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## Invocation of biblical authority in a secular decision: the theocratic relevance of the Torda Edict (1568)

It is often argued that the sixteenth-century Reformation initiated a chain of events that ultimately led not only to religious pluralism within the body of the Western Christian Church, but also to the rise and dispersion of mutual acceptance among various religious groups. The fact, however, that these two things (i.e. religious pluralism and tolerance) did not emerge directly and immediately (almost as a matter of course) from the Reformation itself, is similarly undeniable. As we shall see below, we have sufficient evidence to claim that although the Reformers – including John Calvin, Theodore Beza and others, with whom this paper is partly concerned – at some point in their lives (mostly in their youth) advocated and invoked the cultivation of the spirit of tolerance, most of them refrained from upholding such positions once their situation as leaders within a newly emerged (both religious and political) community or realm became established.

By this assessment we do not seek to diminish e.g. Calvin's positive theological and social achievements, nevertheless, especially in the 'Calvin-year' we consider it to be our duty to bring a balanced picture of what his contribution really meant to world Christianity as well as to the rise and development of Protestant churches (amongst them the Hungarian Reformed Church) in Transylvania. This is a very interesting subject, the more so since it appears that in the second half of the sixteenth century, Transylvanian Christians (including lay members of various Protestant communities) began to follow a different course of action in terms of interdenominational relations than that which ultimately became established in Calvin's, and indeed, Beza's Geneva. Moreover, this alternative rapidly became concretised in secular measures (repeatedly voted upon by Transylvanian Calvinist nobles also), which easily could have been characterised by the two Reformers of Geneva as being outright diabolical or at least deceptive.

One of the aims of this paper, therefore, is to take a glance at the similarities and differences between the 'Western' and arguably the 'Eastern' – more specifically: Transylvanian as well as Polish – understanding of religious tolerance, as it ultimately emerged from within the turmoil of the sixteenth century. Whilst encountering historical events of any kind and attempting to analyse their importance, I cannot help remembering the words of my former mentor in Edinburgh University, Prof. Larry W. Hurtado, who during one of his memorable lectures said: 'Past is what happened. History is what we say about what happened.' I shall therefore try to present this article – dedicated to the

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significance of the Edict of Torda (Turda in Romanian) by the Diet of Transylvania in 1568, a law which promulgated the spirit of religious tolerance within the small Transylvanian principality – bearing in mind that the interpretation of past events is to some extent preconditioned by the interpreter's attitude towards the theme. I think it is still better to admit that certain affairs might bear a different message to other analysts than to pretend one's unbiased objectivity.

Let us begin with the historical background. If we were to disregard the aftermath of the First World War and most of the twentieth century, we might be entitled to say that the second worst part of Hungarian history began in the second trimester of the sixteenth century. Following the tragedy of Mohács in 1526 and the fall of Buda in 1541, the Hungarian Kingdom was almost torn apart: the Western territory was occupied by the Habsburgs, the South by the Turks, whilst the East (including the territory called Transylvania) gradually became a relatively independent principality for almost 150 years adopting a continuous policy of balancing between the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires.

With the death of the young king Lajos (Louis) at Mohács, the leadership over the country became divided as well. Some favoured the Habsburg family, others supported e.g. János Szapolyai, who did not live to see his only son, yet claimed authority over a considerable part of Eastern Hungary. As described by Katalin Péter in her excellent study,<sup>1</sup> Queen Izabella, the Polish widow of King János Szapolyai and the mother of the first Transylvanian Reigning Prince, János Zsigmond, although not being a very talented ruler, gained the respect of her subjects by acting in the spirit of religious tolerance. First, in 1543, despite the vehement protests of the Roman Catholic clergy she authorised the new confession of the Transylvanian Germans (Saxons), a confession drawn up in the spirit of Luther's ideas. Further, during the highly tense disputes of the Diet in 1557 – in accordance with the sacred task of a monarch acting under the authority of the Hungarian Holy Crown – she said: 'By our royal station and office we are obliged to protect all religions'.<sup>2</sup>

János Zsigmond, the one who was born king (being the son of King János Szapolyai), yet who died as a reigning prince,<sup>3</sup> inherited this spirit of tolerance from his mother. Although Izabella never converted to Protestantism (for the daughter of a Polish king and of Bona Sforza this could hardly be in the cards), she manifested a patient attitude regarding the rapidly emerging new trends of Reformation which were sweeping across the entire country. She was a beloved queen by her Transylvanian subjects not just because of her youth (she became a widow at the age of 21 in 1540), but also because of the fact that she grew to love this newly formed country. The moment when she was forced to relinquish the Hungarian Holy Crown to the Habsburgs in 1551 as well as her famous statement according to which no king of Hungarian blood would ever be crowned with it (a prophecy which is still valid in

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<sup>1</sup> Katalin Péter, 'Tolerance and intolerance in sixteenth-century Hungary', *Tolerance and intolerance in the European Reformation*, ed. by Ole Peter Grell and Bob Scribner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 249–261. See also Katalin Péter, 'Tolerancia és intolerancia a 16. századi Magyarországon', *Egyháztörténeti Szemle*, 7/2 (2006), 73–83.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256. See also Sándor Szilágyi, ed., *Erdélyi Országgyűlési Emlékek* (Budapest: 1877), vol. II, 78.

<sup>3</sup> Due to the dramatic changes which took place in Hungary during the sixteenth century, János Zsigmond could not become King of Hungary, only the ruler or reigning prince of the newly emerging Transylvania, a former part of the mediaeval Hungarian Kingdom.

2008) – became well embedded in Transylvanian common memory. Her son, János Zsigmond, a silent young man of very feeble health, although preserving the formal rites of the Roman Catholic faith, became highly interested in the dogmatic disputes of his age, and being influenced by his physician, Giorgio Blandrata, sympathised at first with the Lutheran, then with the Reformed and finally with the anti-Trinitarian or Unitarian trend of the Reformation.

It was during this last phase of János Zsigmond's reign when in January 1568 in the historical church building of Torda, the Transylvanian Diet voted for the first time in world history that – as it entered later in common knowledge – nobody should be harmed or persecuted because of his/her religion or confession. The edict was analysed on numerous occasions, and in accordance with the motto I borrowed from Prof. Hurtado, depending on the analysts' viewpoint, among these interpretations one indeed may find at least two extremes: some would go as far as to venerate the wording of the edict itself as a completely liberal attitude concerning the freedom of individual conscience, thus prefiguring the spirit of the Enlightenment, whilst others even went to say that the entire edict was a farce, since the freedom of religion and the spirit of tolerance did not become established in Transylvania (at least not according to modern liberal standards and expectations). I shall refrain myself here from providing typical examples for either approach. Indeed, history is what we say about what happened – and not necessarily an impartial presentation of the facts, which, again, are often conditioned by the sources of information we possess about them from a certain period.

In spite of the delicate nature of the dispute as well as the fact that I am a Transylvanian Hungarian Reformed minister (which obviously determines me to be proud of this edict) I shall try to analyse not only the wording of this decree, but also to provide a short historical outlook upon the country as well as the continent in which this law was passed in 1568. It may not be the greatest and most eloquent example of a liberal tolerance which developed in Europe a few centuries later (because it is not), yet given the historical circumstances both within and outside the Transylvanian borders, it was a remarkable achievement, worthy of our attention today.

Probably the best way to begin with is quoting the text itself. The English translation of this passage already presents us with a series of problems. One could translate the text in order for it to sound 'well' in the ears of native speakers (thus perhaps risking to misinterpret the original), or rather cling to its wording as closely as possible and sacrifice some of the eloquence for the sake of accuracy. Since my purpose is to have a faithful representation and an equitable appraisal of this edict, I have chosen to follow the latter option and to include explanatory remarks in square brackets whenever I thought it was necessary. Therefore, the text of the edict in my translation says,

His majesty, our Lord [i.e. Prince János Zsigmond], just as he – together with his country – legislated in the matter of religion at the previous Diets, in the same manner now, in this present Diet, reaffirms it, i.e. that in every place the preachers shall preach and proclaim the Gospel, each of them according to their understanding, and if the community wishes to receive it, well. If not, no one shall compel her [i.e. the community] by [any] compulsion, for her soul [i.e. of the community] will not be comforted by it [i.e. the teaching], but she shall be permitted to keep a preacher whose teaching she [the community]

prefers. Therefore neither any of the superintendents nor others may harm the preachers, no one shall be slandered by anyone because of the religion, according to the previous constitutions [i.e. laws], and no one is permitted to threaten anyone with imprisonment or removal from office because of [his] teaching, for faith is the gift of God, which comes from hearing, and hearing is by the word of God.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout the text I have chosen to translate the pronoun referring to the community (or congregation) with 'she', as an analogy to the Church (even the local one), being the bride of Christ. The fact that this term refers to the community and not to the individual members bears an enormous significance concerning the decree's message. Nonetheless, before entering the textual details of this historic document it may be useful to take a look at the old continent of the time. What was Europe really like in the year 1568? Could that perhaps bring us closer to the understanding of this edict's international importance?

### From one religious war to another: France in the sixteenth century

More than half a year after the publication of the Torda Edict in Transylvania, on 18 August 1568 the Third Religious War breaks out in France. Whatever the notion of tolerance or acceptance could mean in that realm, it was almost unheard of, despite the very commendable efforts of Michel de L'Hospital, Chancellor of France between 1560 and 1568 and a handful of honourable church leaders.<sup>5</sup> The edict of tolerance of January 1562 and the Second Edict of Amboise (1563) were not only short-lived, but also refused the right of the lower classes to free religious practice. The most significant attempt to reconcile Catholics with Protestants by a royal marriage becomes truly memorable, since it is turned into a monumental trap against the latter, causing a tremendous bloodbath. On 23 August 1572 Charles IX of France authorised the so-called St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, in which over three thousand Huguenots perished, including their famous leader, Coligny. The total loss of French Protestant lives throughout France has been put at 20,000.<sup>6</sup> This day undoubtedly sealed the reconfirmation of a long-lasting enmity between the two religious groups.

It is interesting to observe that Calvin's publication of Seneca's *De clementia* in 1532, its preface being dedicated to 'the most saintly and most wise prelate, Claude de Hangest, Abbot of St. Eloi's at Noyon',<sup>7</sup> and ultimately aimed to persuade the King of

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<sup>4</sup> See e.g. in *Erdélyi Országgyűlési Emlékek*, vol. II, 374: 'Urunk őfelsége miképpen ennek előtte való gyűlésibe országával közönséggel az religió dolgáról végezött, azonképpen mostan és ez jelen való gyűlésibe azont erősti, tudniillik, hogy midőn helyökön az prédikátorok az evangéliumot prédikálják, hirdessék, kiki az ő értelme szerint, és az közösség ha venni akarja jó, ha nem pedig senki kényszerítéssel ne kényszerítse az ú lelke azon meg nem nyugodván, de oly prédikátort tarthasson, az kinek tanítása ő nékie tetszik. Ezért pedig senki az superintendensek közül, se egyebek az prédikátorokat meg ne bánthassa, ne szidalmaztassék senki az religióért senkitől, az elébbi constitutiók szerint, és nem engedtetik ezt senkinek, hogy senkit fogsággal, avagy helyéből való priválással fenyegetessön azt tanításért, mert az hit Istennek ajándéka, ez hallásból lészön, mely hallás Istennek ígéje által vagyon.'

<sup>5</sup> See Henry Kamen, *The rise of toleration* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 133–139.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Kamen, *The rise of toleration*, 141.

<sup>7</sup> See *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, with introduction, translation, and notes by Ford Lewis Battles and André Malan Hugo (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), 5.

France to adopt a more lenient (not to say: tolerant) attitude towards the Huguenots, did not really have an impact upon the actions of the royal family and of the nobles concerning matters of religious policy. The country could not even hope for an imminent (or even prospective) favourable resolution to the problem – and indeed, it took a very long time until such measures began to take shape.

## The Moriscan revolt and its aftermath in Spain

Exactly in 1568, the Iberian Empire experiences the starting revolt of the Moriscos, the Spanish Moors converted to Christianity. In her excellent book entitled *The Spanish Inquisition*, Helen Rawlings dedicates a separate chapter to the persecution of the Moriscos by the Inquisition.<sup>8</sup> The titles in this chapter are very suggestive:

- 1492–1525: Co-existence and conversion
- 1526–1550: Respite
- 1560–1570: Coercion and Revolt in Granada
- 1570–1600: The End of Tolerance in Aragón
- 1600–1609: The Route to Expulsion
- 1609–1614: The Aftermath

Although the above headings already give us a pretty good idea concerning what was going on throughout the second half of the sixteenth century in Spain, a brief review of the major events (with a summary of the conflict's origins) is nonetheless helpful in our assessment of the overall situation. In December 1526, as Rawlings writes,

Following recommendations put forward by an ecclesiastical congregation attempts were made to eradicate all existing traces of a still flourishing Moorish civilization in Granada (including the use of Arabic, the dancing of the *zambra* and the wearing of traditional Moorish dress).<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, following the spirit of the Council of Trent, i.e. 'keeping abreast of the times' a royal *pragmática* was published on 1 January 1567, which prohibited the practice of Moorish traditions within the kingdom of Granada. Apart from the ban upon the use of Arabic and silk garments, it enforced the destruction of private and public baths. As Rawlings rightly observes,

The anniversary of the surrender of Granada was deliberately chosen on which to announce the *pragmática*, thereby giving pointed offence. The age of co-operation between the two cultures had but all passed away. The conciliatory approach was about to be replaced by one of hard-line coercion.<sup>10</sup>

The highly predictable result was the uprising of Granadine Moriscos on Christmas Eve in 1568. After two years of harsh conflict, the revolt was crushed and in November 1570 over eighty thousand Moriscos were deported in convoy to major cities in the southern part of Castile, including Toledo, Córdoba and Albacete. A forced integration procedure was put in motion, yet with very little success. The obvious blunder of the assimilation plan merely amplified the dissensions, and after a

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<sup>8</sup> Helen Rawlings, *The Spanish Inquisition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 72–89.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>10</sup> Helen Rawlings, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 79.

lengthy process of continuous harassment, a formal decision to expel the Moriscos from Spain was eventually taken by the Council of State on 4 April 1609, a decision enforced by the expulsion of nearly 300 000 Moriscos by the end of March 1611 under Philip III. One may well argue that from the viewpoint of Spanish royalty the aim of the entire action was not so much the real integration of the ever-suspicious Spanish Moriscos (since the Catholic rulers and most of the nobility never trusted them), but rather their obliteration, or – at least – their deportation, a contemporary Spanish ‘Endlösung’ to an increasingly uncomfortable long-time problem.

Concerning the Spanish royal family itself, in the same year of 1568 the death of Don Carlos occurred, who was poisoned at his father’s (Philip II’s) insistence. The persecution of Protestants in the sixteenth century by the Spanish Inquisition is a well-researched subject, summarised by Rawlings in a separate chapter.<sup>11</sup> Spain’s attitude towards other cultures and religious traditions was undoubtedly the same within as well as outside its borders: one needs to take only a casual glance at the history of Holland’s invasion by the Iberian empire to perceive it. Without lengthening this episode any further, the conclusion is imminent: the sixteenth-century Spain (or, for that matter, the seventeenth-century Spain also) could scarcely be depicted as a promoter of any cultural and/or religious tolerance whatsoever.

### A somewhat overstated ‘positive’ example: Holland

The year 1568 is a turning point in Dutch history. It is in this year when the long freedom fight against Spanish occupation unleashes: in October William of Orange invades the Southeastern Netherlands. Spanish forces under the Duke of Alba destroy Orange’s rearguard. Orange abandons his offensive. The partly religion-based war of liberation continues for another 80 years until 1648. Although the ideas of tolerance existed among the Dutch, who define themselves as a tolerant people,<sup>12</sup> one could hardly speak of a tolerant atmosphere both in law and in spirit during the tumultuous decades of the second half of the sixteenth century. As Andrew Pettegree rightly observes,

From the very beginnings of the Revolt ‘toleration’ was always a slogan which could be exploited with a high degree of cynicism by different religious groupings. In his *Brief discourse addressed to Philip II* in 1566, the author, the Calvinist minister Franciscus Junius did not scruple to urge the king to extend religious freedom to his Calvinist subjects, citing among his reasons the obvious justice of the Calvinist cause, and the fact that persecution was damaging to trade.<sup>13</sup>

Sadly, however, the Dutch Protestants of those years did not seem to have learned enough from the horrific experience of highly aggressive foreign invasion. This is

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 90–113.

<sup>12</sup> Concerning the development of religious tolerance in the Netherlands see e.g. Benjamin J. Kaplan, ‘Dutch religious tolerance: celebration and revision’, *Calvinism and religious toleration in the Dutch Golden Age* ed. by R. Po-Chia Hsia and Henk van Nierop (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 8–26.

<sup>13</sup> See Andrew Pettegree, ‘The politics of toleration in the Free Netherlands, 1572–1620’, *Tolerance and intolerance in the European Reformation*, ed. By Ole Peter Grell and Bob Scribner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 182–198 (p. 183). Cf. E. H. Kossman and A. F. Mellink, eds., *Texts concerning the revolt in the Netherlands*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 56–59.

testified by the fate of church buildings as well as by contemporary Protestant–Catholic relationships. Once gaining control over a territory, the Protestant freedom fighters of Holland could not resist the temptation of becoming ruthlessly intolerant towards the Catholics:

The Reformed moved swiftly to secure the best churches in those towns in Holland which had gone over to the Revolt. If the magistracy prevaricated, the Reformed usually pre-empted further discussion by cleansing the churches in renewed and carefully orchestrated waves of iconoclasm. This subsequent episode of church-breaking is much less well-known than the more spectacular events of the ‘Wonderjaar’, but, in the context of any discussion of the spirit of Dutch Calvinism, equally significant. By the end of 1572 the small Reformed congregations had successfully commandeered the best churches in the principal rebel towns. The following year they achieved a further milestone, persuading the States of Holland to ban the Catholic mass altogether in areas held by the rebels.<sup>14</sup>

As a matter of historical comparison it appears that despite the later (and highly commendable) positive achievements, the religiously divided Holland – being in a situation comparable to the one of Transylvania (i.e. under permanent external threat coming from a hostile empire) – does not present itself as a peculiarly tolerant country during the third quarter of the sixteenth century.

### The church of the Tudors in England and the Scottish lesson

Moulding the church after one ruler’s own image was attempted quite a few times in the history of Christianity. Nevertheless, even the famous Edict of Milan by Emperor Constantine and the birth of the dominating Christian Church in the fourth century is still second best to the achievement of Henry VIII. As we know, upon seeing the popularity and spectacular growth of a rapidly spreading Arianism, Constantine with all his might could not impose it upon the entire post-Nicene Christendom. No secular supreme authority or ruler was ever as successful in carrying such a mission through and preserving its main results on the long run as the Tudors in the sixteenth century.

The first *Act of Supremacy* promulgated in 1534 under Henry VIII as well as the *Treasons Act* by which the royal ‘fidei defensor’ managed to condemn and execute Sir Thomas More and Cardinal John Fisher had its obvious continuation in Elizabeth’s *Act of Uniformity* of 1559. Although the methods of father and daughter were not entirely similar (in that sense perhaps Mary I inherited a bit more from her father than her half-sister), the general message of England still remained that any political or (to a great extent) religious dissent from the will of the crowned monarch will ultimately result in a charge of high treason and – perhaps far too often – in capital punishment. Unfortunately, even the reputed Humanist Sir Thomas More proved to be a ruthless

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<sup>14</sup> See Pettegree, ‘The politics of toleration in the Free Netherlands, 1572–1620’. Cf. Pettegree, ‘Coming to terms with victory: Calvinist church-building in Holland’, *Calvinism in Europe, 1540-1620*, ed. by Andrew Pettegree, Alastair Duke and Gillian Lewis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 160–180. See also *Reformation and revolt in the Low Countries*, ed. by Alastair Duke (London: Hambledon Press, 1990), 199–226.

persecutor of Protestants whilst occupying the position of Lord Chancellor between 1529 and 1532.<sup>15</sup>

On a more favourable note, however, one should not diminish the achievements of the Elizabethan period, which to some extent represented a relief by comparison after the rule of Henry VIII and that of Mary. Nevertheless, according to Kamen's accurate assessment of the state of affairs,

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 intensity and ferocity as the reign went on and 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.<sup>16</sup>

The fact that this period was, sadly, quite far from being a 'golden age' in the sense of truly operational religious tolerance, one may indeed consider the valid affirmation of Alexandra Walsham:

From the early 1580s onwards, the Elizabethan government sought to discredit Catholic priests by putting them to death alongside depraved criminals like thieves, coiners and murderers. In December 1582 James Thompson was executed at York with five other felons, while Robert Drury died in February 1607 with no fewer than thirty-two common criminals.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to the events which could be considered as having wider international significance, the year 1568 brought about a 'close-up royal event' in British history – similar to the one which occurred in Spain. As mentioned earlier, this is the year of Don Carlos' death, yet also of the famous capture of a royal relative by Queen Elizabeth I. As history tells us, following the death of Lord Darnley, her first husband and her marriage to Earl of Bothwell, the Roman Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots was defeated by her Protestant subjects. After having escaped, Mary fled to England, seeking for her cousin's help. Elizabeth, however, arrests her on 19 May 1568 and without meeting her face to face throughout the 19 years that followed, reluctantly agrees to her execution on 8 February 1587. As summarised by Walsham,

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<sup>15</sup> Lecler seems to defend More, stating that 'no death sentence for heresy was pronounced within his jurisdiction, even after he had been appointed Chancellor'. See Joseph Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, trans. by T. L. Westow, 2 vols (London: Longmans, 1960), vol. I, 140. On the other hand, Alexandra Walsham provides conclusive evidence of More's 'championing the right, indeed duty, of Christian princes to impose the death penalty for heresy in 1529'. See Alexandra Walsham, *Charitable hatred: Tolerance and intolerance in England, 1500–1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 56. See *ibid.*, 108–109. Cf. Sir Thomas More, *The complete works* 15 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963–1977), vol. VI (I), 407 and 405–410 *passim*.

<sup>16</sup> See Kamen, *The rise of toleration*, 161–162.

<sup>17</sup> See Walsham, *Charitable hatred*, 79.



In 1572 Elizabeth I was exhorted by her bishops to set aside ‘foolish pitie’ and consent to the execution of her Catholic cousin, Mary Queen of Scots, and in a sermon preached later that decade Edwin Sandys insisted that the magistrate must not recoil from shedding the blood of idolaters since the Almighty had commanded that false prophets should be judicially executed.<sup>18</sup>

As it appears from the above, being a Catholic ruler in a Protestant country like Scotland was by no means a life insurance in the sixteenth century. Yet, if this Catholic ruler fled Scotland to seek the assistance of her Anglican cousin, the result was much the same: England was still a far cry from the ideas of tolerance as expressed later by John Locke’s famous *Essay concerning toleration*.<sup>19</sup> It is interesting to observe that whilst even the rulers in England and Scotland were not always safe if the majority of the country’s population belonged to a different belief (see the plots against Elizabeth also), during the very same historical period between 1540 and 1604 – save for the last few years of János Zsigmond’s rule until 1571 – the predominantly Protestant Transylvania had none but Catholic rulers. Moreover, the last Catholic ruler, Zsigmond Báthory (1588–1602) was recalled and re-elected by the mainly Protestant Transylvanian nobility by no less than three times.

At this point we do not intend to lengthen our presentation with the obviously similar examples of the German (or Holy Roman) Empire, of Italy, as well as of the Scandinavian countries,<sup>20</sup> thus proceeding to Switzerland and into the very heart of Calvinism: Geneva.

### An embarrassingly laden heritage: Calvinism and tolerance?

In this section we shall touch upon the issue of tolerance as it appears in the lives, writings and ecclesiastical practice of the two main Reformers of Geneva: Calvin and Beza. As mentioned earlier, the young Calvin published Seneca’s *De clementia* in 1532, thus advocating the cultivation of tolerance with regard to the persecuted Huguenots in France. Nevertheless, not much later, after having established his position in Geneva, Calvin refrains from reappearing as a champion or defender of such principles. Furthermore, he does not merely depart from this irenical position by simply remaining silent. The trial and execution of Michael Servetus in 1553 was the most famous, yet regrettably by far not the only case when the great Reformer publicly revealed his (by then) well consolidated attitude vis-à-vis the issue of religious (or dogmatic) tolerance. According to Kamen’s evaluation,

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 45. Walsham gives further examples of extreme religious intolerance from the part of the English clergy including Alexander Nowell, Dean of St Paul’s, who told Parliament in 1563 that maintainers of a wicked religion [i.e. Roman Catholics] should die by the sword. This was echoed by Bishop Edwin Sandys in several sermons. Further, in his work *Doomes warning all men to the judgemente* (written in 1581), the former chaplain of Archbishop Matthew Parker, Stephen Batman also advocated the promulgation of a law which would allow the execution of Catholics merely for their religion. See *ibid.*, 57.

<sup>19</sup> See John Locke, *An essay concerning toleration and other writings on law and politics 1667–1683*, ed. by J. R. Milton and Philip Milton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> The Danish king Christian III instituted a harsh state Reformation in 1536, which was later extended to Norway. In Sweden, the Diet of Västerås in 1544 declared the Kingdom to be Lutheran and forbade the practice of the Catholic faith. See Kamen, *The rise of toleration*, 54.

Calvin recalled the Reformation to its proper mission. In opposition to the practice of the other Reformers, he emphasised the complete independence, and yet interdependence of Church and State. [...] On his return to Geneva in 1541 Calvin persuaded the authorities to accept his Ordinances as the form of government in religion. [...] This theoretical autonomy of the Church was in some measure deceptive. The State still intervened in religious discipline through lay members of the Consistory, which governed the Church but had no coercive jurisdiction. [...] So began, with the aid of the State authorities, a system of religious regimentation which turned Geneva into a by-word for intolerance [...]. There was clearly to be close cooperation between Church and State, despite their theoretical autonomy. [...] In one case a woman was prosecuted for kneeling by her husband's grave and saying 'Requiescat in pace'. Under Calvin's influence the Council also initiated several proceedings touching religious matters, such as the enforcement of the rules about attending sermons. Civil and ecclesiastical authority therefore combined to crush religious nonconformity. [...] The rigour of Calvinistic discipline is illustrated by the number of excommunications, which rose from only 80 for the four years 1551–4, to over 300 in 1559 alone.<sup>21</sup>

After having taken into account the attitudes and deeds of other famous Reformed Swiss cities (Zürich and Berne), Kamen appears to be justified in asking the ultimate and obviously unavoidable question: 'Was the Reformation essentially intolerant?'<sup>22</sup> And even if the answer would be partially negative, since despite the harsh standpoints expressed by several Reformers (including Luther, Calvin, Knox or Beza), the Reformation ultimately brought about the idea of tolerance as a subsequent development, one ought to emphasise that this development was indeed *subsequent*, i.e. virtually absent from sixteenth-century authentic Calvinism – at least in the genuinely strict sense of the term. With his ominous *Declaratio orthodoxae fidei*, written and published both in Latin and French in 1554, Calvin unfortunately became the choragus of his century's religiously intolerant Protestants. To quote only one example from this lamentably infamous work,

Our sympathy-mongers, who take such great pleasure in leaving heresies unpunished, now see that their fantasy hardly conforms with God's commandment. Afraid lest the Church be blamed for being too severe, they would allow all kinds of errors to spread freely to secure tolerance for one man. But God does not even allow whole towns and populations to be spared, but will have the walls razed and the memory of the inhabitants destroyed and all things frustrated as a sign of his utter detestation, lest the contagion spread. He even gives us to understand that by concealing a crime one becomes an accomplice. Nor is this to be wondered at, since it is here a question of rejecting God and sane doctrine, which perverts and violates every human and divine right.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Kamen, *The rise of toleration*, 51–52.

<sup>22</sup> Kamen, *The rise of toleration*, 54.

<sup>23</sup> See John Calvin, *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy que tiennent tous chrestiens de la Trinité des personnes en un seul Dieu. Contre les erreurs détestables de Michel Servet Espagnol. Où il est aussi montré qu'il est licite de punir les*

In the very same year Theodore Beza, at the time professor of Greek at Lausanne, wrote his *De haereticis a civili magistratu puniendis*, ‘a systematic attack on the doctrine of toleration, which he was to describe a few years later as “diabolical” (*vere diabolicum dogma*).’<sup>24</sup> To say the least, the idea of tolerance was not particularly a Calvinistic invention, although Calvin himself was given the chance to learn more about it during his stay in Strassburg among Huguenot refugees between 1538 and 1541.

### The remarkably positive example of Poland

As one may argue, the second part of the sixteenth century – save for a few scattered and mostly short-lived or ill-fated examples – did not produce any major breakthrough in terms of religious tolerance in Western Europe. In that sense, the so-called Peace of Augsburg of 1555 with the continuously applied principle of ‘*cuius regio eius religio*’ (Calvinists and Anabaptists being refused to enjoy even limited religious freedom for almost another hundred years) was hardly anything more than a feeble armistice or a time-bomb waiting for the Thirty Years’ War to break out.

All this does not mean, however, that the Eastern part of Europe was entirely in the same situation. The territories dominated by the Habsburgs (a dynasty hardly famed for their tolerance in any respect) were indeed suffering from the same illness as the rest of Western Europe. Yet those countries – peculiarly two in the sixteenth century – which were successful in detaching themselves from the Habsburg realm managed to take the first crucial step towards the realisation of religious tolerance. The events leading up to the promulgation of legal formulae were to some degree similar and parallel in time: Transylvania and Poland acted almost concomitantly.

In Poland the general tone for a reconciliation (although denominational dissensions were very much present during the time between Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists and Antitrinitarians) was set by the last king of the Jagellonian dynasty, Sigismund August II, ‘a benevolent monarch, who never sent anyone to the stake for his faith.’<sup>25</sup> His death on 7 July 1572 threatened to suspend the restructuring process of the Polish state based on the middle nobility. There was a lack of legal solutions, which would enable the state to function effectively under these new circumstances. The end of the male line of the Jagiellonians represented an enormous challenge for the Commonwealth of both nations, consisting of the Polish Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, an alliance which had been strengthened by the Lublin Union of 1569. Separatist trends could emerge anywhere, thus threatening the integrity of the state. Moreover, the election of an unsuitable candidate for the royal office could become disastrous concerning religious freedom within the country.

The reformists belonging to the middle nobility were aware that the establishment of a new legal system had to happen first at a lower level. In order to uphold the existing status quo it was essential to make all citizens accept the decisions taken by

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*hérétiques: et qu'à bon droit ce meschant a esté exécuté par justice en la ville de Genève* (Geneva, 1554), quoted and translated by Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, vol. I, 333.

<sup>24</sup> Kamen, *The rise of toleration*, 80. Concerning Calvin’s attitude towards tolerance as well as his polemic against Castellio and others see Perez Zagorin, *How the idea of religious toleration came to the West* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 78–82, 114–122. For Beza on the same matter, see *ibid.*, 122–132.

<sup>25</sup> Janusz Tazbir, *A state without stakes: Polish religious toleration in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries*, trans. by A. T. Jordan (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1973), 90.

the general convention, which took place in Warsaw in January 1573. Its primary mission was to maintain peace and order within the country by means of a mutual agreement, later known as the Warsaw Confederation (*Konfederacja Warszawska*). This act was preceded by the so-called Sandomierz Concord in 1570, an agreement reached by the Lutherans, Calvinists and the Bohemian Brethren. As summarised by Tazbir,

In such circumstances the nobility assembled in Warsaw in January 1573 for the purpose of determining the conditions required for the maintenance of peace during the interregnum. At the top of the list was religious tolerance, which was to protect the nation against a split on grounds of faith; the Warsaw Confederation adopted a policy of *status quo*, that is keeping the privileges which the Reformation had achieved in fact. The resolution admits the existence of wide differences between the different Christian faiths in Poland. In order to avoid the strife which this might cause 'such as we clearly observe in other realms', the members of the Confederation swore on their own and their descendants behalf to keep peace, never to spill blood 'for difference of faith or church' and never to invoke against each other penalties of confiscation, infamy, imprisonment or banishment. If higher authority were to resort to any such penalties, the signatories undertook not only to abstain from supporting it, but to oppose actively any attempt at using force on religious grounds. The resolution of the Confederation granted to the nobility effective religious freedom (even though it did not mention specifically the grant of such freedom nor attempted to define it). It guaranteed to Protestants equal access to all offices, dignities and emoluments (except of course, those from church benefices).<sup>26</sup>

We shall render the text of this historic edict (a mixture of Polish and Latin) together with its long disputed finale concerning the relationship between landlords and peasants as quoted by Lecler:

As there is wide disagreement in our State on matters related to the Christian religion, and in order to prevent any fatal outburst such as has been witnessed in other kingdoms, we, who are *dissidentes de Religione*, bind ourselves for our own sake and that of our posterity in perpetuity, on our oath, faith, honour and conscience, to keep the peace among ourselves on the subject of difference of religion and the changes brought about in our churches; we bind ourselves not to shed blood; not to punish one another by confiscation of goods, loss of honour, imprisonment or exile; not to give any assistance on this point in any way to any authority or official, but on the contrary to unite ourselves against anyone who would shed blood for this reason, even if he pretended to act in virtue of a decree or decision at law. By this confederation we do not however intend to derogate from the authority of the lords, either spiritual or temporal, and we maintain the obedience which subjects owe to their overlords. Indeed, if some disobedience occurred under pretext of religion, any overlord would have the power to punish

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<sup>26</sup> Janusz Tazbir, *A state without stakes*, 91.

the disobedient subject according to his conscience, *tam in spiritualibus quam in saecularibus*.<sup>27</sup>

Instead of being a royal edict, the Warsaw Confederation represented a compromise solution between equal parties. Being approved on 28 January 1573 by a majority of votes, it secured uninterrupted functioning of the state during the inter-regnum. The agreement was extended to all religions and denominations. Religious peace guaranteed to all nobles equal access to offices regardless of denomination, freedom to worship and religious practices, the right to organize synods (i.e. freedom of assembly) and the right to print theological treatises (i.e. freedom of publishing). As Tazbir observes,

Although its benefits were largely confined to the nobility, the resolution of the Warsaw Confederation granted a degree of religious freedom unexampled anywhere at the time and was the highest expression of religious tolerance in Poland. It went far beyond contemporary legislation in other countries, which admitted – at best – the co-existence within the state of two denominations, though not on an equal footing, as did the Charles IX edict of January 1562, which granted certain freedoms to the Huguenots; in any case it was shortlived. The peace of Augsburg of 1555, concluded between Emperor Charles V and the Protestant princes of Germany, admitted the co-existence of the Catholic and Lutheran faiths, but did so on the basis of a prince's arbitrary choice. His subjects had to follow suit (*cuius regio, eius religio*) or leave the country.<sup>28</sup>

The virtue of the Warsaw Confederation is evinced by the subsequent years and decades of Polish history, during which – including the reign of the Transylvanian Prince, the Roman Catholic István (Stephen) Báthory (King of Poland between 1576 and 1586) religious tolerance remained the governing principle of the entire country until 1668.<sup>29</sup> This is quite remarkable – regrettably, even as opposed to the manner of Western European Protestants, who were often cited as examples of religious intolerance:

In their impassioned attacks against religious freedom, written – according to the Protestants – ‘with blood, not ink’, the Catholics often quoted the critical comments of foreigners about Polish tolerance. They particularly revelled in citing the prominent Calvinist leader, Beza, reminding his Polish co-religionists that their teacher condemned the ‘diabolic license’ of religion in Poland as a ‘device of Satan’ and a plague that ‘no nation under the sun would permit’. His views, however, found approval only among the members of dominant churches, while the oppressed religious minorities spoke about Poland's example with admiration and envy. Thus the Calvinists of Geneva condemned Polish tolerance, while the French Huguenots set it up as an example and model for their rulers.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Lecler, *Tolerance and the Reformation*, vol. I, 398.

<sup>28</sup> Tazbir, *A state without stakes*, 92.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

It is perhaps needless to say that both Polish and Transylvanian nobles – although not being under severe oppression – appraised tolerance in the manner of French Huguenots as quoted above. These two countries remained – at least during the sixteenth century and the most part of the seventeenth – the only ones promoting this idea of tolerance at a truly legal level:

Only in Transylvania the local parliament acknowledged (in 1568 and 1571) the co-existence of four denominations enjoying equal rights, namely the Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists und Unitarians. This made it the only country in Europe, except Poland, where the Antitrinitarians (called Unitarians in this case) were tolerated in the XVI-th century.<sup>31</sup>

Having concluded our brief survey vis-à-vis the various assessments as well as different stages of development regarding tolerance in Europe, we shall now return to the analysis of the 1568 Edict of Torda, subsequently strengthened by the decision of the Transylvanian Diet in Marosvásárhely (Tîrgu Mureş in Romanian) in 1571.

### The legalisation of a distinctively theocratic tolerance: Torda, 1568

Let us revisit the text of the Transylvanian law in 1568. The Edict itself, as quoted above, does not speak of the right of the *individual* to choose between the teachings of different preachers, but rather of the *community* (rendered as ‘she’ in my translation).<sup>32</sup> This idea should not be confounded with the notion of tolerance of the Enlightenment or of contemporary liberalism. Those who would celebrate this edict as an early example of legalising the individual’s freedom of conscience do not only read it out of context, but (perhaps against their best intentions) even do injustice to it instead of appreciating its true values. The idea of tolerance expressed at Torda in 1568 is of a sixteenth-century predominantly Protestant society based on social order. Therefore, the idea of ‘freedom of conscience’ in that century, if it could be claimed at all, was regarded as the ‘freedom of conscience’ of the community – not of the individual. And yet, even so, there are hardly any examples of this kind to be found in Western Europe at the time.

In 1568 there were no clearly definable denominations in Transylvania, because their first proper enumeration happened in 1595 only. That is again a virtue of this edict, since it is not the ‘denomination’ that chooses (e.g. through its superintendents

<sup>31</sup> Tazbir, *A state without stakes*, 92.

<sup>32</sup> One of the latest and best studies concerning the Edict of Torda is that of Mihály Balázs, ‘*A hit... ballásból leszön. Megjegyzések a négy bevett vallás intézményesüléséhez a 16. századi Erdélyben*’, *Tanulmányok Szakály Ferenc emlékére*, ed. by Fodor Pál, Pálffy Géza, Tóth István György (Budapest: MTA, 2002), 51–73. See also Béla K. Király, ‘The sublime Porte, Vienna, Transylvania and the dissemination of Protestant Reformation in Royal Hungary’, *Tolerance and movements of religious dissent in Eastern Europe*, ed. by Béla K. Király (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 199–221. For an excellent overview of the history of Transylvanian tolerance from a Saxon (Transylvanian German, Lutheran) perspective, see Ludwig Binder, *Grundlagen und Formen der Toleranz in Siebenbürgen bis zur Mitte des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1976). Concerning the so-called ‘Golden Age’ of Transylvania, one of the best and meticulously documented works published in English is that of Graeme Murdock, *Calvinism on the Frontier: 1600–1660. International Calvinism and the Reformed Church in Hungary and Transylvania* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000).

or lay patrons), but the local community.<sup>33</sup> Although this measure might seem to be of less value to the present-day human mind than the freedom of conscience of the individual, in the very same Transylvanian context history teaches us that the right of the community to decide in such matters is far more valuable than that of the person.

A practical example is – unfortunately – at hand, since together with the fall of the Transylvanian Principality at the end of the seventeenth century the country had to learn that in terms of religious policy the Catholic Habsburgs (who became the rulers of the country) were far worse than the Muslim Turks: as it is obvious, no mosques were built in Transylvania during the time in which the country could be claimed to belong to the Ottoman sphere of interest. Nonetheless, in 1691 already, King Leopold I gave the first blow to religious tolerance with his *Diploma Leopoldinum*. The document seemed to grant all religious freedom to the long-established Transylvanian Protestants, nevertheless, its subsequent ‘Explanations’ (performed by highly trained Jesuits) came to differentiate cleverly between ‘private’ and ‘public’ religious practices. The former were seen as prayers in one’s own home, the latter as ecclesiastical rituals in a church as a community. One might even say that the ‘enlightened’ Habsburg emperor promulgated the highly cherished idea of ‘personal freedom of conscience’. In reality, the notion of private religious practice was set against the public one, thus removing the right of the community to choose. As a practical result, only the private religious practice was granted. Every Protestant became compelled to pay tribute to the Roman Catholic Church and to its priests even if all their services (baptism, wedding, funeral) were officiated by Protestant ministers.<sup>34</sup>

In our assessment concerning the prominence of individual freedom of conscience over that of the community (or vice versa) we can invoke at least two modern examples: on the one hand, similarly to King Leopold, the communist regime did the very same thing by declaring ‘freedom of conscience’ for the individual and removing the community’s right to decide. Having lived in such a society for almost eighteen years I can confirm indeed that in principle you were allowed to go to church e.g. in communist Romania<sup>35</sup> – ironically speaking: if you used the subway. Basically it was required that Christians should restrict the entire manifestation of their religious life and activities strictly within the walls of the church building. Faith was not a ‘common issue’ anymore – only a

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<sup>33</sup> Although secular patrons attempted and used their power to influence the appointment or election of a particular minister within a given congregation, the letter of the law still gave this right to the community itself. In fact, this was one of the reasons why Prince Bethlen Gábor issued in 1629 the edict which conferred the title of nobility to all ministers and their families – thus, they were no longer subjected to the eventual abuse of ecclesiastical power by lay patrons of a local congregation. Furthermore, a latent class of intellectuals (i.e. family members of the clergy) was thus preserved as part of a larger social policy of a great ruler. See e.g. Sándor Tonk, ‘Bethlen Gábor címeres nemeslevele a lelképásztorok utódai számára’, *Cselekvő bit. Emlékkönyv Csiba Kálmán püspöki szolgálatáról* (Kolozsvár/Cluj: EREK, 2000), 225–234. Cf. with the issue of the annual re-election of ministers called ‘papmarasztás’ discussed by R. J. W. Evans, ‘Calvinism in East Central Europe: Hungary and her neighbours’, *International Calvinism*, ed. by Menna Prestwich (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 167–196 (p. 177).

<sup>34</sup> See e.g. Imre Révész, ed., *A magyar református egyház története* (Budapest: 1949), 107–119. Cf. Murdock, *Calvinism on the Frontier*, 298. Another excellent analyst of the subject, R. J. W. Evans observes a ‘striking similarity’ between Leopold’s endeavours and those of Louis XIV concerning the restriction of Protestant religious liberties. See Evans, ‘Calvinism in East Central Europe’, 190.

<sup>35</sup> This ‘privilege’ was, of course, not granted to Christians within the Soviet Union, where (e.g. in the historically Hungarian territory called Kárpátalja, the southern part of Ukraine neighbouring today’s Hungary) even the ecclesiastical funerals had to be performed after sunset, thus to avoid all religious manifestations during daylight.

private one. On the other hand, modern liberals within arguably ‘first world’ countries feel offended and pass laws to interdict the use of Christian symbols in various public places where ‘the community’ – understood in sixteenth-century terms – never objected to them. Thus, the appealing slogan of ‘individual freedom of conscience’ becomes the very tool in the hands of various modern secular powers to diminish and in fact restrain free religious practices. Surprisingly same difference...

Apart from its virtue *per se* as a first promoter of the spirit of tolerance as embraced five years later by the Warsaw Confederation in Poland, the text of the 1568 Torda Edict has a conspicuous peculiarity which distinguishes it from virtually all such decrees of the time. As we have seen, the wording of the Warsaw Confederation includes a rather problematic final statement concerning the acceptance that ‘any overlord would have the power to punish the disobedient subject according to his conscience, *tam in spiritualibus quam in saecularibus*’. Apart from the fact that such a closure is entirely absent from the Torda Edict, which clearly disallows persecution based on doctrinal differences, it does that with a significant (and conclusively final) biblical reference to Romans 10:17. As quoted earlier,

No one is permitted to threaten anyone with imprisonment or removal from office because of [his] teaching, for faith is the gift of God, which comes from hearing, and hearing is by the word of God.<sup>36</sup>

Why is this biblical reference so remarkable? First, because we are speaking of a secular edict – voted by nobles coming from various Christian backgrounds (including Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists and Unitarians), and not of an ecclesiastical canon belonging to a particular denomination. Further, these nobles could just as well have referred to the all-time political danger coming from both Istanbul and Vienna, invoking ‘*salus rei publicae*’, in a somewhat similar manner as Emperor Charles V did in 1526 in Speyer, to reverse that in 1529 once the Turkish danger was over and come up with an armistice rather than an agreement in 1555 in Augsburg, later known as the ‘*cuius regio, eius religio*’ principle. This is a far cry indeed from the Torda Edict, since it authorises indeed the ‘freedom of conscience of the individual’ – the only problem being that this ‘individual’ happens to be exclusively the all-time ruler of a given territory.

As emphatically opposed to the Western pattern, by this concluding biblical reference at the very end of the text – a reference, which is used as the chief argument, not merely as an illustration for what they collectively came to agree upon – Transylvanian nobles in Torda set a historical example for posterity: although they could not assent to the unanimous reception of one doctrinal teaching or another (hence the existence of more denominations), nevertheless, by invoking the commonly accepted authority of Scripture to underpin the necessity of tolerance (instead of quoting political excuses) they signified the theocratic unity in diversity within the Transylvanian political, social and spiritual realm.

Paradoxically, this secular edict also bears a far-reaching theological message. Since faith, as God’s gift, comes from ‘hearing’, yet hearing is by the word of God, the ministers, by the very act of preaching (the ecclesiastical activity emphasised by the edict) contribute to the spreading of faith amongst the hearers. This process of dissemination – as it is clearly stated – cannot be hindered by any means. Moreover,

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<sup>36</sup> Szilágyi, ed., *Erdélyi Országgyűlési Emlékek*, vol. II, 374.



the edict does not qualify the notion of faith, i.e. it does not rank one type of faith (e.g. Roman Catholic) under or above another. Consequently, 'faith' in this context is merely and exclusively 'a gift of God', thus beyond theological disputes – and indeed, beyond doctrine. Dogmatic issues as well as doctrinal divergences could and should be discussed and settled (as it happened in Transylvania also) by various theologians of different denominations, yet faith itself, identified as 'a gift of God' cannot be equated with any dogmatic formulae: it is therefore, by definition, beyond them.

Considering now the very practical consequence of this biblical quotation within a secular law, it is evident that the Transylvanian Calvinist nobleman came to accept and assert – with the clear invocation of Scriptural theocratic authority – that the religious conviction of his Roman Catholic colleague was also deserving the title of 'faith' and not merely 'superstition', 'credulitas' or even 'diabolic teaching', as often labelled in various theological polemics on all sides. In my understanding, one of the truly theological virtues of this edict lies in the mutual acceptance of all other parties' beliefs as being 'faith' and 'God's gift' similarly to one's own. This is commendable especially in a historical situation when one could easily find a secular excuse for the sake of reaching the compromise. Instead of searching for a common enemy (e.g. the Ottoman or the Habsburg threat), the nobles gathered in Torda found a positive common goal in supporting the broadcast of denominationally unqualified faith through the free preaching of the gospel by all preachers.

The text of the Edict clearly elevates both God's Word and its preaching (see the famous principle: *praedicatio Verbi Dei est Verbum Dei*), thus creating a theologically unmistakable basis for a true theocratic tolerance under the exclusively invoked authority of the Word of God. This unique feature of the Torda Edict – as applied e.g. to the Reformed nobles who accepted the belief of the others as 'faith' indeed under the divine authority of the written and freely preached Word (despite the opinion of mainstream Western European Calvinist theologians) – is the very idea of Transylvanian theocratic tolerance, and indeed, to a great extent, a genuinely Transylvanian 'extra calvinisticum'. Calvinism, as it came from the West and especially from Geneva – considering the writings of Calvin and Beza, the actions of the 'consistoire' as well as the multiplying number of excommunications and other severe sentences passed during the services of both Reformers – is unfortunately at variance with the biblical definition given to faith, tolerance and the community's right to choose by the Transylvanian Diet in 1568.

There are hardly any examples to be found in world history where such an important political decision was made with an *exclusive* reference to biblical teaching – especially in a context which may remind us of Luther's explanation of the Epistle to the Romans. It is equally significant that the obvious political reasons for inter-denominational reconciliation do not appear in the edict at all – not even as a secondary motivation beside the biblical one.

The contemporary Western scholarly treatment of the Torda Edict deserves some attention. Apart from Graeme Murdock's highly laudable work and insight,<sup>37</sup> the so-called modern classics in terms of religious tolerance seem to ignore or at least disregard Transylvania. As R. J. W. Evans rightly put it, 'East Central Europe has been grievously neglected in standard accounts of Calvinism.'<sup>38</sup> Henry Kamen appears to be

<sup>37</sup> See e.g. Murdock, *Calvinism on the Frontier*, 110–126.

<sup>38</sup> Evans, 'Calvinism in East Central Europe', 193.

unacquainted with the Torda Edict, although he knows about István (Stephen) Báthory as being ‘a sincerely tolerant ruler’,<sup>39</sup> yet does not mention that one of the reasons behind his election by the Polish nobles was that he came from a country (Transylvania) which also adopted tolerance as one of its governing principles. Unfortunately, in his otherwise excellent book, Zagorin does not seem to mention the Transylvanian example, only that of Poland.<sup>40</sup> The French Jesuit scholar, Joseph Lecler dedicates the entire Book V of his two-volume work on toleration to Poland, yet Transylvania does not even appear in his index. Nevertheless, he praises the Catholic emperor Maximilian II for promoting civil tolerance for various denominations within his domains in the year 1568.<sup>41</sup> Curiously enough, Lecler is familiar with the Torda Edict, yet he largely diminishes its importance, reducing the entire question to the following remark:

Transylvania, ruled by Báthory since the death of John Sigismund Zapolyai [i.e. János Zsigmond] (1572), was, like Poland, a babel of religious confusion. After Lutheranism and Calvinism it had been invaded by anti-Trinitarianism, introduced in 1563 by the Italian George Blandrata whom the king had summoned from Poland to become his physician. The most influential Calvinist preacher, Francis David, had been won over. Under the leadership of these two the sect made rapid progress. Even the king himself was persuaded, and since the Diet of 1568 there were four recognized religions in Transylvania. Having lived and wielded power until 1576 in such circumstances, Stephen Báthory had no difficulty in adjusting himself to the situation in Poland.<sup>42</sup>

As it appears from the text of the Torda Edict, Transylvania was not a bigger ‘babel of religious confusion’ than any other country in contemporary Europe – save for the fact that the confusion was solved much earlier in the little Eastern principality than anywhere in the West. Nevertheless, it could still be claimed that in France there was no ‘confusion’ whatsoever – especially after 23 August 1572...

Instead of spending more time with modern researchers uninterested in the issue, I would like to quote the assessment of the Torda Edict and its aftermath by a truly venerable authority on the subject, a remarkably well-versed scholar not only in the language but also in the spirituality of Hungarian Protestantism (including both its virtues and deficiencies), Graeme Murdock:

The diet had already decreed in 1564 that church buildings should be occupied by whichever confession held majority support in the locality. The new occupants of the church were then supposed to provide an alternative place of worship for any displaced minority. Whilst local patterns of religious adherence continued to be dominated by the rights of patronage of the privileged elite, whether Hungarian nobles, Saxon burghers, or Szekler lords, landowners were forbidden from introducing a priest of a religion different from that of the local community. [...] Opinions among historians have differed as to whether this pattern of

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<sup>39</sup> See Kamen, *The rise of toleration*, 120.

<sup>40</sup> See Zagorin, *How the idea of religious toleration came to the West*, 146.

<sup>41</sup> See Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, vol. I, 268.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* I, 402.

confessional relations in early modern Transylvania was shaped mostly by a native spirit of tolerance or rather by the political weakness of the principality's central administration. Whilst many Transylvanians exhibited fierce loyalty to their own churches, confessional disputes were very mild by contemporary standards and only rarely characterized by violence. Transylvanians had been accustomed to some accommodation between the pre-reformation Catholic and Orthodox communities, and this may have offered precedents for the local arrangements which needed to be made after 1568. The existence of a range of legal churches within Transylvanian society by the late sixteenth century also saw acceptance of mixed marriages, where sons usually followed the religion of their father and daughters attended the church of their mother. In some families things proved more complicated still, such as the family of Kozma Petritivity, an early seventeenth-century chronicler. Petritivity's grandfather converted from Unitarianism to his wife's Catholic religion, and Petritivity's mother was raised in this Catholic family, although one brother later converted to Calvinism. Petritivity's mother then married a Unitarian, who raised the chronicler and his brothers as Unitarians whilst his sisters went to the Catholic church with their mother.<sup>43</sup>

In comparison e.g. with the Augsburg Peace of 1555 it is not up to me to decide which version of religious policy was the more progressive one: the ever-changing attitude of the Empire based on the current political and military situation or the biblically founded decree of the Diet in Transylvania, a country much more exposed to Turkish threat than the Empire ever was – yet did not deem it worthy to include that amongst the reasons for making peace. Nevertheless, as the proof of the pudding is in the eating, following the above pattern presented by Murdock, I can only illustrate what such an agreement could bring about during the coming decades, regardless of the denominational affiliation of the ruling Princes, all of whom helped their own churches, yet remained essentially faithful to this tradition of tolerance. The list is far from being exhaustive, and in order to keep the length of this paper within reasonable limits, I refrained to provide extensive notes on each subject.

### Applied theocratic tolerance: a few examples

The Roman Catholic Prince of Transylvania, István Báthory (1533–1571–1586), later King of Poland (1576–1586), whilst helping the Roman Catholics in both countries, did not infringe the liberties of the Protestant denominations as it had been laid down in 1568. Moreover, he is remembered as one of the best kings of Poland also, who remained faithful to the spirit of the Warsaw Confederation.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Murdock, *Calvinism on the Frontier*, 110–111. On a more personal note, I can add that a similar story happened in my own family: my grandfather, Andor Pásztori was a faithful Roman Catholic, whilst my grandmother Reformed. My father was the youngest of their three sons, and they attended Roman Catholic mass as well as Reformed services. In the end, each of the three sons chose to become Reformed ministers, yet there was never any dispute or dissension within the whole family concerning denominational issues.

<sup>44</sup> See e.g. Karl Völker, 'Stefan Bathorys Kirchenpolitik in Polen', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 56 (1937), 59–86. Also in Heinrich Lutz, ed., *Zur Geschichte der Toleranz und Religionsfreiheit* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1977), 64–92. Concerning Báthory's ecclesiastical policy see also Tazbir, *A state without stakes*, 103–105.

The Reformed Prince István Bocskai (1557–1605–1606), having learned from his former mistake (i.e. siding with the Habsburgs), after his successful freedom fight against Habsburg domination, he made the Emperor sign the Peace Treaty of Vienna in 1606, which guaranteed religious freedom in Transylvania for the nobles, royal cities and soldiers. The Western parts of Hungary (which were under Habsburg domination) did not benefit of this agreement, and the results were quite obvious.<sup>45</sup> Bocskai is amongst the figures on the Reformation Monument in Geneva. The 1608 Diet of Pozsony (Bratislava/Pressburg), summoned to ratify the Peace Treaty of Vienna, ‘held out for larger concessions, including self-determination for village communities’<sup>46</sup> – acting very much in the spirit of the Torda Edict as presented above.

The Reformed Prince Gábor Bethlen (1580–1613–1622) does not only repeat Bocskai’s achievement with the Treaty of Nikolsburg in 1622 (which, again signed by the emperor, restated the religious freedom of and within Transylvania), but also, being a Protestant gives financial aid for the production of the first Hungarian Roman Catholic Bible translation of the Jesuit György Káldi (published in 1626 in Vienna).<sup>47</sup>

Further, Bethlen also established the first printing office in Gyulafehérvár where the Romanian Orthodox could also publish their books. In his academy founded in 1622 he supported young students from all denominations, and in 1624 ‘sponsored a measure through the diet which threatened fines against landowners who prevented the free access of their peasants’ children to schooling’.<sup>48</sup> He ‘permitted a colony of Jews to move from Ottoman territory to Transylvania in 1623, even allowing the settlers to wear Christian clothes to prevent them being marked out and insulted.’<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, despite being a Protestant, Bethlen was elected King of Hungary by the Catholic nobility also, yet he did not accept to be crowned due to the international situation of the time.<sup>50</sup>

The Reformed Prince György Rákóczi I (1593–1630–1648) with the Peace Treaty of Linz in 1645 repeats Bethlen’s achievement, making the Habsburg emperor accept the religious tolerance in Transylvania and the extension of religious freedom to the lowest peasant classes.<sup>51</sup> The very first schools for the Romanian Orthodox children in Transylvania were also founded by him and his wife, Zsuzsanna Lorántffy in Lugos (Lugoj), Karánsebes (Caransebeş) and Fogaras (Făgăraş).<sup>52</sup>

The last reigning Prince and freedom fighter Ferenc Rákóczi II (1676–1735),<sup>53</sup> who ruled over Transylvania between 1704 and 1711 until his banishment to Turkey by the Habsburgs, besides numerous benefactions, although being a Catholic, provided e.g. a new piece of land for the Protestants of Tállya in order to build a new church, since the old one had been taken over by the Catholics.

We should not refrain, however, from quoting the famous negative example as well: the rather infamous Reformed Prince Gábor Báthory (1589–1608–1613), who tried to help his own Reformed Church, yet at the cost of persecuting others (including Catholics as well as German Lutherans), is notably remembered as a

<sup>45</sup> Murdock, *Calvinism on the Frontier*, 27–30.

<sup>46</sup> Evans, ‘Calvinism in East Central Europe’, 177.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 32–33 and 117.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 113. Cf. *Erdélyi Országgyűlési Emlékek*, vol. VIII, 143–145.

<sup>50</sup> Murdock, *Calvinism on the Frontier*, 32.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 34, 38, 112 and 276.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>53</sup> Murdock, *Calvinism on the Frontier*, 298, 301.

negative figure even by the historiographers of his very own church. To the best of my knowledge no statue of him – who became unfaithful to this tradition of theocratic tolerance – was ever erected in Transylvania. This is noteworthy, since the Western pattern often seems to be that a ruler is mostly ‘forgiven’ – at least by his or her own church – if at the cost of persecuting others he/she managed to provide considerable assistance to the relevant ecclesiastical body. I shall abstain from providing examples.

As a further negative aspect it is often claimed that the expulsion of the Jesuits from Transylvania (in 1588 and 1606)<sup>54</sup> was a reversal of the policy and a stain on the declared principle of tolerance. Without entering the details, which would require perhaps a few hundred pages, one remark should be made: the Jesuits were never regarded (because they indeed never were) merely an ecclesiastical order. They repeatedly manifested sheer intolerance not only towards the non-Catholics, but also in the direction of every pro-Ottoman or anti-Habsburg political figure.<sup>55</sup> Despite their undeniable learnedness and remarkable educational achievements, the unconditionally pro-Habsburg Jesuit political influences (e.g. that of Carillo Alphonso, who turned Zsigmond Báthory against the Turks and drove Transylvania into a pitfall) proved to be devastating for the entire country.

It would appear therefore that the Transylvanian lesson of Torda 1568 is that the choice of the community is not negligible, being the only guarantee of a true freedom of conscience. The other kind of freedom, interpreted exclusively as the ‘freedom of conscience of the individual’ can always be twisted and effectively annihilated both by autocratic or pseudo-liberal systems. ‘Christian tolerance’ is by far not the synonym for ‘liberal indifference’. The former is the responsible acceptance of the other person, group or idea; the latter attitude currently seems to be more sympathetic, nevertheless, one should always remember that everything can and should be tolerated through Christian love, except for one thing: *intolerance*. If we tolerate the practice and proclaiming of intolerance, we become irresponsible concerning the future of our society and of our very own children. It seems desirable for Transylvania and for the whole Carpathian Basin to regain its spirit of theocratic tolerance in the same manner as Europe needs to find the resources and courage to regain its Christian character. It is remarkable that since the century of the Reformation the Hungarian Holy Crown (the very expression of Christian and national unity) has been guarded by two nobles belonging to both denominations (i.e. a Roman Catholic and a Protestant), who by law had to respect each other’s ‘faith’. The nation of this Holy Crown is thus entitled to hope for a historical reconciliation if it furthers the spirit of mutual acceptance in a common Christian faith within and outside Hungarian national boundaries. The honest recognition of faith being indeed God’s gift (which comes from paying attention to the written and spoken Word) seems to be one of the very few current pathways capable to lead us in the direction of a genuine European Christian ecumenism.

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 21, 116

<sup>55</sup> See e.g. the contemporary assessment of John Dury, a Scottish promoter of peace and unity among European Protestants in his letter written in 1661, concerning the situation of Hungarian Protestants in Hungary and Transylvania who recently came under increasing Habsburg influence: ‘The Protestants in Hungarie and Transylvania will bee a prey on the one side to the Turck on the other to the Jesuits, and that of the Turck will be the less burdensome by how much the conscience is left free without constraint which the Jesuits put in practice. The Lord in his owne time will send relief and breake the power of all that will establish religion by violence.’ See Murdock, *Calvinism on the Frontier*, 293.

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