

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.

Introduction.

Antitrinitarian writings have been known since the 3rd century, however, organized religious institutions (characterized by the existence of a combination of churches, educational institutions, leadership hierarchy, bylaws) representing antitrinitarian faith have not been established until the 16th century. Religious organizations are an important milestone in the history of Christian denominations, because they represent a level of standing in society that creates and maintains a long-lasting, significant religious and cultural footprint.

The oldest continually operating antitrinitarian religious organization is the Transylvanian Unitarian Church (later changed the name to Hungarian Unitarian Church) founded in 1568 in Kolozsvár (current name Cluj-Napoca) in the Principality of Transylvania, currently located in the country of Romania. It is beyond the scope of this presentation to describe the theological, political and geographical circumstances around the founding the Transylvanian Unitarian Church; such information is somewhat briefly summarized in books in English by Wilbur¹, and by Williams². On the other hand, very detailed and focused sets of descriptions of church history are available in Hungarian: I mention only two here Kénosi³, and Kovács⁴.

Historic periods of the Transylvanian Unitarian Church.

It is beneficial for a better understanding of the rest of this presentation if we sketch out the historic periods in the existence of the Transylvanian Unitarian Church.

¹ Earl Morse Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism in Transylvania, England and America*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1952)

² George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation*. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962)

³ Kénosi Tőzsér János, Uzoni Fosztó István, *Az Erdélyi Unitárius Egyház Története. Volumes I-III*. (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Unitárius Egyház, 2009)

⁴ Kovács Sándor, *Lapozgató; az unitáriusok rövid története*. (Budapest-Kolozsvár: Magyar Unitárius Egyház Magyarországi Egyházkerülete - Kolozsvári Protestáns Teológiai Intézet , 2021)

1. Establishing identity, founding the church in 1568, early defense of antitrinitarian faith articles against Calvinist and Catholic attacks: 1566-1579
2. Maintaining stability, and integrity in the face of counter-reformation: 1579-1636
3. Compromised existence during religious and economic oppression: 1636-1861
4. Beginning of tolerance of non-catholics, and subsequent rebuilding as religious minority: 1861-1941
5. Oppression by nationalism and communism in Romania: 1941-1989
6. Rebuilding as religious, cultural, and linguistic minority in Romania: 1989-present

Organizational aspects of the Hungarian Unitarian Church

The Hungarian Unitarian Church is a state-recognized religious organization both in Romania and in Hungary. The church is led by an elected bishop (currently Kovács István), and a group of lay elders. Headquarter offices are located in Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca) in Romania. The 126 churches in Romania are organized into six districts, and the 10 churches in Hungary are organized into one district.

Barriers that prevent the spreading of Transylvanian Unitarianism.

Development of the antitrinitarian faith articles and positions on Christology, biblicism, catechism, happened in the first period by the founder, and first bishop, Dávid Ferencz. The interpretation of those faith articles and positions, as well as their application in weekly sermons happened during the second period by the third bishop, the "Unitarian Plato", Enyedi György.

Source materials of these periods were written in the Latin and Hungarian languages. Very few Latin language writings have made it to Germany and the Netherlands, but they didn't make an impact in the 1560s. In later periods the Transylvanian unitarian Church was forbidden to maintain its own printing press, so very few writings were printed, and almost none of them reached Western Europe. The exceptions from this is the Latin language book by Enyedi György⁵ that not only reached the Netherlands, but it was reprinted there (Amsterdam) in 1669.

A few decades later (from around 1650s), a large volume of antitrinitarian/socinian writings became available from Poland, because the printing by the Polish Brethren wasn't forbidden by the Polish State Assembly until 1658. Because of the widespread

⁵ Enyedi György, Explicationes locorum Veteris & Novi Testamenti, ex quibus Trinitatis dogma stabiliri solet. (Kolozsvár: 1598)

distribution of printed material, the Socinian version of antitrinitarianism gained more stable foothold in Western Europe.

By the 18th and most of the 19th century the prohibition of printing for Transylvanian Unitarian Church, the uncompensated confiscation of church property, and the forced catholicizations had weakened the church, and made it invisible in the rest of Europe and the rest of the world. The oppressed, impoverished, and isolated Transylvanian Unitarian Church fell into obscurity to the rest of the world. During those centuries the Transylvanian Unitarian theologians, bishops, and ministers continued to write, their works accumulated in hand-written manuscript format stored in church libraries in Transylvania, but not as printed material that could be transported for translation to Western Europe.

The strong Catholic oppression moderated in 1860, and printing privileges were restored to the church. The Transylvanian Unitarian Church began to emerge from its isolation. The effort of the church was directed towards rebuilding on the meager material and financial remnants of the once powerful church. In England and in the United States knowledge about the Transylvanian Unitarian religion was gathered from English translations of Hungarian language summaries written by church officials and theologians. An example of this is the Transylvanian Unitarian traveler who visited England and the United States, where the local Unitarians were surprised to find out about the existence of the Transylvanian faith brothers. However, even leading up to 2022, the original source materials including detailed explanations of theological thoughts, religious disputations, and sermons have rarely been translated into English.

The Unitarian Torch (unitariantorch.com) web site:

It is the opinion of this writer, that the lack of availability of Transylvanian Unitarian source materials in the English language hides the subtlety of the theological underpinnings, the beauty of the original thinking, the fervor and enthusiasm expressed by Transylvanian Unitarians, the diversity of view within the church, and the efforts to educate the faithful. A few years ago, I decided to make an effort to bring to the English-speaking audience the points of view of Transylvanian Unitarians by translating sermons written in Transylvania from Hungarian to English.

I was born and raised in Hungary, so I'm fluent in Hungarian. I've been in the United States for 40 years and speak fluent English. I keep up a cultural and linguistic connection with Hungary and Transylvania through reading Hungarian language books and newspapers, and through visits and communication with relatives and friends there.

From 1995 through 2014 I was a member of Unitarian churches in the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). The UUA initiated a partner church program between

American and Transylvanian Unitarian churches. I served as a translator on those church committees, and visited partner churches in Transylvania on several occasion.

I started translating Transylvanian Unitarian sermons in 2017, when I moved, and my new church (First Unitarian Church, Alton, IL) needed material for the lay-led portion of our services. In 2018 I decided to share the translations in an organized framework, so I created the Unitarian Torch website (unitariantorch.com).

The process of translation includes 7 consecutive layers of proofreadings and corrections. Among the layers is a copyediting step by a US native, English-speaking copyeditor who has extensive religious linguistic experience as a Christian minister. This process provides a level of scrutiny that resulted in sufficient accuracy and English language acceptance, as evidenced by the print publications in an editor-supervised, English language religious journal.

The site currently has 33 full text sermon translations. The date range of the original sermon source material covers the time span from 1594 through 2022. The authors include the “historic greats” of Transylvanian Unitarians, as well as contemporary sermons from bishops and ministers. I wanted to give voice to ministers who visited the United States as part of the Partner Church Program of the UUA. I also translated sermons from Transylvanian Unitarian ministers who were imprisoned in labor camps in Romania for expressing their faith during the communist rule in Romania. The distribution of the translated material among historical periods is given in the following segment.

Contribution from Unitarian Torch to the landscape of translated source materials.

Below I will detail the translations of Transylvanian Unitarian source materials to English. I will use the previously listed historical periods to compare the amount of source material to published English translations, and to translations available on Unitarian Torch (unitariantorch.com).

1. Establishing identity, founding the church, early defense of antitrinitarian faith articles: 1566-1579

Source materials in Hungarian: From the 37 theological theses and defense writings by the founder, and first bishop, Dávid Ferencz only three had been transcribed into

modern Hungarian⁶. 27 of the theological works are in 16th century print format; the rest of the theological works and all the sermons are in handwritten manuscript format.

There are 60 sermons of Dávid Ferencz (not yet published in print), of which a few were selectively analyzed by Gellérd Imre⁷.

There are two transcripts of religious disputations available; one disputation was in the city of Nagyvárád⁸, and the other was in the city of Pécs⁹.

Published English translations : Theological works: Full text of Dávid Ferencz: Rövid magyarazat; and Rövid utmutatas translated by Gazdag Árpád¹⁰. The 37 theses and defenses by Dávid Ferencz are listed and briefly summarized in the English language book by Balázs Mihály¹¹.

Religious disputations: A brief excerpt (a little more than 1 page out of 178 pages) from Disputation of Nagyvárád was translated and published in The Epic of Unitarianism¹².

Sermons: Out of the 60 sermons of Dávid Ferencz, a few were selectively analyzed by Gellérd Imre in English¹³.

English translations at Unitarian Torch (unitariantorch.com): No translations from this period.

2. Maintaining stability, and integrity in the face of counter-reformation: 1579-1636

Source materials in Hungarian: A digitized version of the full text of the main theological work ("Explicationes" in Latin) of the third bishop, Enyedi György, is available¹⁴. Two

⁶ Dávid Ferencz: *Rövid útmutatás*. (Kolozsvár: Magyar Unitárius Egyház, 1984); Dávid Ferencz: *Rövid magyarazat*. (Kolozsvár: Ellenzék Nyomda, 1910); Dávid Ferencz: *Két könyv az Egyedülvaló Atyaistennek, a Fiú- nak és a Szentléleknek hamis és igaz ismeretéről*. (Kolozsvár: Magyar Unitárius Egyház, 2002)

⁷ Gellérd Imre: *Négyszáz év unitárius prédikációirodalma*. (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Unitárius Egyház 2002)

⁸ *A Nagyváradi Disputatio*. (Kolozsvár: Stein János Kiado, 1870)

⁹ Válaszúti György: *Pécsi Disputa*. (Budapest, Akadémiai Kiado, 1981)

¹⁰ Gazdag Árpád: *Francis David, A Servant of the Crucified Jesus Christ*, Kindle Edition 2011

¹¹ Mihály Balázs: *Ferenc David*, in *Ungerlandische Antitritinarianer*, IV, (Valentin Koerner: Baden-Baden und Buxwiller, 2008)

¹² David B Parke: *The Epic of Unitarianism*. (Skinner House Books, Boston, 1985. p. 20-22)

¹³ Imre Gellérd: *A History of Transylvanian Unitarianism through Four Centuries of Sermons*. (Kolozsvár: Unitarian Printing House, 1999.p. 16-33)

¹⁴ Enyedi György: *Az ó es vy teastamentvm-beli helyeknek, melyekből az Háromsagról való tudománt szokták állatni, magyarazattyok*. (Kolozsvár: 1610)

shorter theological works, “Brief answers”¹⁵ and “Brief discussion”¹⁶, of Enyedi György are available in print.

A large number of Enyedi György’s sermons survived, and 213 sermons have been transcribed into modern Hungarian in a work of 3 volumes¹⁷.

Published English translations. No full text English translations of theological texts or sermons have been published from this period. Out of the 213 sermons a few were partially translated and analyzed by Gellérd Imre¹⁸.

English translations at Unitarian Torch (unitariantorch.com): The sermons of Enyedi György are called Concios in this body of literature. Full translations¹⁹ of Concio CXV, Concio, XCIV, Concio CXCII, Concio CXCI, and Concio CXCV are on the web site. Two Concios from this list were accepted for print publication, and were published in the Journal of Unitarian and Universalist History²⁰.

3. Compromised existence during religious and economic oppression: 1636-1861

Source materials in Hungarian: An over 400 page long theological work that collected the biblical, Christological aspect of the Unitarian religion was written in 1736²¹. That work remains, even after almost three centuries, the most comprehensive theological treatment of the Transylvanian Unitarian faith articles. Collections of sermons in hand-written format from 33 ministers have been described by Gellérd Imre²².

Published English translations. No full text English translations of theological texts or sermons have been published from this period. Out of the sermon collections of the, a few sermons were partially translated and analyzed by Gellérd Imre²³.

¹⁵ Rövid válasz, in *Enyedi György válogatott művei*. (Bukarest – Kolozsvár: Kriterion, 1997. P 38-54)

¹⁶ Rövid Értekezés, in *Enyedi György válogatott művei*. (Bukarest – Kolozsvár: Kriterion, 1997. P 55-70)

¹⁷ Lovas Borbála. *Enyedi György prédikációi, Volumes 1, 2, and 3*. (Budapest: MTA-HECE és Magyar Unitárius Egyház, 2017-2019)

¹⁸ Gellérd Imre: *Négyszáz év unitárius prédikációirodalma*. (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Unitárius Egyház 2002. P 53-62).

¹⁹ Unitariantorch.com. Translated Sermon #19, #21, #27, #28, #30.

²⁰ Concio CXCII and Concio CXCI; Sermons from 1597 by György Enyedi, third bishop of the Transylvanian Unitarian Church. Translated by Robert Kokenyesi and Lovas Borbála. Journal of Unitarian and Universalist History, 2021, Volume XLIV, p. 94-114.

²¹ Szentábrahádi Lombárd Mihály. *A Keresztény Hittudomány Összege az Unitáriusok Szerint*. (Gaman J. Printing House, Kolozsvár, 1899)

²² Gellérd Imre: *Négyszáz év unitárius prédikációirodalma*. (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Unitárius Egyház 2002. P 63-284)

²³ Imre Gellérd, *A History of Transylvanian Unitarianism through Four Centuries of Sermons*. (Kolozsvár: Unitarian Printing House, 1999. P. 89-195)

English translations at Unitarian Torch (unitariantorch.com): The translation of a funeral sermon²⁴ preached by Szentábrahádi Lombárd Mihály, over the casket of a Unitarian Councilor, is on the web site. That is the only sermon that is survived from that particular bishop.

4. Beginning of tolerance towards non-catholics, and subsequent rebuilding: 1861-1941

Source materials in Hungarian: Bishop Ferencz József edited and published a Catechism in 1867²⁵. Collections of sermons from 15 ministers are described and partially analyzed by Gellérd Imre²⁶. A commemorative collection of sermons was published on the occasion of the 1000th anniversary of the founding of the Kingdom of Hungary²⁷. Sermons were published in Hungarian in the Keresztény Magvető (Christian Sower) starting in 1861.

Published English translations. The full text of the Catechism has been translated to English²⁸. Out of the sermon collections of the, a few sermons were partially translated and analyzed by Gellérd Imre²⁹.

English translations at Unitarian Torch (unitariantorch.com): Full translations of one sermon from Kriza János³⁰, and one from Ferencz József³¹ are on the web site.

5. Oppression by nationalism and communism in Romania: 1941-1989

Source material in Hungarian: Theological writings of Bishop Erdő János were published³². Hundreds of sermons were published in Hungarian in the journal Keresztény Magvető (Christian Sower).

²⁴ Unitariantorch.com; Translated Sermon #31.

²⁵ Ferencz József. *Unitárius káté tekintettel a konfirmációi vallástanításra.* (Kolozsvár: Stein János Kiado, 1870)

²⁶ Gellérd Imre: *Négyszáz év unitárius prédikációirodalma.* (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Unitárius Egyház 2002. P 316-419)

²⁷ Az Unitárius Szószék. *Egyházi Beszédgyűjtemény Magyarország Ezeréves Fennállásának Emlékére.* (Sepsiszentgyörgy: Jokai Nyomda, 1896)

²⁸ In: Rezi Elek. *Hisszük és Valljuk. Az Unitárius Káte Magyarázata.* (Kolozsvár: Kolozsvári Protestáns Teológiai Intezet. 2008, p. 245-273)

²⁹ Imre Gellérd, *A History of Transylvanian Unitarianism through Four Centuries of Sermons.* (Kolozsvár: Unitarian Printing House, 1999. P. 227-300)

³⁰ Unitariantorch.com; Translated Sermon #6.

³¹ Unitariantorch.com; Translated Sermon #24.

³² Erdő János. *Teológiai Tanulmányok.* (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Unitárius Egyház 1986)

Published English translations. There are no English translations of full length theological texts or full length sermons from this period.

English translations at Unitarian Torch (unitariantorch.com): Full translations of one sermon from each author are available on the web site: Gellérd Imre³³, Nyitrai Berta³⁴, Szabó Árpád³⁵, and Szabó Dezső³⁶.

6. Rebuilding as religious, cultural and linguistic minority in Romania: 1990-present

Source material in Hungarian: Theological writings of Bishop Varga Béla were published³⁷. In addition, contemporary theological writings of contemporary theologians are also being published in the Keresztény Magvető (Christian Sower).

A separately published collection of sermons from 18 ministers was published³⁸. Hundreds of sermons were published in Hungarian in the Keresztény Magvető (Christian Sower). Over forty sermons were published throughout several years in the Central and Eastern European Online Library (CEEOL).

Published English translations: The full text of one sermon was published in a booklet celebrating the 425th anniversary of the Transylvanian Unitarian Church³⁹.

English translations at Unitarian Torch (unitariantorch.com): Full translations of one sermon from each author are available on the web site: Jakabházi Erika⁴⁰, Rezi Elek⁴¹, Bálint Benczédi Ferenc⁴², Gyerő Dávid⁴³, Sándor Szilárd⁴⁴, Pap Gy. László⁴⁵, Koppándi Botond⁴⁶, Szabó Előd⁴⁷, Kovács Sándor⁴⁸, Jakabházi Béla⁴⁹, Czire Szabolcs⁵⁰, Simén

³³ Unitariantorch.com; Translated Sermon #9

³⁴ Unitariantorch.com; Translated Sermon #20

³⁵ Unitariantorch.com; Translated Sermon #22

³⁶ Unitariantorch.com; Translated Sermon #26

³⁷ Varga Béla *Válogatott Hittani Művei*, in Teológiai Füzetek 4. (Budapest: Cerberus Kft. 1996)

³⁸ Vallomások Magunkról. Székelyudvarhely: Infopress. 1997

³⁹ Judit Gellérd, *In Storm, Even the Trees Lean on Each Other*. (Chico: Center for Free Religion. 1993)

⁴⁰ Unitariantorch.com; Translated Sermon #1

⁴¹ Unitariantorch.com; Translated Sermon #2

⁴² Unitariantorch.com; Translated Sermon #3

⁴³ Unitariantorch.com; Translated Sermon #4

⁴⁴ Unitariantorch.com; Translated Sermon #5

⁴⁵ Unitariantorch.com; Translated Sermon #7

⁴⁶ Unitariantorch.com; Translated Sermon #8

⁴⁷ Unitariantorch.com; Translated Sermon #10

⁴⁸ Unitariantorch.com; Translated Sermon #11

⁴⁹ Unitariantorch.com; Translated Sermon #12

⁵⁰ Unitariantorch.com; Translated Sermon #13

Dániel⁵¹, Pap Mária⁵², Bálint Róbert⁵³, Szekely Kinga⁵⁴, Nyitrai Mózes⁵⁵, Simén Domokos⁵⁶, Tódor Csaba⁵⁷, Mezei Csaba⁵⁸, Lázár Levente⁵⁹, Kovács István⁶⁰

Future possibilities for translations:

There are plenty of theological writings, religious disputes, and sermons to translate from the six periods I outlined above. New theological writings may become available from any of the periods, because there are actively working research groups who systematically, albeit slowly, transcribe from old and new handwritten sources.

In addition, new sermons, and new, contemporary, theological works are being published in Hungarian in the Keresztény Magvető (Christian Sower), in the Central and Eastern European Online Library, and in Unitarius Közlöny (Unitarian Herald)

⁵¹ Unitariantorch.com; Translated Sermon #14

⁵² Unitariantorch.com; Translated Sermon #15

⁵³ Unitariantorch.com; Translated Sermon #16

⁵⁴ Unitariantorch.com; Translated Sermon #17

⁵⁵ Unitariantorch.com; Translated Sermon #18

⁵⁶ Unitariantorch.com; Translated Sermon #23

⁵⁷ Unitariantorch.com; Translated Sermon #25

⁵⁸ Unitariantorch.com; Translated Sermon #29

⁵⁹ Unitariantorch.com; Translated Sermon #32

⁶⁰ Unitariantorch.com; Translated Sermon #33

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