by the organizers".<sup>27</sup>

The Second General Assembly of the *League of Nations*, accompanied by the Committee's renewal, was held in *Mackeesport* in December 1920. According to the speakers, the organization had 1,5009 members at that time.<sup>28</sup> Less than a twentieth of the number of American Hungarians who had claimed to be Catholic. In addition, it seems that the *League of Nations* was not unanimously supported by the Catholic clergy there either.<sup>29</sup> Judging by a 1921 newspaper article, the failure of the initiative must have been clear by that year. According to the *Nemzeti Újság*, an American newspaper - the article does not indicate which - "(...) calls for the organization of the *American Catholic League of Nations* by *Father Bangha*".<sup>30</sup> *Béla Bangha*, one of the leading figures of the Hungarian ecclesia militans, was visiting the *United States* at that time. While otherwise impressed by the New World, he noted that the operation of different Hungarian Catholic associations depended on the aptitude of priests. There

<sup>21</sup> *Kis Újság*, 17 March 1920.

<sup>22</sup> *Kecskemét és Vidéke*, 19 July 1920.

<sup>23</sup> *Új Nemzedék*, 19 July 1921.

<sup>24</sup> MÁTÉ 2011.

<sup>25</sup> *Előre*, 20 April 1920. This article also contains heavily anti-Church, and by now anti-Horthy, sentiments.

<sup>26</sup> VASVÁRY 1988. According to *Vasváry's* report, the 4-5000 participants were supposed to climb to the top floor of a multi-story building using elevators. Moreover, they wouldn't have even fit into the rented room.

<sup>27</sup> MÁTÉ 2011. The sound of the brass band was said to have silenced *Kováts*.

<sup>28</sup> *Nemzeti Újság*, 4 January 1921.

<sup>29</sup> PIVÁNY 1921. It is noteworthy that the *Hungarian League of Nations*, which was considered successful by the Church, had fewer Catholics among its members than the American organization, which later died without success. According to the last census before *Trianon* in 1910, more than 9 million people in *Hungary* declared themselves Roman Catholics. According to the organization's own admission, the *League of Nations* had 310,000 members in 1919. This is about the thirtieth of the Catholic population. In 1920, in mutilated Hungary, almost 5.1 million people declared themselves Roman Catholics, and according to a newspaper report, the *League of Nations* had 90,000 members. This is an even more unfavorable ratio.

<sup>30</sup> *Nemzeti Újság*, 8 December 1921 6.

was no umbrella organization or central newspaper that brought together faith, charitable, and social activities, and the *American Catholic Hungarian Nation Association* operated only in theory.<sup>31</sup>

Another attempt to establish a *League of Nations* had only to wait until 1923. This time, the initiative started in *Cleveland*, where Catholic Hungarian members were missing during the foundation in 1919. In fact, it seems they were completely ignoring that one. This is evidenced by the statement of *Károly Bóhm*,<sup>32</sup> the parish priest of *St. Elizabeth's Church* in *Cleveland*, made in front of members of the local Catholic clergy and associations. "(...) reorganize the *Catholic Hungarian League of Nations*, which once flourished on American soil but was disbanded during the war." In other words, he seemingly discussed the organization established in 1916 as if it was the only attempt until 1923.<sup>33</sup> *Cleveland's* omission from the 1919 founding attempt could be justified by the fact that the *American Hungarian Catholic Association* was already operating there at that time. This, as mentioned in the first part, was regularly coping with internal crises. Therefore, it was not desirable for them to support a "rival" merger. It seems that by 1923 they had changed their mind about the issue. At that time, the goal of the *League of Nations* was to unite the "countless" Hungarian Catholic associations operating in the *United States*.<sup>34</sup> In other words, the new *League of Nations* would have been an umbrella organization. The 14-point program included strengthening Hungarian awareness, fostering national cohesion and revision, assisting in the acquisition of American citizenship, organizing and assisting immigrants, community life, the Catholic press, education, boosting the organization of new parishes, setting up a rights advocacy and advisory office, and convening a Catholic assembly.<sup>35</sup> Similar goals and tools as those found at the *Hungarian League of Nations*. *Béla Túri* was a prelate-canon of *Esztergom*, who helped launch the American organization from the old country after arriving in the *United States* at its behest.<sup>36</sup>

By August 1924, the failure of the new attempt had become clear. *Új Nemzedék* wrote of a clear fiasco despite all the efforts of the *Clevelanders*. The newspaper mentioned the American tour of army bishop *István Zadravec*, who was also unable to advance the cause of the joint organization. The article confirms that the demand for such a thing was mostly down to the clergy, the congregations were not described as active.<sup>37</sup> At the Bridgeport Conference of American

<sup>31</sup> BANGHA 1922.

<sup>32</sup> *Károly Bóhm* (1853–1932) was one of the first Hungarian Catholic priests in the *United States*. In his church, he is regarded as an apostle of American Catholic Hungarians. He built *Cleveland's* first Hungarian Catholic church and founded the newspaper *Katolikus Magyarok Vasárnapja*. The Calvinist *Ödön Vasváry* remembers it quite differently. "It was the embodiment of the old, foolishly bigoted priests," he wrote. He also recorded a story that was later difficult to verify. According to this, *Bóhm*, when he was a pastor in *Buffalo*, called on his followers to spit and go to the other side if a Reformed person passed them on the street. (Vasváry Collection B5/a:16–17v.)

<sup>33</sup> *Magyar Jövő*, 10 February 1924 3. Several sources confirm that the foundation took place back in 1923. Beside *Bóhm*, *József Németh*, born in *Szeged*, one of the chaplains of *Horthy's National Army*, the assistant pastor of *St. Elizabeth's Church* in *Cleveland*, was at the head of the initiative.

<sup>34</sup> VÁRDY 2000.

<sup>35</sup> MÁTÉ 2011.

<sup>36</sup> *Nemzeti Újság*, 24 June 1924.

<sup>37</sup> *Új Nemzedék*, 3 August 1924. The article mentions *Lajos Cserneczky*, who served as the leader of the Hungarian Catholic clergy in *America* "in the state of New York, the largest Hungarian quarter". An American Hungarian priest with such a name is not listed in any other source. *István Cserneczky* (1837–1948) did, but first he served in *Cleveland*, and then from 1914 until his death in 1948 he was an extremely active and popular parish priest in *Bridgeport, Connecticut*. (MÁTÉ 2011; Vasváry Collection CS1:51–59.C)

Hungarian Catholic priests in 1925, the merger of Catholic associations into a central federation was once again considered, but no decision was ultimately made. There is no more mention of the *League of Nations*, not even on the *Katolikus Magyarok Vasárnapja* in *Cleveland*, which was named the official newspaper of the organization.<sup>38</sup> For the third time, the *Hungarian Catholic League of America* did not go beyond the stage of foundation. Looking at the reasons, it soon becomes clear that the chances for success were never great to begin with.

### III.

Let the explanation start with the generalities. Such as the ethnic and religious heterogeneity of the *United States* and its enormous geographical extent. Almost all of these are significantly different from the conditions of *Hungary* during the first quarter of the 20th century. Although *Hungary* was also characterized by ethnic diversity until 1920, the proportion of Roman Catholics without *Croatia* in 1910 was 49.3%.<sup>39</sup> After the territorial annexations, this increased to 63.9% in post-Trianon *Hungary*.<sup>40</sup> From the end of the 19th century, immigrants, including many Hungarians, have increased the number of Catholics in the *United States*. In 1910, 14.2% of the population and in 1920, about 16% of the population declared themselves Roman Catholics.<sup>41</sup> However, the situation of American Catholicism was not only determined by the low rate. A significant part of the immigrants were poor, unskilled, illiterate, and formed ethnic enclaves. The religious attitudes of the different nationalities also varied.<sup>42</sup> However, in *Hungary*, the more ethnically homogeneous, historically deep-rooted Catholicism had a significant social influence at the beginning of the 20th century. Notwithstanding the Church policy laws of 1894-1895, which sought to limit this influence. Another important factor is the relationship with the state authority. Due to its deep involvement, the Catholic Church and the respective governments maintained close relations with each other in the 1910s and 1920s, except for shorter periods. Catholic political parties were formed, the bishops were members of the upper house and there were priests among the elected representatives. In contrast, although the *United States* guaranteed broad religious freedom, it sharply separated churches from the state, entrusting the maintenance of denominational life to the believers. Additionally, the Hungarian Catholic community in *America* could have been even more cohesive, more adherent to domestic traditions. However, the religiosity brought from Hungary soon became Americanized and adapted to the habits of the New World. The American Catholic bishops themselves tried to harmonize Catholicism with modern culture, which, in turn, did not really meet the intentions of the popes of the era.<sup>43</sup> However, the role of the clergy and parishes in the spiritual care of immigrants and in keeping the native language community together remained strong.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, centralization efforts have failed repeatedly. Not only the organization of the *League of Nations* but even the various Hungarian Catholic pastoral associations. Regarding the latter, Bridgeport parish priest *István Csernitzky* cited the age

<sup>38</sup> MÁTÉ 2011.

<sup>39</sup> *A Magyar Szent Korona országainak 1910. évi népszámlálása 1. rész.* 1912.

<sup>40</sup> *Az 1920. évi népszámlálás 1. rész.* 1923.

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2013/02/13/the-global-catholic-population> (27 March 2023.); <https://www.pbs.org/fmc/book/6religion3.htm> (27 March 2023.)

<sup>42</sup> AHLSTROM 1972.

<sup>43</sup> ADRIÁNYI 1975.

<sup>44</sup> VÁRDY 2000.



and conceptual heterogeneity of the clergy as the reasons for failure, in addition to long distances.<sup>45</sup> There is little doubt that the fiasco of the *League of Nations* is partly similar, if not for exactly the same reasons.

What were the disagreements that divided the American Hungarian Catholic clergy and probably the believers? For example, the issue of the king. This did not cause spectacular fractures in the church and its followers in *Hungary*. Mostly because the Catholic senior leadership was predominantly legitimist between the two world wars. There were several legitimists among the Hungarian American priests, but anti-*Habsburg* writings also appeared in two important outlets of Hungarian Catholicism there, the *Amerikai Magyar Népszava* and the *Katolikus Magyarok Vasárnapja*.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps it is no coincidence that the former was edited in *New York* and the latter in *Cleveland*. In cities whose large Hungarian Catholic communities were visibly left out of the attempt to establish the *League of Nations* in 1919. Of course, it cannot be categorically stated that the issue of the king was the only or the main reason for the failure of the *League of Nations*, but it could definitely be one of the reasons. On the other hand, there were questions in which at least the priesthood showed unity. These include taking action against left-wing and *Octobrist* ideas, or, as seen before, taking a stand against country mutilation.<sup>47</sup> In the latter, American Hungarians - just like those of the motherland - agreed regardless of religion, political viewpoint, or social affiliation.<sup>48</sup>

It is also worth reviewing the issue from a statistical point of view. The data of the 1920 census are relevant for the establishment attempts of the *Hungarian Catholic League of America*. Accordingly, 473,538 Hungarians lived in the *USA*, of which 284,122 said they were Roman Catholics.<sup>49</sup> This means 60%, which is close to the rate of 63.9% in post-Trianon *Hungary* in 1920. However, it can only be estimated to what extent they actually practiced their religion. In *New York*, where most Hungarians lived, about 10% of Hungarian Catholics belonged to the parish in the early 20s. The same rate could reach 75% in smaller settlements. In *Cleveland*, 44% of Hungarian Catholics could have belonged to parishes.<sup>50</sup> The organization of the *League of Nations* was certainly hampered by the low number of people actually attending church, especially in large cities. This explains why the movement started in 1916 and 1919 in the smaller but more fervent Hungarian Catholic communities. It may also be important that the last attempt of the *League of Nations* to organize was abandoned during the period when the *United States* - in 1921 and 1924 - Congress passed laws restricting immigration. As a result, the number of newly arriving Hungarians had decreased, Catholic communities had grown more slowly, relations with the motherland had been loosened, and assimilation had accelerated.<sup>51</sup>

Finally, it is worth quoting *Béla Bangha* again. In 1922, he also traced the problem of uniting American Hungarian Catholics to several factors. First, the lack of a leading Catholic newspaper. In addition, the haphazard contact between pastors, the involuntary self-reliance of priests were also part of the problem. According to *Bangha*, disorganization leads to believers becoming

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<sup>45</sup> MÁTÉ 2011.

<sup>46</sup> MÁTÉ 2011.

<sup>47</sup> MÁTÉ 2011.

<sup>48</sup> MAJOR 1974.

<sup>49</sup> PAPP – ESZTERHÁS 2010.

<sup>50</sup> MÁTÉ 2011.

<sup>51</sup> PAPP – ESZTERHÁS 2010.

spiritually orphaned and distanced from the church. As he put it in his uniquely effective style about the faithful, “(...) if he does not have a priest, or if he has once become accustomed to avoiding the church, not a single lapping wave of ecclesial life will reach him for a decade, and the black night of new paganism and materialism, which lives only for money and pleasure, will engulf him with almost no escape.”<sup>52</sup>

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