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DOCTORAL THESIS

**THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF ROMANIAN PEOPLE  
FROM HARGHITA AND COVASNA COUNTIES  
DURING THE VIENNA DICTATE  
(1940-1944)**

**ABSTRACT**

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Keywords: *Dictate, Vienna, Germany, Romania, Transylvania, Northern Transylvania, Hungary, Italy, Orthodox Church, Greek Catholic Church, World War II, Nicolae Bălan, Nicolae Colan, Covasna, Harghita, refugee, expulsion, demolition of churches, hungarianization, Orthodox Episcopate of Covasna and Harghita, Adolf Hitler, Miklos Horthy, King Charles II.*

The issue of the Vienna Dictate has caused more studies, especially in recent years, but such a vast problem involves tailor-made research, which can only be exhausted or exhausted to some extent. Many of the documents relating to the act of 30 August 1940 have not yet been published. The research by the undersigned of the parish archives from Covasna and Harghita counties, of the National Archives of Romania, of those from the Ecclesiastical Center for Research and Documentation of Metropolitan Nicolae Colan or of the German Archives, made them present in the present work. some unique events and facts, which took place before, during and immediately after the Vienna Dictate, stories that will shed new light on the general vision of this issue. Also, the research of Hungarian historiography and the Hungarian language press make possible an overview of the research stage.

It should be noted, at the outset, that the main purpose of the research is to present the historical truth, *sine ira et studio*, beyond the historical subjectivism of one camp or another, on the religious life of Romanians in Harghita and Covasna counties during the Vienna Dictate.

The fact that I was born, raised, live and I became a priest in an area that requires a very special pastoral care, namely the Orthodox Episcopate of Covasna and Harghita, part of the territory called Northern Transylvania, hard tried by the times that passed she, then making personal contact with witnesses of the Great Union of 1918, or with people who witnessed the forced occupation by the Vienna Dictate, including my predecessors, and hearing orally the testimonies of these people concerning the trials by which they past her and the Romanian Church, and secondly, seeing the indifference and forgetfulness of the Romanian people and the leaders or those who should be careful with this part of the country, where so many nations coexist, are the subjective reasons for choosing the research topic.

In recent years, more and more young Romanian researchers have researched documents that rewrite the history of Transylvania from ancient times to the communist regime, focusing more on the geopolitical aspects of World War II and the effects of the

Holocaust, leaving , somewhat, a gap in the history of Transylvanian Romanians in the four years of horticultural occupation, which became a pragmatic and objective reason for this study.

The daily problems of Romanians in Harghita and Covasna counties have attracted and continue to attract the attention of national and international public opinion. There was also an increase in the interest of contemporary researchers in the topic addressed in the paper. The knowledge of the recent history and of the current situation, reflected in the present paper, make possible an overview and real on the historical, cultural and religious realities of the Romanians in the area. The present paper aims to bring up to date, to select and systematize the information from the studies already published in the above mentioned institutions or in other periods and places, but also to bring to light new documents that will contribute substantially to those already said, focusing on a certain period of time, a certain field (that of church life) and a well-defined territory (South-East Transylvania). The topicality of the paper is, therefore, not only a scientific one, bringing to light past realities, but also a religious, political, social and cultural one, contributing to the consolidation of a European, anti-revisionist mentality.

Today, the confusion caused by the multitude of information, often contradictory, true or less true, dominates the world. The history of the South-East area of Transylvania has benefited from many researches and studies, especially in the last part of the last century and in the past period of this century, by the establishment of the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of Covasna and Harghia, in 1994, in Miercurea-Ciuc , followed by the establishment of the European Center for Studies Covasna Harghita and the Ecclesiastical Documentation Center "Metropolitan Nicolae Colan", in Sfântu Gheorghe, by the care of His Eminence Ioan Selejan, the first bishop of Covasna and Harghita and the archivist Prof. Dr. Ioan Lăcătuș , which today operates, with a very high scientific efficiency, under the pastorate of His Holiness Father Andrei Moldovan, Bishop of Covasna and Harghita. A study on the church life of the Romanians from Harghita and Covasna counties during the Vienna Dictate is extremely current, given that many of the previous researches have treated only this subject tangentially or partially. From a practical point of view, the work fills a gap in the specialized literature by

bringing to the fore some original archive documents and by highlighting the historical works and the Hungarian language press, unknown to the Romanian public until now.

The work proposed as a doctoral thesis is extremely complex, ranging from general to individual, from macro to micro, so the methods needed to conduct such a study are numerous and must include many attempts to address the final product, polished and proposed for evaluation.

Although the subject of the religious life of the Romanians from Harghita and Covasna counties during the Vienna Dictate is apparently well defined, referring to a specific historical period, to a specific space and place, the study cannot be isolated from the rest of the turmoil on nationally and internationally, the subject can be broken neither by the previous period nor by what followed after the return of Northern Transylvania to Romania, on August 23, 1940.

The three-dimensional view considers the subject, the context, but also the vision of the context, which is why the historical, cultural, social and, especially, religious context of what really happened during the horticultural occupation in the two counties will be analyzed.

Three methods of research have become, through interdisciplinarity, a single method, by which I have tried to bring to light the historical truth, namely the methods of documentation, bibliographic research and analysis, closely related to each other. The documentation included the research of the Central National Historical Archives in Bucharest, of the County Services of the National Archives of Miercurea-Ciuc, Sfântu Gheorghe and Târgu Mureș, of the Diplomatic Archive of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of the Archive of the Ecclesiastical Documentation Center "Mitropolit Nicolae Colan" from Sfântu Gheorghe, of the CNSAS Archive, of the archive funds of several Romanian parishes and the personal archives of the priests from the period of the horticultural occupation, consisting of letters, diaries, personal notes, etc. An addition to this paper is the research of the German Archives, namely: the Federal Archive of Germany (Bundesarchiv), the Political Archive of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Politisches Archiv des Auswärtige Amt), and the Brandenburg State Archive in Potsdam (Brandenburgisches Landarchiv Potsdam). To these are added the specialized bibliographic materials, both those from the Romanian

historiography, and those from the Hungarian and German historiography, which are not few either and which have been analyzed with the greatest scientific rigor.

It is also necessary to use the comparative method, given the multitude of types of documents and bibliographic sources. From what has been studied, it has been observed that some contradict the others, for various reasons, especially due to the location on either side of the barricade, which is why we have placed them in opposite positions, adding direct and indirect evidence that emerged from the studied documents, their importance being crucial.

Another research method was the quantitative method, the one through which we analyzed, from a statistical point of view, the evolution of the Romanian population, places of worship, schools and cultural institutions in Covasna and Harghita counties, using censuses and measurements. before the horticultural occupation, during the occupation and after the occupation, measurements that are mandatory for understanding the effects of the Vienna Dictate.

The microhistory research method was used to exemplify the concrete situations in the affected parishes - the Romanian churches and communities, in part - thus discovering the concrete life of the Romanians in southeastern Transylvania, but also to restore the personality of the great hero bishop, Nicolae Colan. who made an essential contribution to the religious, spiritual, and cultural resistance of the Romanians, refusing to leave occupied Transylvania and preferring to fight alongside his priests, remaining the only Orthodox bishop in the occupied space.

The Vienna Dictate had many consequences for the lives of Romanians in Northern Transylvania, especially in religious life. The church's life in the occupied territory took an unfortunate turn, while in the unoccupied areas the life of the Romanians remained unchanged, until today. The Romanian and German archives, as well as the presentation of Hungarian historiography will bring a new perspective in research.

The research hypotheses, launched, as a continuation of the proposed objectives, are also related to the questions that come to the aid of the research. Thus, the first research hypothesis is that the political, demographic, but especially religious situation would have been completely different, in the long run, if the Vienna Dictate had not been pronounced, or

if the Kingdom of Romania had succeeded otherwise. negotiation, much more favorable to the Romanian inhabitants of the occupied land. Another research hypothesis refers to the exceeding of the attributions by the three Hungarian repression bodies: the Police, the Army and the Gendarmerie, which led to the innumerable crimes and violations of the terms of the Dictate. Next, the research hypotheses refer, on the one hand, to the heroism of Bishop Nicolae Colan and the support given by Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan, to the faithful from the lands under horthist occupation, and a last hypothesis is related to the consequences that are still felt today, long after the time of the Vienna Dictate.

For a better understanding of the subject, as a whole, but also for the clarification of terms that are understood too vaguely, or completely erroneously, we considered necessary the semantic delimitation of these terms, in order to facilitate, then, the scientific discourse on nations. and the places presented in the paper.

*Transylvania* - the historical province between the Carpathians and the Tisza, part of Dacia, in turn under Gothic, Gepid, Hungarian, and Austro-Hungarian occupation, inhabited mostly by Romanians, Hungarians, Saxons, Swabians, Jews and other nationalities, "How many Romanians live in Hungary and in Transylvania and Maramureş from a holy place with Moldovans and everyone from Râm is drawn." The name obviously comes from the Latin *Ultrasilvania*, which is found in documents up to the twelfth century, and with the beginning of this century, the name unanimously used by Hungarian chancelleries is *Transylvania*.

*Ardeal* - The terminological equivalent of *Transylvania*, on which there have been and still are a number of controversies, especially on the etymology but also on its extent. Thus it was found, following various theories on the Thracian, Greek and even Sanskrit origin, that the origin of the term *Transylvania* is the Hungarian *Erdély*, meaning the Latin translation of *Transylvania* (*Erdő* + *ele* = beyond the forest), which through Romanian retranslation became *Ardeal*, the popular name of *Transylvania*. Regarding the geographical extent of *Ardeal*, most researchers consider that it is the same as *Transylvania*, the difference being only one form of the word.

For the scientific discourse, the name of *Transylvania* is preferred, a preferred term for this paper as well.



*Northern Transylvania* - is the territory with an area of 43,492 km<sup>2</sup> that was ceded, in 1940, to Hungary by Romania, following the Vienna Dictate, occupied in the spring of 1944 by Nazi Germany, then in August the same year by the Union Soviet, and in 1947 returning by right to Romania, as will be shown in this paper. This territory will be part of our research object.

*Southeastern Transylvania* - that region of Transylvania that stretches on the territory of the former Szekler counties (seats) Ciuc, Trei Scaune and Odorhei, today the counties of Harghita and Covasna, an area that interests us in particular.

*Szeklers* – a population of warriors subordinated to the central power, were established in some border areas of the young medieval Hungarian state. Their arrival in southern and eastern Transylvania probably occurred in the 11th-12th centuries. The history and institutions of the Szeklers are known only from the era of mature feudalism. At this time, their society, exempt from feudal obligations, consisted of three categories of soldiers. In the past, they were considered a separate nation from the Hungarian one, as evidenced by their appointment in the charter *Unio Trum Nationum*, along with Hungarians and Saxons. At present, the descendants of the Szeklers consider themselves Hungarians, identifying with the Hungarian ethnic group.

*Hungarian* - from the Old Slavic language *ongrinu* - is the equivalent of the name Hungarian, which comes from the Hungarian language, a term used for the inhabitants of Greater Hungary, which until 1918 had a much larger area than today. After this date, the term Hungarian is preferred, in order to unify the nation but also to Hungarianize the other coexisting nations.

*Maghiar* - from the Hungarian *magyar* - according to the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language, designates a person who is part of the basic population of Hungary, identifying with Hungarian. In fact, the notion grew after the Revolution of 1848, “when the Slovak-Hungarian Kosuth and the Serbo-Croatian-Hungarian Petič, wanting to create a homogeneous nation, tried to complete the denationalization of the nations living in Hungary, and therefore in Transylvania, where there should be no more Hungarians, Germans, Szeklers, Romanians, Croats, Slovaks, Slovenes, Jews, Armenians, etc. but Hungarians, that

is, those who recognized the borders of the new state and accepted the renunciation of ethnicity, religion, traditions, customs, etc.”<sup>1</sup>.

The doctoral thesis is structured in six chapters.

Chapter I makes an analysis of the research stage, in which are presented, structured, the previous works having as object the theme of the Vienna Dictate and of the relations between the two coexisting nations from Harghita and Covasna counties. First of all, we made a retrospective of the works of Romanian historiography, starting with 1940 and until now, then, based on the study of German historiography, we managed to make a list of works from the German space, related to our research topic. Another unique approach is the presentation of Hungarian historiography, much broader and more concerned with the issue of the period of Hungarian occupation of Transylvania (1940-1944). We focused on a reference work, published in 2016, by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, in collaboration with several Hungarian institutions in Transylvania, entitled "History of the Szekler Land", a work that caused a wave of controversy at launch and which has become a major source of research for this paper. After the presentation of the historiography, we presented the researched archival sources, these having a majority weight in the elaboration of the present doctoral thesis.

In the second chapter, entitled "The effects of the geopolitics of revisionist villages on the situation of Romania in 1937-1940", we presented the general situation of Romania in the interwar period, emphasizing the geographical and historical framework of the current counties Harghita and Covasna and , especially, on the religious, administrative, cultural organization and of the Romanian education from the two counties. Also in this chapter I presented the domestic and international context preceding the Vienna Dictate, based on archival documents, especially those in the German capital, a country that had an overwhelming role in carrying out the act of August 30, 1940. In the same context I also presented the history of the Hungarian revisionist movement, which represented an extremely important phenomenon, being one of the decisive factors in making the decision to dismember Romania. One of the unique historical and ecclesiastical events, presented in this chapter, is

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<sup>1</sup> Mircea DOGARU, „Argument”, în Gyorgy FERENCZY, *Maghiarimea din Transilvania și revizionismul (A Transylványai magyarság és revisió)*, Ediție bilingvă, Editura Glykon&Fortuna, București, 2006, p. 20.

the attempt to establish an Orthodox diocese of Hungary, which was to include the Orthodox believers in occupied Transylvania. The chapter ends with the presentation of several press articles on the Hungarian revisionist movement and the Vienna Dictate.

The third chapter, entitled "The religious life of Romanians in Harghita and Covasna counties during the Vienna Dictate (1940-1944)", is also the chapter with the largest scope, in which I presented, in detail - based on research the archives, bibliography and press articles of that time - the special situation that the Romanian believers in the area temporarily ceded to Hungary went through, through the Vienna Dictate. It was necessary to present all aspects of Romanian religious life, including the expulsion of Romanian bishops and priests from the occupied area, the demolition, devastation and defilement of Romanian churches, the expulsion, ill-treatment and Hungarianization of Romanian believers, all in the context of a hostile attitude from priests and representatives of the Hungarian historical cults. Also here it was necessary to mention the special support of the Orthodox Archdiocese of Sibiu, through Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan and the special involvement of the hero bishop Nicolae Colan of Cluj, the only Romanian Orthodox bishop left in the occupied territory.

For reasons of structuring the work, in the fourth chapter we presented, apart from the religious life, the aspects related to the consequences of the Vienna Dictate on the Romanians from South-Eastern Transylvania. Thus, we presented aspects of the evacuation of the Romanian administration from occupied Transylvania followed by the efforts of the new Hungarian administration to ban the Romanian language, the Romanian national port and other symbols of the national identity of the Romanians. Of great importance are also the subchapters on the demographic consequences and legislative implications of the Vienna Dictate, which have important consequences today. At the same time, I presented the situation of education in the Romanian language and of the Romanian cultural institutions, during the four years of Hungarian occupation. In order to emphasize the unity of the nation, we also presented some actions, from the innumerable ones that existed, of solidarity of the Romanians everywhere, towards the Transylvanian Romanians under foreign occupation. The press of the time proved to be very important in making a complete picture of the situation in Transylvania, therefore I presented, briefly, some press articles and radio shows on the occupation of

Transylvania and the life of the population (both Romanian and Hungarian, German and Jewish), from the Romanian, Hungarian, German space but also from other countries.

In the fifth chapter we presented the evolutions from August 1944-February 1947, ie from the liberation of Northern Transylvania to the establishment of the communist regime, a period in which, as far as possible, an attempt was made to restore the religious life of Romanians in Harghita counties. and Covasna, by returning priests and believers from the refuge and beginning repair work on church buildings affected during the Hungarian occupation.

Chapter VI, entitled "Contemporary Reverberations and Valuations on the Vienna Dictate and its Consequences on the Romanian People", brings to light the religious, social and ethnic situation of Romanians in Harghita and Covasna counties by presenting the permanent desire of some Hungarian political leaders to restore the borders of old Hungary, but also the resistance of the Romanian population against all pressures through civil society efforts to improve the lives of Romanians in this part of the country and, especially, through permanent actions to improve religious life supported by the Orthodox Diocese of Covasna and Harghitei - a providential divine-human institution for this part of the country.

Therefore, the study of the religious life of the Romanians from Harghita and Covasna counties during the Vienna Dictate (1940-1944) represented a complex scientific approach. We cannot understand the act of August 30, 1940 - when Germany and Italy forced Romania, by Dictate, to cede to Hungary a large part of the territory of Transylvania - without knowing the realities that preceded this act. That is why it was necessary to present the internal and international context, from the interwar period, regarding Romania and Transylvania, in which one can see the political pressures to which our country was subjected. It is also necessary to know the flowering period of church life in the two counties, consisting in the construction of churches, crosses and parish houses, by the ordination of priests, the construction of Romanian schools and the establishment of associations and cultural foundations, led to the increase the number of Romanian believers who returned after being subjected to the process of Hungarianization. The archive documents, the specialized bibliography and the press of the time show, therefore, that the state of affairs, at the end of the interwar period, was a favorable one for the Romanians. Following the Vienna Dictate,

the flourishing state of the Romanians suddenly turned into a state of permanent oppression, they being subjected, from the first days of the Hungarian occupation, to an intense process of denationalization, the Church being the main target of this policy. Therefore, among the main denationalization measures were the expulsion of Romanian bishops and priests, the destruction, devastation and desecration of churches, cemeteries and religious buildings, the expulsion and ill-treatment and forced conversions of Romanian believers for hungarianization.

Also, the Romanian education was abolished, being forbidden the use of the Romanian language in the public space, as well as the Romanian dress and all the Romanian symbols. The demographic consequences and legislative implications of the period of Hungarian occupation from 1940-1944 are visible to this day. Only a part of the refugees returned to their places of origin, and of those who were converted to Hungarian historical cults, very few returned to the ancestral faith, one of the causes being the political situation in the period following the liberation of Transylvania and not it also allowed the reorganization of religious life but led to the arrest and deportation of priests existing in the territory. The religious life of the Romanians from Covasna and Harghita counties entered a normal path only after acquiring the freedom of faith, starting with 1989, when the civil society took steps for the establishment of the Orthodox Episcopate of Covasna and Harghita, realized in 1994, an institution that proved to be providential for Romanians in this part of the country.

Therefore, the present research has largely achieved its original purpose, bringing to light new facts and events, based on archival documents and bibliography, both in Romanian and in Hungarian, German or English, bringing a plus to the research stage and representing a starting point for future research in the field.