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**THESIS SUMMARY**

**The situation of the Transylvanian Roman Catholic Status in the light of  
Relations with the Governments of Hungary from the Period of the Austro-  
Hungarian Dualism and of Inter-War Romania**

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## Summary

**Keywords:** Church-state relations, Transylvanian Roman Catholic Status, Church history, negotiations, Hungarian government, Romanian government, education, economical issues, the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Based on the title, the reader should expect a presentation of the history of an ecclesiastical institution. In our view, the content of the thesis meets this expectation. The chapters shed light on the functioning of the Status, especially on its relationship with the state. The theme of the thesis covers a larger period, in which two clearly distinguishable sections appear, the dividing line being the First World War. In the following, we briefly summarize the essence of the main text of the thesis, referring to each subsection, since each presented case forms the whole picture, through which we can draw appropriate conclusions.

The reviewed literature sources have so far covered the issue in general terms and provided a framework. In the thesis, we have introduced further details to the individual topics, which in most cases have strengthened the general picture. With our research, we give a detailed analysis of Transylvanian church-state relationship between the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. It has been known so far that Transylvania is an area with a specific social structure (from a political, economic and religious perspective), but this knowledge has been further deepened by the events analyzed in the thesis. By including the documents of the individual participants in the sources, specific attitudes and ideas often emerged, which could differ in some respects even among people belonging to the same institution. These subtle differences highlight the liveliness that characterized the era, and do not present a picture of a rigid society in which all members would have thought similarly. Instead of judging individual events, we considered it important to present the positions of the participating parties, thereby remaining objective and letting the facts speak for themselves in each situation.

It can be said that the Transylvanian Roman Catholic Status was created as a result of an emergency. At the beginning of the modern era, as a result of the rise of the Reformation, the number of Catholics in Transylvania decreased drastically, only a few aristocratic families at the top of the social hierarchy and some parts of Szeklerland remained Catholic. After the expulsion of the bishop and the restriction on the activities of priests, the laity also took part in the management of church property, but not in the determination of church

teaching. Then, during the Habsburg period, the Catholics gained more and more space and in 1873, the Status acquired the form of operation that remained in force throughout the researched period.

In the first large chapter of the thesis, we covered the relationship between the Status and the dualist government focusing on the negotiations between the two parties, to grasp the quality of it. The events were contextualized within the historical framework in one of the sub-chapters, to make certain reactions or events more understandable.

Following that, we dealt with controversial situations within economic themes. Negotiations took place between the two parties regarding the settlement of the Status's economic situation, thanks to which we were able to present a series of successful negotiations and the decision was reached with a positive outcome for both parties. But, for example, in the area of payments and debts, a common decision from the parties could only be reached through serious discussions. The biggest difference was that both parties reserved the right to start working in the estates belonging to the foundations. They realized that the long exchanges of letters did not bring results, and switched to negotiations with personal participation. During these discussions, the rights of chief guardian and chief supervisor were also discussed, but the views did not converge. In the case of outstanding debts, the main problem was caused by the fact that the income of the estates did not develop as planned, and the investments did not bring the necessary economic performance, and in addition to all this, the amount of state aid did not increase to a level that would help the funds.

We also presented how a long dispute can cause damage. The planned logging in the estate of Almaşu Mare was blocked by the Ministry of Public Education and the Ministry of Agriculture. All of this caused more problems because the Status could not realize one of its most important goals, to adequately support Transylvanian education, because one of the sources of the scholarships was the income from economic areas. In addition to the proper preparation of the business plans, the tasks of the Status also included the search for a suitable buyer, but even if all the processes were successful, the transaction could not take place, because the Ministry of Culture insisted on giving consent as the final forum. The approval was not without conditions, the minister expected that the experts of the Status act in an appropriate manner, ensure that the young saplings are not damaged in the cut parts, estimate the value of the felled trees and sell them at a public auction. It was also necessary to plant new trees in the cut area, which are covered by the previous purchase price. Besides,

they had to keep accurate statistical data on production and sales. Furthermore, harvesting activities of wood could not be carried out in the neighboring areas until the works for which they requested permission had been completed. As a result of the long negotiations, the value of the wood in the area had deteriorated to such an extent that it was almost unprofitable to harvest it, but it was by no means sufficient to provide the foundations with a serious financial background.

In the final part, we discussed the case of the Audit Office at the economic section. Already at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were plans to establish an Audit Office in Cluj-Napoca, thereby saving money, relieving the burden on the Ministry Apparatus of Budapest, and at the same time speeding up and making administration more efficient by having the employees work locally, so they will have better local knowledge, and there will be no need to count on long exchanges of letters. Although the Status had a plan to create its own Mortgage Institution, it was not established, and the increasingly serious development of the economic situation justified the need of a local Audit Office. As a result of the negotiations, the Audit Office in Cluj-Napoca was created as a compromise solution, but it could not fulfill the expectations attached to it, because of the outbreak of the First World War and its consequences. In any case, results were reached by mutual agreement.

The following segment of the thesis gave an overview of the educational issues. The clarification of issues related to the operation of Status's secondary schools was a priority. The disagreement was based on the fact that both parties, the Hungarian state and the Status, reserved the actual management of the Transylvanian Catholic schools for themselves. It could be seen in the chapter that not only state actors, but also several people from the circle of intellectuals developed arguments that supported the fact that the Status does not have the legitimacy to completely manage schools, it can only have influence, but the right of final decision belongs to the responsible minister. On the other hand, the Status referred to the centuries-old rights, presenting several important articles of law.

The debate related to the management of schools extended to several aspects that appeared in the field of education. Such was, for example, the issue of exemptions from individual subjects. The Minister of Culture based his decision on the fact that since the Status schools are maintained by public funds, only he or the persons authorized by him (principals of the royal school district) are competent to grant exemptions. In contrast, the Status referred to paragraph 41 of law nr. 30<sup>th</sup> of 1883, which ensured that they have the same rights as before the law came into force. In the end, as a result of the negotiations, they

agreed that the Status can decide within its own authority in the case of exemptions from subjects.

Complications were also caused by the fact that not only Catholic students attended Status schools, but based on the church regulations of the time, only Catholic religious education could be held in Catholic schools. On the other hand, since the Minister of Culture considered the schools to be under state management, he expected that the students of other religions of the institutions would not attend religious education in the private apartments of individual religious teachers, but within public borders in the schools. In the end, the matter was resolved with a concession that non-Catholic students could have their religious classes held by their teachers in their own folk schools.

Since they experienced in several cases that the exchanges of letters did not bring the necessary results, the Minister of Culture decided that holding a common meeting would be appropriate for the final clarification of the controversial issues. These discussions took place in Budapest. The focus of the negotiations was on the application of the secondary school law, the determination of who is the actual leader of the Transylvanian Catholic educational institutions. The Status established a grievance committee, which prepared the details that they believed affected their self-government before the negotiations in Budapest. The committee identified the following points as issues worthy of discussion: exemptions from various subjects, determining curricula and textbooks, granting permission for remedial exams, combining classes for students who submit the appropriate request, handling appeals in the case of refusal to transfer from one Status school to another, handling disciplinary cases of teachers and students, determining the amount of tuition fees, appointment of the president present at the graduation exams, and finally the situation of teachers' second jobs. They also discussed issues related to the relationship between the Status and the Ministry: submitting annual statistical data to the Ministry, appointing teachers, leading and maintaining boarding houses, sending ministerial transcripts to the Board of Directors, and the powers of school district principals in Status schools. During the multi-day series of negotiations, representatives of both sides were able to detail their views. Although they strove to obtain as many rights as possible for their own institution, they realized in several areas that a compromise solution is the one that promotes common work. As a conclusion, the results of the long negotiations were summarized in a final document. It can be observed that the Status got the right not only to maintain the schools, but also to lead them. Finally, at its extraordinary meeting held on May 25, 1893, the Status accepted without changes the document, thereby giving the opportunity for a workable relationship to be established

between the Status and the state in the field of education as well, to coordinate their efforts in order to protect and further expand culture, specifically by ensuring quality education, both theoretically and at the infrastructural level.

The last sub-chapter deals with with mixed cases. A commemorative medal case might seem insignificant to most people, but it points out that in many cases the government also changed its legal opinion due to the judgment of a specific case. In the first round, a list was requested from the Transylvanian Catholic secondary schools of the persons who are worthy of the memorial medal, and then in a later response they relied on the argument that since Status is not a state institution, the teachers are not entitled to the award. With this sentence, the Ministry admitted that the management of the schools cannot be a state actor either. In the second case, the state leaders asked the management of Status to send the documents concerning national affairs to the Supreme Council of State, to Budapest, so that they could keep in the appropriate place. Although they were on the opinion that those documents belonged to them as legal documents, they did not want to open yet another controversial case, so they decided to comply with the request, but asked for a delay in order to make copies of the documents. This proved that they were also partners in the compromise solutions, for example if the principles of document organization and document storage supported the rational solution.

Similarly to the first chapter, we started the discussion of the period between the two world wars by outlining the historical framework, since we could not properly interpret the individual cases without understanding the ongoing processes. In this chapter, we primarily described the events of the creation of the legal framework, since after Romania's territorial growth it became necessary to unify the legal order. Furthermore, the territory of the new state has had a significant number of minorities, including a significant number of Catholics, whose situation they wanted to clarify with the Holy See, thereby also achieving international recognition for the country. The process finally ended with the conclusion of the 1927 concordat, some points of which had to be clarified later, and this specifically affected the Status as well. After that, in the second chapter, we also presented academic and economic matters.

In academic matters, similar procedures were observed as in the era of dualism, but new aspects also appeared. For example, an inter-denominational unity was also perceptible, since being a minority brought together parties that had been separated until then. It happened that the bishops commonly participated in the negotiations with government representatives in Bucharest, touching on various doctrinal issues. Besides Bishop Gusztáv Károly Majláth,



Elemér Gyárfás has been the most common representative of the cause of the Status in the capital. In contrast to him, from the state side, Onisifor Ghibu was the one who dealt the most with the issue of religious education, especially with the situation of the Status. Gyárfás kept the Board of Directors informed about developments in the cases. Such was the case of the state recognition of religious schools. Two different legal concepts met, since in the Kingdom of Romania before 1918, even though private individuals and churches could fund schools, they remained at the level of private schools, they were not given the right to be public, so the students in these schools could not take the baccalaureate. On the other hand, in the era of dualism, religious schools were also public in nature, even if there were certain differences of opinion, as we saw in the chapter dealing with the era of dualism. The Romanian government was willing to refrain from applying the laws of the old kingdom when drafting the new regulations, in addition to meeting some conditions (no anti-state manifestations in schools, the educational and cultural standard in schools should reach the minimum expected in state institutions). The government abstained from discussing the issue of the right of the chief guardian, maintaining the position they adopted from the Hungarian government during the dualism era. Gyárfás even paid attention to such details that would have been important for the Status: to have a permanent representative in the Romanian capital, as he repeatedly experienced that even a short conversation gave much more impetus to a given case than the exchange of documents lasting several months. In addition, a senator staying there could also have the advantage of being able to get to know the political life in Bucharest, and thus know who are the persons with whom it is worth conducting negotiations, as well as with whom and how results can be achieved in a controversial situation.

In the preparatory phase of the law on private education, they also tried to get through negotiations to remove the parts that restricted the operation of church schools, or if the complete abolition does not succeed, to at least ease them on certain points, but the government in Bucharest did not take into account the requests of the Board of Directors and the denominations. The most important content parts of the private education law were as follows: it was not possible to establish an educational institution without the approval of the Minister of Public Education, but even so, in order to obtain a license, extensive documentation (plans, inventories, the list of teaching staff and certificates of operating licenses) had to be submitted. Even so, schools could only be founded by Romanian citizens, so the religious orders with foreign centers were excluded from the foundation. For those religious orders that still managed to found a school, it was obligatory to teach in Romanian language. In addition, the law granted the Minister of Education the right of supervision and

control. Teachers had to request permission individually to carry out teaching. Private schools could only give diplomas if they received the right of publicity, but even then, the signature of the school inspector was necessary for the document to be valid. Finally, the acceptance of foreign aid was also subject to prior ministerial approval. After the inauguration of each new government, the Board of Directors tried to get some mitigation of the laws. The most important thing was to secure the right of publicity, which was finally preserved through the intervention of the Holy See.

Questions related to education also included the baccalaureate exam, the employment of teachers, and the situation of their pensions. We saw that in the dualist period, there were significant debates about who had the right to preside over the baccalaureate exams in Catholic schools. As a result of the negotiations with the Romanian state, for which Bishop Majláth participated in Bucharest, the Status only accepted that the government commissioners would have slightly wider powers at the graduation exams held in Catholic schools than in the case of Protestant schools. We found out from Gyárfás's negotiations in Bucharest that no agreement could be reached on the pensions of the teachers, as the Romanian and Hungarian states had to first decide what to do with the teachers who had already taught before 1918 and therefore already collected into their pension fund, and which state should pay the possible pension to what extent.

Just as in the field of education, economic the handling of economic matters was also uncertain in the new Romanian state, more specifically those concerning the existing church territories. The answer became obvious after the agricultural reform. The state wanted to give an adequate share of territories to those who had none. Thus, expropriation procedures were initiated. Two important moments of the legislative process were the Expropriation Act of 1919 and the Agrarian Act of 1921, which laid the foundation for land distribution and contained practical regulations. In the thesis, we mainly dealt with the 6<sup>th</sup> article of the law. Based on the article, the outlying areas that served the public interest were expropriated, including the property of the churches. The territories of denominational church schools – without forfeiting ownership – were given into state-management in the dualist period, with the clause that the transferred territories and properties could only be used to operate Hungarian-language schools. The Romanian state expropriated these territories as well and considered the clause invalid.

Covering part of the teachers salary, state aid was essential for the maintenance of schools, especially after the Status lost significant economic territory because of the

agricultural reform. When the Romanian state no longer wanted to pay state aid, despite the fact that the church schools performed important public tasks, Catholic education in Transylvania was endangered. In order to stabilize the financial situation, the representatives of the denominations repeatedly negotiated with the state leaders. It turned out that in the government's view, by supporting the Hungarian-language public schools, they fulfilled the educational support of the minorities. Later, as a result of the combined effect of several factors (parents preferred to enroll their children in denominational schools, the churches firmly stood up for their own schools, but economic rationality also played a role, since it is easier to a certain extent to support an already existing educational infrastructure than to build a completely new one), in 1921 they were promised that denominational public schools would receive state aid. In numbers, this meant a total of 20 million Romanian lei for the denominations. This money was primarily used to maintain elementary schools. They did not achieve complete success, since they used aid allocated in a previous economic period as a basis and did not apply it to the changed economic situation, especially the rate of inflation was ignored.

Another issue that affected Transylvanian Catholic students was the issue of tuition fees. After 1918, the Status lost most of its economic base, the schools could only be maintained with great difficulty. Tuition fees were increased minimally, so that school could operate smoothly, but without further burdening the already difficult economic situation of Transylvanian Catholics.

In the thesis, we analyzed and put into context events and cases that have not been researched in such a relation so far. As we indicated in the introduction, the basis of the research was the processing of archival sources, but at the same time, we constantly compared the information obtained from the documents with the existing literature in order to draw the appropriate conclusions. We pointed out various processes in the development of the relationship between the church and the state in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thereby we tried to achieve our goal of providing new perspectives in the research of the relationship between the church and the state.

All in all, it can be said that the hypotheses formulated at the beginning of the thesis were affirmed. It became visible that the governments of the two eras used the same arguments in the negotiations with the Status in several cases, and based on similar principles, they tried to retain the right to decide for themselves regarding the management of Catholic institutions in Transylvania. It also became clear that the representatives of the Status and the state did not only have to conduct a theoretical debate about how the

relationship between the church and the state manifests itself, but the consequences of their decisions and discussions appeared in practice. We think that the ideal relationship between church and state has not been clarified to this day, therefore the topic discussed in the thesis addresses current issues, and the compromise solutions that were successfully reached by previous persons can be examples for current decision-makers as well.

It can be concluded that the relationship between the Status and both the Hungarian state during the dualism period and the Romanian state between the two world wars has been ambivalent, there were cases when they could easily agree on certain issues, but at the same time long negotiations and lively debates also characterized the relationship of the parties. The personal relationship of the heads of the institutions was often a decisive factor. It is important to emphasize that the involvement of a historical figure has had in many cases great importance on both sides. We could insert a long list of bishops and ministers of culture, lawyers, educational and economic experts, but during the thesis we published short biographies of them, in this case we only want to specify that there were indeed situations when the action of the given person helped to advance the case, such was the case of Elemér Gyárfás during the negotiations in Bucharest.

The cornerstone of the research was the attitude towards the right of patronage and supervision, which also determined the arguments of the parties. This was the starting point of all major disagreements and is also the reason for the complexity of the topic. After all, over the years, instead of resolved cases, more and more unresolved issues have accumulated. Among these, the situation of schools and the issue of property relations should be highlighted. With minor differences, but, both states argued that the Status could only influence the operation of schools and the way in which economic areas were used, and the final permits should always be issued by the ministry.. Romanian governments tried to push the Status back to the area of private education, especially in the field of education, since its economic capacity to act was reduced to a minimum after nationalization.

There are clearly distinguishable argument systems. The Status referred to its centuries-old rights, the founding documents, and the laws that ensured its existence and operation. In contrast, the state, embracing the liberal argument, saw the previous donations received by the State as not private, but from public property and therefore belonging to the state. In addition, in the case of state aid, the argument arose that if the state provides benefits, then in return it can ask for a say in determining the form of operation of the institution. Cases such as when the ministry contradicted itself, for example in the case of the commemorative medal, highlights that the actors themselves were not always consistent, but

shaped their positions in such a way that it would bring a favorable result to them in the given situation. The reasoning of the Romanian governments was that the previous (dualism era) laws had been abolished, and the monarch's powers remained only through the right of the chief benefactor, which could be exercised by the responsible ministry. Overall, it was clear that both sides were trying to enforce their rights as widely as possible. They often had to reach compromise solutions by giving up less important parts in order to preserve more important points. The individual decisions had important implications for everyday life, as the future of the State's school network depended on whether it could independently decide on the cultivation of the areas belonging to its estates, or whether the award of state aid also determined many things. This also affected the lives of students, as more children would be enrolled in a stable, well-functioning institution, which would increase revenues, enable them to make more investments, and provide quality education.

The ongoing disputes have taken away the opportunity for the two sides to contribute to improving the situation of society through joint work. Several important lessons can be drawn from the topic we are researching for today's people and institutions. One such lesson may be that before starting a negotiation process, it is important to learn about the laws in force that apply to both us and the other party, and what rights the parties have. It is also important to be aware of the factors that move us forward, because we have seen that when the Status and the governments managed to reach a common denominator, they achieved several significant results, which were primarily manifested in the field of education, but were also related to the functioning of the economy. Of course, we cannot ignore the fact that the institutions were and are led by flesh-and-blood people, not robots, and the direct consequence of this is that no matter how much they strived for professional, objective value judgment and professional work, personal interest also played a role, which means that it is not possible to calculate with formulas what decision will be made in certain cases. A worthy conclusion of our thesis can also be that joint work based on mutual understanding proves useful at all levels of society.

Last but not least, we would like to give some additional possible research directions, which, although they affect the topic of the thesis, were not closely related to the analyzed issue. Although, in the case of Status we are talking about a unique institution of its kind, it would be important to study whether there are organizations of a similar nature, if not the same, in other dioceses, and to prepare comparative studies as a result of the research. In addition, the Status not only held continuous negotiations with the state, but there were

several cases of differences of opinion between the bishop of Transylvania and the Board of Directors regarding the management and operation of the Status. It would be important to research this relationship system as well. We hope that the thesis and the sources used can be a starting point for these topics. Furthermore, publishing on the topic of Status in international languages is an important task. Although some studies have been written in English and German, a comprehensive overview has yet to be published.