

When the Language Barrier is Like a Bushel: Bringing the Light of the 454-year-old Transylvanian Unitarian Church to the English-Speaking World Through Translation of Hungarian Language Source Materials.

Dr. Robert Kokenyesi

First Era (1566–79): Establishing identity, founding the church, early defense of antitrinitarian faith articles.¹



*Ferenc Dávid speaking to the Diet of Torda in 1568 (today Turda, Romania).
By Aladár Körösfői-Kriesch (1896).²*

DÁVID FERENCZ, A.K.A. FRANCIS DAVID, FRANCIS DAVIDIS (C. 1520–79)

Influential Unitarian author, theologian, and preacher. General merits of his writings: originator, shaper, and defender of Transylvanian Unitarian faith articles, Christology, and catechism; martyr death in 1579 after imprisonment.

Out of 37 theological works, only 2 have been fully translated into English. The other 35 are briefly summarized in a book. Out of 2 religious disputations, a brief excerpt (a little more than 1 page out of 178 pages) has been translated. Out of the 60 sermons, a few have been partially translated and analyzed by Gellérd Imre.

¹ Unitarian Torch (unitariantorch.com) does not currently feature any translations from this era.

² Image source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ferenc_D%C3%A1vid#/media/File:K%C3%B6r%C3%B6sf%C5%91i-Kriesch_Alad%C3%A1r_Tordai_orsz%C3%A1ggy%C5%B1l%C3%A9s.jpg

Second Era (1579–1636) Maintaining stability, and integrity in the face of counter-reformation.

1. Enyedi György: *Concio*, XCIV; based on Luke 12:32 (KJV) “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

WHY IS IT BENEFICIAL TO BE FEARFUL OF GOD? As the life stories of prophets and saints demonstrate, it was dangerous and frightening to believe in the truth from the very beginning. Similarly, during the time of the New Testament, Nicodemus didn't dare to visit Jesus during the day. In John 12 (John 12:42), we see that: “Nevertheless even among the rulers, many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *Him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue.” Even after the resurrection of Jesus, the Apostles were forced to stay in the same house because they feared the Jews, as John the Baptist stated (John 20:19). All these fears were to benefit the faithful not to harm them. That's because by our human nature we become sluggish, careless, and forgetful when we have no fear. Let us remember what Solomon said (Proverbs 30:8-9): “Give me no riches, lest I be full and deny thee.” He allows the faithful to live amid fear and trepidation because He wants them to be careful, industrious, and of sound mind.

WHY BEING PART OF A LITTLE FLOCK IS NOT A REASON FOR FEAR. If we consider history from the creation of the world to our current time, we can clearly see that God's followers were fewer in number than the sons of Belial; the righteous people were fewer in number than the wicked; the pious people were fewer in number than the villains. Also, at the beginning of the world, there were four people, but only one was innocent, Abel. Cain was wicked, and Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command. After that, we could only find Noah in the entire world. After the great flood, only Abraham was true on the entire planet. In Sodom, only Lot was true. Even if I don't list more examples from the Old Testament, we can easily make an enumeration from the writings of the Evangelists who were the true sons of God and the true God-fearing people at the time of our Lord Christ.

No wonder he calls His followers “little flock.” Why do Catholics brag about their denomination by calling it *catholica*, meaning it is established and recognized throughout the world? Even in the days of the prophet Elijah, the priests of Baal numbered four hundred and fifty (1 Kings 18:22), but there was just one prophet of God, Elijah. The false prophets who prophesied lies for Ahab (1 Kings 22:16) numbered four hundred, while there was only one truth-telling prophet, Micaiah. Thus, a large number of followers doesn't make a faith true, and a small number of followers doesn't make a faith false. A further example of this, from earlier books of the Bible, is when

ENYEDI GYÖRGY, A.K.A.
GEORGIUS ENIEDINUS
(1555–97)

General merits of his writings: interpretation of Unitarian faith articles to a wide audience; called the “Unitarian Plato.”

Published English translations: No full text English translation either of the main theological work (*Az ó es vy teastamentvm-beli helyeknek, melyekből az Háromságról való tudománt szokták állatni, magyarázattyok*) or the two shorter theological works, “Rövid válasz” and “Rövid értekezés.”

Out of the 213 sermons a few were partially translated and analyzed by Gellérd Imre. The sermons of Enyedi György are called *Concios* in this body of literature.

English translations at Unitarian Torch (unitariantorch.com): Full translations of *Concio* CXV, *Concio* XCIV, *Concio* CXCI, *Concio* CXCI, and *Concio* CXIV are on the web site.

the angel tells Esdras: "The most High had made this world for many, but the world to come for few . . . There be many created, but few shall be saved." (2 Esdras 8:1,3). Our Lord Christ said this in Luke 13:24 when asked if only a few would be saved: "Strive to enter through the narrow door," and also in Matthew 7:13: "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it."

2. Enyedi György: *Concio CXV*; based on Colossians 3:16: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

WHERE DO WE FIND THE WORDS OF CHRIST? "As the Apostle said: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom." The words of Christ are none other than His teachings and His wisdom. The wisdom of Christ is none other than the wisdom of the Holy Father from John 7 (John 7:16) – "My teaching is not mine, but His who sent me." Yet all that wisdom is said to be the wisdom of Christ, as he was talking about and explaining the hidden advice and meanings from God. John says this in John 1 (John 1:18): "No one has ever seen God, it is the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known." The Father himself said: "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I'm well pleased." Similarly, our Lord Christ is called the prophecy of God in Rev. 19 (Rev. 19:10), as he had been proclaiming God's words and God's will, as Peter stated in Acts 10 (Acts 10:36). How could we receive the wisdom and words of Christ now that he is no longer walking among us? When Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians, Christ wasn't around, and wasn't teaching, as Christ had ascended to Heaven. So it was that Christ's disciples continued to proclaim the wisdom and the teaching they received from Christ himself; thus their words and teachings are called the words of Christ, just as we called the words of Christ the words of God, since he was speaking the words God had provided to him. What could we do in our time when neither Christ nor his disciples are among us; where could we find the word and teachings of Christ? We find that in no other place than in the Scriptures, as the Apostles wrote them accurately and truthfully, and if anyone reads them, they might as well be reading and hearing the words of Christ.

SINGING PSALMS AND HYMNS AS A CHRISTIAN. When he says: "spiritual songs and singing with grace" he includes all types of religious singings. With that he is saying that we ought not use the clamorous and reveling types even though they might be called psalms, hymns, or chants. We see many songs that have been written about unworthy subjects, about lies, mischiefs, about shameful and filthy things, and those topics bring wicked emotions into any unclean heart and seduce the ones with godly morals. In addition, the Apostle describes what topics a Christian man ought to sing about. When he says "spiritual songs" he means praising God, who is Himself spirit, and His magnificent works, and not about worthless and mortal topics. Rather, about His immortal spirit, godly morals, about God's statutes, and about those who appear in the Scriptures, or about the ones who are teaching us in the Scriptures. When the Apostle says: "singing with grace" he means that we praise God with affection and a joyous heart, and not just as a chore or as an ordinary task. We ought to praise God with a joyful heart, because our Lord expects our adoration to come from a free will and from a cheerful spirit. When the Apostle says: "sing with grace in our hearts" he admonishes us that we ought to praise our Lord God from the heart and not just using our lips and tongues. Not the way some people do it when their lips are singing, but their

hearts and minds wandered far afield, and many times they don't even know what they are saying. That is not how the Christian man ought to sing, rather, the thought ought to precede the singing, the love toward God ought to bubble up to excite the heart; let the mouth express such inner emotions and love when we sing that heavenly verse.

3. Enyedi György: Concio CXCLII based on: "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?" Psalms 2:1

BEGINNINGS OF AN ARGUMENT AGAINST THE ETERNAL NATURE OF CHRIST. The fourth reason why this psalm wasn't written literally about Jesus is that the writing is about a single person in a single time frame, as we can judge from the wording. But when the New Testament scholars associate this psalm with Jesus, they invoke two time periods. The beginnings—*Quare fremueront* etc. —is explained, according to Acts 4 (Acts 4:25), as the time after the ascension of our Lord Christ when the high priests forbade the apostles from teaching. The part (Ps. 2:7) —Thou art my Son—is placed by Saint Paul at the time of the resurrection of Christ. The part (Ps. 2:9)—Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron—is placed in Rev. 2 (Rev. 2:27) at the time of the reign of Jesus, which is in the future, as it hasn't come yet. All these prove that this psalm wasn't written literally about our Lord Christ.

However, the explanation that this psalm is exclusively about David, is also false. There are even some Jewish scholars who associate its spiritual meaning with the Messiah. And the scholars of the New Testament relate several statements from this psalm to Jesus Christ. Let us then accept that this psalm literally and historically is about David, but its spiritual meaning is about the Messiah and his disciples. We will be applying this explanation as we examine the words of our psalm.

IMPLICATION THAT JESUS WAS ANOINTED, WAS MESSIAH, BUT NOT COEQUAL TO GOD. "No one should be astonished when I inferred that David was the christ of God, because I have mentioned frequently that the words "christ," and "messiah" are common words in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, where kings, high priests, prophets and even heathen rulers are given that name. In a few passages of the Bible Saul is called the christ of God, and Cyrus was also called by that name in Is. 45 (Is. 45:1).

Furthermore, David was often called that as we see it in Psalm 18 (Psalm 18:50): "Great deliverance giveth he to his king; and sheweth mercy to his anointed, to David, and to his seed for evermore." While in the New Testament only Jesus is called "christ," the Old Testament, the focus of our explanations, uses that name commonly. From now on, do not be astonished if we use the name "christ" to describe David."

Recall that this psalm was literally and historically written about and narrated by David. However, the apostles explain the relevance to Jesus and to the setting of the New Testament the following way. When the Philistines killed king Saul, they thought the kingdom of the Jews had come to an end; they then heard that God anointed David as christ, as king, so the Philistines gathered, raged, and decided that they would end the rule of Jews. Likewise, at the time of the Lord Jesus, the Jews, the high priests didn't rest until they killed Jesus, and when they crucified him, they believed both he and his teachings were gone. But when they heard that God made Jesus rise from the dead, and his disciples conducted miracles in his name, they didn't think that was God's will, and they rushed to meet, they held counsel,

they dragged the apostles in front of them, and ordered them to stop teaching in Jesus' name. When the apostles heard that they raised their voices to God and said in Acts 4 (Acts 4:24): "Lord thou art God, that hast made heaven, and earth" etc. Their words likened Jesus to David. God made both of them mighty, anointed them to be kings from modest beginnings; one was anointed by oil, the other by the Holy Spirit.

4. Enyedi György: *Concio CXCIII* based on: "I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." Psalms 2:7

ANTITRINITARIAN THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS. While this psalm was written *literally and historically* about David, *in the spiritual sense*, however, it was written about Jesus Christ. For that reason, it is necessary to explain this psalm according to its spiritual meaning, especially, because the apostles also related the words of this psalm to the person of Jesus Christ, as we read in the New Testament (Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5, Hebrew 5:5). To begin with, no Christian could deny, and no Christian does deny that the words (Psalm 2:7), *Thou art my Son*, clearly pertain to Jesus Christ. The explanation of this passage is where we disagree with, and cannot compromise with the papists and trinitarians. They state that this passage must be interpreted as evidence that the Son was naturally born to God, and that proves the eternal, divine nature of Christ. Because the naturally born Son of God is also a God; as here Christ is called the Son of God, thus, he is a God, identical in nature to the Father God. When we refute that by saying that the entire house of Israel, kings, and others have been called "the sons of God," but it doesn't follow that all those people are gods, they answer that Jesus Christ is different from those, because he is a *naturally born* Son of God. We refute that by saying that he called himself a "son of man," and history documents that he was born to Mary by natural birth. They respond that Christ had two births, the first is eternal from the substance of the Father, the second to a mortal human called Mary. We refute that by saying that neither do we read anything about the birth of Christ in eternity, nor do we read about God giving birth from his substance, or giving birth to a son. To this they say that they can point to the Scriptures for the evidence. Among others they bring up the words of David (Psalms 2:7), "Thou art my Son etc.", where they say the prophet is talking about the eternal birth. To that, we respond that they will never prove the eternal birth from this Bible that both they and we are using.

Because we have been discussing this passage, I will prove that this particular passage is not about the eternal birth of Jesus Christ. The trinitarians maintain that the Son of God, who was born of the substance of the Father, is not less powerful than the Father, neither lesser nor greater than the Father, but they are equal in every respect. However, the person David is talking about is lesser than the Father, and not someone equal to the Father like an eternal son of God, who would be equal to the Father. The person David is talking about is lesser than God, which becomes apparent not only from our verse, but also from the verses before and after it. In the preceding verse we read (Psalms 2:6): "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." And that king anointed on the holy hill of Zion says that God spoke to him (Psalm 2:7): "Thou art my Son etc." Thus, there can be no doubt that the son is lesser than God, because God made him king. After that verse we read (Psalms 2:8): "Ask of me, and I shall give thee etc." There is no doubt that when someone asks and accepts something from another, that person is lesser than the one from whom he asked and accepted something."

David is talking about a son of God who is lesser than the Father. For that reason, the trinitarians couldn't possibly relate this passage to an eternal son, because they hold the son to be equal to the Father. Secondly, God speaks about a son that He has begotten today. The word "today" has always been denoting a particular, defined point in time. The trinitarians insist that the birth of the eternal son had no beginning, as he is being born continually, endlessly, as he is being born eternally. However, David says here that God has begotten him at a particular point in time, namely today. Therefore, those words do not refer to the birth of an eternal son of God. Their reply, that the word "today" should be interpreted as eternity, is so shameless, that it doesn't merit even our mocking. Their interpretation is blatantly false, because they can't point to a single line in the entire Scriptures where "today" doesn't mean a particular, defined point in time. Their brainless interpretation is refuted yet a third way, with passages from the writings of the apostles, because the trinitarians cannot possibly be so shameless as to elevate their wisdom and righteousness above that of the apostles. The apostles themselves use those words of David on three occasions to relate them to Jesus, Acts 13 (Acts 13:33), Heb. 1. and 5. (Heb. 1:5; Heb. 5:5). In these three passages the apostles talk about the Jesus who had died, had risen, and had ascended to heaven. Their eternal son of God could not have died, risen, or ascended to heaven, because if he was truly an eternal son of God, then he would continually reside in heaven throughout eternity. Thus, it is beyond doubt that these words are not about an eternal son of God.

Finally, in order to put all your doubts to rest, and to accept our explanations with confidence, you have to know that even trinitarian scholars acknowledge that this line is about a Jesus who was born to Mary. Those scholars, however, do not condemn the mindless trinitarian explanation, perhaps, because they are afraid for their lives, or because their eyes are clouded by the false explanation. You can read about this for yourself in Buceri and Musculi's *Commentarios in Psalmos*. Therefore, yet again, it is obvious that this passage in its spiritual meaning is not about the eternal Son of God, but, rather, about Jesus Christ born to Mary.

Let us now review why this line is about Jesus. I started by explaining that David is not literally the son of God, because he was the naturally born son of Jesse. David is called a son, because God showed him His grace like a father would show to his son. Remember here that the Scriptures never call Jesus a naturally born son of God, as the trinitarians would like you to believe. Jesus, in all passages of the Scriptures, calls himself a "son of man," the naturally born son to a woman called Mary. Jesus is called a "Son of God" because God showed His grace and love towards him several different times.

5. Enyedi György: *Concio CXCIV*: based on Psalms 2:8: "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession."

ADMONISHMENT OF RULERS. Let us then discuss the third part (Ps. 2:10): "Be wise now, O ye kings, etc." This admonishment flows naturally from the words preceding it in this psalm. The prophet stated that all intent and effort against God's will by the powerful of this world is futile, because when He wants to anoint someone, He will do that despite any opposition. That is why the prophet admonishes them to be wise. He tells them don't be foolish, don't tussle with the Lord, but, rather, serve Him if they want to be blessed and not perish. At first, he only admonishes them (Ps. 2:10) "Be wise now, O ye kings etc." Rulers do need that kind of admonishment and instruction. Many rulers believe their reign is all about a

life of splendor, about keeping multitudes of soldiers and horses, about feasting and drinking, and about imposing orders. All the while they give very little thought to, and do very little about, understanding God's truth, about governing their subjects kindly and wisely, and about becoming more learned and wise. These ought to be their main tasks, as the prophet states (Ps. 2:10): "Be wise now . . . be instructed." That is why our Lord God tells the sons of Israel in Deut. 17. (Deut. 17:15, 16, 18, 19): "A king is set over thee . . . But he shall not multiply horses to himself . . . And it shall be . . . that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them."

The reason the prophet gives for why the rulers ought to serve the Lord and kiss His son (Ps. 2:12), is *lest He be angry*. The prophet stated before that the Lord God laughs at the kings who take counsel against Him, and warns them not to upset Him, not to anger Him. Because even if He is angered only a little, they will perish right away. That is why the fear of a servant ought to frighten them, so they will serve him, tremble before Him out of fear of punishment.

But no one ought to conclude that God is solely angry, vindictive, and a destroyer, rather, everyone ought to recognize that He is also merciful, benevolent, and a sustainer of people. He is not only a Lord, He is a Father as well.

Our verse says this (Ps. 2:12): "Blessed are all they that put their trust in him." In other words, while on one hand He destroys the ones who tussle against Him, on the other hand He blesses the ones who put their trust in Him.

We have lessons here for people of all types. The wicked ought to be frightened because the Lord will destroy them, break them, defeat them. The faithful, the godly, ought to be hopeful and trusting of Him because He will bless them and make them glad. Therefore, my brethren, each of us ought to strive to be counted as a son of God, and not His enemy, and then we will receive not the scourge and reprimand, but the blessings of His Holy Majesty. Amen.

Era 2: (1636–1861) Compromised existence during religious and economic oppression

7. Excerpts from the funeral sermon titled “The Origin and Attributes of Justice”

Groan, I say unto you! Oh, groan! Groan, Transylvania, our dear homeland; mourn with our shared sadness, and shed your tears like raindrops from a shower that flow down your face! To quote a poet: *It is pleasing to give grief the full control over ourselves*. Because the unending blows strike with such a force, they strangulate so incredibly, that in our daze we can barely breathe. One bitter anguish followed by an even more exasperating one, as if our tribulations were like colossal rolling waves of the ocean moving forward and then crashing onto the shore. Oh, these endless calamities of our homeland; how they encircled you like multiple columns of guardsmen.

How many billions of encampments of bloodiest warfare have been set up on your soil? Throughout the centuries how much blood of your people soaked your blood-stained grounds? How many faces have been darkened by suffering from the relentless and unforgiving famine? How many times have we been forced to acquiesce and accept unfamiliar and even repulsive provisions? How wide a tract of devastation was left by the ten-year long plague? How great has been the ruination of villages and small and large towns from that contagious pestilence?

Let us think back to the year of 1716 when Nature was so jealous, so stingy with our summer that the early start to the continually freezing cold weather yielded only unripe fruits in the fall; and the wine, if we even want to call it wine, was worse than anything in the past centuries, and the harvest came with thousands of floods.

And right on the heel of that in the year of 1717 a new blow struck us; grief followed grief, our faces were soiled by unexpected, horrible filth, as the Tatars attacked our homeland, with terrible bestiality

SZENTÁBRAHÁMI LOMBÁRD MIHÁLY
(1683–1758)



Preacher, educator, and bishop. According to Hungarian Wikipedia: “He held the office of bishop for 21 years. He stood out for his apostolic work, revitalization of religious life, defense of faith and church building. He was said to be the eyes, heart, and mouth of the Unitarian Church of his day. He was the greatest Unitarian of the 18th century and the second founder of the church.”

General merits of his writings: detailed, systematic explanation of Unitarian faith articles in [“A Keresztény Hittudomány Összege az Unitáriusok Szerint.”](#)

No full text English translation of the main theological work *A Keresztény Hittudomány Összege az Unitáriusok Szerint* (*A Summary of the Christian Theology According to Unitarians*).

Of 33 sermon collections a few were partially translated and analyzed by Gellérd Imre.

English translations at [unitariantorch.com](#): a funeral sermon preached by Mihály over the casket of a Unitarian Councillor.

Image credit: from the book *Keresztény magvető* (“Hungarian Christianity”) Volume 1. Cluj-Napoca: Unitarian Literature Society, 1861.

they plundered it, and woe unto us, many were taken into captivity! And the year wasn't even over with that.

After a year of daze and numbness, the plague, sickening air appeared yet again inside our homeland. Thumb through the pages of yearbooks and answer me if you find a more mournful year than 1718. If in the year of 1716 the long-lasting cold weather denied us the wine, then in 1718 the excessive hot weather took from us our bread, as the heat scorched the wheat, and even the soil itself. Rivers and lakes dried up. How many places were destroyed by tragic fires, and what a loss they caused.

Amidst so much misery the most soothing medicine is the opportunity to forget. But then renewed suffering started from fresh blows, and from blows recurring from the past. Just look at the contagion-filled year of 1719 that spread the plague throughout our homeland so much so that while some infected locations were quarantined, in some others guardsmen could not be found to enforce the quarantine. And then it is still fresh in our minds how in the year of 1720 many kinds of produce were destroyed by countless worms and insects, and it seemed that the normal course of Nature was reversed, and it seemed that the calamities formed a continuous chain that colluded against Transylvania.

But I have digressed from the topic; my grief caused me to stutter and stammer. I came to believe that the most proper topic of my presentation in front of the gathered expert practitioners and supporters of justice, would be if I could speak—trusting in your patience—about the origin and attributes of justice over the casket of a man who labored in his entire life in the administration of justice.

Alas, let us consider: *Piety was dead and virgin Astracea, last of the immortals to depart, herself abandoned the blood-soaked soil.* What does this have to do with justice? Slow down when you would hurry up, as I will attempt to bring justice down from the sky and return it to you, because I believe that justice, like Astracea, journeyed into the sky when she was defeated.

Justice is the queen among the virtues, the lifeblood of any state; without it alliances wither and no nations or citizenry and not even the world could stand. Even those who intend to carry out misdeeds could not live without at least a little of it. Without it the state becomes a burden and a loot. Because when justice is unblemished everyone is guided by a shared ideal; however, when justice is absent, faith and trust in the state are broken. Without justice what is the state if not a den of robbers? Without justice what are the principalities if not workshops of wickedness? Without justice what is the citizenry if not caves of wretchedness? Without justice what is society if not a refuge for shamelessness and cruelty? Justice is the mortar of the state that makes a country blessed, while the loss of justice makes a country miserable and calamitous. When a Spartan king stated that a most blessed state is the one whose borders are marked by spears and swords, Pompey corrected him by saying that the most blessed state is the one whose borders are marked by justice.

Do not wonder why I felt obligated to discuss the nature of justice on such a solemn occasion. I did it, because I know just how much the Honorable homoródentmártoni Biró Sámuel delighted in serving the cause of justice, as he frequently said even when it didn't agree with his personal interest: *The laws of our homeland do not allow this.* Even without espousing any other of his virtues, his relentless pursuit of justice makes him worthy of our respect; he who not only through his actions, but by name as well, was a judge, strived to serve everyone's rights to the highest degree. When he didn't adjudicate a case, it was because of his ill health, and not because of purposeful inaction. Have no doubt, he rendered unto

God the things that are God's, rendered unto the homeland the things that are the homeland's, rendered unto the Emperor the things that are the Emperor's, rendered unto the people of Transylvania the things that are theirs, rendered unto his kin folks the things that are theirs, and rendered unto his family the things that are the family's. He served God through serving this church that he loved so tenderly, so much so that he labored day and night on her behalf and toiled for her benefit all the way until his death. In order to serve God, he dismissed those futile things and temptations that have led many other people astray. In return, God displayed His love for him. Biró Sámuel accepted with a kind heart three and a half years of suffering from continuous illnesses and ailments from the hand of God. Even in his last days he wanted to show his gratefulness when he said: *My Lord! It is well that you humbled me.* He requested that this topic be discussed at his funeral, so when he could no longer speak, others may witness his statement of gratefulness he expressed in private, and from now on others may present it publicly as an example to others.

Era 3 (1861-1941): Beginning of tolerance towards non-catholics, and subsequent rebuilding

Published English translations: The full text of the *Catechism* by the Bishop Ferencz Jozsef has been translated to English. Out of the 15 sermon collections a few sermons were partially translated and analyzed by Gellérd Imre. No sermons have been translated from the collection of commemorative sermons for the occasion of the 1000th anniversary of the founding of the Kingdom of Hungary. No sermons have been translated from the hundreds that were published in the *Keresztény Magvető* (*Christian Sower*) starting in 1861.

English translations at Unitarian Torch (unitariantorch.com): Full translations of one sermon from each bishop, Kriza János and Ferencz József.

8. Kriza János: Sermon titled: "The Divine Truth"; Based on John 18:37-38 "Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?"

We may find the divine truth in our conscience. Conscience is able to tell good from bad, and the same way it can distinguish between truth and falsehoods. Your conscience may serve you well in spiritual matters, in matters of faith and of salvation. In our souls God's words have the sacred mission to explain us and show us the truth. For the longest time our conscience was forced to exist on a diet that sapped its powers. Our conscience has been ridiculed and silenced by those who decided that conscience cannot be beneficial to them. Now is the time for our conscience to regain its rightful place for dignified consideration; after all, conscience is nothing less than the part of our soul that embodies our connections to God."

Let us now compare the God of the divine truth with the God of the canonical doctrine. The God of the canonical doctrine applies himself only periodically, he appears only to one group of people, implying that he has abandoned all the rest of humanity. Frequently he appears with weapons of revenge, and he demands human blood, and he threatens us with the eternal suffering in hell just to ensure the acceptance of his truth. The God of divine truth toils endlessly, he continually reveals himself in daily events, and in our conscience. His mercy is as wide ranging as his

KRIZA JÁNOS (1811-75)



Unitarian minister, ethnographer, translator, poet, and bishop (r. 1861-75).

Image credit:
https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kriza_J%C3%A1nos

truth; he forgives the remorseful, and he embraces all humanity, all his children. He is our father in Heaven.

Let us now compare the Christ of the divine truth with the Christ of the canonical doctrine. The Christ of the canonical doctrine is part of God, but not quite God. He is a man, but also more than a man. We are not certain if he has sacrificed himself or not. We are not certain if he suffered or not. We are not certain if his life is our life or a life unlike us. We can never be certain if he died or not. The Christ of the divine truth is with us and for us. He has the noble goal of establishing God's world in mankind. His life and his words are his own. When he rejects temptation, it is his thoughts that does that; when he is praying, it is his person who is doing it. When he is grateful, it is his own gratefulness, and when he cries, it is his body that cries. He freely fulfills in its entirety the will of his Heavenly Father. His words are sermons from a life of truth, and those sermons inspire our faith. His life is a model for mankind's life, and his death foreshadows mankind's salvation. Even from a distance of nineteen centuries when we kneel at his cross, when we contemplate his life and his death, when we are in those moments of deep meditation, our inner voices can loudly exclaim: Indeed, here was a true man. God lived in him, and he brings us salvation."

Now, let us compare the Bible of the divine truth with the Bible of the canonical doctrine. When we read the Bible of canonical doctrine, we have to give up the freedom of thought about "all are tried and the good is saved"; we have to struggle to accommodate serious contradictions, we have to struggle to explain the imagery of a fallible God, struggle to explain the prejudices and ignorance that comes from the distant centuries. When we read the Bible of divine truth, we gain the freedom and the responsibility to distinguish the certain from the uncertain, the mortal from the eternal, we no longer have to be consumed by the struggle to comprehend the conflicts of the spirit of the Bible with the text. We are able to appreciate the beauty of the Bible, easily absorb the teachings, admonishments, statements, and hopes. This is how this book, this unsurpassed source of knowledge of God and of Jesus, and of holy and true life, will truly become the book that guides our lives.

Finally, let us compare the faith of the divine truth with the faith of the canonical doctrine. The faith of the canonical doctrine is nothing more than symbolic events of faith that are used to cover up and muddy the Christian truth, and these symbolic events offend the intellect and upset the conscience. The faith of the divine truth is a collection of uplifting ideals that make our hearts beat faster. Ideals such as the love of God, the love of our fellow human beings, the limitless and unending love that exists in the present, as well as in eternity. This is the faith of Jesus, the faith that established God's world on Earth. This is the faith that emerges when we follow the spirit of Jesus, and we remove the heavy and suffocating cloak of the canonical doctrine. This is the essence of our religion, the historic authenticity of the divine truth.

9. Ferencz József: The Freedom of Faith and Conscience. Sermon at the 300th year anniversary of the founding of the Unitarian Church; based on: Galatians 5:1 "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."

The freedom of faith and conscience, my dear brethren, is one of the moral concepts of great importance that first gained expression in the Christian religion through the teachings of our Lord Jesus.

FERENCZ JÓZSEF (1835-1928)



Priest, bishop, educator, royal counselor, member of parliament, and the author of a *Catechism* (1864) which as of 1983 had appeared in eighteen editions.

Image credit:

https://www.wiki/wiki/hu/Ferencz_J%C3%B3zsef

Those who carefully read the Gospels, especially the words of the prophet from Nazareth, cannot possibly come to any other conclusion than becoming convinced about the intention of Jesus to liberate faith and conscience. He respected the inner world of others—the personal thoughts, the religious feelings—and when he spoke to the woman who touched his garment: *Thy faith hath made thee whole*, he acknowledged the supreme nature of faith, and the free will of the individual to choose a particular avenue of faith. He didn't use force or coercion, rather, his peaceful tools were persuasion and demonstration when he wished to give more emphasis to his words. He concluded one of his speeches with this admonishment: *If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them*. He didn't condition salvation on outward appearances, he didn't exclude even the sinners from his mercy; his disciples taught this: *It is good in the sight of God who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth*. Indeed, Jesus deserves to be called a liberator, as he liberated faith and conscience.

However, freedom is a concept of high-order, high above the understanding and comprehension of many mundane souls. Jesus experienced that more than once when he was bombarded with questions such as: *Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not? Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their*

hands when they eat bread? After the death of Jesus there was an uncertainty about some aspects of the faith; the freedom of conscience was pushed into the background, and the practice of rituals gained importance, especially, the practice of Jewish religious rituals. Those who still held a free-thinking mindset were forced to state their opposition, and to declare at their first meeting in Jerusalem that keeping with the rituals of the Old Testament wasn't binding to followers of Christ. Moreover, they called those rituals a yoke on the soul. The Apostle Paul was expressing those views in his letter to Galatians as he admonished them: *Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage*.

And that admonishment wasn't unsuccessful. The first three centuries of Christianity respected the freedom of faith and conscience; a wide variety of views existed side by side within the church. No one intended to create an official, mandatory set of articles of faith, and thus the concept of heresy—which later became well known for its ugly atrocities—was completely unknown. It was a happy epoch, even though we can't call it a "golden age" because of the general persecution of Christianity. The fate of Christians and the teachings of Jesus changed in the fourth century. At that time Christians were fighting not only the enemies from the outside, but each other as well. The Church broke apart into Western and Eastern portions, and Rome became the competitor of Constantinople. The struggle between the two empires contributed to the formation of the papacy and the patriarchy, and we witness the diminution

of religion into the servant of politics. The struggle moved along two planes: while the emperors wanted total political and worldly powers, the Pope and the Patriarch wanted to restrain conscience, so they linked the object of faith to specific formats. On the topic of God they found a common understanding, but regarding Christ and the Holy Spirit, a schism developed within the Christian church. The free-thinking bishops were at first questioned in private, and if their views were contrary to that of the Pope, they were scolded or they were brought in front of a council or synod. Those who remained true to their individual faith and conviction, and those who taught in opposition to the official faith articles were put under a papal curse or were excommunicated. As time went on, the highest ranked priests came to present themselves as judges of conscience, and demanded adherence to the official articles of faith. Those who didn't comply were declared disobedient to God, and the guilty party was subject to secular punishment.

However, in the world of virtues, much like the natural world, every action creates an opposing reaction. In the life of the church that law manifested itself only after a long delay and a long repression of mankind. The reformation in the sixteenth century was undoubtedly a reaction to the repression applied with rigid consistency by the church on Christians such as **Bishop Arianus, Wycliffe, the Waldenians**, the Hussites, and every other free-thinking religious movement. More thoughtfulness and less lust for power by the priests may have prevented it, but the open attacks on the freedom of faith and conscience, the strangulation of free thinking, and the efforts to eradicate equality had riled up the feelings of mankind, and a few brave men openly expressed those feelings. The act of Reformation, while handing back Christianity its most precious treasure, the freedom of faith and conscience, also broke the rule of Catholic priests, erased their privileges, and declared that each individual may commune with God, and that regarding the affairs of faith and conscience it doesn't recognize any kind of authority of mortals. Yes, my brethren, that was the goal of the Reformation. However, it pains me to say that all those ideals were accepted mostly as a theory, and soon the practice was demonstrating the opposite.

God forbid I diminish the achievements of the Reformation, as history has faithfully recorded that; the religious and secular worlds, much like the body and the soul, are tightly connected and they affect each other, thus, the freer religious attitudes became reflected in the attitudes of secular institutions. However, history also recorded that even the most famous reformers couldn't reach the high standard regarding the topic of conscience. To mention just a few examples, Luther condemned Zwingli who believed that communion was only a sign and didn't accept the literal meaning of: *This is my body, this is my blood*. Calvin assisted with the sentencing of Michael Servetus, whose conscience couldn't accept the teaching of the Trinity.

Era 4 (1941-89): Oppression by nationalism and communism in Romania

Published English translations: None of the theological writings of Bishop Erdő János have been translated. None of the hundreds of sermons from the Keresztény Magvető (Christian Sower) have been translated.

English translations at Unitarian Torch (unitariantorch.com): Full translations of one sermon from each of four authors are available on the web site.

10. Political prisoners of freedom of conscience: Szabó Dezső; in labor camp from 1959-64 Sermon titled *"With God, in the Service of Mankind,"* written in 1971. Based on: Mark 10:42-44 *"But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all."*

We could name this principle the gravitational law of God's kingdom, because Jesus, the son of man, came to serve and to give his life for the life of many. He, who understood most perfectly the properties of the human soul, wanted to remove selfishness—that largest obstacle to human development—because selfishness is a universal childhood disease of mankind. And it is obstructing efforts to personal improvement! Children want everything for themselves! They want food, drink, toys; they are not disturbed when they cause pain to their pals and make them cry. Because of their rudimentary thought processes and protection of only their own lives, they are the center of everything. Even the disciples remained in the cosmos of their self-centered, child-like soul. Everything is about me! I ought to be the *chiefest*—the greatest, because I am the most true, most faithful, most trustworthy—the center of the world, they thought! And then Jesus said: "Whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the *chiefest*, shall be servant of all!"

You are only kind inasmuch as you help others with your kindness! You are only as true as long as your truth is better than that of the Pharisee. You are only as faithful as you faithfully keep my commandments. You are only at the center of the world as long as you serve others and put them in the center. The son of man didn't come to be served, but so that he could serve!

It is a sad testament to the heedless nature of men that the rivalry among the disciples about faithfulness has been repeated time and time again. Since then some disciples, who received their knowledge from Jesus, became prosperous and acquired wealth and power, and reigned and ruled like heathen princes. They demanded servitude from others. Those who would attempt to recall the words of the Master now faced the flames at the stake: on the banks of the River Thames and Lake Constance, on the Plateau of Geneva, at the market of Granada. However, the fires of the stakes couldn't incinerate, and the cries of excruciating pain couldn't repress the eternal command from the road to Jerusalem: "Whosoever of you will be the *chiefest*, shall be servant of all!"

David Ferenc emerged from that great storm of a struggle to retain the purity of the words of Jesus. He wanted to fulfill the spiritual command of Jesus: serve everyone. Thus, he preached in 1568: everyone

ought to believe and attain salvation according to their own conscience. Let there be a freedom of conscience, a freedom for the words of preachers, a freedom for all mankind.

That is how fifteen hundred years after the constructive life and ghastly death of Jesus, a new church, our church, gained an organized format: "To the glory of one true God and to the service of mankind."

11. Political prisoners of freedom of conscience: Nyitrai Berta in labor camp from 1959-64, Sermon titled "The Treasure of the Church" based on Matthew 23:17, *"Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?"*

In our simple Unitarian churches, there is no ornate altar, lavish receptacles, expensive artwork, or golden treasures. I hope you have noticed that all along in this sermon I've been pointing your attention toward treasures of a different kind. And our churches have ample treasures of those different kinds. A treasure of our churches are the newborns who are brought in for baptism. A treasure of our churches are the youth who come for their confirmation to confess their faith before God. A treasure of our churches is the love of couples who ask for a blessing of their "til death do us apart" vow. A treasure of our churches are the deceased, as teary-eyed prayers are said for them within our walls.

A treasure of our churches are the many hearts in prayer, seeking the proximity of God within our walls. Within our walls that magnificent Son of God will gild the hearts of all who bring here their kindness to their neighbors.

The essence is the church . . . Even gold itself can be sacred if the church sanctifies it. Sacred is the white gold of our churches; the character of our white church walls that exemplifies the modesty of our religion. For us, the steeple is sacred gold, whether it is made of stone or wood. Sacred gold is the church bell, no matter the size or what it is made of. The flower gardens around our churches also belong to the treasures of the church, because our faithful expressed their love toward the church with them. The guardians of all that treasure is us; indeed, you all are. Guard then those white walls of our churches, so they continue to spotlessly gleam about the modesty and clarity of our faith. Guard then the church inside your hearts, so its treasure, the unity of love and virtue, will never be diminished. People of David Ferenc, do remain the keeper of your religious heritage. Safeguard it for the coming generations.

12. Political prisoners of freedom of conscience: Gellérd Imre; in labor camp from 1959-64; committed suicide in 1980 after continued harassment by the state. Sermon titled: Hidden Treasures; Based on Matthew 13:44.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." Here is an important question to consider: Just why God keeps the treasure hidden? And why is it described as "hidden" in the parable as well? Why isn't the treasure placed out in the open, uncovered above ground? When I was a child every Tuesday my mother would bring us candy from town. But she never gave it to us directly; instead, she

hid the candy, and she set two conditions: one being that we had to search out the hidden candy, and the second being that we had to do something in exchange for the candy. My mother knew that if she just handed us the candy without us having to search for it, and without us having to do something in exchange, then we wouldn't appreciate and value the treasures: the candy and my mother's kindness. My mother put us onto the path of excitement during the search, and onto the path of satisfaction when we found the candy. With those small tasks that we had to do in exchange for the candy, she wanted to make us feel that we didn't receive a free gift, but we received something we worked for, and so we became the rightful owner of the candy.

A wise teacher wouldn't just bring to the students a new course topic, but rather, the teacher would conceal some of the truths of science or ethics, and would pretend that he needs assistance from students to find those truths. So, he would request help from the students to assist with finding the hidden truths. Teaching is nothing else but a search for the knowledge goal or for the pedagogical goal; the shared sacrifices to find those hidden truths, the shared excitement during the search, and the shared happiness once the hidden truth is found.

The wisdom of God is very much like the wisdom of a great teacher. God doesn't serve the Kingdom of God on a silver platter. Instead, God hides those treasures, and, thus, God allows us to enjoy the excitement of the search, the happiness of finding the treasure, and along the process God develops in us the appreciation of those treasures. And finally, God makes it possible for us to search for several treasures throughout our life. The teaching method of God includes motivation to start the search, the action of searching, and the act of collaboration. I hope I don't come across as sacrilegious, but God's pedagogical method is the Socratean heuristic method. I see that in Jesus' own words: "But seek first the Kingdom of God."

The act of hiding has a deeper, more general meaning: the hiding of something as in the hiding something in a seed. When I pick up an apple seed, God has managed to hide an entire apple tree in there. In that apple seed hidden are the trunk, the leaves, the roots, and the fruit of the tree. Nothing in the seed is in the final form, but in the starter germ form. In the terminology of philosophy the apple seed is a potential, a possibility. The treasures hidden in the apple seed are waiting for us to discover it. How could we do that? Surely not by breaking and unfolding the seed, the way we would have unwrapped the candy we found after our search. We plant the seed, we water it, we take best care of it, and out of that effort the treasures appear, the apple tree grows out. Yes, growing, cultivating, and developing are ways of seeking; as a matter of fact, they are the most involved forms of seeking.

The Kingdom of God is hidden inside of us just as the germ of a tree is hidden in a seed. So, when we seek the Kingdom of God we don't seek it like we seek a hidden candy or a lost coin, but we seek by planting the seed, and then we nurture it, water it, weed around it, cultivate it, and then we harvest the fruit.

Era 5 (1990-present): Rebuilding as religious, cultural, and linguistic minority in Romania

Published English translations: The full text of one sermon was published in a booklet celebrating the 425th anniversary of the Transylvanian Unitarian Church. None of the theological writings of Bishop Varga Béla have been translated. None of the additional theological writings have been translated. None of the 18 sermons from the sermon collection have been translated. None of the hundreds of sermons from the *Keresztény Magvető* (*Christian Sower*) or Central and Eastern European Online Library (CEEOL) have been translated.

English translations at Unitarian Torch (unitariantorch.com): Several sermons from the *Keresztény Magvető* (*Christian Sower*), and from the CEEOL.

13. Balint Bencedi Ferenc; bishop from 2008-21; Sermon titled: “Let us all be disciples,” based on Acts 2:14: “But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words”.

For many people in our time the light of the Morning Star, the sound of the Heavenly Choir, the sight of the empty tomb is nothing more than fodder for disbelief and skepticism. For them the visual gratification is very short-lived, and they have to be constantly moving on to the next spectacle. And that leaves no time for deep reflection.

For many people in our time the family, friends, members of their congregations, members of their community grow evermore distant. The single-minded pursuit of life’s fleeting satisfactions comes to rule their waking hours.

As the passages of the gospels describe it, the circumstances and stories of disciples may be considered as stages of an inner journey. Such journey is possible only if, even for short time, we can ignore the distractions from our environment. For that short period of time we, too, may become homeless. And then retracing the teachings of Jesus, and reflecting on them, we too can rediscover the spirit of God. If the events of Good Friday make you disheartened, you are noticing God’s presence in your soul. As you grow in your relationship with God’s spirit, you will grow in your relationships with your fellow human beings.

Once the disciples experienced Pentecost, they remained receptive to the teachings of their Master. The disciples weren’t distracted onto side roads by external appearances, but on the inner trails of their souls they remained firm in their faith. They prayed quietly and acted decisively. They stuck to their ideals by walking the trails of their inner journey pointed out by their teacher. The power from the conviction of their souls successfully resisted the tremendous pressure and temptations of the external world.

Until we decide to step onto those innermost trails of our own souls. All we can be is disciples in outward appearances. The spirit of God will move us, direct us, only if we frequent those innermost

trails. Only there may we gain the courage of Peter to stand up for and bear witness to God's true nature.

In our own lives, receiving the teachings of Jesus, participating in church life, and personal prayer are parts of the quiet waiting in our own upper house. That is the path to become true disciples of Jesus every day; that is the path to gain the guidance of God's spirit each day.

14. Kovács István; bishop from 2021- present; consecration sermon; based on 2 Corinthians 3:17

"Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." and Galatians 5:13 "For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love."

Our eternal God, our loving, caring dear Father!

When I stand here before You and my fellow brethren, at this uplifting celebration, my knees are trembling, and questions are swirling inside of me: Am I worthy of this? Am I suited for this tremendous task?

What strengthens me, almighty God, is that in the moments when prophets were called, similar questions, internal struggles, and self-doubts surfaced. Because everyone who sizes up the magnitude of a task they called for, will, unavoidably, feel insufficient for it, if it exceeds their capabilities. Right here, Your comforting response comes in a prayer: You don't call the ones suitable for a task, but You enable the ones You call to become Your coworkers. What a message of gladness it is that Your trusting call enables all of us to accomplish anything in every area of life; Your call in itself is a force for creation, and after that Your words are miraculous encouragement for more action. We ought to receive Your call with joy, whether we are ministers in Your service, worldly leaders, or any and all of us called by You to carry out a task that surpasses our abilities in any area of life.

I answer Your call by reciting the words of Isaiah, whose doubts turned into powerful acceptance [Is. 6:8]: "Here I am, send me," and the words of Dávid Ferenc spoken from behind prison walls: "My spirit, you possess wings; do not disavow your true self." I am reciting the rock-solid words of Márton Áron, the unbreakable bishop of Transylvania: "my Lord, if it is Your will for me to live out the example of Christ's life for the needs of my nation, who worship You from the depth of their soul, then *non recuso laborem*. I accept your will. I shall not run away from the task." To such an acceptance I add the prayer of Rákóczi Ferenc, the second: "Grant me wisdom to make decisions, a heart to start carrying them out, and the power to complete them."

Bless our congregations in Transylvania and in the mother country, all of our brethren in the Carpathian basin, and all throughout the world. Bless this celebration! Bring to life for this celebration, those who went before us, who held this cup and drank from it, as their spirits are with us here today.

Bless Your people who pray and work in the here and now. Bless those who, because of our love, will arrive into this miracle of being alive, so they dream and build Your beautiful country. Amen.

15. Jakabházi Erika; Sermon titled “Do not be indifferent” based on Luke 10: 25-37: “And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

Very few of us have gone through life without observing people who feel excluded because they are stricken by a disease, people who feel outcast because they have an illness, people who feel isolated because they have an affliction. Those of us who have been put in a situation where we felt vulnerable know all too well just what a relief is a helping hand, even an attentive ear. At the same time, whether we are healthy or sick we contemplate the question of our own demise. What will happen to us after our passing? Is there an afterlife, and what could we do to reach that afterlife? We all have found our own individual answers to these questions, but as life moves on our answers are challenged, and we are compelled to search for additional meaning. Our introductory passage from the Bible gives us renewed motivation to explore our questions, and to reexamine our human relationships.

In our Bible passage when Jesus tells the crowd of followers the story of the “Good Samaritan,” the story, the parable, is an answer to a question that comes from the crowd. From the crowd a lawyer first asks a question about what he, the lawyer, can do to “inherit eternal life.” At first he admits that he knows the law that tells him to love your God with all your devotion, and love your neighbor like yourself. But then he admits that he is not certain who his neighbors are. This lack of certainty appears to make the lawyer unsteady in his faith, so the parable of the “Good Samaritan” is Jesus’s guidance that uses an unusual setting with an unusual selection of participants, and suggests a conclusion, but never directly spells it out.

In verses 34 and 35 we learn exactly the means by which the good Samaritan assists the victim, how he is reacting to this unexpected event in his life. Verses 36 and 37 serve as a sort of reflection on the story by referring to the question of the lawyer, and then providing the answer to it. The neighbor of the victim is who was compassionate with him. The neighbor is who can become compassionate through their acts, intentions, and the demonstrations of those intentions. Verse 36 has a feel to it like Jesus is asking: What would you do? Who are you in this story? What are your intentions? Who models your being? Not answering those questions is not a choice. You have to choose whether you are a neighbor or not. So, by reflecting on a personal level, we ask ourselves if we are neighbors? Can we become neighbors?

While at the beginning we could passively listen to the story, now we are moved to action by the story. We are forced from our convenient passive position, we are moved out of our indifference. We become the message of the story: we can’t stay indifferent at the sight of human suffering, deprivation, and vulnerability. Leo Buscaglia, the American psychologist, once said that the opposite of love is not hate, but indifference and disinterest. Those we saw embodied in the behavior of the priest and the Levite.

The conclusion of verse 37, “You go and do likewise,” is a call for action for all of us. This channels the apostle James whose letter states that a faith without deeds is dead. Psychologist Eric Fromm said that because love is an action of faith, if someone has little faith, he will have little love. He also said that if love guides your way, then the destination is not important, because it’s the experience that enriches our hearts. Our parable is an expression of this action of love. The priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan

are all traveling, but it is only the Samaritan who stops to help the victim, and then he follows it by attending to him. Through his actions the Samaritan opens up a new perspective for the victim, opens up new possibilities of tomorrow. That illustrates so well the love that is predictably responsible.

It is entirely up to us which role we will play. We choose the point of view: do we see a dead person on the side of the road, or do we see a living person? And then, what do we perceive? Our choices provide the answers to the questions we asked at the start of our service. "You go and do likewise."

16. Pap Mária; sermon titled: "The Empty Hand"; based on Deut. 16: 15b, 16b, 17: "for the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all your undertakings, and you shall surely celebrate. They shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed; all shall give as they are able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God that he has given you."

The people of the 21st century express their gratitude not by sacrificing prime livestock, or by offering produce, but by the gifts of the soul that we express through our way of life and through our actions. An empty hand, with a soul filled with Spirit, would be a great way to give thanks to God.

When, sometimes, we feel that it is impossible to be thankful, it is our fault, and not God's. A few years ago I agreed to escort an American visitor group made up mostly of older individuals. Among them was a kind and cheerful lady who, as I found out, was born in the same year and month as my mother, who by then had been resting in the Nagyajta cemetery for 10 years. Right there such an envy and bitterness filled my heart, that I felt physically unwell. I brooded over the thought that if my mother wasn't born to be a Transylvanian country woman, but rather an American citizen surrounded by all that comfort, my mother might still be alive. Some time had to pass before I could see and comprehend that my mother was a gift in my life for almost seven decades, and that I ought to be thankful for God for such benevolence.

When we feel that we are missing out on God's blessings we are not looking for them where we ought to, or we are not receiving them in the manner or at the time we would wish. We expect blessings where we haven't worked for it, or, when we do receive blessings, we don't appreciate them, and we want more of it, or we want a different kind of blessing. We can be truly grateful only when we are at peace with ourselves, when we acknowledge the limits to our abilities and to our potentials, and when we don't wish for something more and bigger than our possibilities allow."

As a unitarian, my faith was passed down to me as a gift by my parents and by our ancestors. I am not alone; I belong to a community. While I have to fight my daily battles in my individual and community life to maintain my existence as a follower of the teachings of Jesus, I am thankful.

My brothers and sisters, as you just heard, we need very little to be thankful, to recognize the blessings in our lives. This is not rocket science; we just have to know and accept our abilities with their limitations. Once we accomplish that, once we accept ourselves as we are, once we recognize our Father's blessings in our lives, then we will be able to repay it. Then we will not come empty handed into the house of the Lord, as we are bringing the best of our lives, our actions, our kindness, according to our own abilities. Then it will not matter who brought what or how much, what matters is how I, a child of God, by taking advantage of my abilities, have allowed the outpouring of His blessings in my life. His

blessings are ever present in the lives of all of us, even when we are stumbling blindly and full of fear, or when we are thrashing in the web of ungratefulness and sorrow.

Gratitude can be the only outcome of such discoveries. Gratitude toward God; gratitude toward our loved ones. Gratitude for life and its incredible gifts. Gratitude for our existence, as people, as companions, as children, as parents, as pupils of Jesus. Gratitude for our daily bread, gratitude for visitors to our sickbeds, gratitude for soothing words, and gratitude for His grace.

We are grateful for the start of our denomination. While our faith origins reach all the way to that manger in Bethlehem, more pointedly we are grateful for the Edict of Torda [in 1568], as that secured for us unitarians the legal framework, so we could preach and teach the theology of “God is One,” the theology that was forbidden before the Edict.

21st century religious educators

17. Rezi Elek; Sermon titled “The Joy of Religious Freedom”, based on 1 Thes. 3:5: “For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before God.”

In 1868, 300 years after the Edict of Torda, our then bishop Kriza Janos wrote these enthusiastic lines: “Our God, The souls of our joyful people set ablaze as we walk through the memories. Some memories are nice and well, the shining letters of your spirit. Some memories are sad and instructive, the wise moves of your hand.”

It took 300 years after the Edict of Torda for our denomination to be allowed to publicly commemorate the religious freedom declared in 1568. It was only after those 300 years that we could share our souls being set ablaze, our joy of religious freedom. Today, 425 years after the Edict of Torda we came together yet again, we the people for whom the edict was so paramount. It is not surprising that we, just like our predecessors, feel that overwhelming joy, that tremendous gratefulness toward God. On this day of celebration our thoughts, feelings, and beliefs give us a joy like that felt by the Apostle Paul when he wrote his first letter to Thessalonians.

It was only after the Edict that Ferenc David could publicly state: “In the entire fine Scripture there is no more self-evident pronouncement than the pronouncement of ‘God is One.’ ” After the Edict we could state that we consider Jesus Christ the Son of God not because his conception, not because of his resurrection, but because of his teachings, his actions, and his ability to attune his living flesh to the will of the Divine. This is why we, unitarians, believe that it is more important to understand, to identify, and to fulfill the will of the Divine, rather than just express belief in dogmas or religious instructions.

After the Edict we could state the most significant message of Unitarianism is to act in our everyday lives the love of Jesus. The Edict also meant that for the formation of the Unitarian belief system we could now freely examine the truthfulness of statements from other religions, and we could freely state the results of those examinations in public, without any compromises without limits or restraints. We could also put into action our own relationship with God. No one could break that relationship, and no one could force that relationship on anyone.

Our spiritual convictions triumphed over any title and rank. In other words, we now had the choice to accept a religious argument based on our personal conviction anchored in our intellect and in current thoughts, and not because the argument forced on us or widely popularized.

It was that Edict that directed us not only to be tolerant, but to be accepting of other faiths and world views. We could act on the call of Jesus for universal kindness in John 13:35: “By this shall all know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another”.

The Edict of Torda was the result of the tireless work of Ferenc David and the wisdom of John Sigismund. Today the Edict is considered a masterpiece of Transylvanian, Hungarian, and even European civic culture.

18. Kovács Sándor; Sermon title: “On the Way There” based on Ezekiel 36:24-28.

I tried to picture in my mind how the prophet might have felt as he, together with Judea’s political leaders, was exiled to Babylon. He was personally experiencing the miserable existence of people moved away from their compatriots and forced to become a minority. In the minds of the exiled the thought of returning home stayed alive for a while, but then, years later, they could only cry on the banks of the river Kebar as they lamented the fate of Jerusalem (as we can read in Ps. 137).

On the way between Torda and Kolozsvár, I began to enumerate just how many times Hungarians and our Unitarian church have lived the story of the Babylonian exile. When I was still in Torda, I was so excited about the deeds of our ancestors 450 years ago. Then the prophet reminded me that we were scattered into the four corners of the world, and how we are currently experiencing life as a minority, an unprotected minority at that. How unfortunate we are, I sighed, that we are a minority by our nationality, and also by our religion, and that we are so scattered. What a bitter turn of fate is ours that we now have to abide by the decisions of the majority. We have to endure the dispersion of our compatriots, and we have to exist as prisoners of the majority culture. I was ready to continue grieving over all that, as we, Hungarians, are given to grieving so easily. By the time I was driving near Felek, I was about to lament the fate of Torda, our Jerusalem. However, my thought took flight further upward, and I suddenly realized that we don’t have to lament our own Jerusalem, because that is the site that marks our sacrifices, the site that marks our triumphs, the site that represents God’s loving and caring relation to us. I felt it deep in my bones that God has cared for us in the past, and his caring continues through the present.

God is our witness just how many times our churches have been taken from us, how many times our people have been decimated. It’s a miracle we still exist. Not only we exist, but we gather to celebrate under the banner of religious freedom and Christian unity. I love to see every member of my extended family gather around the dinner table at bigger celebrations. When I’m with you here, I feel that I’m sitting down to a huge, richly set table with my faith brothers. We wash hands before sitting down to the dinner table, and our benevolent God cleanses us once we are gathered. “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean” said the prophet Ezekiel (Ez. 36:25). Let’s leave it to the scholars of the Old Testament whether this passage is a prophetic vision of Christianity or a reference to a Jewish ritual (I happen to believe it’s the latter). As God has gathered us and cleansed our thoughts, He has washed

away prejudices and toppled false idols. One such false idol, especially for us ministers, is the visible parts of our church and our establishments. So many times, we commit the mistake of worshipping our institution, when worship is due only for the one behind and above those institutions. And I don't mean the church deans or our bishop, but our God. I'm truly proud that 450 years ago at Torda the noble ideal of religious freedom was decreed and was made into law the first time ever, thanks to chaperoning by our church founder. So, it makes sense that the fact that Torda still stands, and Hungarians still exist even after a series of unfortunate and adverse events, are not our glorious achievement, but it is God's. It is the sign of God's providence that He rather considers our deeds, than the number of our church buildings or the statistics on our parishioners. The sign of God's mercy is that He dispenses salvation rather out of his endless love, than based on our national identity, or on our denomination.