

BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY, CLUJ-NAPOCA  
FACULTY OF REFORMED THEOLOGY

## PhD THESIS

### Church, Politics and War

An Analysis from a Political and Religious Perspective of the  
Fundamental Events in the History of Transylvania in the XVIth and  
XVIIth Centuries

#### Summary

Supervisor  
Prof. Desideriu Buzogány, PhD

Candidate  
Ciprian Simuț

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The PhD thesis, entitled *An Analysis from a Political and Religious Perspective of the Fundamental Events in the History of Transylvania in the XVIth and XVIIth Centuries*, aims to present the history of the two centuries in the history of Transylvania from a political, as well as religious perspective, having the purpose of underlining the ties between the political and the religious realm within the churches of Transylvania. The events described in this thesis are not resumed only to the reformed church, but to the history of all the churches it has gotten into contact, and which have been its contemporaries, after it was established, in the respective two centuries. The churches we are referring to are the catholic, lutheran, unitarian and orthodox. Also, the thesis debates the influence that the wars, uprisings, and military tensions had on Transylvania's church life. These difficulties hit oftentimes hard in the structure and organization of the churches. Politics is one of the segments that have influenced and which was influenced by the religious sphere. The church's influence on the princes, but the influences of the counselor, determined changes in the ecclesial structure within the principality. Therefore, this PhD thesis describes the method of interaction between church, politics and war, presenting the consequences that have influenced the religious life of the population in Transylvania.

The methodology used in the thesis is based on description and analysis. Events are not presented chronologically from the beginning to the end of the argumentation. The aim is to present and debate on specific aspects in the historical, political and religious contexts to which they belong. The same events are mentioned in other historical contexts as well, being tied to various problems that they have influenced. The conclusions are presented throughout the argumentation, as well as in the last chapter, as a compendium of the thesis.

The thesis is structured on 7 chapters, the first and the last chapter represents the Introduction and the Conclusions of the thesis. The second chapter presents the general history of Transylvania in the XVIth and the XVIIth centuries, but it emphasizes the Mohacs moment, from 1526, which represents a turning point for the kingdom of Hungary, as well as for the region of Transylvania. The history of the kingdom of Hungary and that of the region of Transylvania link these two territories inexorably. The breaking into three parts of the kingdom of Hungary was not considered to be a definitive and unchangeable event by the Hungarian population from Transylvania. Instead it was considered a transitory situation, to which the population must adapt. Due to the rulers who succeeded in the governing of the region, from the earliest times of the XVIth century, an increasingly powerful idea starts to take form, an idea that favors the

Transylvanian nobles, namely, the idea of an autonomous principality. This idea is not born out of nothing, but from a stringent need to adapt to the political and military context of the time. The Battle of Mohacs breaks the Hungarian kingdom in three parts, and Transylvania is forced to solve the problem without losing in front of its Habsburg counterparts. The accomplishment of the break, not due necessarily to their influence, but to the possibility of taking over the territory, has forced the nobles and the rulers of the principality to orient their internal policy towards autonomy. The military power of the Habsburgs was superior to that of the Transylvanian nobles, reality that forced the nobles to ask for the Porte's military aid. This force was preferable to that of the Habsburg because it did not impose Islam except for certain conditions, and these conditions were not met in Transylvania.

The military tensions carried on in these two centuries, and Transylvania saw itself forced, through the institution of the prince, of the nobles and the states to choose the party which best served the interest of establishing the autonomous principality. For a century and a half, the Ottoman Porte had been the military and political help for the princes and the nobles who wanted to keep their privileges, but also the region's autonomy. Even if some princes wanted to unite Transylvania to the broken kingdom of Hungary, and even to the crown of Poland, they did not succeed to create the favorable environment for such a political accomplishment. The political tensions are backed by the religious ones. These followed the pattern set by the military tensions. The church, but in the case of Transylvania we are dealing with churches, adapts to the problems generated by the military conflicts. In spite of the problems created by the wars, the churches try to consolidate their power at a central level, using the institutions of the principality. The ethnic groups that have lived in Transylvania shared their different religious faiths, while there was no single group that could claim to belong entirely to one denomination. Due to the adherence to four major Christian denominations in under a decade, adherence that started with Protestantism settling in Transylvania, four Christian received religions and one tolerated religion coexisted at the same time. The interdenominational tensions generated interethnic tensions, but they also created a unique trait in Europe, namely the coexistence of more denominations, ethnically separated, but also religiously, in a small territory. The spirit of tolerance, but not in the modern sense of the word, existed in order to assure, even through the very reason that could have been used to generate tensions, stability in the principality.

The third chapter presents the political perspective on the history of Transylvania, but starting still from the Mohacs moment in 1526. The presentation of the political perspective is continued with the aspects related to the legislative fundamentals through which the principality of Transylvania was consolidated. The territory of Transylvania needed institutions that would administer the internal and external politics. Part of the old organizations are kept in place, such as the states and the diets, but also the Hungarian constitution, which is taken in its original form and adapted to the new reality of the Transylvanian political scene. At this point, it was considered that the Bathory reign was important for the history of Transylvania, as well as for the development of the Transylvanian state. This was the family that sealed the fundamentals of the Transylvanian state, as well as the spread of the idea of “transylvanianism” and autonomy. The princes that reigned during this family’s time up to that of the definitive takeover of the Habsburg in the beginning of the XVIIIth century, preferred the protection of the Porte, or, in some cases, playing at both ends, using both the Porte and the Habsburg, all this just to keep the balance in favor of the principality’s autonomy. Being a territory at the borders of two great empires, it could not avoid the continuous debate regarding the territorial disputes. Transylvania was desired by the Habsburg as well as by the Porte, the purpose being that of a strategic advantage, coupled with an economical one, if any of the two controlled the territory. Due to this role played by the principality it was of utmost importance to establish the influence between the two powers. Therefore, going through periods of strength, and periods of weakness, the principality proved its capacity to be an important player amidst the military tensions between the two empires. The Ottoman Porte, however, did not rise to the expectations the Transylvanian princes had. Oftentimes it was quite bellow expectations, but went on to disappoint by obvious illegal interventions in internal politics. Still, towards the end of the XVIIth century, the ottoman power weakens, and the princes are forced to reckon with the habsburgă growing influence. The tensions between the two powers have spilt over the Transylvanian politics. Risking to upset the two powers, the Transylvanian princes, together with the states, elaborated measures to keep the principle of autonomy and religious freedom, even if the latter referred only to the received religions.

In the fourth chapter a number of political measures taken by the certain main rulers of Transylvania were presented, in the first half of the XVIIth century. The princely conflicts were tense, each trying to reach the throne with the help of one or the other parties that favored the

great military powers of the day. Another aspect that must be mentioned is related to the religious adherence of some of the princes, adherences that were or were not liked by the states. Together with these princes and leading rulers we also presented the influence of the religious wars, in the fifth chapter. The first half of the XVIIth century is marked by a series of military events that influenced the state politics of the principality, as well as the religious one. The fluctuations in the religious tensions created diverse scenarios, that favored either Catholicism, during the Basta reign, or orthodoxy, during the reign of Michael the Brave, or the protestant denominations, during the reign of some of the Transylvanian princes. War and religion are linked, the first being justified on religious grounds. Even if at the level of the general population, the interdenominational conflicts were not a serious problem, at the level of state politics it was proved that the persecution of certain denominations, such as the Unitarians and the Sabbatarians, were heavily prepared in order to succeed. The results of the military conflicts affected the population and the welfare of the people. However, the situation of Protestantism remained almost unaltered for a century and a half. The wars between the Turks and the European Christians, represented mainly by the Habsburg Empire, forced Transylvania's participation, either on the side of the Porte, or the side of the Habsburg. The Long War and The Thirty Years War are two of the most dramatic conflicts for the history of Transylvania. They restructured the situation of Transylvania, ushering the gradual passing from the ottoman suzerainty to that of the Habsburg.

In the sixth chapter the history of the churches in Transylvania and Hungary was presented, during the XVIth and XVIIth centuries. The religious situation in these two centuries is marked mainly by the rapid and powerful spread of Protestantism in a territory dominated by Catholicism and Orthodoxy. From the statute of foreign religion it passed, in a relatively short period, to a dominant religious power in the principality, first for Lutheranism, and then for the Reformed faith. Unitarianism imposed itself just as rapidly, but together with Sabbatarianism. The imposition of the later two, coupled with their rapid spread, reached the highest levels of the administration, later becoming a received religion. This status appeared to offer protection for the believers, but following ample movements and a well thought out plan, the persecution of Unitarianism and Sabbatarianism lead to its weakening and restraining of its influence in the principality. The reformation in Transylvania created an ecclesial space which would seem to be ecumenical, but which, in fact, is not and it cannot be called as such. Even if in a restraint



territory four major religions coexisted, and one was tolerated, while Sabbatarianism was persecuted, this cohabitation cannot be defined as tolerance, at least not in the modern sense of the word. The intention of the Reformed church to convert the orthodox believers, made up of all the Romanian population, through a well thought out plan of publishing religious books into Romanian, including the Bible, could not be fulfilled, but it does offer a glimpse of the determination with which Transylvanian Protestantism operated. Together with the process of confessionism of the XVIIth century, the process of reintroducing Catholicism and the restoration of its influence is started, under the guise of the Counter-Reformation. The religious context in Transylvania cannot be ignored also because orthodoxy could not be eradicated, and the Romanian population remained faithful to their ancient religion, in spite of the process which offered schooling to poor Romanian children. Also, the lack of rights, coupled with a series of freedoms offered later, did not manage to determine the Romanian population to leave the Orthodox Church to join the reformed church. The measures taken by the leaders of the Reformed Church consisted in offering nobiliary titles to the Romanians who converted to Calvinism, but it was considered an act of treason. The serfhood remained an issue for the Romanian population, and the limitations of their social rights, coupled with the differences between the general rights of the Romanians and the other nations living in Transylvania, created a mentality of ideological nationalism, through which the Romanian population considered itself persecuted and exploited, and therefore found an identity in their nationality. This created the possibility to tie the common things they shared.

The conclusions of this thesis refer to the aspects tied to politics, and to religion, both influencing one another. The social, economic, political and religious problems that were generated by the tensions between the Habsburgs and the Turks, coupled to the tensions that were generated by the entrance of Christian Europe in the wars between these two powers, generated consequences in Transylvania as well. The idea of the autonomous principality, the introduction, spread and implementation of Protestantism, the reception of the statute of received religions, and the attempts to convert the orthodox Romanians, and the acceptance of the Ottoman suzerainty, created a scene in which Transylvania developed a unique and well defined identity among the leading powers of the XVIth and XVIIth centuries.

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