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*Sermon, Exegesis and Protestant Tradition:
Unitarian Commentaries on Apocalypse in Transylvania
(16th–18th Century)*

Theses of doctoral dissertation

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The matter and aims of the study

The dissertation focuses on antitrinitarian commentaries on Apocalypse from the 16th until 18th century, which were written in Transylvania or were alliable somehow to the Principality. There are two main aims of the study: (1) firstly to find new texts through the investigations in archives, in the Main Archive of the Hungarian Unitarian Church in Cluj-Napoca, in the Biblioteca Academiei Române – Filiala Cluj-Napoca, and in the Teleki Téka in Târgu Mureş; (2) secondly, to investigate the discovered commentaries from different perspectives. In the focus of the text-analysis (a) there are Unitarian exegetical methods and results relevant to the Book of Revelation, with special attention to their modern considerations, which can foreshadow the historical-critical interpretations. The dissertation examines how the Transylvanian Unitarians, who were really interested in biblical philology, could connect to the European developments between the 16th and 18th century, how they could attain to the first line of the European bible-critics and what they could preserve from these results at the end of the 18th century. Along the research of the Unitarian texts on Apocalypse we can estimate the size of their absolute position-losing. (b) Besides, it is important to take the Unitarian developments in the context of the Hungarian and European tradition of the interpretation about the Apocalypse and to emphasize the similarities and also the differences. (c) The genre of these Unitarian commentaries is sermon, so this study can assist the Unitarian sermon research through the rhetorical, stylistic and genre analysis of the texts.

In addition to these specific points of the investigation, the dissertation intends to give a general picture of the antitrinitarian concepts on the Book of Revelation through the centuries. The investigation rests on the following texts: Pál Karádi, *Az Szent János mennyei Jelenésekről való látásának magyarázása...* (1580); Miklós Bogáti Fazakas, *Apokalipszis-kommentár* (1589–90); a Polish Socinian Andreas Voidovius, *Brevis dissertatio...* (print, 1625), a Dutch Collegiant Daniel de Breen, *Explicatio locorum...* (print, 1644); a sermon-cycle from the 17th under the title *Conciones vetustae ex Apocalypsi*; the sermon book of Jakab Ajtai Kovács from 1716, which contains a commentary on the Book of Daniel; István Uzoni Fosztó, *Jelentése a Jézus Krisztusnak...* in two volumes (1765–66) and György Derzsi Varga, *A Szent Jánosnak mennyei látásának... magyarázása* (1776), which is a supplementation of István Dersi Gergely's intermitted Commentary on Apocalypse (ca. 1750); and József Gejza, *Nostra cogitationes...* (1771–1779).

The structure and results of the study

The first chapter establishes the text analyses and gives overview about the connections between the biblical philology and humanist text-criticism of the 16th century and different approaches to the Book of Revelation. It sums up how the Transylvanian Unitarians used the new results of the bible criticism, which was born by the works of Jacques Lefèvre, and by Erasmus' *Annotationes*. The letter of the humanist, András Dudith sympathising with the Antitrinitarians and *De veritate narrationis Novae Sacrae Scripturae...* of Jacobus Palaeologus, the founder of the nonadorantist Christology, show that the Unitarians questioned the inspired and sacral nature of several biblical books at the end of the 1570s. This development is related to the great plan of the Unitarian Bible translation by Palaeologus, Johann Sommer and the Sabbatian Matthias Vehe-Glirius. In the context of this project Adam Neuser, converted to Islam, searched for ancient texts of the New Testament in Constantinople, then gave a new Greek codex to Palaeologus in 1573. This document confirmed the Unitarian interpretation on Jn 1,1, where they preferred the "God had the Word" genitive form, which conception was based on Rev 19,13. The connection of these *loci* appears in the Unitarian works in Transylvania and also in Hungary, such as the *Nagyváradi komédia* (1573), the *Pécsi disputa*, and the Commentary on Apocalypse of Palaeologus and Bogáti Fazakas. However, Karádi did not refer to the new Greek text in his similar interpretation, as Palaeologus. It is vital that these modern developments of the Antitrinitarians received international attention only in unique cases because as a result of the Principality's censures and bans, they were composed and circulated only in manuscripts from the 1570s. Thereby the international studies give a false picture when they review the role of the Unitarian works in the developments of the early Enlightenment's historical-critical exegesis and emphasize only the role of Fausto Sozzini's *De auctoritate Sacrae Scripturae* (1588), which furthermore was based on András Dudith's rationalist considerations.

The second part of this chapter shows how Erasmus' negative approach to the Apocalypse lost its validity and how the canonical status of the Book of Revelation strengthened in the considerations of Luther and the Calvinists in Zürich and Geneva. However, among the Unitarians there was no debate about the status of the Apocalypse, but they became divided in the question of the author and in the direction of interpretation. Sozzini claims that the Apocalypse is an obscure prophetic text. But Matthias Vehe-Glirius recognises it as the most valuable text of the New Testament, which is perfectly clear by the books of Moses and he emphasizes the chiliastic interpretation of it. His views appear in the works of Benedek Óvári

and Pál Karádi. Karádi claims to the high esteem of the Apocalypse by its parallel with the revelation of mosaic laws. According to him, the author is Saint John apostle and the text is about the history of the church until the Judgement. However, Palaeologus and Bogáti Fazakas argue on the authorship of John Mark, and claim that a huge part of the book was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem. According to the references of Bogáti Fazakas and Karádi, they knew about the debates in the Reformation era.

The second chapter focuses on the analysis of Pál Karádi's Commentary, which was preserved by two hand-written copies: György Papolci wrote it down between 1640 and 1647, and Péter Kovásznai copied the text between 1641 and 1645. In the investigation, I used the copy of Kovásznai, which is located in the Main Archive of the Hungarian Unitarian Church in Cluj-Napoca. In the analysis I took into consideration the explanation of Bogáti Fazakas, the Calvinist tradition of interpretation from Zürich and Geneva and the Hungarian Calvinist superintendent, Péter Melius Juhász's *Az Szent Ianosnac toett ielenesnac... magyarázasa...* (1566–68).

Karádi followed the exegetical method of the Reformation with the preference for the *sensus litteralis*. The peculiarity of his exegetical method is the simultaneous use of the spiritual and literal meaning. Its main purpose is to avoid the arbitrary allegorisation. In order to achieve this, he tries to bind the spiritual sense to the letter: with the criteria of similarity based on physical characteristics and alignment with the times and with the events of history. He called this construction a "historical allegory". At the same time, Karádi imposes a cyclical approach to history on the historical allegory, which means that the prophesized events can recur in different times with more progress and fulfilment. It expands the possibilities of application and allows Karádi to connect to other models of interpretation, such as the explanation of Melius Juhász and Bogáti Fazakas. On the other hand, this exegetical construction requires a historical reading of the Bible, which leads to the historical-critical considerations of forthcoming ages. Among the Hungarian protestant commentators, Karádi was the first, who identified the little horn in the Book of Daniel with Antiochus Epiphanes, based on the hermeneutical turn by John Calvin. The cyclical approach to history plays an important role in his reduced eschatology, meaning the end of the times had already begun, but its fulfilment is not immediate. Karádi's eschatology also differed from the tradition of Antitrinitarians, who celebrated their ideas as the perfect fulfilment of the Reformation. In Karádi's work the progress of the fulfilment is continuous: God preaches his doctrine again in a pure way and it will gleam even more plainly in the future. So his commentary on Apocalypse also has an eschatological importance.

The exegetical method of Karádi opened the way to other models of interpretation. He used not only the Unitarian works, such as Servet's *Restitutio Christianismi...* or Veheglirius's *Mattanjah*, but he also utilized Heinrich Bullinger *In Apocalpsim... Conciones centum* (1557). Karádi's explanation has further parallels with the work of Melius Juhász and the commentaries of Zürich and Genf in the interpretation of the important role of preachers and preaching of the word of God or in the explanation of the Woman and the child in the Rev 12: meaning the image of the child refers to all the believers, who are given birth continuously by the church. The ideas of Karádi can be best understood within Antoine du Pinet's interpretative framework, the *Familie et brieve expositio sur l'Apocalypse...* (1539, 1543), which makes use of works by Sebastian Meyer and François Lambert.

In the third chapter I take a look at two works, which were printed in Kolozsvár according to the Unitarian bibliographies. On the title page of the *Brevis dissertatio...* (1625, RMK II, 436) written by the Socinian Andreas Voidovius, the "Claudipoli" is a false place of the printing, because neither the type of the letters nor the tail-piece correspond to the works by Heltai's printing-house. Furthermore, there is no data about the reception of this print in Transylvania. However, a short review of the *Brevis dissertatio...* is required, because it explains the Rev 13. and 17. similar to the Lutheran interpretation model and it enriches the reticent Socinian commentaries and tinges the exegetical method of Karádi. Voidovius' explanation is based on Livius' *The History of Rome*, so his historical reading of the Book of Revelation is more strict. Voidovius makes a more subtle differentiation in the identification of the images with people and events. The work has a radical place among the Unitarian commentaries, because it prophesied the fall of the Antichrist in ca. 1630.

The chiliast *Explicatio locorum...* (1644), written by the Dutch Collegiant Daniel de Breen, is reviewed by the *History of the Unitarian Church*, written by János Kénosi Tözsér and István Uzoni Fosztó in the 18th century. Although, it was not printed in Kolozsvár, because it was published as an appendix of De Breen's *Amica disputatio adversus Judaeos...*. This work, aiming to convert the Jews, had major reception among the Unitarians. Today there is one print in the Biblioteca Academiei Române – Filiala Cluj-Napoca, which was possessed by Uzoni Fosztó and there is another one, which was bound in a hand-written codex under the press-mark of Ms. U. 1971, which contains Remonstrant and Collegiant works. Albeit there is no data about the effects of De Breen's work. It is interesting that the author of the *History of Unitarian Church* could imagine that this chiliast work, which aims the conversion of Jews would have been printed in Kolozsvár after six years of the Accord of Dézs.

The fourth chapter offers a comprehensive analysis of a newly discovered text corpus from the 17th century and establishes the context of its ideas, theology and genre. This *Conciones vetustae ex Apocalypsi* is available in the Biblioteca Academiei Române – Filiala Cluj-Napoca under Ms. U. 732. notation. The work without author is a sermon cycle in Hungarian, which explains allegorically the description of the new Jerusalem in Rev 22,1–2. From several aspects the *Conciones vetustae...* is appraisable as a meeting-point of traditions. First of all, the allegorical interpretation of new Jerusalem distances itself from the Anabaptist tendencies, which pervaded in the beginning of the Antitrinitarianism and took an important role in the utopian experiment in Raków (1569–1571), but the work distances itself from the chiliastic ideas of Dávid Ferenc's *Rövid magyarázat* (1570) and from the chiliastic ideas of the works of Matthias Vehe-Glirius, Pál Karádi and Benedek Óvári. According to the sermons the new Jerusalem is the true church, which embodies the heathens, the river of life is the evangel, and its well-spring is God. The tree, which is nourished by the river, refers to the pious life, which produces twelve fruits. In spite of the Unitarian emphasis on the *sensus litteralis* in the 16th century, the sermons use the allegorical exegetical method of Sozzini, however its results are similar to the interpretation of the nonadorant Palaeologus and Bogáti Fazakas, according to whom the new Jerusalem is a spiritual, celestial city.

Secondly, the sermons show openness between the Socinian and nonadorantist ideas about the invocation and adoration of Christ. The considerations about the new creation, the might and rule of God and his throne are similar to the views of Lelio and Fausto Sozzini and parallel with the Hungarian translations of several polish Socinian works, which were printed in Kolozsvár in the 1630's, such as the translation of Johann Crell's *Ad librum Hugonis Grotii*, which was published as an appendix of the *Az háromságnak oltalmazására gondolt legfőbb okoskodásnak megvizsgálása* (1634); or such as the translation of Valentin Schmalz's *Kurtze Auslegung...* under the title *Az Szent János evangéliuma kezdetinek rövid magyarázatja...* (1636). Despite of the presented Socinian considerations, the sermons keep silence about the adoration of Christ and in their ending formula they invoke only God, which is an absolutely nonadorant feature. These sermons probably were spoken to a theologically mixed ecclesia, where they had to maintain continuous openness, after all the *Conciones vetustae...* focuses on the exhortation to pious life and not on Christological questions. All of it fits to the situation of the church history, which is depicted by the new researches, that we can imagine the Unitarianism as a colourful coexistence of the Socinian and nonadorantist tendencies in the first half of the 17th century.

Thirdly, the aim of the allegorical composition, as an exhortation to godly life, connects the sermon cycle to the genre of pious reading. This connection is well-illustrated by the structural parallels and features of genre of the *Hét prédikációk az örök életről* (1612), written by the Lutheran János Mihálykó, and the *Mennyei szó a lelki álomból való felserkenésről* (1652), written by the Calvinist, János Enyedi Fazakas. Correspondence with the genre of pious reading is also confirmed by the rhetorical analysis of the sermons, in which the rhetorical aim of the *movere* predominates, just as in the catholic rhetorical system. The establishment of the piety is promoted by the long *exempla*. The story of Francesco Spira in the 9. concio fits into the scheme of its Hungarian reception, which emphasizes the features of the *ars moriendi* of the story.

The fifth chapter begins the analysis of the commentaries from the 18th century also with a new sermon book, which contains the first Unitarian commentary on the Book of Daniel. The document is located in the Biblioteca Academiei Române – Filiala Cluj-Napoca under the Ms. U. 288. notion. The author, Jakab Ajtai Kovács, was a minister, consistor and scrivener in Bágyon. He began to write his sermon book in 1716. The 17–23. sermons explain the Book of Daniel, similar to the historical approach of Wittenberg. Their main message is that only God rules over the world and determines the history. However, Ajtai Kovács's conception lacks the traditional parallel between the Jews and the Hungarians (which is presented by more Unitarian sermon books from the 17th century), and the sermons do not denote the Antichrist. They emphasize only the determined history and the *topos* of sin–punishment. Other sermons refer to the natural disasters (dryness, fire and deficiency of crop) and the attack of the counter reformation against the Unitarian Church, which became really aggressive from 1716, when the Catholics expropriated the Unitarian temple in the market-place in Kolozsvár together with the Unitarian school and rolled back the Unitarian in the political life. This apocalyptic background contextualises the 2–6. sermons against the Catholics, which focus on the true Unitarian faith, the questions of the Trinity, martyrdom and apostasy. The 2nd, 3rd, and 4th sermons have long parts of the texts, which polemize with the Catholics, but these texts were stemmed from the *Mártírok koronája* (1675), written by the Calvinist István Szőnyi Nagy. So Ajtai Kovács took chapter long passages literally from this Calvinist work, which reflects on the events of the Catholic oppression against the Calvinist Church in Hungary. The borrowing shows the inter-confessional features of the Hungarian puritan concept of martyrdom which is based on similar historical situations. However, the sermons of Ajtai Kovács differentiate themselves from the work of Szőnyi Nagy with their apologetic speech. The Calvinist works became increasingly introvertish under the catholic oppression,

but Ajtai Kovács always identifies the true faith with the Unitarian religion and amplifies his dogmatic thesis as catechism. In these sermons we can see the foundation of the Unitarian apology, which could communicate toward other confessions. I detected this apologetic tradition in other Unitarian works, such as in István Dersi Gergely's *Próbakő* (1715) and *Diacrisis...* (1717, 1764), in the *Catechism* (1692–1724) of Mihály Almási and Mihály Szentábrahámi Lombard; in a tract about the true knowing of Jesus Christ (Ms. U. 1227/G), in the *Summa Universale Christianae*, written by Szentábrahámi Lombard in 1787, and in the *History of the Unitarian Church* by Kénosi Tózsér and Uzoni Fosztó. The works, which compare the dogmas of different confessions, have a more moderate tone than Ajtai Kovács has, because the massive resistance and strong confessional identity had to conjoin with tactical talent, which was necessary in the discourse between the Unitarian Church and the court of Vienna. The modern research, based on the Unitarian memoirs, which were sent to Josef II and the court, maintains that the events in 1716 were interpreted by the Unitarians only as an arbitrariness of several Catholics and did not blame the whole Catholic Church. However, the strong polemical sermons of Ajtai Kovács change this picture. Besides of this, it is important that the confessional debates and polemics were held back in the Unitarian commentaries from the second part of the 18th century, or the target of the controversy were the Calvinists.

The last chapter of the dissertation focuses again on the Commentaries on the Apocalypse and their exegetical methods. Firstly, it gives an overview of the status and estimation of the Book of Revelation among the Antitrinitarians by three non-analysed and unnoticed works: 1) István Uzoni Fosztó presented his sermon book in two volumes about the Apocalypse (*Jelentése a Jézus Krisztusnak...*) to the consistory in 1765–66. 2) *A Szent Jánosnak mennyei látásának prédikációk által való magyarázása* written by György Derzsi Varga in sermons in 1776, who was a preacher in Árkos, but stood in conflict continuously with the Church. This work is an addition and accomplishment of the half-finished *Diatiposis totius Apocalypseaos, Conciones 59...* written by István Dersi Gergely. 3) The third work, *Nostra cogitationes in Apocalypsim* was written by the great Unitarian scholar and Hebraist, József Gejza (1742–1782). He explained the Apocalypse until the Rev 11,19 by *The Wars of the Jews* of Josephus Flavius and wrote it down to his codex, *Sacrarum Dissertationum...* between 1771 and 1779.

In relation to the ways of interpretation Karádi's and Bogáti Fazakas' bipolar approaches of the 16th century survived in the 18th century. According to Derzsi Varga the author of the book is Saint John apostle and it tells about the history of the church until the end of the world, so he offers an allegorical-moral interpretation of the Apocalypse. However, Uzoni

Fosztó and József Gejza claim that the prophecies were fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem and the author of the book is Mark. The common feature of the works of Uzoni Fosztó and Derzsi Varga is that they argue in details for the status of the Book of Revelation, its role in the salvation and the necessity of its investigation and reading. It is interesting, because this kind of justification of the Revelation was not necessary for the Calvinists since the 17th century, which is well-illustrated in István Szathmári Ötvös' *Titkos jelenése* (1668), István Czeglédi's *...Sion Vára...* (1675) and Péter Bod's *Bibliának históriája* (1745). The Transylvanian Unitarian Church officially recognized the canonical place of the Book of Revelation, so the confirmative arguments concern to the reluctance among the preachers and believers.

I show the Unitarian exegetical developments concerning the Apocalypse through the analysis of István Uzoni Fosztó's sermons. He knows the whole Unitarian exegetical tradition and also the European protestant interpretations. Uzoni Fosztó applies the interpretational framework of Palaeologus and Bogáti Fazakas and strengthens it with the new results of the moderate Enlightenment. The authorship of Mark and the origin of the book are presented by the universal history of Jean Le Clerc, the Huguenot Samuel Bochart's *Geographia Sacra seu Phaleg et Chanaan* and the itinerary about Asia Minor and the Seven Church containing antiquarian results and inscriptions written by the Oxford scholar Thomas Smith. Uzoni Fosztó translated and attached this itinerary under the title *Az ázsiai hét városoknak angliai Smith Tamás papnak itineráriumából... leíratása* as an appendix to his commentary. I published a bibliography about the most relevant sources of Uzoni Fosztó by his citations. The well-illustrated case of his handle of the Unitarian tradition is when concerning to the Rev 1,4 and 1,8, Uzoni Fosztó presents the interpretation of the *Explicationes...*, written by the Unitarian bishop and famous exegete in the 16th century György Enyedi, but instead of the citation of Enyedi's work, Uzoni Fosztó takes a reference to the Commentary on Apocalypse of Campegius Vitringa, Sr. and the considerations of Enyedi is confirmed by the works of Vitringa, Bochart, Pierre-Daniel Huet and Le Clerc, however Uzoni Fosztó recognized very well Enyedi's *Explicationes*. Uzoni Fosztó follows the exegetical method of Vitringa: he emphasizes the *sensus litteralis*, the historical critical context of the text-origin and the authorship, and the role of the ratio in the interpretation. Uzoni Fosztó also uses the method of rational historical typology. According to him the Apocalypse is about the kingship of Christ and the establishment of the true priesthood in the physical kingdom of God. In this context Uzoni Fosztó takes new considerations about the close connection between the Hebrews and the Book of Revelation and about their common author, Mark. The rationality of his

interpretation is the exact determination of the context, in which the Revelation is explainable, and in which the typology is applicable. His results agree with the historical lines of Palaeologus and Bogáti Fazakas, but Uzoni Fosztó confirms it with the reception of the new results of biblical philology: such as antiquarianism, and the Hebraist Coccejian tradition.

While the exegetical considerations of the Transylvanian Antitrinitarians were in the first line of the European biblical philological developments in the 16th century, there was a considerable decay according to the proper inventions in the 18th century. However, in the context of the Transylvanian reception of the biblical critical results of the early Enlightenment, the Antitrinitarians were still in the frontline.

The possibility of the application of the results

It is an important result, that the dissertation can determine a Unitarian text corpus about the interpretation on Apocalypse and the Book of Daniel, which contains new discovered commentaries through the 16–18th centuries. This corpus can probably be broaden by further researches – I think of handwritten Unitarian codices, which are not full commentaries, these contain several sermons which explain some parts of the Apocalypse. Besides the text-discovery, the most important aim is to publish the above analysed texts. An anthology about the Unitarian Commentary on Apocalypse with annotations is in progress.

The dissertation takes all along an important emphasis on the alludes of the Hungarian and European protestant works. So it shows the fruitful productivity of the inter-confessional investigation on the phenomena of the history of ideas. Concerning to the Unitarian literature in the early modern period we should pay attention to the considerations of the other confessions.

Investigation of the work's genre opened further possibilities to the research, which should focus on the productive tension between the scholar interpretation of the Book of Revelation and the popular register of the sermon. In this investigation the indexes of the works should play an important role, which show the practical use of the sermons and the Apocalypse. The further research should resolve how the scholarly interpreted, unclear passages of the Revelation give an answer to the questions of everyday life and faith.

In the near future, I intend to publish my dissertation as a book.

Publications related to the subject of the dissertation:

1. *Egy unitárius Jelenések-kommentár kontextusai a 17. században*, Keresztény Magvető, 121(2015)/1, 3–21.
2. *Spira Ferenc históriájának magyar és erdélyi recepciójáról*, Keresztény Magvető, 120(2014)/2, 103–130.
3. *Unitárius prédikációalkotás a 17. század végén: Egy nyilvánosságra szánt iskolai prédikációskötet = Kultúrjav. Írásbeliség és szóbeliség irodalma – újrahasznosítva, Fiatalok Konferenciája 2014*, szerk. Bartók Zsófia Ágnes, Fajt Anita et al., Bp., Reciti, 2015 (Arianna Könyvek 9), 197–214.
4. *Apokalipszis és mártíromság az unitáriusoknál: Egy 18. századi unitárius prédikációs kötet tanulságai. = Mártírium és emlékezet. Protestáns és katolikus narratívák a 15-19. században*, szerk. Fazakas Gergely Tamás et al. Debrecen, Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó, 2015 (Loci Memoriae Hungaricae, 3), 213–222.