

VATICAN ARCHIVAL DATA ON THE SITUATION OF HUNGARIAN CATHOLICS IN TRANSYLVANIA AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR¹

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Abstract: This study, based on research conducted in the Vatican Apostolic Archives, seeks to shed light on several data and details that remain less familiar to contemporary Hungarian historiography and that, in my view, constitute important elements of the broader mosaic from which a comprehensive picture of the Hungarian population in Transylvania between the two world wars may be reconstructed. The period examined here extends from 1918 to 1932, from the incorporation of Transylvania into Romania to the signing of the 1932 Agreement, which in several respects settled the situation of Hungarian Catholics who had been placed at a disadvantage by the 1927 Concordat. In addition to this main theme, the situation of Roman Catholic Hungarians in Transylvania can also be followed through a number of subsidiary threads, which likewise reveal aspects that help us understand the position of the Holy See on this question. The archival sources show that, alongside universal ecclesial and diplomatic interests, Rome also kept the question of minority rights in view and, over time, attached increasing importance to it.

Keywords: Transylvania; Hungarian minority; Roman Catholic Church; Romania; Holy See; minority rights; education; property

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- 1 The research and the preparation of this study were supported by the Babeş-Bolyai University Postdoctoral Advanced Fellowship - UBB programme through contract no. 21PFE/30.12.2021; ID: PFE-550-UBB.
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Article history: Received 03.05.2026; Revised 05.05.2026; Accepted 15.05.2026.

Available online: 01. 07. 2026. Available print: 31. 07. 2026.

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Introduction

Drawing on research conducted in the Vatican Apostolic Archives, this study examines several archival details that have received relatively little attention in contemporary Hungarian historiography. These details, I argue, are important pieces in the broader historical mosaic of the Hungarian community in Transylvania during the interwar period. The study covers the years between 1918 and 1932: from the incorporation of Transylvania into Romania after the First World War to the conclusion of the 1932 Agreement, which in several respects remedied the situation of Hungarian Catholics disadvantaged by the Concordat of 1927.

The central thread of the period examined here is the long series of concordat negotiations between Romania and the Holy See. These negotiations began well before the First World War and continued until 1927, although the Concordat itself was not ratified until 1929. Over the course of these years, the positions of the negotiating parties shifted repeatedly, particularly regarding the status of Hungarian Catholics in Transylvania. The initial atmosphere of optimism and confidence gradually gave way to mistrust. Paradoxically, this change helped create the conditions for the 1932 Agreement, which proved more favourable to the minority.

Alongside this main line of inquiry, the situation of Roman Catholic Hungarians in Transylvania can also be followed through a number of related issues. Several of these will be discussed below, since they shed further light on the Holy See's position. The archival material suggests that, in addition to universal ecclesial and diplomatic considerations, Rome also took the question of minority rights into account and came to attach increasing importance to it over time.

A Brief Overview of the Diplomacy and Archives of the Holy See

Navigating the institutional structure of the Catholic Church is not always straightforward, nor is it easy to use the relevant terminology with complete precision. Because of its distinctive historical development, this structure is highly complex. It is often referred to simply as "the Vatican," but such a shorthand can obscure important distinctions. The Papal States, the political and administrative entity of the Catholic Church, ceased to exist in 1870. Vatican City State, which may be regarded as its successor in a limited sense, was established by the Lateran Treaty of 1929. Its jurisdiction extends only over the small territory that includes

Saint Peter's Basilica, the papal palaces, several other institutions, and the archives. By contrast, the official institution representing the universal Church is the Holy See. It is non-territorial in character and is not identical with the city-state.³

The Holy See is headed by the pope, who is also the monarch of Vatican City State, while the practical direction of its diplomatic activity belongs to the Secretariat of State. The Secretary of State coordinates the work of the dicasteries, formerly known as congregations, and plays a central role in the external relations of the Church.⁴ Both the Holy See and the Secretariat of State have their own archives.

The most visible representatives of papal diplomacy are the nuncios, who function as ambassadors of the Holy See. They are appointed by the pope on the recommendation of the Secretary of State and represent the interests of the Catholic Church in a particular country or region. They report directly to the Secretary of State, and their reports are preserved in the Vatican Apostolic Archives. Nuncios also act as intermediaries between Rome and the local Church. In many cases, however, diocesan bishops communicated directly with the Secretary of State, the pope, or the cardinals heading the dicasteries, without passing through the nunciature.

According to canon law, local bishops, and especially archbishops, belong to the ecclesiastical diplomatic body in the broader sense: they represent the Church, not the nation or state of which they are citizens.⁵ As will become clear, this principle was not always consistently observed in practice. The letters and reports of bishops and archbishops are likewise preserved in the Apostolic Archives.

The Vatican Apostolic Archives took shape in the seventeenth century, gradually separating from the papal library. From 1646 onward, the institution was commonly known as the Secret Archives. In 2019, however, Pope Francis restored the older designation "Apostolic Archives," partly to dispel popular associations of secrecy and mystery surrounding the institution. Although the Napoleonic period severely damaged the collection, when a large part of the documentation was transferred to Paris, the archive remains one of the largest

3 See: <https://www.vaticanstate.va/it/stato-governo/note-general/origini-natura.html> [Accessed 3 August 2024].

4 BÚZA László, A Szentszék nemzetközi jogi helyzete a lateráni egyezmény szerint, *Magyar Jogászegyleti Értekezések*, vol. XX, no. 103 (1929), Budapest: Franklin Társulat.

5 Michael F. FELDKAMP, *La diplomazia pontifica da Silvestro I a Giovanni Paolo II. Un profilo*, Milan: Jaca Book, 1995, 84.

in the world. It preserves not only records of the Catholic Church, but also an exceptionally rich documentary heritage concerning the history of humanity over the past two millennia.⁶

The documents are open to scholarly consultation, and part of the collection is also available in digital form. In what follows, this study focuses on documents preserved among the records of the nunciature in Romania.

The Diplomatic Aims of the Holy See in Relation to Romania between the Two World Wars

The outcome of the First World War posed a serious challenge for the Holy See, whose principal diplomatic partners had traditionally been the Habsburgs. The collapse of the Dualist Monarchy forced the ecclesiastical diplomacy associated with Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Gasparri⁷ to adjust to the new international order established after Versailles. This adjustment brought with it what may be described as a French orientation in Vatican diplomacy. Seen in this context, it is understandable that the series of concordats so characteristic of the pontificate of Pius XI continued with states regarded as allies of France. Among these were Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Romania, the three countries that together formed the Little Entente and contributed to the diplomatic isolation of Hungary.

During this period, Romania's chief political objective was to consolidate the borders drawn at Versailles. Although the overwhelming majority of the population belonged to the Orthodox Church, and although government policy developed largely along National Liberal lines, the leading politicians of the period considered it important to establish good relations with the Catholic Church. This was especially true of Prime Minister Ion I. C. Brătianu.⁸ For Bucharest, such relations offered the possibility of securing recognition from a universal religious community and institution whose influence extended well beyond the borders of any single state. It was with this aim in mind that the Romanian authorities

6 See: <https://www.archivioapostolicovaticano.va/content/aav/en/l-archivio/note-storiche.html> [Accessed 3 August 2024].

7 Pietro Gasparri (1852-1934), cardinal and Secretary of State of the Holy See between 1914 and 1930. His activity centred on the conclusion of concordats, the most significant of which was the treaty signed with Italy in 1929.

8 Ion I. C. Brătianu (1864-1927) was Prime Minister of Romania, president of the National Liberal Party, and a defining political figure of the period.

revived the concordat negotiations that had first begun under the country's first ruler, the Catholic King Carol I.⁹ When the leading politicians became aware of the resistance of the Orthodox Church and of part of the population, however, the issue was gradually removed from the government's list of priorities. This development caused considerable disappointment in Rome.

Romania was important to the Holy See for several reasons. It could serve as a bridgehead toward the Orthodox states of Eastern Europe, a prospect that gave it particular strategic value in Vatican diplomacy. At the same time, after Versailles Romania had acquired a substantial Catholic minority whose ecclesiastical and legal position required clarification. The Holy See's approach was also shaped by another expectation: namely, that the Greek Catholic Church might become a means through which a significant part, perhaps even the majority, of the Romanian nation could be drawn closer to Catholicism. During the period examined here, the Holy See was represented in Romania by two nuncios: Francesco Marmaggi, who served between 1920 and 1923, and Angelo Maria Dolci, who held the office from 1923 to 1933. The two archbishops of Bucharest, Raymund Netzhammer (1905–1924) and Alexandru Cisar (1924–1954), likewise played important roles. Regarding the Roman Catholics of Transylvania, Count Gusztáv Károly Mailáth remained bishop of Transylvania, or Alba Iulia, throughout the entire period under discussion (1897–1938). He generally maintained contact with the Holy See through the nuncio, although there were also several occasions on which direct communication took place between Mailáth and Rome.

Transylvania from the Perspective of the Holy See

It would perhaps be an exaggeration to claim that the Holy See had a distinct Transylvania policy of its own. In administrative and political terms, the region was regarded before the First World War as part of Austria-Hungary and, after the war, as part of Romania; in this respect, Rome could hardly have acted otherwise. From an ecclesiastical point of view, however, the Holy See had to take account of both the Greek Catholics and the Roman Catholics living in the region. The former were considerably more numerous. According to the census of 1910, Roman Catholics accounted for 14 per cent of the population of historical Transylvania, or 375,325

9 Ofelia MILO, *România și Sfântul Scaun în a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea*, PhD dissertation, Cluj-Napoca: Babeș-Bolyai University, 2008, 233.

persons, whereas Greek Catholics represented 28 per cent, or 749,404 persons.¹⁰ This numerical imbalance appeared to support a view widely held in Rome: that the Romanian Greek Catholic Church, united with Rome, might facilitate the rapid and substantial growth of Catholicism within the new kingdom.¹¹ Nevertheless, not least because of its historical past and institutional weight, the Roman Catholic bishopric was also treated by Rome as a partner of comparable importance. This attitude was visible in Nuncio Marmaggi's tour of 1921 and in the way that visit was received.

The nuncio first travelled to Blaj. Many interpreted this gesture as an acknowledgment of the new Romanian political reality and of the missionary role assigned within it to the Greek Catholic Church. Through the meeting of Latin and Eastern Christian traditions, this Church was expected to contribute decisively to shaping the identity of the newly enlarged Romanian state.¹² It is therefore not surprising that Hungarian diplomatic sources followed Marmaggi's journey through Transylvania with suspicion and criticized it from Budapest. Yet the nuncio also visited Alba Iulia, where he made a favourable impression. In his address, he stressed that the Holy See was aware of the situation and difficulties of the Roman Catholics of Transylvania and wished to act in such a way as to improve their position.¹³ As an experienced diplomat, Marmaggi was careful not to say or promise more than he could. At the same time, he did say what the Hungarian faithful wished to hear: that the universal Church had not forgotten them and was attentive to their situation. Subsequent developments, however, including the transfer of the Minorite church in Cluj to the Greek Catholics, shook this confidence among the local Catholic community.¹⁴

10 JAKABFFY Elemér, Erdély statisztikája, Magyar Kisebbség. Nemzetpolitikai Szemle, Lugos, 1923, 2.

11 Raymund NETZHAMMER, Episcop în România, vol. II, Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2005, 903.

12 Unirea Poporului, III/25, 19 June 1921. Source: Vatican Apostolic Archives (hereafter AAV), Archivi Delle Rappresentanze della Santa Sede presso Organizzazioni Internazionali, Arch. Nunz. Romania, 1243A, bundle 12, P169.

13 A pápai nuncius Gyulafehérváron, *Erdélyi tudósító*, IV/13-14, 1 July 1921; source: AAV, Arch. Nunz. Romania, 1243A, 12, P169.

14 On this, see ANDRÁS Szabolcs, A kolozsvári minorita templom átadása a görögkatolikus egyháznak, *Erdélyi Krónika*, source: <https://erdelyikronika.net/2020/02/06/a-kolozsvari-minorita-templom-atadasa-a-gorogkatolikus-egyhasznak/> [Accessed 4 August 2024].

The work of ecclesiastical diplomacy was further complicated by the fact that relations between the two Catholic Churches in Transylvania were far from harmonious. One source of tension was the disputed affiliation of Hungarian-speaking Greek Catholics. Alba Iulia sought to secure separate parishes for them, thereby preventing their full absorption into Romanian Greek Catholic ecclesiastical structures.¹⁵ Another source of conflict was the ambition of Blaj to obtain a dominant role in the management of Catholic affairs in Romania and to acquire a legal position comparable to the state-church status enjoyed by the Orthodox Church. In pursuit of these aims, the self-organization of Hungarian Roman Catholics came to be seen as an obstacle. This is evident from a letter addressed by Vasile Suciu¹⁶ to Secretary of State Gasparri in May 1922. In that letter, Suciu objected to Mailáth's request that József Hirschler,¹⁷ the archdeacon and parish priest of Cluj, be granted the title of auxiliary bishop. In Suciu's view, such a step on the part of the Church would be perceived in Bucharest as a provocation and would jeopardize the good relations that had been established between the parties.¹⁸

The Echo of the Land Reform in the Vatican

If any issue tested relations between the Holy See and Romania in the years following the First World War, it was not primarily disagreement within the Church, but the land reform of 1921 and its consequences. The law regulating the agrarian reform in the territories attached to Romania by the Treaty of Trianon profoundly disrupted the property system of the Catholic Church. For centuries, this system had provided the material basis for the autonomous functioning of the Church's institutional network. The impact was especially serious in the field of education, since earlier bishops of Transylvania had assigned substantial forests and landed estates to the support of schools and other educational institutions, and the revenues from these properties were used to cover their expenses. In some cases, the income generated by a Church-owned mill, or by another enterprise of varying size, served the same purpose.¹⁹

15 AAV, Arch. Nunz. Romania, 1243A, 6/12, 28 May 1921.

16 Vasile Suciu (1873-1935), Greek Catholic Archbishop of Făgăraș-Alba Iulia.

17 József Hirschler (1874-1936), Roman Catholic archdeacon-parish priest of Cluj and founder of the Marianum Girls' Gymnasium.

18 AAV, Arch. Nunz. Romania, 1243A, 6/18, 18 May 1922.

19 ANDRÁS Szabolcs, *Iskola múlt időben. A gyergyószentmiklósi Fogarassy Leánynevelő Intézet története*, Gheorgheni: F&F International, 2016, 27–28.

The consequences of the reform were made more severe by the structure of Catholic landed property. In the case of the Reformed Church, estates serving comparable purposes tended to be smaller and were usually held by individual parishes. Catholic estates, by contrast, had been consolidated into larger property units. As a result, under the proportional principle applied in the agrarian reform, the Catholic Church suffered substantially greater losses. In Bihor, for example, the Reformed Church lost approximately 40 per cent of its relevant property because of the reform, whereas the Catholic bishopric recorded losses of more than 90 percent.²⁰

The Holy See did not contest Romania's right to carry out land reform and, in principle, regarded the matter as one belonging to the domestic jurisdiction of the Romanian state. At the same time, it followed the implementation of the reform closely. The reports arriving from the region were alarming. It soon became apparent that the reforms threatened not only ecclesiastical property, but also the survival of Church institutions themselves. The Holy See received a copy of a letter addressed as early as 1920 to King Ferdinand of Romania by Sámuel Jósika, the lay president of the Transylvanian Roman Catholic Status. In this letter, Jósika warned of the drastic impact that the proposed legislation would have on the Catholic educational network.²¹

Jósika's fears proved well founded, as the detailed report prepared by Ágoston Pacha, vicar of Timișoara, clearly shows. In a table arranged by diocese and religious order in the annexed territories, Pacha recorded the amount of landed property held by each institution before the reform and the amount that remained after the expropriations. The greatest losses were suffered by the religious orders of the Diocese of Oradea.²² The Hungarians of Transylvania naturally sought assistance not only from the Holy See, but also from the Hungarian government. They asked that the reform be reconsidered and that its consequences be mitigated as far as possible.

Budapest, however, had no direct influence either over the decisions of the Romanian government or over relations between Romania and the Holy See. It nevertheless attempted to exert pressure through its ambassadors accredited to the Holy See, urging Rome to adopt a firmer position in defense of the affected ecclesiastical institutions. This pressure from Budapest placed the Holy See in an

20 AAV, Arch. Nunz. Romania, 1243A, 12, 2913/May 1923.

21 AAV, Arch. Nunz. Romania, 1243A, 12, 6/18, 50/26 November 1920.

22 AAV, Arch. Nunz. Romania, 1243A, 12, 2913/May 1923.

uncomfortable position. At that time, the conclusion of a concordat with Romania had priority in Vatican diplomacy, and Bucharest made it clear that it would not tolerate the involvement of any third party in that matter.

The Holy See therefore sought to reassure both the Hungarian Catholics of Transylvania and the Hungarian government by invoking the prospect of the future concordat. In Rome's view, such an interstate agreement would eventually resolve the difficulties created by the agrarian reform. Gasparri had hoped that the concordat might already be signed in 1921, but much time was still to pass before this expectation was fulfilled. In the meantime, the protests of the bishops within Romania became increasingly forceful. Greek Catholic hierarchs also raised their voices on several occasions. They did so partly because they too had lost some property in Transylvania, and partly because, in comparison with the Orthodox Church, they received very little through the redistribution that followed the reform.²³ The strongest intervention came from Timișoara. It led to another low point in the complex relationship linking the Holy See, Romania, Hungary, and the Hungarian Catholics of Transylvania.

The Holy See Background of the Glattfelder Affair

Gyula Glattfelder,²⁴ bishop of Csanád/Timișoara, protested the consequences of the agrarian reform in a circular letter addressed to his faithful. The letter soon provoked indignation and, at the same time, furnished the authorities with a pretext for taking action against him.²⁵ Prime Minister Brătianu described the bishop's circular as an act directed against the king and appealed to the Holy See, demanding the removal of the prelate.²⁶ At the same time, a press campaign was launched against Glattfelder. He was accused of having become a standard-bearer of Hungarian irredentism despite his Swabian origin, while the argument was advanced that the diocese needed a bishop capable of representing Romanian,

23 AAV, Arch. Nunz. Romania, 1243A, 12, 1650/2 October 1922.

24 Gyula Glattfelder (1874-1943), bishop of Csanád/Timișoara and, from 1923, bishop of Szeged.

25 I analyzed the details and background of the Glattfelder's expulsion, here I present new informations regarding this case. See: ANDRÁS Szabolcs, New Details Regarding the Expulsion of Bishop Gyula Glattfelder from Romania, *Studia Theologica Catholica Latina*, LXI, 1 (2016), Cluj-Napoca: Babeș-Bolyai University Press, 87–98.

26 AAV, Arch. Nunz. Romania, 1243A, 8/24, 9153/30 October 1922.

Swabian, and Serbian believers alike. From the outset, the prime minister made it clear that the conflict that had arisen between the Romanian state and the Holy See could be resolved only if Glattfelder left the country.²⁷ Budapest was soon informed of the affair and likewise turned to the Holy See, urging it not to give in to the Romanian demand. It also conveyed to Glattfelder that he should not, under any circumstances, leave Timișoara.

The affair placed the Holy See in a difficult position. Rome still attached great hopes to the conclusion of the concordat and failed to assess accurately the determination of the Romanian government. Through the nuncio, Gasparri asked Glattfelder to defend himself and to apologize to the king. Glattfelder complied with the instructions received from the Holy See. In a letter to King Ferdinand I, who was also personally acquainted with him, he explained that his circular had not been motivated by anti-state intentions, but by concern for the interests of the faithful. He also sent an explanatory letter to the Secretariat of State.²⁸ The Holy See accepted his explanation and believed that the matter had thereby been brought to a close. The government in Bucharest, however, took a different view. It persisted in its original intention of forcing Glattfelder out of the country. To that end, it froze all the assets of the Timișoara bishopric and suspended all payments until the bishop departed and a person acceptable to the government was appointed in his place.²⁹

Faced with the prospect of the financial collapse of the bishopric, Secretary of State Gasparri ultimately yielded to Bucharest's demand. He justified this decision by referring to the fact that, as a consequence of the Treaty of Trianon, the diocese had been divided into three parts. Glattfelder was therefore entrusted with organizing the new seat of the Hungarian Diocese of Csanád in Szeged. From the point of view of canon law, however, Glattfelder remained bishop of Timișoara, while his former vicar, Ágoston Pacha, represented him in the Romanian territories as apostolic administrator. Glattfelder accepted the decision of the Holy See and, in a letter addressed to Pope Pius XI, agreed to transfer his seat to Szeged. This step caused considerable disappointment in Budapest. Thereafter, the Holy See rejected further intervention by the Hungarian government, arguing that the

27 AAV, Arch. Nunz. Romania, 1243A, 8/24, 10632/1 December 1922.

28 AAV, Arch. Nunz. Romania, 1243A, 8/24, 12024/2 January 1923.

29 AAV, Arch. Nunz. Romania, 1243A, 8/24, 27 January 1923.

bishop himself had shown his willingness to leave Timișoara.³⁰ The greatest fear was that the case might create a precedent that would allow Bucharest to force other Hungarian bishops into exile as well. Such a possibility was also raised, at least theoretically, in connection with Mailáth. The Holy See, however, promised that this would be its last concession of this kind to Bucharest, and it ultimately kept that promise.

The Glattfelder affair deeply unsettled Hungarian Catholic society in Transylvania. It strengthened the conviction that the community could rely only on itself and that it had to take responsibility for preserving its own institutions, especially its schools. One might say that among Transylvanian Hungarian Catholics the belief became increasingly firm that, for the Holy See, the concordat mattered more than anything else. Mailáth himself also articulated this view. In Rome, too, the growing mistrust of the Hungarian Catholics was noticed. Nevertheless, the response remained essentially the same: they were once again reassured by reference to the beneficial effects expected from the concordat that had yet to be signed.

The Question of Hungarian Denominational Education in Rome

As already noted, the question of education was of central importance for Hungarians in Transylvania, because after 1918 it became one of the essential conditions for preserving national and confessional identity. Following the First World War, Romania gradually dismantled state-supported minority education. In this situation, denominational schools became the principal institutions through which instruction in the mother tongue could be maintained. The Reformed Church succeeded in increasing the number of its schools. The Catholic Church, by contrast, was placed in a far more difficult position as a consequence of the agrarian reform. It had to make considerable efforts simply to maintain its existing schools, and several institutions were eventually forced to close.³¹

In Transylvania, Partium, and Banat, Catholic schools may be divided into four main categories. The majority were episcopal property and were operated directly by the bishopric. A second group also belonged to the bishopric, but, in accordance with the intention of the founding bishop, their administration had

30 AAV, Arch. Nunz. Romania, 1243A, 8/24, 2556/13 February 1923.

31 SZABÓ Kálmán Attila (ed.), *Az erdélyi tanító- és óvóképzés évszázadai*, Târgu Mureș: Mentor, 2009, 75.

been entrusted to a religious order. In Partium and Banat, however, there were also several schools that were both owned and operated by religious orders. In historical Transylvania, the most prestigious secondary and civic schools functioned under the supervision and maintenance of the Transylvanian Roman Catholic Status in the larger towns.³²

In the first half of the 1920s, there were several attempts to nationalize ecclesiastical schools, with mixed results. Around the same time, the authorities seized both the Theresianum orphanage and school in Sibiu³³ and the seminary in Satu Mare. Gasparri attempted to exert pressure on the Romanian government in order to secure the restitution of both institutions, but he ultimately succeeded only in the case of the Satu Mare institution.³⁴ Another characteristic feature of the period was the introduction of subjects taught in Romanian, together with repeated inspections. During these inspections, several schools were deprived of their public rights—that is, of their right to issue officially recognized diplomas—on the grounds that either the teachers did not know Romanian adequately or that a large proportion of the students had failed the Romanian-language examinations.

In the second half of the decade, the authorities increasingly turned their attention to schools operated by religious orders, and this brought relations between Romania and the Holy See to another low point. The 1925 law on private education, which also applied to denominational schools, stipulated that instruction in schools run by religious orders had to be conducted in Romanian.³⁵ In the Diocese of Alba Iulia, that is, in Transylvania, this should not have created a serious difficulty in principle, since Bishop Mihály Fogarasy had already placed all schools under episcopal jurisdiction. At the same time, however, he had also entrusted the administration of several schools to the Sisters of Mercy of Satu Mare, a circumstance that now nearly turned against the diocese. Overzealous local authorities attempted to apply the restrictive provisions of the law even to those schools that were merely administered by religious orders. Consequently, both

32 For more detail, see ANDRÁS Szabolcs, *Az erdélyi római katolikus szerzetesi oktatás helyzetváltozása az I. világháború után*, *Sapientiana*, 2.16 (2023), 63–74.

33 AAV, Arch. Nunz. Romania, 1243A, 6/18, 578/11 May 1921.

34 AAV, Arch. Nunz. Romania, 1243A, 6/16, 163/3 February 1921.

35 Monitorul Oficial, Law no. 93 of 30 July 1921 on agrarian reform in Transylvania, Banat, Crișana, and Maramureș, source: https://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.htp_act_text?id=65850 [Accessed 4 August 2024].

Rome and Mailáth once again had to make clear that, in historical Transylvania, all Catholic schools were the property of the bishopric.³⁶ The situation was more complicated in Partium and Banat, where several schools were indeed owned and operated by religious orders.

The question of the language of instruction in schools run by religious orders overshadowed the final phase of the concordat negotiations. The bishops continuously informed the Holy See of the state measures affecting their schools, while the Bucharest government insisted on the implementation of the law. At the centre of the dispute stood the argument that religious orders were subject to foreign control, since their major superiors did not reside within the territory of the Romanian state. From the government's point of view, the national interest required education to remain under state supervision and direction. In the end, the Romanian position was incorporated into the text of the concordat. This meant that education in the mother tongue remained possible only in episcopal schools. The sources of the Holy See suggest that this question was still under discussion on the very day the Concordat was signed.³⁷

As a solution, the Holy See adopted the proposal of the Transylvanian Hungarians in a manner that was almost without precedent at the time. By a central decree, it transferred all ecclesiastical schools into episcopal ownership. This measure ended a centuries-old network of schools run by religious orders. At the same time, however, it made possible the preservation of Catholic education in Hungarian. Rome had also come to recognize that, without such a measure, there was a real danger that large numbers of Hungarian faithful would turn away from the Church.³⁸

The Place of the Catholic Church in the Romanian State

After the First World War, one of Romania's principal aims was the administrative and legal unification of the territories it had incorporated. To this end, a series of laws were enacted that extended the legal system of the Old Kingdom to the newly acquired provinces. The education law discussed above belonged to this

36 ANDRÁS, *Iskola múlt időben*. 50.

37 AAV, Arch. Nunz. Romania, 1243A, 38/182, 4559/26 May 1927.

38 Mailáth himself drew the attention of the Secretariat of State to the fact that many parents had already enrolled their children in Reformed schools to ensure education in the mother tongue.

process, as did the law on religious denominations adopted in the same period. The latter provoked at least as much indignation in the Holy See as the education law, since the Bucharest government had previously promised that no law on religious denominations would be adopted before the conclusion of the concordat.³⁹ The indignation was further intensified by the fact that, under the draft law, the Catholic Church would have received only a secondary form of recognition. The Orthodox Church was to be granted the rights of a state Church, the Greek Catholic Church was to receive recognition as a Church of national importance, while the Roman Catholic, Reformed, and other Churches would have been placed in the category of other denominations.

As soon as the Holy See received the draft, it lodged a protest with the Bucharest government. Its first objection was that Romania was failing to honour its earlier promise not to adopt a law on religious denominations before the concordat. At the same time, Rome also protested the discriminatory character of the proposed legislation. The government responded by arguing that the legal and administrative unification of the country made the adoption of the law urgent and that it was therefore unwilling to wait for the concordat, whose signing the same government had repeatedly postponed. In response, Rome also adopted a firmer position. It declared that if the law on religious denominations were adopted in its proposed form, there could be no question of concluding a concordat.⁴⁰ Bucharest, however, did not wish to jeopardize the concordat either, since it needed recognition from a political actor and institution of universal significance within the framework of the new borders. It was therefore ultimately forced to make concessions.

After lengthy negotiations, a compromise was reached. The law retained the privileged distinction accorded to the Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches, but it also included an article removing the Roman Catholic Church from the category of other or foreign Churches. In addition, a clause was inserted stating that the status of the Roman Catholic Church would be regulated by a separate interstate agreement, namely the concordat.⁴¹ Under these conditions, the Catholic Church was ultimately willing to continue the concordat negotiations. Nevertheless, trust between the parties had been damaged to such an extent that the enthusiasm characteristic of the early 1920s had largely disappeared.

39 AAV, Arch. Nunz. Romania, 1243A, 18/56, 4056/29 March 1925.

40 AAV, Arch. Nunz. Romania, 1243A, 18/56, 4188/26 November 1925.

41 AAV, Arch. Nunz. Romania, 1243A, 18/56, 1/16 December 1925.

The debate over the status of the Roman Catholic Church can also be observed at the local level, especially if we examine the documents concerning Mailáth. During this period, two legal disputes of symbolic importance reflected the changed circumstances both within the Catholic Church in Romania and in the relationship between the Romanian state and the Hungarians of Transylvania. One concerned the precise designation of the bishop's title, while the other concerned the senatorial seat held by right. In the first matter, after the union of Transylvania with Romania, Mailáth continued to insist on using the title "bishop of Transylvania," since this designation could be traced back to the foundation of the diocese by King Saint Stephen in 1009. The Romanian government, however, was unwilling to accept this. It consistently avoided allowing Hungarian ecclesiastical or public figures to bear titles that referred to the territory as such. The Romanian side invoked canon law and ecclesiastical custom, according to which bishops were named after the see city of their diocese. On this basis, it argued that Mailáth was entitled only to the title "bishop of Alba Iulia." Since Bucharest's position was well founded from a canonical point of view, the Holy See accepted it, and this designation was accordingly included in the text of the concordat and in other documents. Nevertheless, Mailáth continued to sign his internal ecclesiastical correspondence as bishop of Transylvania.⁴²

The second dispute involved more than a question of nomenclature. As in the period of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the bishops of the historic Churches in royal Romania also held seats as senators in the upper house of the Bucharest parliament. The electoral law of 1926, however, modified this arrangement. Under the new provisions, all Orthodox and Greek Catholic bishops remained senators by right, whereas the other "minority Churches" could each appoint only one senator, with the exception of the Muslims, who were permitted to designate two leaders. At first, Mailáth was not especially worried by this restriction. As the oldest Roman Catholic bishop in the country, he assumed that, according to customary practice, the senatorial seat would belong to him.

Archbishop Alexandru Cisar of Bucharest, however, appealed to the Holy See for permission to receive the parliamentary seat himself, bypassing the nuncio in the process. He did so on the grounds that he was the highest-ranking Roman Catholic prelate in the country. In this initiative, he was personally encouraged and supported by the prime minister, who informed Rome through the Romanian

42 AAV, Arch. Nunz. Romania, 1243A, 20/61, 3013/31, 4 December 1931.

embassy that the government's preferred candidate was Cisar. In its response, the Holy See did not attach great importance to the matter and, for its part, attempted to close the issue by stating that it was an internal affair of Romania. Thereafter Mailáth, together with his principal supporter Elemér Gyárfás, made several further attempts to retain the senatorial seat. Once they saw, however, that the Holy See had adopted a neutral position, they eventually accepted the *fait accompli* created by the Bucharest government and the archbishop.⁴³ In the elections, Gyárfás succeeded in winning a senatorial seat and went on to represent the interests of the Hungarians and Catholics of Transylvania with considerable expertise until his death in 1945.

The Concordat as an Objective: Concluding Remarks.

A full analysis of the Holy See documents concerning the concordat would require a separate study, or even an entire volume. For this reason, no attempt is made here to present that topic in its entirety. It may nevertheless be stated that most of the events that took place between the end of the First World War and the signing of the concordat in 1927 were assessed by the Holy See primarily in relation to a single question: whether they facilitated or hindered the conclusion of that agreement. In Rome, there was a strong conviction that such a document could create conditions in Romania favourable enough for the Catholic Church to make possible its later flourishing in the region. In pursuit of this objective, the Holy See was prepared, especially in the first years after the war, to accept a number of compromises. These included questions concerning the transfer of churches, education in the mother tongue, and the reorganization of dioceses along the new state borders. The increasingly dissatisfied Hungarian Catholics of Transylvania were repeatedly reassured that the concordat itself would eventually resolve their difficulties.

The documents of the Holy See also make it possible to trace the gradual process by which the Church's diplomats and representatives came to realize that the complaints and warnings of the Transylvanian Hungarians were not without foundation. Rome had placed excessive hopes in the concordat, while Romania's objectives did not in fact coincide with those of the Holy See. Through the reports of nuncios and bishops, Rome gained an increasingly accurate picture of Romanian public opinion and of the positions adopted by successive governments. At the same time, it carefully documented the expressions of hostility in the Romanian

43 AAV, Arch. Nunz. Romania, 1243A, 18/57, 4674/1 August 1927.

press directed both against the concordat and against Mailáth. Over time, these developments made the Holy See more receptive to the petitions and arguments submitted by the Hungarians of Transylvania.

The Church's reassessment of the concordat's significance, however, occurred only after the agreement had been signed. Romania delayed ratification for two years, thereby causing considerable disappointment in Rome. In the meantime, an important change also took place within the Holy See itself. In 1930 Cardinal Gasparri retired and was succeeded by Cardinal Pacelli. Pacelli no longer sought, above all, relations regulated primarily through concordats. Rather, he aimed at a more rational system of relations with European states, based on the equality of the parties. For the Hungarian community, this shift ultimately led to the Agreement of 1932, which corrected those articles of the concordat that had also placed the Hungarian Catholics of Transylvania at a disadvantage.

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