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UnitarianTorch contact: kokenyesi@unitariantorch.com

The freedom of faith and conscience

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."

Galatians 5:1 KJV

The blessed sounds of our bells concluded the long, quiet effort that has been ongoing in the religious lives of Hungarian and English unitarians in order to prepare for the celebration of the three hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the Unitarian religion in Transylvania. And now, here is the synod of our church, within these blessed walls, in the welcoming bosom of the historically renowned little town of Torda. The big celebration has begun. My Christian brethren, let us raise our clasped hands to the sky; let us give thanks to the Lord in whose name we gathered for the synod; let us give thanks to Him who granted us life to live to celebrate this three hundredth anniversary of the establishment of our holy religion in our homeland; let us shout joyfully: Blessed be the indivisible single God.

A synod and a three hundredth anniversary celebration! One event with twice the significance in our religious lives. Our church community understands the importance of today's dual celebration, as evidenced by the large number of attendees. In the distant past the sons of Israel gathered in Jerusalem for the yearly celebration; now it is our church elders, men of the clergy and of the secular world, devout women, hope-filled youth, people from both our religion and from other denominations, and the men and women of our homeland are the ones who left behind their homes, their comfort, their loved ones, and their common daily affairs to attend our synod. In addition, for the first time since the beginning of our Unitarian church, a representative of the Unitarian men and women of England, the first free European country, is visiting our assembly. His reputation is well-known to us through his assistance to our church and our youth studying in London, and through his amazing theological studies. He was welcomed

here by all Unitarians who live in our homeland. I cannot be certain whether it is his reputation and esteem are bigger, or the respect and appreciation expressed in his home as well as here. Please accept our outstretched right hand, oh son of a free nation. May the Hungarian Unitarians proudly remember this day as the holiday of holidays.

It would be a vain attempt to assign a particular day to mark the complete triumph of any historical development or thought. Who could say whether the Christian religion achieved victory throughout the life of Jesus, or at the time of the death of Jesus, or with the events at Pentecost, or with the formation of the first congregation in Jerusalem, or, perhaps, with the assembly of the writings of the Saints and the writings of other Apostles? Should we link the beginnings of the Reformation to that day when Martin Luther nailed his theses against Tetzal on the door of the Church of Wittenberg? Or should we go farther back to the day when Luther, then a university student, found a dust-covered Bible, and decided to enlist as a monk in the monastery of the Augustinian Order? Or was it the day at the Diet of Worms when he replied to the authorities who wanted him to repudiate his teachings: "To go against conscience is not right. Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God"? Or, rather, was it the determined opposition by the evangelical princes and priests against the restrictive conditions brought in front of them at the Diet of Speyer? I cannot decide; I cannot possibly point to one day and say it had the most decisive effect.

We are that way with regards to the Unitarian religion, too, but not about its origin which goes back to the first century of Christianity, but about its resurrection. As a Europe-wide renowned priest and religious scholar noted: "Among the many derisive comments about Unitarianism perhaps the most unjust is the charge that it wasn't present during the origins of Christianity". Some people link the origin of our religion to the visit to Transylvania by an Italian priest named Stankar, who, in 1557, debated the priests of Marosvásárhely regarding the intercessory role of Christ. However, debating an article of faith does not mean the establishment of a new religion. Others credit George Biandrata with the dissemination of Unitarian ideals in Transylvania, as he moved here from Poland in 1563, and stayed in the court of the princes, by some accounts, until 1580. He undoubtedly accomplished a great deal, yet we cannot relate the beginnings of the religion itself either to the earlier or to the later date. We can relate the beginnings of our religion more specifically to 1566, when Dávid Ferencz, then the lead pastor of the ecclesia of Kolozsvár, spoke on one occasion about the tenets of our religion on the corner of Torda street, from atop a round stone (which we still have), under the open sky. He was so successful that the enthusiastic crowd carried him on their shoulders into the Great Church by the marketplace, the church where Unitarian religion, the belief that God is one, was preached until 1718. The records of historical archives declare 1571 the year of the victory of Unitarian religion, because at the Diet of Marosvásárhely the supporters of Unitarianism overcame all obstacles to have the Unitarian religion officially declared as a statewide recognized denomination, whereby, it was included among the four religions of the three nations within Transylvania.

So, then, on what basis do we connect our three hundredth anniversary with this year, when it doesn't match any of the previously mentioned years? That is because in 1568 in this very town, the scene of many verbal debates about faith articles of reformation-minded religions in those days, at the Diet starting on January 6, under the rule of the elected king John II, the enlightened participants enacted a nationwide law regarding religious freedom:

His majesty, our Lord, in what manner he - together with his realm - legislated in the matter of religion at the previous Diets, in the same matter now, in this Diet, reaffirms that in every place the preachers shall preach and explain the Gospel each according to his understanding of it, and if the congregation like it, well. If not, no one shall compel them for their souls would not be satisfied, but they shall be permitted to keep a preacher whose teaching they approve. Therefore none of the superintendents or others shall abuse the preachers, no one shall be reviled for his religion by anyone, according to the previous statutes, and it is not permitted that anyone should threaten anyone else by imprisonment or by removal from his post for his teaching. For faith is the gift of God and this comes from hearing, which hearings is by the word of God.

From the structuring of this law it shows that it was built on earlier efforts of 1557, 1558 and 1563 when laws of similar nature were enacted; those enacted laws first officially recognized Luther's religion, now called Augustinian, and later recognized the religion of Calvin, now called Helveticism, to be practiced freely in our beautiful homeland. However, the 1568 law was constructed with more circumspect wording, the Unitarian religious ideals received better protection, and this, previously secretly embraced concept of one God, could now remove its armored helmet, and step into the open. Indeed, the enactment of that law is a bright moment in the religious and political history of Transylvania, and when we associate the celebration of our three hundredth anniversary with it, we are declaring that we do not commemorate a single person, we do not boast of our denomination, but we are welcoming the victory of a universal, important, and revered concept of freedom of faith and conscience brought about by the recognition of our religion. That is right my brethren, that law was written to especially articulate the freedom of faith and conscience. That Transylvanian law deserved to have been enacted then for all mankind; most European countries achieved it in this century, and Austria enacted it only this year to the loud applause of public opinion. That law is a worthy companion to the words of the holy Apostle Paul as he addressed the Galatians on the topic of the freedom of faith and conscience: *Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.* These words were chosen as our Bible quote for this sermon, and you heard them read from the Holy Book.

Honorable synod participants, Christian brethren! I will follow my introduction and our Bible quote with my celebratory sermon that will explore, guided by the explanation of our Bible quote, the topic of freedom of faith and conscience. I will examine

I. The history

II. The present status

III. The likely future triumph

of the freedom of faith and conscience. In my presentation I will take into consideration the most essential religious needs of mankind, the general aspects of Christianity connected to the past, present and future of Unitarian religion. I aim to hold your attention, please don't take it away from this feeble servant of God's church.

I.

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. 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. 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 - 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 IVth 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 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 of God, and the guilty party was subject to secular punishment. If bishops could be subjected to such treatment, could the fate of common people be different? It saddens me, but I have to say that independent thoughts were stripped away from Christianity; Christians had to believe what was dictated to them, and they couldn't even think freely about the path to salvation. Seats of inquisition were set up everywhere, and they stood guard with tireless eyes over even the most hidden aspects of the soul. When local views were opposed to such a practice, the most heinous ways were used to exterminate the opposition: exile, dungeons, torture chambers, burning people at the stake came to be common daily occurrence. Who could possibly list all the abuses employed to mock and tread underfoot the freedom of faith and conscience, all the deeds that turned man, created in the likeness of God, into machines without soul, and lowered Christianity, once liberated by Jesus, into spiritual slavery, under the yoke of pagan customs and rituals and the autocratically assembled canon laws.

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 XVIth 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 movements. 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. Both Luther and Calvin drew a line to restrict the freedom of conscience, and crossing that line was equal to committing an error, a heresy. They both accepted the right of unrestricted examination, but only up to the line they themselves had already reached. Thus, they demanded the same kind of authority for themselves that they had earlier opposed; they wanted to create a papacy of Reformists to replace the papacy of Catholics.

That was the point in time when the thoughts and history of our religion joined the religious thoughts and history of Christianity.

Unitarianism, as I mentioned before, is as old as Christianity itself, and it would not be difficult to demonstrate that during the first two centuries of Christianity it was a fundamental view, especially among the Jews who converted to Christianity, and this view lived on in sometimes narrow, sometimes wider circles within the church. Indeed, the Ebionites, the Samosotarians, the Monarchians, the Arians, the Waldensians, and many other groups to whom historians even today, without foundation or sufficient evaluation, refer to, as believers of a false doctrine, represented sometimes clear and sometimes vague forms of Unitarian faith articles and beliefs. The Reformation allowed the rejuvenation of those faith articles and beliefs. Relying on the concept of free examination, that ideal of the Reformation, did lead Leo Sozzini to deny the doctrine of the Trinity, and with that he laid a new foundation for Unitarianism, and resurrected it from the dead. But his age and its people weren't ready for such a daring thought. Not only were he and his followers exiled from Italy, the country they worked in, but then they had to wander from one country to another in Europe in search of a land to rest from persecution and to sow the seeds of their thoughts. One country after another rejected them; many of his followers perished, and many straggled on in search of a home until their dying days. Others were imprisoned, sometimes by the very countries

flying high the flag of Reformation, the ideal of freedom of faith and conscience. Only the country of Poland accepted them in a friendly manner; their teachings took hold there, but eventually they were expelled from there, too. The glory of providing a new definition for the ideal of freedom of faith and conscience that would satisfy the demands of free thinking, and make its practice to match the ideal, has fallen to our little Transylvania. In Transylvania, because of the protection by the enlightened ruler János II, because the bright mind of the ingenious Dávid Ferencz, because of his convincing oratory, and his powerful writings the Unitarian faith - centered on a God whose spiritual and personal unity is indivisible - not only spread, but became protected by the law enacted in 1568, as I described earlier. Indeed, the thoughts and teachings about the absolute unity of God, as expressed by those wise founders of our religion, gained visible form in our country; the principal elements of Unitarian faith crystallized into a viable entity here, surrounded by the mountain peaks of Transylvania.

In recent years, my brethren, now that the reunification of Hungary and Transylvania has become a reality, many people attack the age of the Principality of Transylvania by making it appear it is responsible for the tragic events that struck our nation in the past three hundred years. While it is true that the separation of the Principality of Transylvania forced major changes onto the jurisdiction of Hungary, this also exacted great sacrifices from Transylvania. I cannot condemn the act itself; all I can say with an aching heart: I wish it wasn't necessary! Yes, the separation was a matter of necessity for our nation just like the reunification is. I am amazed that some people attribute these events to the ambitions and vanity of certain individuals. The efforts of a single person, no matter how powerful or highly ranked, would be futile even if their effort served a blessed ideal. In order to achieve a goal of a nation there is a need for the assisting direction of politics, the contributions of hundreds of thousands of people, and the steering effect of public opinion. The fact that most of the Kingdom of Hungary wanted separation from Transylvania, and several powerful people assisted with the process is reflected in its success, as recorded in history. Perhaps, those enthusiastic about the freedom of faith and conscience wished that separation most, as they sought protection for the practice of their beliefs. It becomes obvious they were not disappointed as soon as we compare the supportive stance towards the Reformation in Transylvania, and the oppressed condition of it in Hungary, even in recent times. The observation that Unitarianism could not have been established in Hungary becomes even more obvious when we consider that the Transylvanian laws on freedom of faith and conscience were not adopted in Hungary until a few months ago. That is a delay of three hundred years in their enactment.

When Unitarianism emerged onto the scene in the history of Transylvania, it was like a spring morning with the sun rising in all its glory turning the horizon into the color of gold. It was comparable to the moment when the first Christian king guided the rugged nation of Árpád into the service of Christianity. When the Diet enacted the law of the freedom of faith and conscience the benefits were immediately visible, as the words *the preachers shall preach and explain the Gospel each according to his understanding of it*

found fertile ground in the king's court as well as in the hearts of people living in huts. When someone stepped onto the pulpit nobody asked them: What do you believe and what teachings do you follow? Rather, what happened was *and if the congregation like it, well. If not, no one shall compel them for their souls would not be satisfied, but they shall be permitted to keep a preacher whose teaching they approve.* There were instances when there were two preachers teaching differently in a single church, and the people of the congregation followed their freedom of faith and conscience to listen to the preacher whose religious thinking they agreed with. In other words, in this little Transylvania the wish of the Apostles came true: *Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.* Oh, how I wish we could stop at this scene! Oh, how many tears of suffering have fallen following such a memorable beginning! Alas, the convictions of some people yet again declared war on the freedom of conscience and that burning zeal of those people left a trail of destruction throughout the three hundred years of our church life.

A swan rightfully mourns his murdered hatchlings on the boulders by the sea; please allow me then, to briefly review the sufferings our religion and our follower were subjected to during those centuries.

Not very long after Unitarianism was recognized among the official religions, János Zsigmond unexpectedly died on March 14, 1571, and just like a tree whose crown was shattered by lightning, the group of believers of the teaching that God is one were thrown to the ground. With the death of John Sigismund lost was the allure of the Unitarian prince who maintained order, lost was the crown jewel that attracted attention, and lost were all the advantages that had undeniable appeal. Catholic rulers acceded to the throne of the Principality of Transylvania, and their religious interests set the course for the future. The astute Báthori István was soon followed by his younger brother Kristóf who used the Jesuits to target the brightest genius of the age, Dávid Ferencz. Kristóf didn't refrain from turning George Biandrata, the court physician eager to seek the favor of the prince, into a religious examiner. Instigated by the treacherous adviser of the court, Biandrata took advantage of his position in the court, questioned David about his teachings, and tried to make him change his beliefs. When Dávid refused and cited his firm convictions, evoking the freedom of conscience, Fausto Soccini was invited to visit Transylvania. Soccini used the cover of his friendship with Dávid, and took advantage of David's hospitality to sound out David's innermost thoughts just to bring charges against him later. Prince Christopher, influenced by Jesuits, had Dávid arrested despite his serious illness; the Prince then assembled a tribunal of priests and secular individuals mostly critical of Dávid. Once the tribunal found Dávid guilty he was thrown into a prison cell in the fortress of Déva where his noble life ended after a brief struggle with his illness. From that moment a war of cleansing began against the Unitarian faith in Transylvania. In the very land of the freedom of conscience that spirit was shackled! The very existence of Unitarianism was conditioned on official declarations that were only requested at first, but were later dictated. This is how the declaration about the adoration of Jesus and the prayers to Jesus were created in 1638

at Dézs. This how Péchy Simon and many churches became victims of accusations of Sabbatarianism. Then government appointments were conditioned on religious faith and select positions were filled by people of Catholic faith. As a consequence, Unitarians were locked out of important government positions, and their valuables and churches were confiscated. Thus, the freedom of faith and conscience retreated from everyday life to the paper fortresses of libraries where they became mere decorations in those tomes of legislations; those wonderful laws were no longer in the hearts, as the royal court entertained very different ideals.

Indeed, there are a great deal of tragic memories connected not only to the general history of the freedom of faith and conscience, but specifically to our three hundred years of church life. Thus, no one could condemn us for shedding tears of appreciation for our predecessors when we deliberate about our past. It was those predecessors who not only fought for the recognition of our holy religion, but they kept it alive until this day through three long centuries in the face of persecution, pressure, shaming, disparagement, imprisonments, and martyrdom by painful death. However, God created the human heart in a way that makes it forget the sufferings of the past, once it is under better circumstances. Our fate has changed for the better. Let us put a veil over the past. We are on the threshold of a new age. Let us give thanks to God that the current state of the freedom of faith and conscience is very different. That is the topic of the second part of my sermon.

II.

The end of the last century, my Christian brethren, was marked by a tremendous event that shook the whole of Europe, and pointed history in a new direction. That event was the French Revolution. It demolished the decaying structures and outmoded institutions of the Middle Age, abolished its privileges, declared liberty equality and fraternity the preeminent shared ideals of mankind, and accorded to all peoples the civil liberties they had been denied. This was a loud thunderclap that awoke the human spirit from its slumber; it was a heavy bloodletting that restored circulation to its systems atrophied through the centuries; it released pent up forces that propelled the spirit to higher accomplishment, and breathed new life into it. In our current century we can observe liberty, equality, and fraternity, the goals of that revolution. In other words, every country, every nation is demanding human and civil rights. Our nation, too, was eager for it, and 20 years ago it fought for it with great determination in 1848, the year whose achievements and glory will forever remain in our memories. How painful it is that all advances on this earth have their enemies. The great ideals have always had them, and it appears they will always have their martyrs. Our magnificent era has had its sadness and joys, its bright and dark sides, its spectacular glory and cross of Golgotha.

The transformative ideals (which weren't free of excesses I won't mention them here) that animated society, also naturally influenced religious life; moreover, the dawning of these secular freedoms brought a new beginning to the realm of faith and conscience

where more free ideals, sometime excessively so, began their circulation, and brought about those wondrous changes we experience in the church today. Blessed God, what a tremendous change! In the past if someone would have referred to his own understanding or to a rational human understanding in religious matters, the response would have cited a passage from the Scriptures, or the opinion of one or another Pope, and all further debate would have been cut off. This person would either have retracted his views, gave up, or, like Galileo, stood by his statements that the Earth orbits the Sun, and then with a clear conscience they entered a monastery, or went to prison. The reformers themselves used that kind of weapon when they fought to support their views as they interpreted the Scriptures to fit their goals. That was the origin of the generally held conviction that in the Bible everybody can find what they seek. Nowadays, however, only those words have definitive authority that do not contradict the rational mind. The interpretation of the Bible has taken a new and free-thinking direction where the goal is not to affix on all its statements the stamp of divine inspiration and human infallibility, but to seek out those truths that are able to withstand the scrutiny of examination by the free mind, and are pertinent to all nations for all time periods. Believe me, my brethren, the authority of the Scriptures is being raised higher by those who can distinguish the essence from the appearance, the germination-ready seed from the husk, rather than by those who insist on literal meanings, and cannot rise to the level of freedom given to us by Christ when he freed us from the form, the bonds of human opinions and from pointless ceremonies. In the old days they thought salvation was conditioned on obeying canon laws, and those who disagreed with even one of those laws became hopelessly lost for salvation. Today such a yoke of submissiveness is unacceptable, and the view that others ought not be harassed for their faith is becoming commonplace. The important thing is not what someone believes, but what that someone does, as the essence of faith doesn't lie in words, but in deeds. Likewise, the faith of Jesus was evidenced from his life he set as an example for his disciples saying: *For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.* In the past, religion was considered to be the exclusive merchandise of profiteering by certain individuals or classes; nowadays the idea of an universal priesthood is spreading wider and wider, and according to it everyone should care for their own soul, and negotiate matters of this world, and also matters of their heavenly fate.

Indeed, my Christian brethren, as the age of Reformation furthered the secular freedoms, in our century the secular freedoms help the cause of religion. We can only rejoice over such turn of events, because the energetic momentum of Unitarianism is due to that. It is a fact that the Unitarianism, resurrected by the Reformation, gained more freedom to operate at the end of the last century. That is when Unitarian congregations formed in England and in America, and even in Transylvania the harassment began to subside. Most of our churches have been built since the end of the last century, and in 1848 Hungary accepted us with open arms, as the XXth law stated that the Unitarian religion is an officially recognized religion in Hungary. If that official act deserves our gratitude, we then ought to outright rejoice today as we now experience the factual implementation of it. We derive great satisfaction from the moral

renumeration extended to Unitarian views by the greats of religious literature, and by the fact that religious culture of our age is directed by free thinking principles. Here I refer to that foreign writer whose work I mentioned before: "It wasn't too long ago when Unitarianism was considered a twisted aberration that didn't merit the interest of scholars, and religious souls abhorred it like it is a sacrilege". That biased judgement has been shattered by the status Unitarianism achieved in England and America, by the growth of Unitarianism within the bounds of European reformed churches as almost all locations officially recognize it, by the significant number of the enlightened Catholics who appreciate and follow Unitarian ideals without formally leaving their church, and by those well-known persons whom the Unitarians call their own. Thus, Unitarianism can rightfully demand true respect as the purest, most free, and most rational form of Christian religions. Let us add to this the new movement in religious literature that examines the person of Christ, and the learned and well-respected scholars who bring evidence from the Scriptures about one of the tenets of Unitarianism that Jesus was a real human being, that his divinity has no other meaning but his mission as the Messiah, and that his glory is exemplified by his life for which he was persecuted. When we contemplate all these, we can celebrate our tree hundredth anniversary with the uplifting thought that we are no longer isolated in our religious views, that other countries are no longer foreign to the ideals of Unitarianism, and that the number of our faith cousins are increasing daily.

My Christian brethren, I cannot pass up the opportunity to once again memorialize Dávid Ferencz, the first bishop of our denomination, who taught the human nature of Christ, and that in the Scriptures only the adoration of God is commanded, and who, for his teachings, was sentenced to life long imprisonment on the charges of being a religious innovator and a destabilizer of the country. He addressed those very few followers who did not desert him even under that terrifying circumstance: "Do not be outraged because of my maltreatment; after my death the world will recognize and acknowledge that the one God is the only entity who is commanded to be adorned by prayer." That address was spoken in 1579, here in Torda, and I, his feeble successor, after the passage of 300 years, under the blessed protection of the supporting public statements of the free thinking world, can now refer to the millions of educated and knowledgeable people in America, England, Netherland, Switzerland, France, Germany, and Hungary, and declare his teachings to be valid. I commemorate his legacy in this congregation with the words of the great German poet: "The history of the world is the world's court of judgement."

Far be it from me to relate the question of faith and conscience only to Unitarianism. My examples intended to show that indeed, the state of the freedom of faith and conscience has improved, and it has taken such a deep root in the hearts of millions of people that it can no longer be removed even if someone wanted to use religious differences as a weapon against their fellow human beings, because such a person would surely draw the condemnation of the world opinion. It is truly time to extinguish the smallest spark of intolerance, and to connect humanity through the brotherly love of Christianity. It is time

that we stop looking down on others, stop persecuting each other just because one adores God standing versus kneeling, or under a cross versus under an orb. It is time that we stop forcing our own faith and our convictions onto others; it is time we allow everyone to develop their faith and convictions for themselves with the *liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.*

But am I looking through rose-colored glasses when I see the present? Or am I willfully closing my eyes to events that would lead to a different conclusion? Don't we observe in our time that, despite the spread of the freedom of faith and conscience to the ends of the world, there are still those around who can't get rid of the pestilence of their denominational bias, who see the freedom of faith and conscience, like democracy itself, as a temporary infatuation, or they may carry it on their lips because they want to be popular, but their hearts keep a distance from it? Don't we see that the self-interest of religions still has a powerful effect that tugs not only on the steering wheels of governments, but also on the tender threads of family life? What else could be the meaning of expressions such as "reigning religion" or "most accepted religion" still surviving into our days, except that we still don't have a clear comprehension of the freedom of conscience, as we demand more rights for some religions than others, and we may dismiss some of them outright? Many would place the rights of the heart in the shackles of canon law and create obstacles to prevent mixed marriages. Doesn't the institute of civil marriage derive from such dire situations? And then there is the recent famous allocution from Rome in which new ideals and their associated social movements were declared ungodly. Isn't the glorious ideal of freedom of faith and conscience being tarnished when differences in faith are used to build a wall not only to separate the living but the dead as well? Doesn't that show that securing the rights to the freedom for thinking and conviction of an individual is the construct of a few enlightened souls? And in real life such rights will be achieved only slowly?

I don't deny, my Christian brethren, that seeing all that and thinking about it could bring a chill to our flush of victory, and it could lessen our happiness regarding the current state of the freedom of faith and conscience. Nonetheless, they don't nullify the foundation of our hope, because a cloud may block the golden platter of the sun, and may delay, but doesn't prevent, the ripening of the grain in the field. Similarly, the final triumph of the freedom of faith and conscience may be delayed by some human deviousness, but it is impossible to strip it away from humanity. A triumph in the future is very likely in my judgement. I explore that in the last part of my sermon.

III.

In our days, my Christian brethren, there is no other issue that would more intensely engage the mind and demand greater attention than the matter of education. And deservedly so. Education merits our attention as well, because, as common wisdom tells us, it makes a human being into a human. There could be an upright posture, a

wide forehead, a skyward looking head, all those for naught if a cultured intellect and a spiritual refinement is missing. I openly admit I see little difference between an uneducated person and a witless animal; moreover, the uneducated person, in theory, may even be worse, leading to dangerous consequences, because the person may cause damage by living in community, as opposed to a witless animal whom we either tame to accept us, or against whom we rationally prepare to defend ourselves. The interest of society demands that its members be properly educated, otherwise the shared prosperity, which is the goal of society, cannot be achieved. We cannot truly talk about civil liberties until the members of society are sufficiently educated to take advantage of their freedom without harming someone else. The education of the individual is important for an additional reason, as there is no doubt that we have to aim at gaining the highest possible level of education for ourselves, and at providing better education for our children. We have to keep in mind the proverb "more brain than brawn", if we are not satisfied with what nature provides us and if we want to live and thrive in our age when industry, trade, science and engineering have made incredible progress, when, contrary to the ancient wisdom that there is nothing new under the sun, new and better things are created daily or even every hour, when we reached the point where we talk through lightning, write with sunshine, travel on water vapor, and complete the work of hundreds by a single wheel. These are large and important causes that justify the societal interest in education, and make it clear that we couldn't speak of a more noble cause, couldn't sacrifice for a more blessed goal than the institutes of education, may it be elementary school, trade school, science school or schools by any other name.

But are these relevant to our chosen textus? I, for one, my brethren, am convinced that education is tightly linked to the Christian religion. A major part of the mission of Jesus was the teaching of the multitudes; when he released his disciples to the world, he instructed them this way: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations." Now, if the points of view of human wisdom, the leaders of society, the necessity for a cultured citizenry are embracing education, allow me, my brethren, to embrace education from the point of view of religion, and I hope that this will result in the final victory for the freedom of faith and conscience. Yes, the educated person makes independent decisions about living conditions and convictions; the soul of the educated person cannot be shackled by cannon law, and even less by declarations from long dead popes. The educated person freely constructs the concept of God, the world, the good, the bad, morals, sin, the earthly life and the life hereafter. And once an educated person has exercised those rights, that person ought to respect similar rights being exercised by others. In other words, this person would allow others to enjoy those rights undisturbed, and would not force a personal faith and convictions onto others. Thus, a truly educated person cannot be intolerant; only zealots may be convinced to take part in religion-based persecution and only uneducated people may be willing to commit acts like the St Bartholomew's Day massacre. Oh, come enlightened education of the people, spread your wings quickly, and bring with you the era of free thinking about the matters of faith, and the respect for the convictions of the others! Bring with you the

freedom of conscience and of the citizens, so under their protection the private and public prosperity and general happiness can grow, so that the words of the Apostle can be fulfilled: *Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.*

How can that be? What will then happen to the notion of one shepherd and one fold if the freedom of faith and conscience is triumphant? From that question we can see that the human mind is still operating around canon laws even though there are many religions in our home country. I believe, my Christian brethren, that it is those very canon laws that lead to the development of many religions, and if those canon laws didn't exist, the Christian faith would be a unified one; it is difficult to find a better proof than the phrase frequently uttered by educated people: "We might use different words, but we worship the same God." Here we see the application of the idea of the single fold, and not the idea of "force everyone to join". Jesus himself taught that it is necessary for disunions to happen. Thus, those who wish to stretch the thoughts of the entire humanity onto a single picture frame, those who think hard to create new canon laws that everyone may find acceptable, are fighting against nature, because, in nature, we cannot possibly find two identical blades of grass. Give room for the unfettered development of the human spirit in the matters of faith; do not restrict the conscience of the people. Do not be afraid, because free conscience will not harm either the individual or society. Are there any more forms of religious establishments and views of faith at any place than in England or in America? And do we know of any happier nations or more powerful states than these? Ah, England! America! They are totally different, I hear the scattered objections. They are different, true, but why? Because there education and rational literacy are at a higher level than in our country, and that high level was achieved by the combined efforts of political and religious institutions. Those examples support both the necessity of education, and my hope for the victory of freedom of faith and conscience through education.

Assuming that within decades, or rather, it pains me to say, within centuries, mankind will reach a much higher level of intellectual cultivation than it is today, the faith and conscience then will be freed from all sort of yokes and pressures by authorities, what fate will then be awaiting our religion? The answer to this question, my Christian brethren, depends on what we consider to be its essence. If we insist with relentless stubbornness to hold onto those practices of faith laid down hundreds of years ago by our ancestors who were not only driven by their convictions, but also influenced by intimidation, intellectual pressure, and exploitation, if we consider them the pinnacles of flawlessness, and if we lock them away from the fresh air of free examination, then without a doubt, the passage of time sooner or later will deposit Unitarianism into its antique collection as it does with any other religious system that considers itself perfect and complete. Religions must keep developing further just like all other matters that involve people. With relation to the human mind, the practice of confession offers an opportunity and a direction for a much-needed improvement. While the biblical truths of Christianity are eternal truths, the way people understand and interpret them today is

very different from the interpretation of 500, 1000, or 2000 years ago. Philosophy, physics, chemistry, mathematics, and, in general, all disciplines allow for a path of improvement; we ought to provide the right to a similar path for the human mind in the matters of religion, and necessarily maintain it. Such is the thinking of the majority of Christians today; such was the general basis of the Reformation. Jesus himself alluded to this when he spoke to the disciples who inquired about secrets: *I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.* The religion that ceases to develop, ceases to live. The clear-thinking members of every denomination have recognized that truth, and have started adjusting. The outstanding people of the Jewish religion also recognized that religion needs to be brought into accord with the spirit of this new age; they are currently expediting reforms in the elements of worship, and eventually, gradually, they will shed the encrusted and outdated laws of Moses which were powerful in their days, but by today, after 2000 years, they have outlived their usefulness. In the face of that, I dare to declare however, that the future of Unitarianism will be ensured forever if we can agree that Unitarianism encompasses the right of human spirit for free examination and decision in the matters of faith, if we can respect everyone's convictions formed from the freedom of conscience that lead our predecessors to the recognition that one and only God who will continue to guide us as long as we don't intentionally entangle ourselves in the web of grandiose medieval concepts, as long as we don't allow our religion to become an outmoded, decaying building destined for collapse, but maintain it as an lively organism capable of improvement by relying on a strong foundation, capable of first absorbing new truths of the human spirit, and then renewing itself, and capable to guide the salvation of the faithful through the coming centuries. This way, I am confident to say, the future of Unitarianism will be secure, because it will be in friendly relationship with the sound mind on which educated humanity puts a heavy emphasis in the matters of religion.

I tell you, my brethren, Unitarianism is not an opponent of the ever-innovating spirit of our time, rather, it is continued to be validated throughout the world by scientific research and the deeper understanding of the Bible. Unless earthly powers and brute force yet again stoop to interfere with it, Unitarianism will not be impeded by the achievements of science, rather it will be utilizing those achievements and incorporating them into its free-thinking religious system. I am convinced, my brethren, that if we managed to keep ourselves alive during 300 years of pressure and antagonism, we have no reason to be fearful. Unitarianism - whether it is called the religion of the mind because it intends to use a sound mind to interpret the Scriptures, or it is called unadorned and dry religious system, because it doesn't seek visual effects during its worship - has a promising future, and I believe that those who will celebrate our four-century anniversary will be joined not only by England, but by Unitarian church representatives of additional countries and states.

This is the end of my sermon. Accept my gratitude, Christian faithful, for your attention. I hope you found the hour you dedicated to me worthwhile. It is time for me to part from the pulpit, and for you to part from me. Let us give time to each other to rest and to

reflect. With my parting words I do want to instill in you the words of the Apostle: “ *Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.*”

My dear faith brothers, remain persistent and maintain a strong self-confidence. That is what I request of you. The plowman has to plan to add to the number of furrows in his field. Let us, the believers of our magnificent ideal, do likewise. Let us not despair because of our small numbers. How many times has it happened that soldiers fall one after another while attacking a fort, and only one or two remain to fly the flag of victory on the fort? Once victory is won, the glory belongs to the entire army. We, Unitarians, have been holding in our hands the flag of the faith in one God. Let us grasp it firmly. The hour of victory is approaching. Our ideal is the ideal of the educated humanity; our religion is the religion of the progressive mind and the religion of the future. Amen