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Reformation And/or Union: Notes on Early Seventeenth Century Romanian Reformation in Transylvania in a European Context

Reformacija in/ali Unija: zapiski o romunski reformaciji v Transilvaniji na začetku sedemnajstega stoletja v evropskem kontekstu

Abstract: The study presents some phenomena of the impact of the Reformation on Eastern Orthodoxy. In the 17th century, Eastern Orthodoxy was assailed with offers of union from both Protestants and Catholics. The Greek-Eastern Church responded to these challenges with some reforms. So, like the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic revival, we can speak of a Reformation, and revival in the Greek Orthodox Church as well. This Orthodox reform manifested itself primarily within the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and within the Romanians of the Principality of Transylvania. In our study, we present the activity of some Greek Philo-Calvinist intellectuals (Nikodemos Metaxas, Zacharia Gerganos, Metrophanes Kritopoulos). At the centre of this presentation is the Calvinist catechism of Patriarch Cyril Lucaris. We analyse the existing links between Lucaris and between the teachers and preachers of the Calvinist college in Alba Iulia (Johann Heinrich Alsted, Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld, György Csulai, István Katona Geleji). We provide new data about the translators of the New Testament of Bălgrad (1648), which is the first complete edition of the New Testament in Romanian. We present the Calvinist features of this translation, as well as the fact that in the preface of the New Testament of Bălgrad, some ideas are taken from the writings of Francis Bacon.

Keywords: Protestant Reformation, Catholic Revival, Orthodox Revival, Cyril Lucaris, New Testament of Bălgrad (1648)

Povzetek: Prispevek predstavlja nekatere vidike vpliva reformacije na vzhodno pravoslavlje. V 17. stoletju je bilo vzhodno pravoslavlje preplavljeno s pobudami za unijo, ki so izvirale tako od protestantov kot katoličanov. Vzhodna grška Cerkev se je na te izzive odzvala z nekaterimi reformami. Tako lahko – podobno kot pri protestantski reformaciji in katoliškem preporodu – o reformaciji in preporodu

govorimo tudi v Grški pravoslavni Cerkvi. Ta pravoslavna reforma je zajela predvsem konstantinopelski patriarhat in Romune v Transilvanski kneževini. V naši študiji predstavljamo delovanje nekaterih grških filokalvinističnih intelektualcev (Nikodemos Metaksas, Zaharija Gerganos, Metrofanes Kritopoulos). V ospredju predstavitve je kalvinistični katekizem patriarha Kirila Lukarisa. Analiziramo že znane povezave med Lukarisom ter učitelji in pridigarji kalvinističnega kolegija v Albi Iuliji (Johann Heinrich Alsted, Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld, György Csulai, István Katona Geleji). Navajamo tudi nove podatke o prevajalcih Nove zaveze iz Bálgrada (1648), ki je prva popolna izdaja Nove zaveze v romunščini. Prikazane so kalvinistične značilnosti tega prevoda – pa tudi dejstvo, da so v predgovoru Nove zaveze iz Bálgrada nekatere ideje povzete po spisih Francisa Bacona.

Ključne besede: Kiril Lukaris, Nova zaveza iz Bálgrada (1648), katoliški prepoved, pravoslavni prepoved

1. Introduction

In order to provide a sufficiently accurate description of the unique Transylvanian Romanian Reformation, which lasted for almost two hundred years (approx. 1540–1740), one must study this phenomenon in the context of the early seventeenth-century European dialogue between Protestants and the Greek Orthodox. In the second half of the sixteenth century, first Philipp Melancthon, then the Urach-Tübingen circle (Primož Trubar, Hans Ungnad, Stephan Gerlach, Martin Crusius) made contact with the Patriarch of Constantinople to work on a kind of union between Eastern Orthodoxy and Protestantism. Despite the fact that Patriarch Jeremias II (1536–1595) was initially ready to engage in dialogue, the initiative failed (Benga 2003). However, the situation changed dramatically at the beginning of the seventeenth century, when Greek Orthodoxy began to open up to Protestantism. This was primarily due to the activity of Greek intellectuals who, supported by Constantinople patriarch and Calvinist sympathiser Cyril Lucaris (1572–1638), went on a peregrination to the Protestant universities of Western Europe. Among them, for example, Nikodemos Metaxas (†1646), who resided in London between 1622 and 1627 (Pektaş 2015, 18). After his return to Constantinople, the French ambassador, Philippe de Harlay, count of Césy, reported that with the help of the English ambassador, Sir Thomas Roe, Lucaris and Metaxa wanted to set up a college in Alexandria, where Greek monks returning from England and the German principalities would continue their education (Olar 2019, 123). The French ambassador, and the Greek archbishop of Paronaxia, Jeremia Barbarigo (Varvarigos) spread the rumour that Metaxas' publications (Legrand 1894, 237–240) were Calvinistic in nature. However, Metaxas created a compilation from thirteenth-century Byzantine authors and from a work of the Patriarch of Alexandria, Meletios Pegas (1541–1601). In this work, Pegas challenged the ideas of Antonio Possevino (1533–1611) who wanted to achieve the union of the Eastern (Greek Rite) and the Western Catholic Church. Therefore, Metaxas' work was only anti-Catholic, but not Calvinist (Olar 2019, 124–

127; Palabyk 2020). The result of his collaboration with Lucaris was an anti-Jewish treatise published in 1627, the author of which was Lucaris (*Σύντομος πραγμαεία κατὰ Ἰουδαίων*). Metaxas also planned to publish Lucaris' Calvinist catechism, but this plan never materialised, as the janissaries confiscated Metaxas' printing house in January 1628 (Augliera 1996, 50–51; 70–72).

Metrophanes Kritopoulos (1589–1639), who studied at Oxford University between 1617 and 1624, was another student of Lucaris. He went to Helmstadt and published a Greek catechism there in 1625 with the intention to provide Greek-speaking Western European humanists with a brief summary of the basic tenets of Eastern Greek Orthodoxy (Ică 1973; Davey 1987). There are no purely Calvinistic features in the catechism, but some tenets show the influence of Protestantism. For example, the text discusses the two kinds of divine revelation: the written word and the unwritten word. The written word is the Holy Scripture inspired by the Holy Spirit, which is true, perfect, and unchangeable (Ică 1973, 317–345). The unwritten word is the tradition of the Church, for the Holy Spirit, in a mystical way, reveals itself to the Church, and does so continuously. The Scriptures teach us to live with the sacraments, but it does not advise on how to do it. This is revealed by the Holy Spirit exclusively through the Church. Similarly based on divine revelations, the ceremony and the rite hold the same value as the Holy Scriptures. On the other hand, the ceremony can be learned from the tradition. The Church is the guardian and overseer of the divine revelation (Scripture), and at the same time protects the Truth (Scripture) against those who want to change it. In addition, it is the Church who conveys the Scriptures in the appropriate way to the faithful, who, because they are not sufficiently prepared, may fail to understand or misunderstand the details of the Scriptures. At the same time, according to Kritopoulos' catechism, the recognition and practice of three sacraments (baptism, eucharist, penance) are enough for salvation, while the other four sacraments (chrismation, marriage, holy order, anointing of the sick) are only mystical ceremonies (Ică 1973, 234–256). Kritopoulos also resorted to an inventive hybrid solution in the matter of salvation through faith and good works. According to him, there are two types of justification: first, there is general redemption from the original sin, and second, there is individualized redemption from our own personal sins. In the first case, we can be absolved from the curse imposed on the entire human race due to the disobedience of Adam and Eve only through the intercession of Jesus Christ, from the free grace of God. In this domain we cannot influence God with our good works. However, good deeds come to play a role in the personal justification of each individual. According to Kritopoulos, not everyone receives the same reward in the afterlife. The better deeds a person has done, the better place he will have in heaven, since God will make a distinction among the chosen ones based on the amount of good works (Ică 1973, 441–442). Kritopoulos visited all German and Swiss Protestant universities of the time (Altdorf, Wittenberg, Geneva, Bern, Tübingen), and then returned to Alexandria. After the execution of Lucaris, he felt that his life was no longer safe either, so he fled to Wallachia in 1639, where he died under unclear circumstances (Davey 1987, 460–486).

Another student of Lucaris, Zacharias Gerganos, studied in Wittenberg, where he published a Greek catechism in 1622 (Legrand 1894, 159–170). The catechism contained two Latin prefaces: he dedicated one to John, Margrave of Thuringia, and the other to the Tsar of Russia, the Voivodes of Moldova, Wallachia, and Kiev, as well as all the bishops and priests of the Greek rite. According to Gerganos, the Holy Scriptures cover all questions of Christian theology. No external help is needed to interpret the Bible because its text interprets itself. This is the reason why the Bible can be read not only by the clergy but also by ordinary believers. Gerganos tried to construct his argument by referring only to biblical passages, pushing even the church fathers into the background. Gerganos' views reveal a clear Protestant influence. Furthermore, Gerganos accepted the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Eucharist, and he passionately defended the communion under both kinds, but at the same time he also assigned an important role to confession, even though he condemned the Roman Catholic practice that favoured multiple communions. According to him, receiving communion three times a year is enough for believers. Gerganos' catechism was also an anti-Catholic polemic: the text contains fierce attacks against the primacy of the Pope, and its author did not accept the validity of the sacraments of the Catholic Church either. Yet, he never spoke an ill word about the Protestants (Argyriou 1990, 183–192).

2. *Confessio of Lucaris*

Compared to the cautious and ambiguous positions of his disciples, Lucaris' creed is entirely Calvinist and entirely unambiguous. Lucaris handed over the manuscript of the *Confessio Fidei* to the already mentioned Metaxas as early as 1627 to see it published in the Constantinople printing house founded by Lucaris (which was the first printing house in the Ottoman Empire). However, the Jesuits learned of the plan, and persuaded the Sultan not only to forbid the publication of the *Confessio* but also to confiscate the entire press.

In the catechism, Lucaris published not his personal creed but the articles of the entire Eastern Church (*de religione Ecclesiae Orientalis, id est Graecae*), and orthodox faith (*quid credamus videlicet sentiamus de articulis orthodoxae fidei*) with a good conscience and without pretense (*sine simulatione, sed bona conscientia*). And that is how it came to be reputed among contemporaries as well. Philipp de Harlay, Count of Césy, the well-informed French ambassador in Constantinople, in his report of May 13, 1629 – at a time when Lucaris' catechism had not yet appeared, only the Dutch ambassador, Cornelius Haga, and the preacher who worked alongside him, Antoine Léger, circulated some manuscript copies in March-April 1629 – he wrote the following:

“I know from a good source that Cyrill sent a creed to England and the Netherlands, in which he not only declares himself a heretic, but also claims that the Greek Church accepts all the tenets included in the creed (*il se*

déclare hérétique non seulement quand à sa personne, mais il dit que l'église grecque tient tous les articles contenus en ladite profession de foi), which the English and Dutch Calvinists are overjoyed with, and some copies of the creed were sent to Geneva and Sedan [where the Latin version appeared in June 1629], and it was sent to other places in Switzerland and Germany." (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Fonds français nr. 16153, fol. 162^v)

Most of the articles explicated in the catechism did not contradict the teachings of the Greek Orthodox Church. On the other hand, Lucaris did attack the Catholics: he criticised the authority of the Pope, the doctrine of transubstantiation, and purgatory. At the same time, some of its statements were in stark contrast with the teachings of the Eastern Church. Such was, for example, the assertion of the principle of sola scriptura. Lucaris claimed that the authority of Scripture is greater than the authority of the Church (*ejus auctoritatem esse superiorem Ecclesiae auctoritate*). It is true that the head of the Church is Jesus Christ himself, and the Church is indeed permeated by the Holy Spirit, but the earthly, visible "particular" (*particulares Ecclesiae visibiles sunt*) churches are made up of people, therefore the earthly Church is liable to errors, and "can take a lie as true" (*Ecclesia in viam errare potest, falsum pro vero eligendo*). The Eastern Church, on the other hand, taught that the Holy Scriptures and the Church are equal in importance, since both are equally imbued with the Holy Spirit, and the Church is the keeper of the correct interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. I quote the Latin text of the *Confessio* from the following edition (Alsted 1630, 1661–1662).

The doctrine of predestination, which the Eastern Church firmly opposed, is discussed by Lucaris in plainly Calvinist terms: "We believe that the best and greatest God hath predestined his Elect unto glory before the beginning of the World, without any respect unto their works, and that there was no other impulsive cause to this election, but only the good will and mercy of God." (Lucaris 1629, 2) He consistently emphasised that there are only two sacraments: the baptism and the Eucharist, which again contradicted the teachings of the Eastern Church: "We believe that there be Evangelical Sacraments in the Church, which the Lord hath instituted in the Gospell, and they bee two: we have no larger number of Sacraments, because the Ordainer thereof delivered no more." (5) In his four additions to the Greek edition of 1633, he pushed his attack on the doctrines of the Eastern Church even further: he advocated the free reading and interpretation of the Bible, claiming that the text of the Holy Scripture is pure and clear, and even simple believers can understand it by invoking the Holy Spirit; therefore, the mediation of the Church in the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures is not necessary. Regarding sacred images, which had a huge cult in the Eastern Church, he claimed that they can be respected, but not worshipped (Aymon 1708, 251–253).

Lucaris used a metaphor with definite Calvinist connotations even when he discussed that faith is a means to grasp Christ: "We believe that a man is justified by Faith, and not by workes; but when we say, by Faith, we understand the correlative or object of Faith, which is the righteousness of Christ, which Faith appre-

hends [like a hand] and applyeth unto us for our Salvation.” (Lucaris 1629, 4) (The expression “like a hand” is found only in the Greek version of the Loukaris Confession. See: Conțac 2017a, 220) The irreconcilability of this metaphor with Eastern Orthodoxy is also indicated by the fact that Patriarch Dositheos of Jerusalem specifically addressed it in his refutation of Lucaris’ catechism in 1672: “We believe that man is justified not only by faith, but by the faith working in love, that is, by faith and works. And the notion that faith is like the hand that grasps the righteousness of Christ is devoid of all piety.” (Conțac 2017a, 222)

3. Lucaris and Dissimulation

There was no question that the publication of such a catechism under the name of the Patriarch of Constantinople would cause a huge scandal in contemporary Europe. But does it really mean that Lucaris became a Calvinist? There is no easy answer to this question, as navigating the world of ecclesiastical and political intrigues in Constantinople at the beginning of the seventeenth century is a challenge in itself. The status of the patriarchs was particularly unstable because no one could be a patriarch without the sultan’s authorization (*berât*). Initially, when issuing the *berât*, the patriarchs gave a particular gift to the sultan and the main officials of the seraglio. Later, this habit grew into a thriving business. “In Constantinople, the installation of a patriarch was considered only a matter of money. Dignity was simply awarded to the one who promised more,” as László Hadrovics claimed (1947, 599). This is precisely the reason why the patriarchs always suffered from a lack of money. Therefore, they tried to build good relations with the most influential foreign diplomats in order to get money and support from them. Both Protestant and Catholic propaganda quickly recognized the vulnerable position of the patriarchs and tried to use it to their advantage. In exchange for money and support, the ambassadors of Catholic (Vatican, France, and to a lesser extent, the Habsburg Monarchy) or Protestant countries (mainly the Netherlands and England, Sweden less so) asked that their protégé be sympathetic towards Catholics or Calvinists (Harai 2011).

No wonder that under such circumstances, Lucaris became a master of dissimulation. For many years he managed to make Canachio Rossi, the papal envoy who arrived in Constantinople in 1625 (who was of Greek origin, but studied at the Greek college in Rome, and became a Catholic), believe that he was ready to accept the union with Rome. In the fall of 1627, when it was discovered that the patriarch had misled Rossi, the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith launched a total war against Lucaris. Even the French ambassador in Constantinople, the aforementioned Count de Césy, was mobilized, whose task would have been to discredit Lucaris in the seraglio and persuade the Sultan to shut down Lucaris’ printing house. (As mentioned above, this campaign was quite successful.) At their meeting on November 3, 1627, Pope Urban VIII’s most influential cardinals (Bandini, Barberini, Millini, Ludovisi, Magalotti) decided to publish a Catholic catechi-

sm in Modern Greek, in which they would refute the already mentioned Calvinist catechism of Zacharios Gerganos, and they would widely propagate the view that Lucaris was a heretical Calvinist (Olar 2013).

After Lucaris published his Calvinist confession in both Latin and Greek, the Ruthenians of Lemberg contacted him, and asked him to clarify whether he had truly become a Calvinist. Here are some excerpts from Lucaris' answer (December 4, 1634): "we have always steadfastly maintained the orthodox faith of the Eastern Church /.../ our enemies accuse us of becoming Calvinists and heretics, but they only want to cover up their own deceit and ill-will [because with this statement] they speak against God and the truth /.../ we resisted all heresies [including Calvinism]." (Papadopoulos 1906, 329) This was the patriarch's reply to the Ruthenians of Lemberg, while a few months earlier (March 15, 1634) from the island of Tenedos (where he was in exile), he wrote to Antoine Lèger:

"Se io moro, come moro Catholico Ortodoxo nella fede del Nostro Signore Jesu Cristo nella dottrina evangelica, conforme la *Confessione Belgica*, la confessione mia, e le altre delle Chiese Evangeliche, che sono tutte conformi, abhorisco li errori delli Papisti, e le superstitioni delli Greci provo et abbraccio la dottrina del Dottor meritissimo Gioanni Calvino, e di tutti quelli che sentono con lui." (Olar 2019, 237)¹

Lucaris could be considered a Proteus, a Nicodemus, a Balkan fanariot without principles, as his Western European contemporaries, from Daniel Tilenus to Hugo Grotius, have done (Olar 2019, 213–217), however, attention must be drawn to the tragedy inherent in Lucaris' fate, who lost his patriarchal seat five times, and regained it the same number of times. However, he could not survive his last replacement: on June 29, 1638, the Sultan's men strangled him on the ship that would have taken him to the place of his exile.

4. Lucaris' Catechism and the Transylvanian Romanians

It is scarcely imaginable that the waves of scandal caused by Lucaris' catechism would not have reached the Principality of Transylvania. All this naturally leads to the question whether it can be shown that Lucaris' person, and especially the views expressed in his catechism, were used by Transylvanian Hungarian Calvinist leaders to spread the ideas of the Reformation among the Romanians? Much has been written about the relationship between the Prince of Transylvania, Gábor Bethlen (1580–1629), and Lucaris (Murdock 2000, 243–249; Dumitran 2004, 132–178; Fonkič-Kalugin 2015, 67–95; Kármán 2013, 806–808; Pop 2000, 32–39; Ciure 2015, 109–115; Olar 2019, 207–213), so this issue is not discussed here. In-

¹ "If I die, as an orthodox Catholic, in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Lutheran doctrine, which faith is the same as the *Confessio Belgica*, my creed, and that of the other Lutheran churches; I abhor the errors of the Papists and the superstitions of the Greeks, I share and I support the teachings of the most outstanding divine, John Calvin, and those who follow him."

stead, I focus here on the question of who were familiar with Lucaris' doctrines in Transylvania, and whether they appeared in the Romanian-language Calvinist works published at the time.

Johann Heinrich Alsted left his university in Herborn for the college in Gyulafehérvár in the summer/autumn of 1629, at the invitation of Prince Gábor Bethlen. It is probably no coincidence that Alsted promptly republished the Latin version of Lucaris' confession in his *Encyclopaedia* published in Herborn in 1630. The encyclopaedia's section on religious debates (*Peroratio Theologiae Polemicae*) includes Lucaris' writing with the recommendation that Calvinist preachers involved in debates with Catholics can draw good arguments from the patriarch's creed. Alsted even dedicated his *Trifolium Propheticum* (written three years later but not published until 1640) to Lucaris. The work offered an interpretation of the Song of Songs, the book of the prophet Daniel, and the Book of Revelation from the point of view of the approaching universal reformation. In the *Trifolium*, Alsted used complex logical and combinatorial operations to prove that the second coming of Christ is imminent. Of course, before that, everyone would convert to the Calvinist faith: first the Greeks, then the Turks, and finally the Jews. The united reformed hosts will also overthrow the power of the Antichrist (the Pope). We know that around this time Alsted was invited not only to Transylvania, but also to the Netherlands (Hotson 2000, 65; 75). Could the presence of Romanians following the Greek religion in Transylvania have influenced his decision to choose Transylvania instead of the Netherlands (especially considering that in Alsted's view, the Greek rites were the first to convert to Calvinism)? Howard Hotson thought so, although he suspected that instead of Lucaris the strangely named and still unidentified Stephanus Pannonius Belogradensis might have given the main impetus for Alsted's decision.

Stephanus Pannonius published his brief millenarian work *De Circulo Operum et Judiciorum Dei* in 1609. In Pannonius' view, before the end of the world, a universal reformation will take place on earth. Only those who believe in the Holy Trinity will be entitled to belong to the reformed world empire. The ruler of the empire, who is also the conqueror of the Turks, can only be someone who respects religious freedom: "Neminem vere Augustum Imperatorem Christianum fieri posse, nec Turcas gentes debellare posse, sive is fit Pontificae, sive Evangelicae Religionis, nisi concessa Christianis, qui nomen S. S. Trinitatis veris illius Dei invocant, religionis libertate." (Pannonius 1609, 11) The day of Christ's justice (*Cursus Soli Justitiae Christi*), i.e. the universal reformation, moves from east to west. In other words, the history of humanity begins with the Jews who crucified Christ, and the course of those who will then accept Christ (i.e. the Reformation), will return there. Hungary will play a special role in the spread of the evangelical religion in the East, which will first reform the Greeks and then the Jews: "Zelum religionis evangelicae in Hungaria esse prodromus zeli orientis et meridiei, et apud ipsos etiam Venetos in cineribus igniculos zeli Dei non extinctos, sed ad tempus latitantes." (3)

Pannonius' pamphlet had a strong influence on Alsted's millenarian ideas. Pannonius' circulus, which shows the course of the day of Christ's righteousness, was republished by Alsted in two of his fundamental works on chiliasm, even before his

arrival in Transylvania: *Praecognita Theologica* (1614) and *Diatrobe de Mille Annis Apocalypticis* (1627). Based on these records, Howard Hotson believed that it was under the influence of Pannonius's work that Alsted decided to go to the college in Gyulafehérvár instead of Holland, since Pannonius cast Hungary a distinguished role in the universal reformation (Hotson 2000, 65; 75). However, Pál Ács and Mihály Balázs used convincing arguments to suggest that Hotson's hypothesis was weak. First, Pannonius only talks about Hungary, and he never mentions that the Transylvanian Principality would play any role in the universal reformation – however, the Romanians following the Greek rite lived there. On the other hand, Pannonius' comments about the future tolerant reforming ruler clearly referred to Archduke Matthias, who ascended the throne in 1608 after Rudolf II's death. In short, Pannonius' pamphlet was strongly pro-Habsburg, while Alsted's fervently anti-Habsburg position is widely known (Balázs 2011, 542–550; Ács 2014, 287–299). In my opinion, this lends additional probability to the idea that Alsted might have been influenced to some extent by Lucaris' Philo-Calvinism, and especially by his catechism, which was written in a Calvinist spirit through and through. For it was easy to interpret Lucaris' relevant discussions as the beginning of the reformation of the Greek Rites.

Another teacher from Herborn, Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld, who also happened to be the husband of Alsted's daughter, arrived with Alsted in Transylvania in 1629 (Menk 1979, 29–63; Viskolcz 2009, 201–214). It is known that Bisterfeld corresponded with Lucaris, despite the fact that these letters have not yet been found (Legrand 1896, 464). Bisterfeld even had a Romanian student at the college in Gyulafehérvár, a certain *Petrus S. Karansebesi Walachus*, who completed his disputation with him in August–November 1651 (Bisterfeld 1651).

The views of Alsted and Bisterfeld on the union between the Greek and Calvinist churches were formulated during the synod held in Gyulafehérvár in 1634. At the beginning of 1634, John Dury (Duraeus) wrote a letter from the meeting of the German Estates' Assembly in Frankfurt, and asked the Calvinist bishop of Transylvania, István Geleji Katona (1589–1649) to explain his position regarding the union of the Calvinists and the Lutherans. In response to this, Geleji convened a synod in Gyulafehérvár on February 7, 1634, which discussed Dury's questions and outlined an answer. The answer was also printed in Latin with the following title: *Concordiae inter Evangelicos Querendae Consilia*. The professors from Herborn (in addition to Alsted and Bisterfeld, Johann Ludwig Piscator) also participated in the council, and signed the resolution. According to this, the only differences between Calvinists and those of the Greek Rite are found in the area of adiaphora, i.e. something neither forbidden nor commanded by scripture, that is, those elements of faith, which are not absolutely necessary for salvation (*fundamentum salutis directe non concernentibus*). Within the adiaphoras belong, for example, the church ceremonies, superstitions and the cult of holy images. The synod commented on the ceremonies in the following manner:

“Ordinances are indifferent things [in regard to salvation], not founded on the command or ordinance of Christ; within the church these are human provisi-

ons. Those in which papist idolatry can be detected or which do not serve the edification or embellishment of the church can be deleted or changed. Those which seem to serve this purpose, may be established or preserved, according to the diversity of churches, nations, places, adversaries, and other circumstances. It is not mandatory that these be the same in all churches or at all times, but they must be adapted to the practice and era of the church. /.../ And if there is a [ceremony] that is useful and seems to serve the edification of the church, it should be observed. /.../ The bottom line is this: it is not right to act violently on indifferent things. For we see that even the apostles in their own churches could not achieve what they wanted all at once and forever. Love must therefore be kept in mind, and we should never attempt to change the ceremonies, only after we have understood the reason for the change.”²

Regarding the synod’s decision on superstition, it is important to point out that in their interpretation, the word *superstitiones* did not refer to folk customs and beliefs existing in popular religiosity outside the official church, but to certain elements of church life and ceremonies (holy water, fasting, etc.). Obviously, these were essential components of Eastern church ritual and customs. According to the synod decision, only those who are weak in their faith keep them, because they believe that they are absolutely necessary for salvation.

“Those said to be strong and firm in faith are sufficiently prepared both in teaching and in Christian freedom. Therefore, those who have not yet sufficiently mastered the teaching and understood the nature of Christian freedom are considered weak. /.../ They are said to be strong who believe that they are free to live with indifferent things, and that they can either keep them or discard them with a clear conscience and without injury to conscience. The weak or the feeble believe that they cannot live freely with them, but must either keep them, because they are obligatory, or turn away from them, because they are forbidden (Romans 14:2 and 23). Such people can very easily stumble or fail, unless the strong - in possession of knowledge, love and wisdom - take exception to them, strengthen and guide them. Love is needed in both cases, so that neither the strong give any occasion to offend the weak, nor look down on them because they do not yet understand these things, nor that they be judged by those who have received more Christian strength [faith], and gained more knowledge for themselves. The apostle speaks of both in Romans 14:13.”³

² “Ceremoniae adiaphorae sunt, quae non nituntur praecepto, aut institutione Christi, sed sunt ordinationes humanae in ecclesia. Et in his tolli et mutare oportet, quae idololatriam papisticam sapiunt, aut aedificationi ecclesiae, illiusve decoro non serviunt. /.../ Si quid autem utile et commodum videtur aedificationi id retineri potest. /.../ Summa: in adiaphoris non sunt probanda fortia consilia. Videmus enim apostolos, non semel, neque subito, in suis ecclesiis obtinere, quae voluerunt. Dilectio itaque ob oculos est habenda, et mutatio ceremonialium, sine intellectis causis mutationum, nunquam est tentanda.” (Buzogány et al. 2016, 86)

³ “Robusti et firmi in fide dicuntur, qui vel doctrinam, vel libertatem christianam probe sunt docti. Itaque infirmi censentur, qui vel doctrinam, vel libertatem christianam, ejusque naturam, nondum probe per-

It is not difficult for us to guess that, based on the quoted criteria set by the synod, the Transylvanian Romanians belonged to the category of those with weak faith (*infirmi seu debiles*). Weakness and feebleness in faith actually meant ignorance, i.e. the lack of knowledge of basic Christian teachings, which directly led to the lack of ability to comprehend the nature of Christian freedom. It is not by chance that the synodal text refers to the parts of the apostle Paul's letter to the Romans that were almost obligatorily mentioned in the debates about fasting in the age: "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him." (Rom 14:1-3 [KJV]) In a paraphrase of Paul's text, the synod stated that fasting belongs to adiaphoric things, i.e. it is neutral from the point of view of salvation: it is completely indifferent whether someone lives with it or not. Those who are strong in faith know this and are therefore free to decide whether to fast or not. Those who are weak in faith, on the other hand, believe that fasting is obligatory (i.e. essential for salvation), so they cannot freely choose between keeping it or ignoring it. Christian freedom is, therefore, nothing more than the knowledge that only the universal branches of faith (*articuli catholici*) must be known and kept (which are the faith in Jesus Christ, the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the two sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper), and a person strong in faith can freely decide whether to keep or discard adiaphoric things.

5. The New Testament of Bălgrad (Alba Iulia, 1648) and the Reformation

The synod's answers to Dury's question reveal that in terms of the *fundamentalia* there are no differences whatsoever between the Protestant and the Eastern Greek churches. The differences (the ceremony, the veneration of sacred images, the doctrine of the origin of the Holy Spirit) do not belong to the fundamental branches of faith, therefore a union with the Eastern Church is not impossible, because they also belong to the Church of Christ, in contrast to the Catholics who are members of the Church of the Antichrist. According to the idea of the Transylvanian Calvinist intellectuals (Alsted, Bisterfeld, Geleji), the Protestant union should be realized not only for the sake of the fight against Rome, but also because if the Greeks of the East see that there is agreement between the Protestants, then they too will be encouraged to unite with the Protestants. Violence

ceperunt. /.../ Robusti dicuntur, qui rerum adiaphorarum usum liberum esse credunt, et illas salva tranquilliaque conscientia vel observant, vel omittunt. Infirmi seu debiles, qui usum illarum liberum non credunt, sed eas observant tanquam necessariis, vel reformidant tanquam illicitas, Rom, 14 v. 2, 23. Hi tales facile offendi et labi possunt, nisi firmiorum scinentia, charitate et prudentia excipiantur, fulciantur, dirigantur. Magna utrobique charitas requiritur, ut nimirum nec firmiores infirmioribus causam scandali praebeant, aut rerum illarum, quas necdum intelligunt, causa eos despiciant, nec contra hi illos damnent, qui plus christianarum virium, plusve scientiae acquisiverunt. /.../ Rom 14, 1, 2, 3." (Buzogány et al. 2016, 88–89.)

is neither necessary nor useful, because if the Greeks also have the opportunity to learn the word of God (the Bible) and the basic teachings of the Christian religion (the catechism), then the Holy Spirit will begin to work in them, and thus the faithful will recognize the truth on their own. That is why Geleji considered it a particularly important task to put the Bible in the hands of the Romanians. Thanks to his efforts, two representative Romanian publications of the seventeenth century were published in the Prince's printing house in Alba Iulia (Bălgrad, Gyulafehérvár): the New Testament in 1648 and the Book of Psalms in 1651. In what follows, I provide more details about the Calvinist characteristics of the text of the Romanian New Testament of Bălgrad.

Initially, Geleji commissioned the translation to monk Silvestru from the Govora monastery in Wallachia. Silvestru died in 1646, so he could not finish the translation. Besides, Geleji found multiple errors in the translation, so he charged György Csulai with the completion of the translation and the amendment of Silvestru's text. Coming from a Romanian family near Hátaszeg (Hațeg) in Southern Transylvania, Csulai enrolled in the theological faculty of the University of Heidelberg on August 12, 1618, and then on February 24, 1621, in Altdorf. He returned to Transylvania in July 1621, where he taught at the college in Gyulafehérvár (Heltai 2006). After the death of István Geleji (December 12, 1649), he became the bishop of Transylvania. He talks about the translation of the Romanian New Testament in a letter sent from Gyulafehérvár to János Kemény, Chief Captain of Fogaras, on December 24, 1646:

"The priest János Illyei [his official Romanian name today is Ilia], who is also a deacon /.../ as he is an intelligent young man /.../ he writes elegant Hungarian and understands all Hungarian books, *he is my penman and coadjutor in the translation of the New Testament, I showed him the controversial loci during the translation*, and now he has a greater foundation in religio [that is, he is more and more erudite in matters of religion]." (National Archives of Romania, Cluj-Napoca, col. József Kemény, nr. 528)⁴

This letter proves that in 1646 it was Csulai who reviewed and amended the Romanian translation of the New Testament prepared by Silvestru. All we know about Csulai's penman, dean János, is that in August 1643, in accordance with Geleji's decree, he accompanied the newly appointed Romanian bishop of Transylvania, Simion Ștefan (d. 1656) to visit the Transylvanian Romanian deans in order to ask them for the tax of one forint that Geleji spent on printing the Romanian New Testament (Koncz 1887, 329).

In the New Testament of Bălgrad, each book of the New Testament is preceded by lengthy prefaces which contain the most important information about the given New Testament book: its author, the date of its composition, its content (Conțac 2012, 178). The textual explorations presented in the prefaces testify that their author was a particularly skilled theologian who was also able to clearly and

⁴ (My emphasis – NL).

comprehensibly summarize the most important points about each book of the New Testament. These extensive prefaces (they make up 55 pages out of the 330 pages of text in the book) reveal the most powerful Protestant features (Conțac 2017b). Of these, here I only mention the one which was also present in the already analysed *Confessio of Lucaris*. This is the “Faith is the hand of the soul with which we grasp Christ” metaphor, which the author brings up twice in the New Testament of Bălgrad (in the prefaces to the letters of James and Paul).

“James speaks of dead faith, the fruits of which are not good works, and he says that with that [dead faith] we will not be justified before God, because it is without good works, therefore it is not true, but a dead faith. He speaks a second time about justification [which arises from this dead faith], but it is not before God, but only [justification] before men, and shows that Abraham was indeed justified by good works, but only before men and not before God. The Apostle Paul speaks of true faith, which continually results in good works and by which we are justified before God. This faith is the hand of the Christian man’s soul, which he reaches out to grasp Christ, with all his goods, and makes Him his own /.../ That is why [Paul] says that man is justified only by faith, for true faith is the hand of the Christian man, by which he reaches out to grasp Christ. And good works are the fruit of faith, which we give to our neighbors.” (NTB, 365, 409; Conțac 2017a, 229)

The metaphor can be traced back to Calvin, due to whose influence it spread rapidly in Calvinist theological literature as early as the end of the sixteenth century. “The power of justifying which belongs to faith consists not in its worth as a work. Our justification depends entirely on the mercy of God and the merits of Christ: when faith apprehends these, it is said to justify” – as Calvin said in *Institutio*, III. 18. 8 (Calvin 1845, 691–692). This metaphor is particularly abundant in William Perkins’s work *A Reformed Catholike*, published in 1598. Some relevant quotes:

“So likewise in the soule there is a faith, which is both hand, mouth, and stomacke to apprehend, receiue, and apply Christ and all his merits for the nourishment of the soule. /... / Nowe as the propertie of apprehending and applying of Christ belongeth to faith, so it agreeth not to hope, loue, confidence, of any other gift or grace of God. But first by faith we must apprehend Christ, and apply him to our selues, before we can haue any hope or confidence in him. /... / Faith must be considered two waies: first, as a worke, quality, or vertue: secondly as an Instrument, or an hand reaching out it selfe to receiue Christs merit. And we are iustified by faith, not as it is a worke, vertue, or qualitie; but as it is an instrument to receiue and apply that thing whereby we are iustified. And therefore it is a figurative speech to say.” (Perkins 1598, 48; 108)

The works of Calvin and Perkins were already well known in Hungary and the Principality of Transylvania in the seventeenth century (Ősz 2023, 32–36). Calvin’s

Institution was translated into Hungarian by Albert Szenci Molnár (1574–1634) and published in Frankfurt am Main in 1624 in the printing house of Aubrius Daniel and David, under the title *Az keresztyéni religióra és igaz hitre való tanítás, melyet deákul írt Calvinus János*. Perkins's work was translated to Hungarian by János C. Kecskeméti (d. around 1627) as *Catholicus református*. Szenci and Kecskeméti studied at the most prominent Protestant universities of the time: Wittenberg, Heidelberg, Dresden and Strassburg. Between 1590 and 1624 Szenci lived in Amberg, Frankfurt am Main, Altdorf, Marburg, Oppenheim, Heidelberg and Hanau. It is completely reasonable that in such a context György Csulai added the metaphor "faith is the hand of the soul with which we grasp Christ" to the text of the New Testament of Bălgrad. For Lucaris' Confession could legitimise this Calvinist metaphor even for Romanians.

The preface to the reader of the New Testament of Bălgrad contains another frequently quoted passage about the language question:

"We also ask you to remember that Romanians do not speak the same way in different countries, they speak not even the same way within one country. Therefore, it is difficult for someone to write in a way that everyone can understand, some people say the same thing in one way, others in another way, either the jar, or the robe, or many other things are not named in the same way. We very well know that words must be like coins, for only those coins are good which are current in all countries, and so are words which are good when everybody understands them. For this very reason, we strove to translate as much as we could in such a way that everyone could understand, and if not everyone understands, it is not our fault, but the fault of the one who scattered the Romanians to different countries, so that their words were mixed with other languages, so they don't speak the same way." (NTB, 116)

The question raised by the author of the preface had a great career later in Romanian critical literature, as it was generally interpreted as the author discussing the need to create a unified Romanian literary language (Dimitrescu 1988, 79; Nicolae 2010, 72). Ambrus Miskolczy even wrote that "the historical relevance of the quoted passage lies in the fact that the demand for a philological revolution turned into some kind of cosmic rebellion" (1994, 82). Undoubtedly, this passage can be interpreted as including the issue of responsibility. Who is to blame for the fact that the Romanians do not speak the same language, i.e. there is no unified literary language? Perhaps the prince? The powers that be? Who is responsible for this? The answer is: those who scattered the Romanians to different countries. However, these were not named by the author of the preface. It is questionable whether he intended to name a specific person at all. Of course, it is also questionable to what extent we can talk about a cosmic rebellion in the case of the New Testament of Bălgrad. Did Ambrus Miskolczy really think that the author would not blame the injustice of fate, but directly God, for the lack of a unified Romanian language? I do not think so. All the more so because the pas-

sage quoted above is an inventive rewriting of an ancient *topos*. In my opinion the author of the preface used the saying attributed to Aristotle, *Verba valent sicut pecunia*, or *Verba valent in usu sicut pecunia* (words are like money, or the use value of words is like money) to characterize his translation method. His procedure is particularly important because at the beginning of the seventeenth century, this metaphorical saying also appeared in Francis Bacon's theoretical expositions of language. According to Bacon, one of the imperfections of natural languages is that the relationship between words and things is arbitrary (*ad placitum*). That is, a word can denote several things, just as one thing can be expressed with several words, since when creating the meaning of words, it is not "reason that commands the words", but rather "the creation of words is mostly adapted to the intellectual capacity of the majority (*ex captu vulgi induntur*) and it touches reality along the lines most conspicuous to the common sense" (Bacon 1778, 241). In short, the meaning of words is based on general agreement. Like the meaning of words, the value of money (coins) is also arbitrary and based only on public agreement.

"Words are like money," Bacon wrote, "they reflect the prevailing public opinion." Words put together and take apart meanings about things according to popular opinion, which is usually wrong and vague. Unfortunately, children are also forced to learn these meanings full of mistakes, as if unconsciously, when they learn to speak. Scientists try to free themselves from this servitude and invent new words and definitions (meanings), but they still find it difficult to shake off this yoke.

"Verba enim certe tanquam numismata esse, quae vulgi imaginem et principatum representent. Illa siquidem secundum populares notiones et rerum acceptiones (quae maxima ex parte erronae sunt confusissima) omnia componere et dividere; ut etiam infantes cum loqui discant, infelicem errorum cabalam haurire et imbiberre cognatur. Ac licet sapientiores et doctiores se variis artibus ab hac servitute vindicare conentur; nova vocabula fingendo, quod durum, et definitiones interponendo, quod molestum est; nullis tamen viribus jugum excutere posse." (Bacon 1879, 112–113)

In another place, where Bacon discusses the division of iconic (*ex congruo*) and arbitrary (*ad placitum*) signs (words), he again uses the words-money metaphor. In the case of iconic signs (e.g. hieroglyphs, gestures, sign language) there is always some kind of similarity, emblematic relationship between the signifier and the signified (*hieroglyphica et gestus semper cum re significata similitudinis habere; et emblemata quaedam esse*). However, real (linguistic) signs do not have any properties based on the similarity of the signified and the signifier (*at characteres reales nihil habent ex emblemate*) (Bacon 1778, 145). In addition, words do not directly denote things, but concepts (meanings) about things (hence the errors mentioned in the quote above). Words are therefore not signs of things, but of concepts: *verba notionum tesserae sunt* (128). (In ancient times, the *tessera* was a square-shaped stone or piece of wood that served as an admission ticket for

theatre and circus performances.)

“Words are like coins with a marketable value. The things of the mind (concepts) can be expressed not only in words and letters, just as coins are not cast only in gold and silver. /.../ The real, i.e. non-nominal signs [such as words] do not refer to letters and words, but to the thing or concept that is meant.”⁵

Just as the value of a coin is not determined by the gold or silver in it, so the value of words is not determined by the thing it represents. A given coin is only worth as much as people agree; therefore, the circulation value of money is just as arbitrary and consensus-based as the meaning of words. The purpose of Bacon’s linguistic investigations was to eliminate the fraudulent and deceptive nature of language. He did not want to reinforce analogical thinking by making words recall the image of things or reveal their nature. He primarily wanted to stabilize the market value of words, i.e. the concepts denoted by words (*notiones*), ultimately the meaning. He would have left the words as conventional and arbitrary signs, but in such a way that they preferably refer to a concept, i.e. have a meaning that everyone understands. The author of the preface to the Romanian New Testament argued in a similar spirit when he ingeniously transformed Bacon’s linguistic theoretical questions into a technical method of translation. That is why, in my opinion, the writer of the foreword was not talking about the lack of a unified Romanian national language in the passage in question. The need to create a Romanian literary language does not fit into the linguistic context of the mid-seventeenth century at all. The translator simply stood on the fundamentals of Baconian linguistic theory: like Bacon, he also wanted each word to have, if possible, only one meaning that everyone understood, i.e. use only one word to denote a concept. Therefore, during the translation, just as the traveller sets out with money with which he can pay in many places, so the translator preferred those good and valuable words that many people understand, i.e. which, like good money, are accepted by many.

In mid-seventeenth century Transylvania, Francis Bacon was not among the most widely read authors. So, who could the Romanian-speaking author be, who was aware of Bacon’s linguistic explanations, and how did he acquire this information? The most obvious candidate is Bisterfeld. We know for sure that he was a connoisseur and enthusiastic promoter of Bacon’s works. “Verulamius is the standard of everything for me, I have never seen anything like him” (“Verulamius mihi est instar omnium: hactenus neminem vidi et parem”, quoted in Viskolcz 2003, 84), as Bisterfeld wrote to Samuel Hartlib in the fall of 1638. In 1649, he recommended Zsigmond Rákóczi, the son of II. Transylvanian prince György Rákóczi II. to read *De augmentis scientiarum*, in which, as we saw above, Bacon repeatedly recalled the metaphor “words are like coins”: “Siquid otii suppetat Excellentiae Vestrae, percurrat Verulamium de Augmentis [sic!] Scientiarum: plurima

⁵ “Tractamus enim hic, veluti numismata rerum intellectualium: nec abs re fuerit nosse, quod sicut nummi possint confici ex alia materia, praeter aurum et argentum, ita et notae rerum aliae possint cudi, praeter verba et literas. /.../ Characteres quidam reales, non nominales; qui scilicet nec literas, nec verba, sed res et notiones exprimunt.” (Bacon 1778, 145)

habet eximia.” (Bisterfeld’s letter to Zsigmond Rákóczi, December 19, 1649: Szilágyi 1888, 108–109).

Based on the above, I believe that the passages referring to Bacon’s concept of language were included in the unsigned preface of the Romanian New Testament for readers through the mediation of Bisterfeld, Csulai, or the mentioned Bisterfeld student Simon Péter from Karánsebes.

6. Conclusions

Based on the above, it is fruitful to compare the situation of the Eastern and Western churches in the era of the formation of denominations. While in the West the “universal” and one existing church split into several denominations, in the East the Orthodox Church based around the concept of autocephaly remained united. The Principality of Transylvania, which relative to Rome, Wittenberg, and Constantinople is equally peripheral, was a particularly interesting area because their Eastern Orthodoxy could have split into several denominations, however, Reformation was not able to fully realize this. Only the Catholic union in the 18th century would bring about a true sectarian split in the lives of Transylvanian Romanians. At the same time, it is worth noting that in Eastern Orthodoxy, the dynamics of institutionalization and the compulsion to modernize occur precisely when the influence of Western confessionalization reached not only Gyulafehérvár, but Constantinople as well. The fate of Cyrill Lucaris clearly proves that Eastern Orthodoxy had to respond in some form to the Catholic and Protestant union offers, and this response really started a kind of Orthodox renewal.

Abbreviation

NTB – Emilian bishop of Alba-Iulia 1988 [*Noul Testament de la Bălgrad (1648)*].

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