

GEODEMOGRAPHIC REMARKS ON THE REFORMED CULT IN TRANSYLVANIA, 1930-2002

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Abstract: The Reformed Religion was brought into Transylvania in 1550 and swiftly adopted by a part of the Hungarian nobility and the urban patriciate. In the inter-war period, after the Greater Union of all the Romanian Provinces on December 1, 1918 the Reformed Church had two Episcopates: the Episcopate of Transylvania and ‘Piatra Craiului’ Episcopate. Major changes in the numerical evolution and territorial distribution of the Reformed Transylvanian populations were the following: a) a decrease from 497,861 faithful in 1930 to 476,481 in 2002 due to negative birth-rates after 1990 – which is not specific to this confessional group alone, but to most religious communities, and emigration to Central and West-European countries; b) changes in the distribution of the Calvinist believers by habitat, from 21 % in the town area of 1930 to some 53 % in the urban of 2002.

Key words: population, Reformed Cult, Transylvania, Romania

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The founder of the Reformed or Calvinist Church religion, which exists in many European states – Switzerland, Hungary, etc., was Jean Calvin. He was born at Nozan (Picardy) on July 10, 1509 and was viewed by his teachers as a ‘remarkably religious’ person. In 1532, Calvin took his Ph.D. degree in Orleans and influenced by Martin Luther’s (1483-1546) conceptions converted to Protestantism. In 1536, Calvin published Frankfurt am Main the first edition of his work “*Christianae religionis institution*”. Being considered a religious trouble-maker he was ousted from France, and took refuge in Geneva, where he proved to be a vigorous preacher. He died on May 27, 1564 and was buried in Geneva’s Cemetery des Rois, but only the initials I.C. were carved on his tombstone.

The Reformed Church acknowledges only two sacraments: Baptism and Communion, rejecting the dogma of the real presence of ‘Christ’s body and blood’ during Communion, the invocation of the saints, the episcopal institution,

etc. Those preaching the cult had to be chosen by believers and each Calvinist Church was to be led spiritually by an elected Council.

The Reformed Religion was brought into Transylvania (a historical province situated in the centre of Romania and documented in 1159) in 1550 and swiftly adopted by a part of the Hungarian nobility and the urban patriciate. However, it soon had to compete with the Lutheran (Evangelical) creed which had been adopted by numerous Transylvanian Saxons in the first decades of the 14th century. In 1558 Pastor Péter Meliuz Juhárez succeeded in determining the clergy of Cluj City to adopt Calvinism, which would shortly become the religion of a large part of the Principality's Hungarian and Szeckler populations.

In 1564, the Synod held in Aiud city (Transylvania) decided that the two Protestant cults – Calvinist and Lutheran, should separate definitively. As a result, they founded the Reformed Episcopate of Transylvania, initially located in Arad, and the language of the divine service and of administration was to be Hungarian.

Throughout history to the present-day, the Reformed Church in Romania was known under the following denominations: “Evangelico Reformată, vulgo Calviniana”, “Helvet Hitvallasu Evangeliumi Reformatus Egyház” (Reformed Evangelical Church of Helvetian Confession), “Reformatus Egyház” (Reformed Church) and the Reformed Calvinist Cult.

In the inter-war period, after the Greater Union of all the Romanian Provinces on December 1, 1918 the Reformed Church had two Episcopates: the Episcopate of Transylvania founded in the 14th century when Protestantism had become the dominant religion of the Transylvanian Hungarians, with the Episcopal See in Cluj, and ‘Piatra Craiului’ Episcopate set up in 1920, Episcopal See was in Oradea, for the faithful from the west of Romania.

In 1930, Romania's Reformed believers numbered 710,706 people (3.9 % of the country's population, ranking fourth among the other denominations). They were concentrated mainly in Transylvania (497,861 people; Fig. 1) and represented 15.5 % of the Province's population. A greater proportion of Reformed had the following counties: Trei-Scaune (40.6 %), Odorhei (37.4 %), Mureș (30.3 %), Sălaj (24.5 %), Cluj (21.7 %), Târnava Mică (16.6 %), Turda (14.4 %) and Someș (12.8 %).

The majority (79.3 %), 394,852 people, lived in the countryside and only 20.7 % - 103,009, in town mostly in the counties of Brașov (64.5 %), Sibiu (60.0 %), Făgăraș (45.1 %), Cluj (40.6 %), Ciuc (32.3 %), Târnava Mare (32.3 %) and Alba (30.8 %). High proportions registered the towns of Zalău (56.7 %), Huedin (48.6 %), Sfântu Gheorghe (47.3 %), Târgu Secuiesc (39.9 %), Aiud (38.7 %), Târgu Mureș (35.1 %) and Turda (30.9 %).

With the advent of communism in Romania (1948), ‘Piatra Craiului’ Episcopate was abolished, despite protests by its Bishop [István Sulyók](#) and by Károly Nagy, the Bishop of Transylvania, who considered the regime's policy to be discriminatory and fascist. And again for all the protests of the clergy, the Reformed Church in Romania lost the greatest part of its patrimony.

After the abolishment of the communist regime on December 1989, ‘Piatra Craiului’ Episcopate was re-established; the Synodal Session of December 5, 2007 adopted the statutes of the Reformed Church in Romania which stipulated that ‘parishes, archdioceses and dioceses are juristic persons entitled to self-governance’. Under the Statutes, parishes may be set up only by the express will of the faithful who live in a clearly delimited territory, and by approval of the

higher Church bodies; dismantling them, in case they no longer meet the purpose they had been set up for, rests with the members of the Parish General Assembly. The patrimony of dismantled parishes is to be transferred to the parish their faithful have been directed to. Decisions to set up, dismantle or change the territorial boundaries of archbishoprics and of dioceses rest with the General Diocesan Assembly, and the Synod of the Reformed Church in Romania, respectively.

The 1992 Population Census had in view also the country's confessional structure. At that time, Romania's Reformed population represented 3.51 % (802,454 people), coming third in the country's religious structure, after the Orthodox (ca. 87 %) and Roman-Catholics (5 %). In 1992, just like in 1930, Reformed believers lived mostly in Transylvania (66.86 % of Romania's Calvinist population – 536,595 persons), especially in the counties of Mureş – 174,616 persons (28.62 % of the county's inhabitants), Cluj – 103,837 (14.10 %), Covasna – 79,802 (34.21 %), Sălaj – 54,175 (20.30 %) and Harghita – 44,558 (12.79 %), where most Hungarians dwelt (41.3 % in Mureş, 19.8 % in Cluj, 75.2 % in Covasna, 23.7 % in Sălaj and 84.6 % in Harghita).

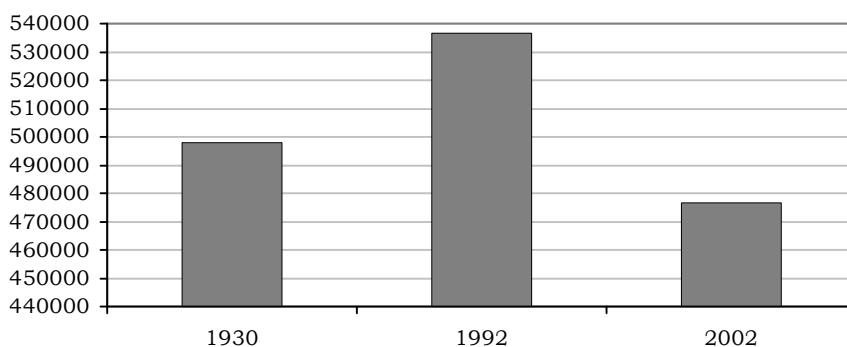


Figure 1. Numerical evolution of Transylvania's Reformed population (1930-2002).

Unlike the 1930 Census figures, the 1992 returns showed 53.4 % of the Transylvanian Calvinists to be town-dwellers (298,897 faithful) and only 46.6 % villagers (240,698), a situation explained by the unprecedented development of the urban system in Romania, and obviously in Transylvania, too. Significant proportions of urban Calvinist believers had in the counties of Hunedoara (94.4 %), Sibiu (82.4 %), Braşov (71.2 %) and Cluj (65.6 %).

Table 1. The Reformed population of Transylvanian counties, 1992

County	Total	Rural	Urban
Alba	17,673	8,686	8,987
Bistriţa-Năsăud	16,739	10,210	6,529
Braşov	18,891	5,423	13,468
Cluj	103,837	35,647	68,190
Covasna	79,802	38,718	41,084
Harghita	44,558	20,374	24,184
Hunedoara	15,534	867	14,667
Mureş	174,616	97,920	79,696
Sălaj	54,175	20,967	33,208
Sibiu	10,770	1,886	8,884
TOTAL	536,595	240,698	298,897

According to the 2002 Census figures there were 476,481 followers of the Reformed Church (11.1 % of Transylvania's total population), that is slightly fewer than in 1930 (497,861). This decrease over the 1992-2002 period was the consequence of the negative natural balance of Romania's population, the upsurge in emigration, Hungarians included, to Hungary and Western Europe.

The 2002 distribution of Reformed faithful in the Transylvanian counties looked as follows: 157,046 in Mureș, 86,811 in Cluj, 74,312 in Covasna, 48,452 in Sălaj, 41,269 in Harghita, 14,805 in Alba, 14,489 in Brașov, 14,398 in Bistrița-Năsăud, 11,466 in Hunedoara and 8,073 in Sibiu. The confessional structure of counties with an above-average ratio of Reformed people: Covasna (33.4 %), Mureș (27.0 %), Sălaj (19.5 %), Harghita (12.6 %), Cluj (12.3 %), (figure 2).

A more numerous Calvinist population lived in the towns of Târgu Mureș (45,104), Cluj-Napoca (38,779), Sfântu Gheorghe (22,804), Odorheiu Secuiesc (11,138), Zalău (9,591), Brașov (7,193), Reghin (7,188) and Covasna (5,246).

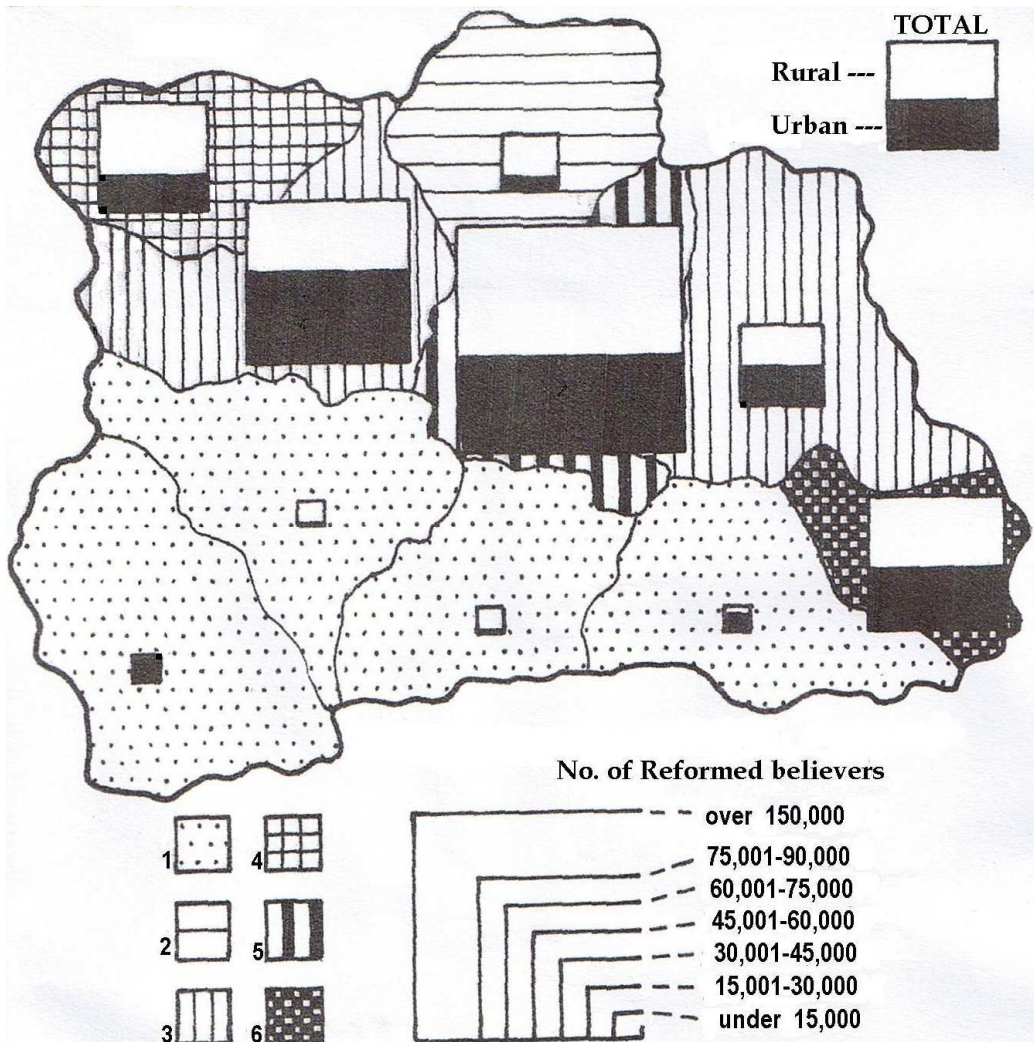


Figure 2. Distribution of the Reformed Transylvanian population in 2002
 County ratio: 1, under 5 %; 2, 5-10 %; 3, 10-15 %; 4, 15-20 %; 5, 25-30 %; 6, over 30 %.

As shown, major changes in the numerical evolution and territorial distribution of the Reformed Transylvanian populations were the following:

a) a decrease from 497,861 faithful in 1930 to 476,481 in 2002 due to negative birth-rates after 1990 – which is not specific to this confessional group alone, but to most religious communities, and emigration to Central and West-European countries;

b) changes in the distribution of the Calvinist believers by habitat, from 21 % in the town area of 1930 to some 53 % in the urban of 2002.

Likewise in the inter-war period, in 2002 the followers of this cult were concentrated mostly in the east and north-east Transylvanian counties of Covasna, Harghita, Mureș, Covasna, Cluj and Sălaj.

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