

András Máthé

The Economy of the Transylvanian Roman Catholic Status Between the World Wars

Abstract

The purpose of the study. To examine how the 20th century's political changes affected the Roman Catholic Church structurally, and its specific institution, the Roman Catholic Status by the agrarian reforms which were part of the modernization process and nation-building in Greater Romania; and more importantly in Transylvania, the area of the four Roman Catholic dioceses of Nagyvárad, Gyulafehérvár, Temesvár and Szatmár, and what alternatives were created for economical surviving.

Applied methods. Literature review including the history of World War I and the consequences of the upcoming treaties of Versailles. We involved sources from church literature, agrarian estates records and data from researches of the Status archives from Transylvania. The research framework is the history of the Roman Catholic Status. We introduced four ecclesiastical counties whose economically changes influenced the administration of several institutions and funds belonging to the Status. We made a structural analysis examining the new economic system of the Roman Catholic Status situated in the middle of the modernization development of Greater Romania.

Outcomes. Due to the annexation of Transylvania to Romania, the Roman Catholic Church went from a privileged position to a marginal position, since the majority of the Romanian population was Orthodox Christian. Many problems of the process of modernization and nation-building in Greater Romania were felt by all sections of the population, but it was the ethnic minorities and their institutions - especially the churches - which were to be integrated into the new nation-state that were most affected. The four Roman Catholic dioceses Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia), Nagyvárad (Oradea), Temesvár (Timișoara) and Szatmár (Satu Mare) expropriated 277,513 acres of a total of 290,570 acres of land, which represented 98% of the land holdings. The agrarian reform of 1919-1920 brought major changes in the management of the Status funds and the estates belonging to them.

Keywords: Transylvania, church, agrarian, ecclesiastical, estates, losses.

The period between the world wars was a trying time for the minority churches in Transylvania. The development of these church institutions was structurally altered by the two great socio-political demands of the inter-war period: the unfolding developmental process of modernization and the power considering the nation-building.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a fundamental challenge in the modernization development of Greater Romania was the solution of the agrarian question, which had a wide-ranging impact on the whole socio-economic sphere. Both the economic development of the country and the rising living standards of the peasantry depended on this solution. The agrarian reforms promised as early as 1917 were adopted and implemented between 1918 and 1921. However, their provisions were applied in different ways in the various historical provinces, in an attempt to adapt them to their socio-economic conditions and levels of development.

In this way, legislation was applied much more radically in Transylvania and Bessarabia than in Moldavia, Wallachia and Bukovina. The primary reason for this was that in the case of the first two provinces, the spirit of the revolution at the end of the war was stronger in 1917-1918, and there was also a strong correlation between land ownership and ethnic differences.

The primary aim of these laws was to distribute land to the peasantry and this was explained by social rather than economic motives. At the same time as private land was expropriated, the same was done with the land of the different companies and private banks, towns and villages, and also with the private lands of the churches.

The many problems of the modernization process and nation-building in Greater Romania were felt by all sections of the population, but it was the national minorities and their institutions, especially the churches, which had to be integrated into the new nation-state, that were most affected.

For the Hungarian minority churches in Transylvania, the adjustment to a new system struggling with a new complex social and political reality was very difficult. The difficulty of the situation is also reflected in the fact that all social groups expected the leaders of these churches to understand and explore the situation and, in general, to define the future development of the Hungarian minority in Romania at political, public, cultural and social levels.

Due to the annexation of Transylvania to Romania, the Roman Catholic Church went from a privileged position to a minority position, since the majority of the Romanian population was Orthodox Christian. The new state power also tried to draw the borders of the dioceses according to the new state boundaries that had already been established, which meant a direct dismemberment in the case of the Roman Catholic Church. In the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the Romanian state, taking the oath by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Transylvania, Gusztáv Károly Majláth, before the Romanian King Ferdinand I on 19 March 1921 was a historic moment. This was obviously a necessary act, as the Church was forced to integrate into the new state framework and would have found it difficult to reorganize and survive economically without the approval of the Romanian government. The Hungarian churches had many political struggles against the Romanian state, regarding both internal politics and foreign policy, at the League of Nations. In the case of Hungarians in Transylvania, the churches were the main critics of Romanian school and agricultural policies. Through their bishops they tried to take over the role of the former Hungarian state, especially in school matters. Gusztáv Károly Majláth, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Transylvania, notes in connection with the land reform that 'despite the expropriation of a large part of the lands of the Transylvanian Roman Catholic Status, 118 parishes and 77 filiates remained without the land officially defined by law'.¹

In the process of structural transformation of the Romanian state, the Catholic Church also had to adapt to the new political situation in order to maintain and develop its specific institutions. During the period of its activity, the main points of contention were the controversies surrounding the legal personality of the Roman Catholic State. The primary task was to clarify property rights, to recognize the ownership of the property of the Status and the ways in which it was to be administered and used.

The economic framework and the conditions for the operation of the Status were determined by two fundamental issues. The first was the extent to which the centuries-old autonomy of the Transylvanian Catholics could be preserved without substantial changes, and the second was the extent to which the estates donated by the patrons could be used legally for the maintenance of cultural, educational and other religious institutions.

According to a summary published in the „Erdélyi Magyar Évkönyv” (Transylvanian Hungarian Yearbook) in 1941, during the land reforms in Northern Transylvania alone, a total of 136,140 cadastral acres² were appropriated from non-Romanian churches, and only 5,582

¹ Roman Catholic Bishop Károly Majláth Gusztáv, Senate speech of 2 November 1924, in: *Glasul Minoritatilor*, II, 1924, no. 10-12, October-December, p.2.

² One Cadastral acre equals 0.575464 hectares or 5754.64152861 square meters. In this study acre means Cadastral acres.

cadastral acres from Romanian churches. Accordingly, the non-Romanian registered a loss of 96%, the Romanian churches a loss of 4%. The situation in Southern Transylvania was similar, as the objectives were the same. From the multitude of data on the damage suffered by individual parishes, it can be seen that with the land reform, the planners of this reform took away 90% of the property of the Hungarian churches and allocated most of the expropriated land to Romanian parishes.³

The following table shows the amount of land lost by the minority Hungarian churches during the land reform:⁴

Table 1: The losses of lands of the Roman Catholic Episcopates from Transylvania

MINORITY HUNGARIAN CHURCHES	LOSSES	
	CADASTRAL ACRES	%
Roman Catholic Episcopate of Varad (Oradea)	229.151	97.39
Roman Catholic Episcopate of Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia)	37.656	85.56
Roman Catholic Episcopate of Temesvár (Timișoara)	10.270	95.58
Roman Catholic Episcopate of Szatmár (Satu Mare)	568	76.55
Roman Catholic Church (total)	277.645	95.50
Reformed Episcopate of Transylvania	24.563	41.98
Reformed Episcopate of Várad (Oradea)	660	18.09
Unitarian Church	11.389	63.57
Hungarian Evangelical Parishes	74	7.10
Protestant Churches (total)	36.686	45.23

The Transylvanian land reform was decided in Paragraph 3, Article 5 of the Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia) resolutions, and by this measure the state wanted to enforce its intentions of social equalization and economic development. This was also the purpose of Decree no. 3911/1919 of the Governing Body of 10 September 1919, later amended by the Averescu Government on 9 July 1920. However, the expropriation of church property was based on a bill of 23 July 1921 by the Minister of Agriculture, Constantin Garoflid.⁵

According to Article 6, point 4 of the Land Reform Law implemented in Transylvania, the arable land of each parish was exempt from expropriation up to 40 acres. In addition to the 40 acres, the law exempted 16 acres of land from expropriation for parishes with a school, and 10 acres for parishes with more than 300 inhabitants, making a total of 66 acres. By this provision, the Romanian legislator himself determined the minimum amount of land that a parish must have in order to cover its church and school expenses. Another provision of the law and its implementing order also provided that where parishes did not have the above mentioned amount of land, they should be supplemented with the expropriated land up to the amount prescribed by law. However, the implementation of the law revealed that the above mentioned provisions of this law were only applicable to Romanian churches for their own benefits, and not to Hungarian churches.⁶

³ Bíró, S. (2002): 330.

⁴ Venczel, J. (1942): 133.

⁵ Ibidem: 30.

⁶ Bíró, S. (2002): 330.

The strict provisions of the land law brought radical changes in the economic structure of minority churches, as the consequences of the land reform had a double impact on churches and their specific institutions. In addition to the expropriation of a large part of the church's urban real estates and agricultural lands, the financial support of some church members was also lost. Previously, many church members with land had financed the church schools and other church institutions, and their donations had supplemented the salaries of the employees of these institutions, but the reform also meant that they lost a large part of their property and could no longer support the church from their income.

The four Roman Catholic dioceses (Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia), Nagyvárad (Oradea), Temesvár (Timișoara) and Szatmár (Satu Mare)) expropriated 277,513 acres of a total of 290,570 acres of land, which represented 98% of the land holdings.⁷

The expropriation of the land of the Catholic Status began on 13 May 1922. The first property to be expropriated was that of Alsóbajom (Boian), followed by the Radnót (Iernuț) manor and other forest covered districts. The Diocese of Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia) lost almost all of its properties.⁸

75% of the land was appropriated from the counties of Bihar (Bihor), Csík (Ciuc) and Kolozs (Cluj), as the largest ecclesiastical owner in Bihar (Bihor) was the diocese of Várad (Oradea). In Csík (Ciuc) almost all Roman Catholic parishes had estates, and in Kolozs (Cluj) there were three large estates of the Roman Catholic Status, all of which were meant for educational purposes.⁹

Some documents of the League of Nations give an insight into some of the problems of religious minorities in Romania. Eric Colban, a Norwegian diplomat, Chief of the Administrative Department of the League of Nations, Commissioner for Minority Affairs, prepared a series of reports on his last visit to Transylvania, 23-28 October 1926. In them he devoted much attention to the consequences of the land reform for the church institutions. During his visit to the Roman Catholic Bishop Imre Bjelik, he was able to identify some of the difficulties in maintaining schools, which stemmed from the excessive expropriation of church property.¹⁰ In the diocese of Várad (Oradea), in the regions bordering Hungary, the answer to the questions addressed to the population is: "The villagers were given land for building houses and farm buildings, which were the property of the Episcopate of Várad (Oradea) before the land reform."¹¹

Most of the Hungarian ecclesiastical estates belonged to various funds, which the church merely administered. Most of the estates of the Transylvanian Roman Catholic Status also belonged to various funds, such as the estate of Kolozsmonostor (Mănăștur), which was owned by the Educational Fund. The manors of Váralmás (Almașu) and Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca) belonged to the Scholarship Fund, while the Radnót (Iernuț) and Alsóbajom (Boian) manors were in 1/3-1/3 part owned by the Scholarship Fund and the Religious Fund.¹²

The Roman Catholic parishes in Transylvania had only 4,179 cadastral acres of land before the land reform. They were still entitled to 12,595 acres of land up to the amount of land officially allowed by law. Only three parishes benefited from a total of 21 acres. There were also

⁷ Marton, J. (1993): 154.

⁸ Ibidem, 155.

⁹ In the above mentioned areas, the Roman Catholic Church lost 114,881 acres of land, the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church lost 1,649 acres, the Armenian Catholics 352 acres, and the Ruthenian Catholics 4.3 acres. See: Venczel, J. (1993): 94.

¹⁰ Iancu, Gh. (2002): 285.

¹¹ Ibidem, 288.

¹² Móricz, M. (1932): 97.

many cases in which a number of additional parcels of land from the statutory areas of some parishes were also appropriated.¹³

Income from the estates of the various funds provided for the running of church institutions and denominational schools, as well as the maintenance of church buildings. As a result of the political and legal changes of 1918, the only Status estate to escape the ravages of the revolutions unscathed was Radnót (Ierņu). The National Guards managed to stop the onslaught of looters during the upheaval, but what was saved from them later fell victim to natural disasters. The floods of the spring and summer of 1919 completely destroyed the crops and destroyed the workers' houses and the mill. The devastation made it difficult to feed the animals, so a major financial investment from the Status budget was needed. The floods destroyed the brickworks on the banks of the Maros (Mureş) river, which also belonged to the manor. Most of the pigs sold from the estate died as a result of the epidemic, and the buyers made claims to the estate's administration office.¹⁴ In the same year, the expropriation of the Radnót (Ierņu) estate began. First 150 acres of pasture were distributed among the population, then 60 acres in Maroslekenca (Lechința). Then a 50-acre clover parcel was expropriated. The law allowed 1300 acres of land to be retained by the Status out of 4360 acres of land. In the Alsóbajom (Boian) manor, the law left 150 acres of the 1450 acres of land in the ownership of the Status. While half of the hayfields in Radnót (Ierņu) were appropriated, in Alsóbajom (Boian) all the hayfields were completely taken away.¹⁵

All these losses have upset the order in the administration of the institutions of the Status. The huge losses also recorded in the case of the other estates resulted in a stagnation or total lack of funding for the institutions and various activities of the Catholic Church.

In the fall of 1918, as a result of the revolution, the Alsóbajom (Boian) estate was completely destroyed. On 5 November, looters set the castle on fire and the mob scattered any remaining valuables. Surviving documents show that livestock, agricultural machinery and crops were stolen, causing damage to the Status's institution of around 3 million Kronen.¹⁶ Order was later restored and production restarted, at great cost. Theft continued to be a daily problem and manpower was hard to find.

60 acres of forest were cut down and taken from the Kolozsmonostor (Mănaştur) estate, and 1200 cubic meters of firewood were stolen from the Kisbácsi (Baciu) forest. The Calvary Church in Kolozsmonostor (Mănaştur) was vandalized by unknown perpetrators, who also vandalized other buildings belonging to the estate. The Kardos mill and the Horák house suffered similar damage. The Váralmás (Almaşu) estate was similarly vandalized.¹⁷

The agrarian reform left the Roman Catholic Church in Transylvania with 43,890 cadastral acres of land. The Roman Catholic Diocese of Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia) was left with 100 acres of ploughland out of 2,556 and 2,109 acres of forest out of 29,196 acres as a result of the reform laws of the Minister of Agriculture, Constantin Garoflid. The chapter was left with 23 acres of the 818 acres of land and 603 acres of the 3,363 acres of forest. The 821 acres of land and forest were completely expropriated from the clergy. The Status Fund was initially left with 579 acres of land out of 11,717 acres, and even this was reduced to 380 acres when the expropriations were completed. Only 2,670 acres of forest land remained out of 14,820 acres.¹⁸

¹³ Bíró, S. (2002): 331.

¹⁴ ASRCT. Report of the Governing Body of the Roman Catholic Status to the Assembly of the Status, 29 September 1920, page 26.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 31.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 28.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, 30.

¹⁸ Marton, J. (2008): 35.

In the case of many Roman Catholic parishes in Transylvania, data on expropriation are missing. What is certain is that there were some parishes which ceased to exist due to the lack of financial resources.

At the end of the 19th century, the assets of the funds of the Status consisted largely of various stocks, cash and the manor of Kolozsmonostor (Mănăştur). The instability of the stocks led the Status management to the decision to buy up real estate, which in the long run was a secure investment. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Transylvanian Roman Catholic Status, together with the old estate of Kolozsmonostor (Mănăştur), owned 15,000 acres of forest and 12,000 acres of land.¹⁹ The income resulting from acquired properties has increased year on year. The income has been used to ensure the proper functioning of the Roman Catholic denominational schools and other institutions run by the Status.

The issues related to the school and other material issues of the Roman Catholic Episcopal Diocese of Transylvania were administered by the Transylvanian Roman Catholic Status. The main decision-making body of the Status was the Status Assembly, and its administrative and executive body was the Governing Body. The General Ordinary Assembly of the Status was convened once a year. In the event of extremely important events, the Governing Body could also convene the Status Assembly. The members of the Status Assembly consisted in 1/3 part of the clergy and in 2/3 part of the laity, who had to belong to the Episcopal Diocese of Transylvania and be Romanian citizens.²⁰

The competence of the Status Assembly extended to all school matters, the administration of funds and all church-related matters that were not specifically part of the bishop's duties. In the Transylvanian Catholic diocese, it determined and administered the school system for all Roman Catholic elementary schools and grammar schools. It determined the posts, the conditions for the promotion of secondary school teachers, and paid for them from the Educational Fund. It also provided for the establishment of vocational schools according to needs and possibilities. It has supported boarding schools from the Scholarship Fund. The Status Assembly has supervised and controlled the proper and rational administration of the funds and endowments, and has laid down firm principles for the control and administration of church, school, and endowment property. To this end, it made proposals to the Governing Body. The Governing Body implemented the decisions taken by the Status Assembly, administered the schools and the property of the Status, provided for the school staff and all the material needs of the schools.²¹

The Transylvanian Roman Catholic Status administered several funds, such as the Educational Fund, the Scholarship Fund, the Religious Fund, the Fund of the Roman Catholic Elementary Schools, the Teresa Orphanage Fund, the Employees' Pension Fund, the Insurance Fund and the Fund for the Education of the Denominational Schools. Each Fund had its own accounting records and its own budget to help control and monitor expenditure.

In several cases, Transylvanian noble families, or just very wealthy families, left part of their property to the church or became patrons of a church institution. It was often the donations of wealthy church members that enabled a denominational school to be run, or the salaries of employees of a church institution to be paid, or even the maintenance of a priest in a village. There were a number of foundations, funds in the administration of the Roman Catholic Status, founded by Catholic nobles, with the fund bearing their name and their precise purpose. In the administration records of the Status, there are entire registers with the names of the founders,

¹⁹ Ibidem, 82.

²⁰ DANIC. Ministry of Religion and Culture, file 171/ (1924-1932) Status, Accord, (From the decisions of the Status Assembly, 20 November 1930, Cluj-Napoca, pp. 251-253.

²¹ Ibidem, 253-255.

and next to the names the purpose of the donation is indicated, most often to support a gifted student attending a religious school who has financial difficulties.

The agrarian reform of 1919-1920 brought major changes in the management of the Status funds and the estates belonging to them. On one hand, they suffered enormous losses due to expropriations, and on the other hand, the devastation caused by the upheavals resulted a great deal of damage when the population of the surrounding villages looted and burned the buildings on the estates. After the situation had calmed down, the Roman Catholic Church, through the Status, re-established order, started cultivation on the remaining land and tried to free the land from forced rent.

Due to the increase in real estate prices, in the 1920s, the Governing Body of the Status auctioned off some outer areas, lands, but also inner lands from the assets of the Religious, Educational and Scholarship Funds of the Kolozsmonostor (Mănăştur) manor. The English Park in Kardos (Cordoş) - because it had become difficult to maintain due to the stumps of felled trees - was parceled up and sold as a building site for 10,000 lei. In Kolozsmonostor (Mănăştur), a 154-square-foot land was sold for 1,500 lei.²² In the same area, 1 acre and 114 square feet land were sold for 17,000 lei. An area of 274 square feet used for hemp cultivation was sold for 2,800 lei. A four-acre field land was sold for 25,000 lei and a 24-square-foot land in Kálvária Street was sold to the former tenant for 1,300 lei. In Bogártelke (Băgara), an area of 1 hectare and 635 square feet was sold for 6,000 lei, and a mowing area of 1,165 square feet was sold for 4,000 lei. In Kisbács (Baciu), a 400 square-foot mower was sold for 750 lei and a 3 hectare, 607 square-foot plot was sold for 10,135 lei.²³

The income from all these sold properties were deposited in the Educational Fund. In addition to the income, there is also a list of expenditure, which shows that the Status has signed a one-year contract with a water sewerage company for maintenance for the sum of 3,600 lei per year. For the maintenance of buildings alone, 18,890 lei was spent. The total value of the properties rented by the Roman Catholic Church in Kolozsvár (Cluj) was estimated at 13,829,180 lei. At the same time, there is a 1921 statistics on the income from agriculture of the estate in Kolozsmonostor (Mănăştur), which shows that the annual income of the Educational Fund was 125,000 lei.

The loss of income suffered by the Kolozsmonostor (Mănăştur) manor as a result of the land reform prompted the Status management to look for new alternatives to make up the shortfall. The loss of property had a negative impact on the functioning of some ecclesiastical institutions, which the Status maintained through various funds. The mill and the farm buildings were not expropriated but, in the absence of the land taken, they had to find other uses to ensure continuous income generation for the funds. The management of the estate was considering converting the buildings into a factory. With a small investment, they envisaged using hydropower to generate electricity that could provide electricity for one or more villages. A proposal was made to the Governing Body of the Status to approve the setting up of a rope factory and a weaving factory processing hemp in the event of a major expropriation. They also envisaged the setting up of a hydroelectric fruit canning factory or a chicken farm.²⁴

Similar situations prevailed at the manor of Alsóbajom (Boian). The expropriation of the land resulted in a change in the course of production. In addition to 22 acres of vineyards, they now farmed a total of 51 acres of land. Of these, 20 acres were devoted to wheat, 10 to beech

²² This is an old unit of measurement used in Romania to measure the size of lands, which differed in size from other areas. Thus, in Transylvania, a square-foot of land was 3.59 square meters, in the province of Wallachia, 3.87 square meters, and in Moldavia 4.97 square meters.

²³ ASRCT. Report of the Governing Body of the Roman Catholic Status to the Status Assembly on the Estates, 10 August 1922, page 82.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, 88.

and oats and 25 to maize. The livestock consisted of 17 cows, 4 buffaloes, 11 horses and 199 sheep. The income from agriculture was 69,801 lei and 82 bani, of which all the funds had its own share. 25,000 lei was deposited in the current account.²⁵

Such economic documents, reports on the management of the Status funds, can be found for each year. However, there is a wide variation between them. This was due to the constant acquisition and sale of new properties. In a number of cases, it was possible to recover properties that had been taken on forced lease for the benefit of the Status Funds. The church was forced to sell several properties, as it was unable to maintain them in the new situation.

Statistical accounts show that the amounts of income from economic activities within an estate have varied from year to year. In the mid-1920s, it was observed that the nominal income of some estates could even triple, but this was not the result of economic growth but inflation. The post-war period was characterized by a steady rise of inflation. Thus, the volume of money supply increased from 1452 million lei at the end of 1916 to 17,917 million lei at the end of 1923.²⁶ This represented a 12-fold increase compared to 1916 and was mainly due to the fact that the state called on the National Bank of Romania to issue large amounts of paper money to balance the budget deficit, especially in 1920-1921. According to official data from the Ministry of Industry and Trade, trade price indices increased nationwide in 1923. Compared with the figures in 1914, the increase was 2586 %, i.e. a 26-fold increase. Another reason for the financial chaos in Romania and the rise in inflation was that in the first two years after the war, in addition to the leu issued by the National Bank of Romania, other currencies were in circulation, such as the Austro-Hungarian Kronas and the rubles, each of which had a different exchange rate. The inflationary increase in monetary turnover was followed by a rise in prices and a fall in the exchange rate of the leu at national and international level.²⁷

From the correspondence between the Roman Catholic Church in Transylvania and the Romanian state authorities, a number of petitions have survived in which church people or the bishop himself request financial assistance for the repair of church buildings or for the payment of teachers in religious schools. In a document dated March 1924, Imre Bjelik, the leader of the Roman Catholic Church in Nagyvárad (Oradea), appealed to the Minister of Culture for financial aid. This letter revealed that the Roman Catholic Church in Nagyvárad (Oradea), due to its patronage obligation, allotted for the parish priests, cantors and vestrymen a total of 62,820 lei and 69 bani per year, 82,80 hectoliters of wheat, 212,90 hectoliters of rye, 128,40 hectoliters of oats, 14,80 hectoliters of barley, 6685 liters of wine, 3626 cubic meters of firewood, 67 cubic meters of wood for building and 28 fattening pigs worth 1,800,000 lei. In addition, he was also obliged to maintain 58 churches, schools, parish buildings and the associated farm buildings.²⁸

Under Article 90 of the land reform, after the expropriation of forests and land suitable for agricultural use, these patronage obligations were transferred to the state. However, the state failed to fulfil these obligations towards the church, and this created serious structural disturbances in the functioning of church institutions.

In a document dated 14 January 1925, Bishop Gusztáv Károly Majláth of Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia) appeals to Alexandru Lapedatu, Minister of Culture, for financial aid for the Catholic Theology. In his letter, the Bishop explains that he is once again forced to ask for financial support for the seminary, as the 45 theologians and staff need 900,000 lei per year

²⁵ Ibidem, 89.

²⁶ Related to statistics of the Ministry of Industry and Trade from 1925.

²⁷ Compared with the French franc (the Western European currency unit that depreciated the least after the World War), 100 Romanian lei were worth 11.05 francs in 1919, but only 2.30 francs in 1922. The depreciation of the leu was best reflected in the rise in prices at national level.

²⁸ DANIC. Archives of the Department of Administration and Culture, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, file 166/1924, page 51.

to support them, of which the own income is only 200,000 lei. This leaves a deficit of 700,000 lei, which the state would be obliged to pay. He also notes here that the Catholic seminary had sufficient land to cover the costs of this institution, but lost this resource as a result of the agricultural law. It is clear that if the state does not return the land and if it does not intend to abolish this diocesan institution, it will be obliged to pay the difference of 700 000 lei.²⁹

A large part of the church's real estate was made up of donations left to the church by individuals in the absence of heirs, and of estates renounced by Transylvanian noble families in favor of the church. This is evidenced by a number of written wills by which movable and immovable property was transferred to the Church, certified by a notary.

Such donation letters and wills were also significant because they provided the church with unforeseen financial resources. One such donation was the one now known as the Stanca Hospital in Kolozsvár (Cluj). The management or sale of these assets could provide the basic conditions for the operation of church institutions when, in difficult times, state grants were delayed or permanently withheld.

In most cases, the agrarian reform deprived the churches of the agricultural land that served to maintain the denominational schools. And the onset of the global economic crisis destroyed private foundations. The operating conditions of church institutions were further worsened by some paragraphs of the enacted cult law, which abolished private patronage. This meant that all the difficulties had to be borne by the parishes themselves. Even though taxes were very high. By the end of the 1930s, properties that were exempt from expropriation were strictly taxed according to their value.

At the end of the 1920s, there was a proliferation of documents from various churches requesting financial assistance. The main reasons for this were the national and international financial crisis, the fall in grain prices and the disappearance of various markets. The economic situation in Romania did not allow these requests to be honored and, as a result, the churches could only rely on their own resources. Romania not only had to meet the criteria for a modern state (bureaucracy, army, justice), but also had to consolidate the conditions for its future development (education system, infrastructure, economic support). Despite the fact that Romania was able to finance about a quarter of its internal needs from the profits of its oil industry, in 1936 it had the largest external public debt in South-East Europe.

From 1928 onwards, it became increasingly difficult for Romania to meet world challenges, both economically and politically. The Great Depression caused a general shock at economic, political and social levels. It tested the leadership of the political parties and the entire state apparatus in general.³⁰

In the midst of economic crisis, the Transylvanian Roman Catholic Status also underwent an internal structural crisis, as the institution had to change its structural foundations according to the decisions of the Rome Accord, finalized on 30 May 1932. The institution, known as "Status Romano-Catholicus Transylvaniensis", was transformed into an organ of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia), in accordance with the first article of the Accord, and was named the Roman Catholic Diocesan Council of Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia). Article X of the Accord emphasized that the signing of this agreement coincided with the signing of the new institution's organizational and operational statute. According to this article, the membership of the Catholic Diocesan Council was reduced and the still existing Status Assembly was dissolved on the basis of the same article.³¹

The reorganization of the institution of the Status and the reduction of its membership temporarily created a situation of confusion within the institution, which also affected the

²⁹ Ibidem: DANIC. file 182/1925, page 6.

³⁰ Berend, T. I. - Ránki, Gy. (1974): 309.

³¹ Monitorul Oficial, no. 180, 1932, VIII, p.3.

management of the various Funds' estates. The financial reports were only partially completed, audits and minutes were in most cases lacking, the internal bureaucracy and the sphere of activity of the various departments were reduced, and the Catholic Church incurred huge losses as a result of the difficult management of property and assets.

Starting in the 1930s, more and more real estate rental laws appear, that cause financial damage to the Status's sources of income. Under the new Landlord and Tenant Act of 1932, from 1 May, the Status was subject to a 30% reduction in the rent of each shop or tenement, which was already sold at well below market value. In the 1930s, the Status owned a number of properties that could not be used. In order not to increase their number, a decision was taken by the Assembly to impose a reduction in wages, especially for old tenants and those loyal to the Church. However, the wage cut imposed by the state was not accompanied by a reduction in property taxes, despite the law stating that in the event of a 30 % wage cut, the tax paid on the property would also be reduced in proportion. On the other hand, the Status had to reckon with an additional tax on real estate, so that the amount paid on real estate rose from 161,319 lei in 1931 to 240,830 lei in 1932.³²

All in all, these more than two decades were also a search for the socio-economic adaptation of the minority churches and their integration into the new state framework, when they were assigned a secondary position, in contrast to the Greek Eastern (Orthodox) Church, recognized as a state religion by the Romanian state, and to the Greek Catholic Church, which had its privileged position legitimized.

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³² ASRCT. Report of the Governing Body of the Roman Catholic Status to the Status Assembly on the estates of Kolozsmonostor (Mănăstur), 17 November 1932, page 113.

Monitorul Oficial, nr. 180, 1932, VIII.

ASRCT = Arhivele Statusului Romano Catholic din Transilvania. (Az Erdélyi Római Katolikus Státus Levéltára). A Római Katolikus Státus Igazgató Tanácsának jelentése a Státus Gyűlés számára a birtokokról, 1920 szeptember 29.

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