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THE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND THE RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN WESTERN EUROPE (1532-1685)

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ABSTRACT

By comparing the political and religious relations between Transylvania and Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries, it can be emphasized and demonstrated that Transylvania was an island of religious peace in a Europe of religious intolerance. Between 1568 and 1690, culture and religious life in the Principality of Transylvania flourished in the spirit of tolerance. With the enactment of freedom of religion, the Principality of Transylvania became one of the most enlightened states in 16th-century Europe. Western Europe at the beginning of the 16th century did not know any forms of religious tolerance. The Roman Catholic Church of the time classified all theological and religious views that differed from its own as heresy, and as a sin against God, punishing followers with death.

KEYWORDS Religious tolerance, freedom of religion, reformation Europe, Transylvania, confessional conflicts

1. Introduction

Meanwhile, the reformers of the 16th century – Martin Luther[2], John Calvin[3], and John Knox[4] – used the same tools against their opponents that the Holy See[5], and the Inquisition[6] used against them. The reformers initially acted and spoke in terms of religious freedom and religious tolerance. This position changed over

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[2] Martin Luther (Eisleben, 10 November 1483 – Lutherstadt Eisleben, 18 February 1546) was the spiritual father of the Protestant Reformation, a theologian, reformer, and biblical teacher at the University of Wittenberg.

[3] John Calvin (Noyon, 10 July 1509 – Geneva, 27 May 1564) was a Swiss reformer of French origin, a Christian scholar, and the founder of the Geneva Academy.

[4] John Knox (Giffordgate, c. 1505–1515 – Edinburgh, 24 November 1572) was a Scottish reformer, Calvinist theologian, and church organiser.

[5] The name "Holy See" or "Apostolic See" refers to the Pope himself and the organs of the Roman Curia that act on his behalf (Pálos Könyvtár, n.d.).

[6] The Latin name for the Inquisition was inquisitio haereticae pravitatis. Its primary purpose was to investigate suspected heresy, followed by a specific legal procedure conducted by the Catholic Church. The process concluded with the punishment of those who defied or disrespected Catholic dogma and were declared heretics (Pálos Könyvtár, n.d.).

time, and they persecuted and punished those whom they had earlier defended, declaring other reformers and religious groups heretical based on reformist principles.

Prince John Sigismund, together with the Transylvanian orders, accepted the principle of free thought and free preaching, and unlike the Western European countries, did not destroy freedom of religion and conscience with fire and sword, but addressed differing beliefs and religious disagreements through public theological debates[7].

With the proclamation of the Peace of Torda in 1568, Prince John Sigismund of Transylvania and the Transylvanian orders – contrary to the intolerance of the Reformation movements in Switzerland and Saxony – favoured peace and tolerance between the emerging denominations. The prince ruled like a true benefactor and took a conciliatory approach to confessional disputes. He appeared as a defender of the Christian religions (Borsos, 1855).

In the decades that followed, the spirit of religious tolerance and freedom continued to define the religious policy of Transylvania.

2. Religious freedom, religious tolerance, and the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* in the Holy Roman Empire

The religious peace treaty of Nuremberg in 1532 granted Protestants in Germany the right to freely practice their religion until the planned universal council. Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (1519–1556) worked to reconcile the Catholic and Protestant sides when he issued the Augsburg Interim at the Imperial Assembly in Augsburg in 1548. However, neither side was willing to accept this creed. The Treaty of Passau, concluded in 1552, allowed Protestants to practice their religion freely. This treaty remained in effect until the acceptance of the Religious Peace of Augsburg in 1555[8]. The Religious Peace of Augsburg was formulated and proclaimed in the presence of Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand I (1556–1564). The *ius reformandi* authorized the lord of the given principality or province to decide on religious matters.

Here, the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* ("whose realm, his religion") was promulgated, according to which the inhabitants of a territory were obliged to follow or adopt the religion of the landowner. The agreement only allowed the possibility of religious practice within a given Christian denomination and only within a specific territory – but not in the spirit of religious coexistence. Only the

[7] On March 3, 1568, a synod was held in Gyulafehérvár, Hungary, where Lutherans, Reformed, and Unitarians from Hungary and Transylvania engaged in a theological dispute (Pokoly, 1904; Pásztori, 2009).

[8] The Peace of Augsburg was signed on 24 September 1555.

Catholic and Lutheran religions were included in the religious peace. The Lutherans were granted religious freedom throughout the Holy Roman Empire[9]. Protestant denominations that did not accept the agreement were allowed to emigrate from the respective areas. According to the agreement, an ecclesiastical prince could later change his own religion, but not the religion of his principality. This was known as the *reservatum ecclesiasticum*. In Germany, confessional division was legitimized at the level of imperial law.

Calvinism spread in the northwestern provinces of the Holy Roman Empire in a "second wave" from Switzerland, the Netherlands, and France. Frederick III (1559–1576), Prince Elector of the Palatinate, was the first to adopt Calvinist principles in 1562. He made Heidelberg the first centre of German Calvinism by drafting the Heidelberg Catechism with the university theologians Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus, and presenting it to the synod convened on 29 January 1563, which accepted it and issued it for public use. The University of Heidelberg's reputation was enhanced by the widespread use of the Heidelberg Catechism[10] throughout the Holy Roman Empire. John Casimir, Elector of the Palatinate (1583–1592), gave refuge to Calvinist refugees who were being persecuted in France. Calvinism was also accepted in the states of Hesse-Kassel, Saxony-Anhalt, Lippe, Kleve, and Bremen. To counterbalance the political power of the Lutheran orders, the electorates increasingly supported Calvinism.

In 1613, Prince Elector John Sigismund of Brandenburg also adopted the Calvinist religion. In his country, he practiced religious tolerance toward the Lutherans. The religious wars raging between 1618 and 1648 rewrote the religious map of the Holy Roman Empire and Western Europe. In once-thriving towns and villages, many churches fell victim to religious intolerance. The wars between the armies of the Catholic League and the Protestant Union were both evidence and consequence of the religious intolerance manifested in European history.

[9] Martin Luther (1483–1546), a Saxon reformer and teacher in Wittenberg, formulated the idea of religious freedom in terms of his willingness to obey the emperor as a secular authority, while giving priority to the things of God in his life. In his opinion, it is not the bishops, the synods, or the pope who are competent to judge matters of faith, but the free conviction and decision of the individual in faith. The free individual is entitled to two things: to judge the doctrine of the Church and to choose the preacher (Warga, 1906).

[10] "The Heidelberg Catechism (1563) was composed in the city of Heidelberg, Germany, at the request of Elector Frederick III, who ruled the province of the Palatinate from 1559 to 1576. The new catechism was intended as a tool for teaching young people, a guide for preaching in the provincial churches, and a form of confessional unity among the several Protestant factions in the Palatinate. An old tradition credits Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus with being the coauthors of the catechism, but the project was actually the work of a team of ministers and university theologians under the watchful eye of Frederick himself. Ursinus probably served as the primary writer on the team, and Olevianus had a lesser role. The catechism was approved by a synod in Heidelberg in January 1563." (Christian Reformed Church, n.d.).

3. Religious freedom and religious tolerance in Switzerland (1509–1564)

3.1. Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531), the reformer and religious freedom in Switzerland

Ulrich Zwingli, as the pioneer of the Swiss Reformation, introduced innovations in preaching and the doctrines of the Lord's Supper. As the initiator of the Swiss Reformation, Zwingli Ulrich introduced innovations in preaching and the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. During his reformation activities, the city of Zurich converted to Protestantism. According to church historians and theologians, he was an enemy of all religious compulsion. He considered the Holy Scriptures to be the standard of faith and, in light of this, he respected freedom of religion and freedom of conscience (Warga, 1906).

During the disputes between the Catholic and Protestant sides of the Swiss cantons, the civil government prohibited all religious persecution and discrimination. This was sealed in the religious convention of Marburg in 1529. Tolerance toward the Lutherans was not extended to the Anabaptists. After the adoption of strict laws, the free persecution and extermination of the Anabaptists was declared. The religious differences and political disagreements of the Swiss cantons sparked a religious war in 1529 that lasted until 1531. Zwingli Ulrich, who participated in the renewed religious wars between the Swiss cantons, also chose this path. He died a heroic death in defence of Protestantism at the Battle of Capel in 1531.

3.2. John Calvin, the Geneva reformer and religious freedom in Switzerland (1509–1564)

After years of warfare, the Swiss Catholic and Reformed cantons made peace in 1531. According to the agreement, only the two parties were allowed to practice their religion freely. In 1532, János Kálvin published his commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia*. In this work, he advocated religious tolerance in defence of the persecuted Huguenots in France. He asked the French King, Francis I, for mercy on the persecuted French. In his declaration on religious freedom, he emphasized that true tolerance is essential, warning that so-called freedom must not become an excuse for disobedience to God or for boundless permissiveness. At the same time, he argued that individuals should neither renounce their own freedom nor deny it to others.

Calvin was the target of many criticisms and accusations from his theological contemporaries. He was subjected to numerous criticisms and accusations by his fellow theologians and was also accused of having almost completely abandoned his commitment to tolerance. His ecclesiastical and social status in

Geneva had been consolidated. Calvin's tolerance remained toward those who based their theological and moral teachings on the Holy Scriptures.

He exercised total intolerance toward those who spread arguments that differed from the Holy Scriptures and his teachings. He practiced complete intolerance against those who promoted doctrines different from the Holy Scriptures and his own teaching. The incident between John Calvin and the French doctor Hieronymus Bolsec was also related to this. Bolsec opposed Calvin's doctrine of double predestination and publicly criticized him. At Calvin's initiative, the city magistrate – taking into account the opinion of the Geneva church council – arrested Bolsec in October 1551, and after a long deliberation, exiled him from Geneva and Switzerland (van't Spijker, 2003).

Another similar case was that of Jean Trolliet. Calvin did not allow Trolliet to serve as a pastor. The conflict culminated in June 1552 when Trolliet complained to the council about Calvin's sermons. He criticized the Calvinist doctrine of predestination as developed in the *Institutio*[11]. He emphasized that by accepting the doctrine of predestination, one also blames God for sin. Calvin submitted a memorandum to the council in which he defended himself against the accusations. After a long investigation and debate, the council sided with Calvin's doctrine. It declared that the doctrine of predestination developed in the *Institutio* was based on Holy Scripture. Trolliet withdrew his complaint and admitted his mistake. The council rebuked him for his claims and obliged him to accept the doctrine of predestination.

The trial of Michael Servetus was one of the most controversial cases of religious freedom in the history of the city of Geneva. With the trial and execution of the Spanish doctor Mihály Servet in 1553, the city of Geneva became a stronghold of intolerance. John Calvin played a leading role in this (van't Spijker, 2003).

The British historian Henry Kamen describes the conditions prevailing in Geneva when he says: "The severity of the Calvinist discipline is also shown by the number of excommunications, which rose from 80 during the four-year period between 1551 and 1554 to over 300 in the year 1559 alone" (Kamen, 1967, pp. 51-52). With the introduction of Calvin's *Code of Geneva* (1541) and the publication of his work *Declaratio orthodoxae fidei de sacrae Trinitate* (1554), he became a representative of religious intolerance in Geneva. In this work, he develops the idea that tolerance is nothing more than the toleration of heresy. He was convinced that promoting heretical teachings was a sin against God, since they were contrary to divine doctrine. Heresies must be eradicated because they corrupt and dishonour both human and divine law (Calvin, 1554).

[11] It was the 1536 edition of the Institutio by the Genevan reformer John Calvin.

John Calvin's fellow reformer, Théodore de Bèze, professor of classical Greek, spoke out against tolerance in his work *De haereticis a civili magistratu puniendis* (*On the Punishability of Heretics by the Civil Authority*). He regarded tolerance as the work of the devil and loudly proclaimed that it must be rooted out as such.

In response to the Servetus trial and execution, Sebastian Castellio published *De haereticis, an sint persequendi* in 1554. He became known as a defender of religious tolerance in Western Europe (van't Spijker, 2003). He stood up against the persecution of heretics and in favour of religious freedom. He interpreted religious tolerance as follows: "Seeking the truth and saying it as we think can never be a sin. No one can be forced to believe, since belief is free […] The dogmas for which Christians mutually curse and kill each other are quite indifferent in themselves and do not improve people. The judgment over the spiritual does not belong to men, but to God alone" (Guggisberg, 1997, p. 45).

A few years later, in Bern in 1566, another heretic, Valentino Gentilis, was executed. Religious freedom and religious tolerance in Switzerland were only realized, and executions abolished, centuries later.

4. The struggle for freedom and religious liberty in the Netherlands in the 16th and 17th centuries

The English King Henry VIII (1509–1547) initiated the establishment of the Anglican Church in 1534 after his separation from Rome, which retained many of its Catholic features. As head of the Church of England, he dissolved the monasteries in 1536. However, he left dogmatic teachings, church ceremonies, and church organization largely untouched. The last years of his reign were characterized by religious intolerance and anti-Catholicism. The Act of Supremacy and the Treasons Act authorized King Henry VIII to convict and execute Thomas More and Cardinal John Fisher.

During the reign of Edward VI (1547–1553), his legitimate successor, Protestant reforms were introduced with the support of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury. The next ruler, Mary I (r. 1553–1558), being a fervent Catholic, strove for the re-Catholicization of England and Scotland and mercilessly persecuted Protestants.

This political and religious intolerance continued during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603). The Act of Uniformity of 1559 reflects the political and religious conditions that characterized England in the 16th century (Lecler, 1960). The political and legal actions of the English rulers were a clear indication that anyone who went against their will would end up on the losing side. The intolerant spirit of 16th-century England is best reflected in the reign of Queen

Elizabeth I, who imprisoned her Catholic cousin, Mary, Queen of Scots, for 19 years before having her executed on February 8, 1587 (Walsham, 2006).

Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England was characterized by intolerance[12]. England had to wait a long time for the establishment and practical application of religious tolerance.

5. Conventions and religious edicts in the name of religious freedom in France

In the years preceding the proclamation of the Edict of Torda, France was characterized by religious intolerance. In the Edict of Châteaubriant of 1551, French King Henry II prohibited all contact with foreign heretics and ordered the confiscation of the property of Reformed refugees living abroad. The Peace of Cateau-Cambrésis, signed on April 3, 1559, did not improve the situation of the Protestants. Neither the religious edict of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, issued in January 1562, nor the Edict of Amboise of 1563 lasted long, and neither guaranteed the free exercise of religion for the lower social classes (Papp, 2009).

After the proclamation of the Edict of Torda in 1568, the third French religious war broke out on August 18, 1568. Religious tolerance and the acceptance of beliefs other than Catholic dogma were completely unknown in France. This religious intolerance culminated in the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre.

In one of the bloodiest events in European history, on August 23, 1572, Charles IX authorized the murder of 3,000 French Reformed Christians (Kamen, 1967). The Edict of Nantes, issued by Henry IV on April 13, 1598, ended 36 years of religious warfare. Its 92 articles included provisions for legal proceedings against the Reformed and the release of those imprisoned for their religion. Confiscated property was returned to the Reformers. Catholics and Reformed Christians enjoyed the same rights and could practice their religion freely.

Reformed believers had the same civil rights as Catholics. However, their public worship was restricted. On estates with high-ranking lordships, the practice of the Reformed religion was allowed for the owner, his family, and his household. On estates with lower jurisdiction, only the family was permitted to practice the Reformed faith. The Reformed were granted political equality with Catholics and could hold all kinds of titles, offices, and public positions.

[12] „Toleration was, despite this, not a distinctive feature of the Anglican Church. The Catholic population, which at the outset of the reign was still a substantial proportion, was subjected to penal laws which grew in the intensity and ferocity as the reign went on the menace from Catholic Spain grew greater. Elizabeth may have claimed not to wish to set a window into men's consciences, but the executions and repression suffered by English Catholics were a potent argument against the toleration of Protestants by Catholic powers in Europe. Under her 189 Catholics, the majority of them secular priests, were put to death, and some forty more died in prison. [. . .] Among the few on the Protestant side who opposed this policy is the surprising figure of John Foxe. [. . .] He was a rare apostle of liberty" (Kamen, 1967, pp. 161-162).

The Peace of Westphalia, adopted in 1648, reaffirmed the Peace of Augsburg. The Reformed faith was officially recognized, and the status quo prior to 1624 was restored. In France, Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes in 1685 and stripped French Reformed Christians of their rights. Around 200,000 Huguenot artisans, merchants, and intellectuals left the country and settled in Germany, England, and the Netherlands. French Protestants were only allowed to freely practice their religion again in the mid-18th century (Adriányi, 1975).

6. The dominance of intolerance in 16th- and 17th-century Spain

In Spain, the religious and cultural segregation of the Christian Moors (Moriscos) living in the territory of the Spanish Empire began with the announcement of the royal decree published on January 1, 1567. In the territory of Granada, Arab clothing and the use of baths were forbidden. The Moriscos, who revolted on Christmas Day in 1568, were resettled in the southern parts of Castile in Spain under an assimilation plan. After the unsuccessful attempt, according to the decision of the Council of State on April 4, 1609, the aim was to expel the Moriscos from the country. The resettlement of around 300,000 Moriscos took place in March 1611 (Rawlings, 2006).

The Spanish Inquisition of the 16th century mercilessly persecuted and exterminated not only the Moriscos, but also the Protestants. Due to intolerance towards other cultures and religious groups, in the 16th and 17th centuries non-Catholics and ethnic groups with foreign cultures completely disappeared from Spain.

Religious tolerance and freedom were unknown concepts in 16th- and 17th-century Spain.

7. Conclusion

Summarizing the issues of religious freedom and religious tolerance established in Western European states, the conclusion can be drawn that the religious freedom and religious tolerance proclaimed in the Principality of Transylvania was unique in 16th-century Europe.

In the second half of the 17th century, political thinkers, philosophers, and legal scholars debated the natural rights of man. Religious tolerance and freedom of worship were increasingly promoted. The idea of religious tolerance permeated their work. Lawyer Samuel Pufendorf and political thinker John Locke stood out among them. Samuel Pufendorf, the well-known lawyer, supported his arguments with biblical quotations and explained his idea that every person has the right to choose their religion and practice it freely. This went against the

teachings of the medieval Church, which dictated and prescribed the individual's religious affiliation and religious life. With his new teaching, he proclaimed that ecclesiastical or secular superiors had no right to interfere in a person's religious beliefs. The freedom of religion advocated by him remained only a theoretical issue.

The famous work of the philosopher John Locke (1632–1704), *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, published in 1689, was only a philosophical approach to religious freedom. The practical implementation of the issue of religious freedom was not achieved. Results similar to the religious freedom and religious tolerance in Transylvania and Poland were only realized in Western European states at the end of the 18th century, in the Declaration of the Rights of Man during the French Revolution. The proclamation and implementation of religious freedom in Transylvania was unknown in Western political and ecclesiastical circles.

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