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CYRIL LUCARIS AND THE “UNFINISHED” REFORMATION OF ROMANIANS IN TRANSYLVANIA

Abstract. The occurrence of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century in Western Europe caused a real earthquake inside the Roman Catholic Church, also causing extremely interesting reverberations in the Eastern Christian world. This short essay intends to show the impact that the reformation has had on the Orthodox Romanians in Transylvania, who, although a numerical majority, were not recognized as a nation though their faith enjoyed certain tolerance. The episode that we will examine here takes place in the early part of the XVII century during the time of Prince Gabriel Bethlen. Under the pretext of the so-called religious, cultural, and even national emancipation of the Romanians, he proposed their conversion to Calvinism. In this regard, he asked for help from the ecumenical Patriarch Cyril Lucaris, an unusual hierarch for his time, flexible and firm at the same time, who was open to dialogue with other Christian denominations. With good knowledge of the political and religious realities in Transylvania, Patriarch Cyril replied to him in the most possible *ecumenical* way, defending the right of the Orthodox Romanians to keep their faith, language and customs they hold in common with their brethren beyond the Carpathian Mountains, Moldova and Wallachia.

Keywords: Reformation; Orthodoxy; Faith; Nation; Religious Freedom; Unity; Ecumenism.

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SHORT INTRODUCTION

Transylvania is one of the three old Romanian provinces, along with Moldova and Wallachia. Its history begins with the presence of the Dacian people, a pagan people conquered later by the Romans who founded cities on its territory whose names endure until today: Apulum, Potaissa, Napoca and Porolissum. They founded a civilization of an urban nature. From the symbiosis of the Romans and Dacians, Romanian people appeared in history and were Christianized the moment they were formed.² The first millennium of their existence was marked by the presence of migratory peoples: the Visigoths, Goths, Huns, Gepids, Avars, Slavs or Bulgarians, and later the Pechenegs and the Cumans, some ending up being assimilated into the local population.³ Around the year 900, it is recorded that the first Romanian state was formed as duchies, which would be taken over in the following centuries by the Kingdom of Hungary. This began a long stage in the history of Transylvania, with the status of a voivodship, located in areas of Catholic influence and marked by numerous internal and external conflicts of a political, social and religious nature. Catholic and Protestant princes successively succeeded in ruling the country, each trying to impose not only their political authority, but also their faith, especially upon the underprivileged class made up mostly of Romanians. Every time, the latter heard the same promises that, unfortunately, were always broken.

The year 1541 brought important changes. Transylvania was organized as a semi-independent principality under Ottoman and Austrian suzerainty, led by a prince chosen by the Diet⁴ and then confirmed by the Sultan. It came to be regarded as the center of Hungarian culture and humanism and the bastion of Protestantism in Eastern Europe. Transylvania developed into a very interesting country, with a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society dominated

² Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române (The History of the Romanian Orthodox Church)*, vol. I, 2nd edition (Bucharest: Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române Publishing House, 1991), 59-69.

³ Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe*, 105-114, 185-196.

⁴ The Transylvanian Diet was a pre-parliamentary institution founded in the sixteenth century from the representatives of the privileged nations (Hungarians, Saxons and Székelys) and those from the *receptae* denominations (Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, and later Unitarian). Its role was to elect the prince and to adopt the decisions of a legal, military and economic nature, <https://coltulcultural.wordpress.com/2013/05/17/dieta-transilvaniei>, accessed: 15 September, 2023.

by major social and religious inequities that would become a permanent source of conflicts over the next four centuries.

THE REFORMATION AND ITS CHALLENGES

The turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was marked by numerous disturbances, meaning inter-state and inter-religious conflicts that would bring significant changes in Europe's political and religious geography with important consequences worldwide. In France, it took the form of a true internal religious war ending with the massacre of the Protestant Huguenots on the *Night of Saint Bartholomew* (August 23-24, 1572); next, Protestant England recorded an unexpected victory over the Spanish Catholic armada, perhaps the greatest naval force in medieval history (1588); the Catholic missions, favored by the great discoveries of the New World, were transformed into missionary expeditions served by organized religious orders, congregations and missionary societies that gave birth to a new cultural and sociological ideology, often accompanied by colonization, Latinization, and cultural, spiritual and economical imperialism. In the East, after the death of Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent (1566), the Ottoman Empire entered a period of regression in all aspects, including territorial, with different consequences on three continents: Europe, Asia and Africa.

In this context, religious reform seems something that almost naturally fitted into the landscape of changes that took place worldwide. However, not everyone was ready for *the great religious challenge* that the Protestant Church brought, especially the Orthodox, well known for their traditionalism and inflexibility in matters of faith. The same happened with the Orthodox Romanians in Transylvania.

At the time of the Reformation, the inhabitants of Transylvania were in a well-defined political and religious situation. The country was ruled, from 1437, by the Hungarian nobility, all of whom belonged to the Catholic confession dominant throughout the Hungarian Kingdom within the three recognized nations of Hungarian, Saxons⁵ and Szekelys.⁶ Romanians, who

⁵The Germanic population that came in the middle of the XII-th century, along with the Teutonic Knights, at the invitation of the Hungarian King, to strengthen the line of defense of the Voivodeship of Transylvania, in the areas of the South and East. Later, they received certain privileges that secured them a special social and religious status. Thomas Năgler, “Transilvania între 900 și 1300 [Transylvania between 900 and 1300],” in *Istoria Transilvaniei*, vol. 1 (până la 1541), ed. Ioan Aurel Pop and Thomas Năgler (Cluj-Napoca: Institutul Cultural Român, 2003), 241-248.

formed the majority population, did not play any political role and were of the Orthodox confession. Moreover, Romanians were not accepted as a nation, and so their church was considered to be “schismatic.”⁷

In the centuries preceding the reformation, the Orthodox Romanians had been subjected to a real campaign of Catholicization, but apart from a few noble families, the vast majority of Romanians remained faithful to the Orthodox faith, even if it meant their stigmatization. This was a testament to their extraordinary resistance in the face of political and religious assimilation, fully proven in the following centuries.

In contrast, after the reformation, most Hungarians, Saxons and Szeklers would embrace the new faith and become Calvinists, Lutherans or Unitarians, who, together with the few remaining Catholics, would form the *receptae religions*, while the Orthodox Romanians would further form a *tolerated confession*.⁸

Lutheran and Calvinist reformers came to Transylvania almost simultaneously but, because of the principles adhered to by the latter, they were the ones who started the propaganda for Calvinism among the Romanian Orthodox people.⁹

Any attempt to attract the Romanian population to Lutheranism cannot be spoken about in the same terms. If there were isolated conversions to Lutheranism, they were more due to the desire for social advancement by those individuals. The causes are not hard to point out. On the one hand, it should be noted that Lutherans did not have important positions in the political, administrative, legislative and judicial life of the principality and,

⁶ Their origin is still unexplained. Most likely they are a combination of diverse populations mixed with Hungarians from whom they took the language, some traditions and costumes. On the one hand, there is the plausible theory that they would have represented rather a military social *status*, not ethnic. Yet, on the other hand, they have always claimed their own identity and autonomy and benefited from a special administrative structure in Transylvania (Nägler, “Transilvania,” 234-240).

⁷ Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe*, 496-497; Ioan Aurel Pop, *Istoria Transilvaniei Medievale: de la etnogeneza românilor până la Mihai Viteazul* [The History of Mediaeval Transylvania: From Ethno-Genesis of the Romanians till Michael the Brave] (Cluj Napoca: Cluj University Press, 1997), 207-213.

⁸ Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe*, 497-498.

⁹ Calvinism somehow became the official religion of Transylvania, although in theory the other three, Catholicism, Lutheranism and Unitarianism, benefit from a similar status. Virgil Căndeș, ed., *Istoria Românilor, vol. 5. O epocă de înnoiri în spirit European 1601-1711* [The History of the Romanians vol. 5. An époque of renewals in Spirit] (Bucharest: Encyclopedia Publishing House, 2003), 777-779.

therefore, they would not have had the strength to impose the Lutheran faith on others. On the other hand, being a “recognized” people, a possible massive movement of Orthodox Romanians to Lutheranism would not have brought any benefit to them. On the contrary, if the Lutheran confession were identified with the nation, it would have endangered their status. In short, they were more concerned with preserving their privileges and conserving their social, political and economic status than increasing the number of believers.¹⁰

Calvinism, however, was a kind of missionary confession by nature, sometimes with a ferocious proselyte character in some places. The goal of the Calvinist leaders was, from the beginning, the “return” of the Christians who were contaminated by so-called heresies from the Catholic Church and the Orthodox to what they called pure, primary or genuine Christianity.

Therefore, we can note several attempts by Calvinist princes to attract the Romanian Orthodox people to the new faith with the promise that they would also benefit from the same rights as other inhabitants of Transylvania. One of them, Prince Sigismund Zápolya, even managed to set up a Romanian – Calvinist Episcopacy for the Orthodox people who chose to convert to Calvinism. His enthusiasm was diminished by the very low number of Romanians who left their faith hoping for a better life. Next, the unification of the three Romanian provinces intervened for the first time in history under the reign of Michael the Brave, but it was especially caused by a *Catholic intermezzo* for about thirty years when Transylvania was ruled by the Catholic princes from the Báthory family who, even if they did not stop the Calvinist offensive, managed to slow it down and reduce its amplitude.¹¹

MISSIONARY METHODS AND STRATEGIES

The Romanian population in Transylvania always held great respect for preserving old traditions, even though many people had never really un-

¹⁰ Petre Filimon, *Protestantismul și românii din Ardeal. Combaterea unei teorii uniate* [Protestantism and the Romanians from Transylvania. Combating of an uniate theory] (Arad: Tiparul Tipografiei Diecezane, 1938), 15-18.

¹¹ Zenovie Păclișanu, “Biserica românească și calvinismul de la moartea lui Sigismund (Báthory) până la urcarea pe tron a lui Gabriel Bethlen [The Romanian Church and Calvinism since the death of Sigismund (Báthory) till the enthronization of Gabriel Bethlen],” *Cultura creștină* 19/1 (1911): 614-614.

derstood their significance. Their traditionalism sprang largely from the religious element overlapping the national. Practically everything that was beyond Orthodoxy was foreign and useless for them because it did not define them in any way. Therefore, the case of the Calvinist princes and superintendents on their forced acceptance of a new faith was automatically correlated with the loss of national identity. It was an obstacle difficult to overcome, which required a lot of ingenuity and inspiration. For this, they chose an ingenious method, namely, to replace the old Slavonic language, used in the Orthodox Church, with the language spoken by the people. It was believed, rightly, that adopting the language used in worship and church practices would cause a split within the Romanian community that would deepen rapidly and favor the spread of the new Calvinist ideas at all levels of the population. Besides eliminating the Slavic language from worship, which, by the way, Romanians hardly understood, the Calvinists, posing as their benefactors, established schools in Romanian for the people and gave Church books to their disposal, through which Calvinist ideas and precepts gradually replaced, almost entirely, those of the Orthodox tradition. Of course, the ignorance of the vast majority of the population about the changes that could occur both at religious and political levels was, in the long term, also taken into account.¹²

At first sight, this method seemed a success; it was logical and quite effectively hid the real reason for the surprising tolerance that was manifested by Calvinist rulers towards the Romanian population in Transylvania.

However, the results were quite modest. Those who responded positively to these new measures to normalize inter-ethnic and inter-confessional relations were not the majority (the crowd of simple believers for whom the new information was quite difficult) as the initiators expected, but only a small part of the Romanian nobility used to this kind of change, for which their interests were much more important than those of the community. More specifically, the propagation of the Calvinist reform was completed with just a series of personal conversions within the Romanian elites – those who had previously passed through a process of Catholicism and who, to maintain their social status, were able to adapt to any *new confessional style* without

¹² Adrian Popescu, “Statormicia poporului român din Transilvania în legea străbună [The steadiness of the Romanian people from Transylvania in the ancestors’ law],” *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 9-10(1968): 1083.

any reluctance.¹³ They were the ones who nonchalantly accepted not only to change their faith by removing the “idolatrous” traces from churches that were on the properties of their noble families, meaning the icons and other specific signs of orthodoxy, but they were also willing to change their names to total denationalization. The process of accepting Calvinism can be translated as their voluntary Magyarization.¹⁴

Of course, besides these privileged groups of Romanian society, there were also conversions among the Orthodox priests, either due to the threats they systematically faced, or due to the promises of some material benefits that would bring them to a social status similar to their Calvinists fellows. Some successes among the Orthodox believers have also been noted, especially where there were mixed communities of Calvinists and Orthodox who used the same church, alternately.¹⁵ Since there were no clear provisions about conducting divine services, there was a danger of a gradual assimilation of the Orthodox believers and their future “registering” as Calvinists. This process took place naturally, without a hurry, for example by the Protestants turning the icons to face the wall on the days when the church was used by them, or even by the definitive elimination of the iconostasis, the altar and the frescoes on the wall, under the pretext of a kind of imposed, rather than accepted, religious tolerance.¹⁶ It is still the case that few details are known about the penetration of Calvinist influences among Orthodox communities that were in a more privileged situation.

Instead, what is certainly known is that the vast majority of Orthodox Romanians from Transylvania, although some claimed that they were “officially” Calvinists, basically remained faithful to their traditions and continued to live according to their old habits. They continued to attend the Orthodox liturgy conducted by their priests, worship the icons in church or their homes, and continue to fast and keep the feast days ordained by the Church. In other words, they remained loyal to the faith they inherited from

¹³ Adrian Andrei Rusu, *Ctitori și biserici din Țara Hațegului până la 1700* [Founders and Churches of the Hațeg ‘country’ till 1700] (Satu Mare: Muzeul Sătmărean Publishing House, 1996), 48-50.

¹⁴ Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe*, 504-507.

¹⁵ Ana Dumitran, Gudor Botond, Nicolae Dănilă, eds., *Relații internaționale române-maghiare în Transilvania (mijlocul secolului XVI – primele decenii ale secolului XVIII)* [The Romanian – Maghiaryan/Hungarian international relations in Transylvania (middle of 16th century – first decades of 18th Century)]” (Alba Iulia: Muzeul Național al Unirii Publishing House, 2000), 121-122.

¹⁶ Rusu, *Ctitori și biserici*, 45-46.

their parents and grandparents.¹⁷ Therefore, we can speak of a kind of Calvinism among the Orthodox Romanians in Transylvania that was rather *conjectural and punctual*, characterized by adopting some elements of the practical Calvinist liturgy, rather than a deep one, with major effects in their lives, or which eventually led to a massive transition to the new faith. The truth is, beyond any other consideration, that the Romanians never believed in the promises made by the Protestant leaders and their future history proved it.

POLITICS AND RELIGIOUS DIPLOMACY

One of the most intense periods of these attempts to make the Orthodox Romanians from Transylvania become Calvinists was during the time of Prince Gabriel Bethlen (1613-1629), who proposed a balanced approach, but was also a good missionary strategist. A skillful diplomat, aware that *great achievements* are made in time with lots of patience and flexibility in making decisions, he took some measures to encourage the functioning of the Orthodox confession by providing better conditions never previously provided. For example, he confirmed the naming of Theofilos and, subsequently, Efthimios, as Bishops at Vad, and of Dositheos and Gennadios as Metropolitans of Transylvania with their residency in Bălgrad (today's modern city of Alba-Iulia). Confiscated goods were returned to the Orthodox priests, and he ordered that they had to be exempted from the tribute in grain and cattle; the children of the Romanian serfs also received the right to learn in state schools.¹⁸

His tolerance towards Romanians was not just the result of some personal belief in the need to respect the rights and freedoms of the inhabitants of Transylvania, regardless of ethnicity, language and faith, although these cannot be completely denied. Rather, the result of his political calculations aimed to protect him from conflicts with neighbors; this included the intention to strengthen, in the future, his authority within the country and the opportunity to obtain a political career at the European level. The prince

¹⁷ Ștefan Meteș, "Atitudinea preoților români din ținutul Hațegului față de unirea cu Roma (1699-1700) [The Attitude of the Romanian priests of the Hațeg county towards unity with Rome]," *Renașterea* 25 (1947): 2-3.

¹⁸ Aurel Jivi, *Orthodox, Catholics and Protestants. Studies in Romanian Ecclesiastical Relations* (Cluj-Napoca: Cluj University Press, 1999), 116-118.

wanted to follow in some way in the wake of the tolerance that was manifested by the Ottoman Empire, in particular towards non-Catholic beliefs, but also to ensure for himself certain political stability on the borders with the two largest Romanian principalities, Moldavia and Wallachia, that supported the Orthodox Church in Transylvania.¹⁹ At the same time, we cannot overlook his political aspirations that led him to think even of the crown of Poland, which he would have obtained with Swedish (Protestant) and Russian (Orthodox) support. Therefore, he needed to change tactics in his religious politics so that he would achieve more power and stability from within his nation, but also generate strong support from the outside.

Therefore, he gave up the previous practices that tried to abolish the Transylvanian Orthodox Church outright and adopted the tactics of *small steps* gradually leading to its subordination and, ultimately, to its total annihilation.²⁰

Thus, after hinting at his willingness to grant appropriate status to the Orthodox faith by recognizing its bishops and metropolitans, but on whom he had imposed some humiliating conditions, he decided to seek help from the one who had, at that time, under his spiritual jurisdiction all the Orthodox churches on the territories where the Romanians lived, namely, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Cyril Lucaris.²¹ It was an extremely

¹⁹ Avram Andea & Susan Andea, *Principatul Transilvaniei sub suzeranitate otomană (1541-1691)* [The Principality of Transylvania under Ottoman suzerainty (1541-1691)], in *Istoria României. Transylvania*, vol. 1 (Cluj-Napoca: George Barițiu Publishing House, 1997), <https://profudeisto.wikispaces.com/file/view/v1c5.pdf>.30-32.

²⁰ It seems that the intention of Prince Gabriel Bethlen was even bolder than his contemporaries thought, namely to unify the three Romanian provinces, Transylvania, Moldavia and Wallachia into one country named Dacia (named after the homeland of the ancestors of Romanians), but it should embrace one faith, which was to be Protestantism. Of course, now it seems a utopia, but this seemed to be a strategy when he decided to contact Ecumenical Patriarch Cyril Lucaris and tried to convince him by his arguments that he wanted the good, the social and spiritual prosperity of Romanians (Ștefan Andreescu, “Transilvania la începutul secolului al XVII-lea; acțiuni și proiecte pentru unitatea spațiului carpato-danubian [Transylvania at the beginning of the 17th century; actions and projects for the unity of the Carpatho-Danubian area],” *Revista de Istorie* 6(1987): 564-574.

²¹ The biographic route followed by Cyril reveals that he was a true precursor of contemporary ecumenism, well anchored in the tradition of his ancestors, educated in important schools in the West, able to easily develop relationships with the representatives of the other Christian churches, aware of the importance of interdenominational dialogue for peace and prosperity among Christians everywhere. In brief, he was born in 1572 in Candia, Crete, the son of a known priest of his time and nephew of the Patriarch Meletios Pigas of Alexandria. He studied in Venice and Padua, where he got to know the realities of the Catholic world, but also had contact for the first time with Protestants. In 1592, he was convinced by his uncle to become a monk and sent to Constantinople

interesting approach that led to great speculations over time concerning the attitude of Patriarch Cyril, accused of showing too much sympathy for Protestantism.²²

I did not have Bethlen's letter available,²³ but we can reproduce most of its content from the letter of the Ecumenical Patriarch Cyril, registered on September 2, 1629. The Prince invoked, among others, the hard situation faced by Romanians, but also the fallen Christian law that they followed; he set himself up as being their savior and promised them all his protection and goodwill under one condition, which was to move from Orthodoxy to Calvinism. For this, however, they would need his help, or rather, the slight intervention by their Metropolitan (Gennadios), convinced that if he would advise him not to oppose, even if he did not encourage such an approach,

where he had the opportunity to understand unionist propaganda, aggressively launched by Poland and imposed on the Orthodox countries all over Eastern Europe. After a dangerous experience in Poland in the middle of the events related by the Synod of Brest (1596), followed by several attempts to compromise him through various Jesuit methods and after a short visit to Moldova, in 1601 he was elected to be the Patriarch of Alexandria at just 29 years of age. This was followed by an extremely dense period of events. He initiated correspondence with Calvinists and Anglicans and was elected deputy to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, but because of many intrigues, he was forced into exile; he spent long periods in Wallachia, where he came to know very well the situation of the Orthodox world from the three principalities: Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania. However, he became Patriarch of Constantinople in 1620. For 18 years, he was subjected to the most foul and dangerous political-religious intrigues, and one which proved to be fatal, the betrayal of the state. Without any serious research on the accusations being made, he was killed by strangulation by the Janissaries sent by Sultan Murad in 1638. (See for details: Teodor Popescu, "Patriarhul Chiril Lukaris văzut după 300 de ani [Patriarch Cyril seen after 300 years]," *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 9-10(1942): 455-473; Milan Șesan, "Comemorarea morții patriarhului Chiril Lukaris [Commemoration of the death of Patriarch Cyril Lucaris]," *Mitropolia Ardealului* 7-8(1958): 574-579; Nicolae Chifăr, *Istoria Creștinimului* [The History of Christianity], vol. IV (Iassy: Trinitas Publishing House, 2005), 158-166.

²² The accusations were based generally on his friendly relations with several Protestant political and church personalities, such as Lutheran pastors Marcus Fuchs from Râșnov and later Brașov, with whom he engaged in dialogue for a long time about the invocation of the saints. Even if, during his youth, he had left the impression that he was convinced of the Protestant arguments in this respect, his work as Patriarch of Alexandria (1601-1620) and especially that as Patriarch of Constantinople (1620-1638) proved otherwise; not only did he accept the invocation of the saints, but he also canonized some of them. Aurel Jivi, "Patriarch Cyril Lucaris' Ties with Transylvanian Protestants," in *Persoană și Comuniune. Prinos de cinstitie Pr. Prof. Acad. Dumitru Stăniloae la împlinirea vârstei de 90 de ani*, ed. Ioan Ică jr. (Sibiu: The Orthodox Archbishopric Publishing House, 1993), 390-392, 396.

²³ We are generically talking about a letter, but it is most likely that it was about several letters handed out, of course, by the prince's messengers, as was common at the time. We are still in the speculation zone because we have no reliable information in this regard.

things would go smoothly. At the same time, he assured him that the emperor (the sultan) of the Turks would not have opposed this, and the King of Sweden, Prince of Brandenburg and many German princes would encourage Romanians to convert to Calvinism, considering it as an act of normality; it was better for them to turn to Calvinism than Catholicism, because the faith of Rome was full of mistakes and should not be followed. However, he mentioned, in fact, that the Orthodox monks and priests had no religion (!) and it was better for them to adhere to one, even a wrong religion, as they considered Calvinism to be, rather than have no faith at all.

Moreover, he advanced the argument that, in countries where there were not too many religious differences, people were happier. His approach, unusual in its very nature, is difficult to understand. He presents his arguments rather rigidly, with a lack of diplomacy and even an air of superiority. To speak to the Ecumenical Patriarch, to the one who by his position, as *primus inter pares* among the Oriental patriarchs, had the duty to defend the Orthodox faith anywhere, anyhow and anytime, by stating among other things that the Orthodox Romanians in Transylvania had no religion (!) seems from the start an unsuccessful attempt, not to say even an affront. The only truthful explanation was that Bethlen was aware of the relationships that Cyril had with the Protestant world,²⁴ which had earned him several allegations from the Orthodox Church that escalated especially after the appearance of the work “The Confession of the Orthodox Church” under his name in Geneva in 1629 and 1633.²⁵

²⁴ Patriarch Cyril was in a good relationship with a number of protestant theologians, such as David Höschel, Friedrich Sylberg, Cornelius Haga, David Le Leu de Wilhelm or Antoine Leger, and knew many protestant writings; Jivi, *Catholic and Protestants*, 100-119.

²⁵ See Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Românești din Transilvania, Banat, Crișana și Maramureș* [The History of the Romanian Church of Transylvania, Banat, Crișana and Maramureș] (Cluj-Napoca: Archbishopric Publishing House, 1992), 152. It is necessary to mention that contemporary church historians have concluded that *The Confession* is either the creation of the Calvinists who sought the recognition of their teaching in the Occident, with the endorsement of Orthodoxy, or of the Jesuits who sought to totally compromise Cyril, the Patriarch. In Constantinople, there were few who knew Latin, but its mere publication was enough to cause the author to be suspected of heresy (!). The strategy worked; it created a scandal boosted by his enemies, and Cyril resigned. He was rehabilitated through the help of the Lutheran King, Gustav Adolf of Sweden, in 1630, which increased the suspicions. After two years, he died and Calvinists again started their attacks. In 1633, in Geneva, *The Confession that leads to Calvinism* was published and – what seems really suspicious – Patriarch Cyril’s signature was printed on it! Might it have been a forgery? Probably yes. How else could his struggle for the defense of the Orthodox faith throughout his entire life be explained? Chifăr, *Istoria Creștinimului*, 163-164.

THE REFINEMENT OF THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH

Cyril's answer, despite its elegance and refinement, was a disappointment for the intentions of Prince Bethlen, because he defended the Orthodox faith and supported the Romanians' rights to protect their national identity and religion. The patriarch said that he appreciated the so-called prince's benevolence and protection of the Romanian people, categorized by him in a malicious or even contemptuous way, as being *pitiful*, but said that this attitude should not condition the switch to Calvinism. Moreover, he explained to Bethlen very clearly why this forced conversion could not take place. First, it was because of the solid opposition of the Romanians themselves. They would not willingly agree to abandon their faith by converting to Calvinism. Second, there was a bond by blood, language, and traditions, among Romanians in Transylvania and those in Wallachia and Moldova. Third, the Romanian rulers from the two extra Carpathian provinces would never agree to such a coercive measure applied to their Orthodox brethren. It was certain that they would oppose it by any means, even armed conflict, hidden inducements and diplomatic actions. To this, he added another, rather political but very logical argument, namely the possible opposition from the other three *religions receptae* (Catholic, Lutheran and Unitarian). He suggested that, even if they enjoyed the same privileges, if it were to be a unilateral conversion of Romanians to Calvinism, these religious communities would feel somehow prejudiced and disadvantaged. Such an approach would lead, most likely, to social tensions that would not benefit anyone.²⁶

At the same time, the patriarch made some comments on the differences between the two denominations and the suitability of such actions, which he saw as political rather than religious, and not bring benefits to any party. Calvinism was not a pagan belief, but a Christian one, but the differences

²⁶ Ioan Aurel Pop, *Patriarhul Kiril Lukaris despre Unitatea Etno-Confesională a Românilor* [Patriarch Cyril Lucaris on the Ethno-Confessional Unity of Romanians], 318-319, <http://dspace.bcucuj.ro/bitstream/123456789/48292/1/Pop%20Ioan%20Aurel-Patriarhul%20Kiril%20Lukaris-2003.pdf>.

between it and Orthodoxy were far greater than between it and Catholicism; the Orthodox Romanians could convert to Calvinism only from ignorance, never from their conviction; if the prince would insist, however, on this intention, he would not be opposed, partly because of the considerable distance and a lack of a concrete force, but mainly because the Church should not fight with weapons, but with the word and the Gospel of Christ. On the other hand, he understood the desire of the princes to have one majority faith (if possible) in their countries, but the Orthodox Church would never agree to such a strategy to equalize or neutralize certain Christian denominations for strictly political reasons.²⁷

Therefore, the only thing he could do was to pray that the Spirit of the Holy Trinity would help the Orthodox Romanians in Transylvania keep their faith unaltered, and for the unity of language, customs and traditions among their brethren from the other two principalities, Moldova and Wallachia.²⁸ In other words, not only did he not support the process of converting the Transylvanian Romanians to Calvinism, even if it were to be organized by Prince Gabriel Bethlen in a much more diplomatic manner by using more refined methods, he even tried to discourage it altogether through rational arguments by engaging in a political and religious dialogue.

The letter itself is an extremely valuable document because it shows us the relationship between politics and religion and its consequences on the social life of the people of the time. Both protagonists of this epistolary dialogue prove themselves to be quite clever in their areas of authority, but they also have quite relevant opinions with respect to the domain occupied by the other, which often do not match. Their opposition started from the very nature of the subject in question, because one of them (the Prince) wanted to convert the Orthodox Romanians in Transylvania to Calvinism, while the other (the Patriarch) did not agree with this initiative, considering it inappropriate, especially because it was spoken of as a forced action, performed without the people's consent.

The patriarch was well informed about the religious situation in Transylvania, because he had very close relations with the voivodes of Moldova and Wallachia, principalities he visited on many occasions. Therefore, Bethlen's "arguments" did not persuade him; moreover, he understood them to be pretexts to justify the eventual forced switching of the Romanians to Calvin-

²⁷ Pop, *Patriarch Cyril Lucaris*, 319-320.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 320-321.

ism, which meant not only losing their religious identity, but rather their national identity. This could never be approved by the Ecumenical Patriarch, the guarantor of preserving the purity of the Orthodox faith throughout the Balkans at that time. Cyril was a man with exceptional theological training, important relationships in the Protestant world, an extraordinary capacity to adapt to the new historical realities of the time and show eagerness for dialogue and collaboration. This did not allow him to doubt for a moment the correctness of his opinions on defending Orthodoxy, especially in the context of the major political and religious changes in seventeenth-century Europe.

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT AN UNFINISHED REFORMATION

First, it is necessary to mention the official and non-official dialogues between the Calvinist Church and the Orthodox Church in Transylvania that brought about the establishment of a quasi-ecumenical climate between the two Christian traditions, although the terms in which the religious realities of the time were discussed were not entirely the most suitable, being rather a kind of political dictate. An important role was played by Ecumenical Patriarch Cyril Lucaris who, despite some unfounded allegations of *sliding* towards Protestantism, was a staunch defender of the Orthodox faith, but also a man open to collaboration, demonstrating flexibility and adaptability to the new realities of the European religious world and showing intelligence in approaching the differences and rivalries.

Second, it can also be said that, in these circumstances, there was progress in the cultural evolution of Romanians and their integration into the greater European culture through the initiatives of translating and printing religious books in their native language.²⁹ Of course, it would be a mistake to ascribe to *the reform* the beginning of this process (translations and publications in Romanian) because today we know that it took place more than half a century earlier;³⁰ yet, what happened in the reform led to the con-

²⁹ Ana Dumitran, "Reforma protestantă și literatură religioasă în limba română tipărită în Transilvania în secolele XVI-XVII [The Protestant reform and the Romanian Religious literature published in Transylvania in the 16-17th Centuries]," *Studia Universitas Babeș-Bolyai (Series Theologia Graeco-Catholica Varadiensis)* 2(2003): 146-147.

³⁰ Păcurariu, *The Romanian Orthodox Church*, 545-560.

solidation, development and diversification of some activities that were not yet in a very advanced phase, both in terms of quantity and also quality.

Third, it is easy to see that, despite the insistence of the Calvinist princes that they were offering the Transylvanian Romanians an “opportunity” for politico-religious emancipation, the latter did not agree to leave the faith of their ancestors because they were convinced that changing their faith meant giving up their national identity. Furthermore, the fact that the reform did not reach its *ultimate goal* in Transylvania is noted both by the Protestant historians of the era³¹ and also contemporary historians.³² Moreover, perhaps the most important argument that cannot be challenged by anyone is that, even today, there is no Romanian Reformed (Calvinist) Church.

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³¹ See Georg Haner in *Samuil Micu, Istoria Românilor* [Samuil Micu, The History of Romanians], vol. 2 (Bucharest: Viitorul Românesc Publishing House, 1995), 215-216.

³² Georg Hancock-Ștefan, *Impactul Reformei asupra Românilor între 1517-1645 (The Impact of Reformation over Romanians between 1517-1645)* (Oradea: Cartea Creștină Publishing House, 2003), 173.

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CYRYL LUKARIS I „NIEDOKOŃCZONA” REFORMACJA RUMUNÓW W TRANSYLVANII

Abstrakt

Pojawienie się reformacji protestanckiej w XVI wieku spowodowało w Europie Zachodniej prawdziwe trzęsienie ziemi w Kościele rzymskokatolickim. Interesujące reminiscencje powstających ruchów religijnych można zaobserwować także we wschodnim świecie chrześcijańskim. Zamiarem niniejszego opracowania jest pokazanie wpływu, jaki reformacja wywarła na prawosławnych Rumunów z Transylwanii. Ich dominacja liczebna oraz pewien zakres tolerancji religijnej, jaką się cieszyli, nie współgrał z uznawaniem ich za odrębny naród. Przywołana uwaga ma znaczenie dla opisywanego w tekście epizodu. Samo zdarzenie miało miejsce na początku XVII wieku za czasów księcia Gabriela Bethlena. Przywołany władca pod pretekstem tzw. religijnej, kulturowej, a nawet narodowej emancypacji Rumunów zaproponował ich konwersję na kalwinizm. W tym względzie zwrócił się o pomoc do ekumenicznego patriarchy Cyryla Lukarisa, niezwykle jak na swoje czasy hierarchy. Analiza jego postaci pozwala dostrzec w nim elastycznego i zarazem stanowczego zwierzchnika, który pozostawał otwarty na dialog z innymi wyznaniem chrześcijańskimi. Dzięki dobrej znajomości realiów polityczno-religijnych Siedmiogrodu, patriarcha Cyryl odpowiedział na prośbę księcia w najbardziej ekumeniczny sposób, broniąc prawa prawosławnych Rumunów do zachowania swojej wiary, języka i zwyczajów wspólnych z braćmi zza Karpat, Mołdawii i Wołoszczyzny.

Słowa kluczowe: reformacja; prawosławie; wiara; naród; wolność religijna; jedność; ekumenizm.