

A REFORMÁTUS ASSZONYOKRA KÉNYSZERÍTETT UTOLSÓ KENET

A haldoklás felekezeti rítusai a 18. századi erdélyi
grófnő, Bethlen Kata ego-dokumentumaiban

THE EXTREME UNCTION FORCED UPON REFORMED WOMEN
Confessional Rites of Dying in the Ego-Documents of the Eighteenth-
Century Transylvanian Countess Kata Bethlen

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ÖSSZEFOGLALÁS

A „hosszú reformáció” három évszázada alatt a vallási szertartások közötti különbségek nem csupán a temetések alkalmával és a halottak megemlékezése során nyilvánultak meg; Európa különböző régióiból származó számos példa azt is bizonyítja, hogy maga a halás ág is a vallási viszályok színterévé vált. Jelentős feszültség keletkezett, ha a haldoklás során alkalmazott szertartás eltért a haldokló vagy a búcsút vevők vallási hagyományaitól. Ez különösen igaz az utolsó kenetre, amennyiben ezt a katolikus szentséget haldokló protestánsoknak is megadták. Jelen tanulmányomban ezt a vallási feszültséget vizsgálom, elsősorban a 18. századi erdélyi grófnő, Bethlen Kata (1700–1759) önéletrajzi dokumentumainak elemzésével. Álláspontom szerint a haldoklás rituáléinak növekvő jelentőségét a hatalmi politika és az egyházi politika kontextusában is értelmezni lehet, és a felekezeti elemek egyre nagyobb szerepe részben ennek a fejleménynek a fényében érthető meg.

ABSTRACT

During the three centuries of the “Long Reformation,” differences in religious rites were manifested not only on the occasion of funerals and in the commemoration of the dead; numerous examples from various regions of Europe also show that the deathbed itself became a site of religious strife. Significant tension arose if the rite employed during the process of dying diverged from the religious traditions of the dying person or those bidding them farewell. This is particularly true of the Extreme Unction, insofar as this Catholic sacrament was administered to dying Protestants. In the present study, I examine this religious tension, primarily by analyzing the Ego-documents of the eighteenth-century Transylvanian countess, Kata Bethlen (1700–1759). I argue that the growing significance attached to the rituals of dying can also be interpreted in the context of power politics and ecclesiastical policy, and that the increasing prominence of denominational elements may in part be understood in light of this development.

Kulcsszavak: Bethlen Kata grófnő, egodokumentumok, 18. századi Erdély, rekatolizálási törekvések, haldoklás vallási szertartásai, utolsó kenet

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Keywords: countess Kata Bethlen, Ego-documents, eighteenth-century Transylvania, re-Catholicization efforts, religious rituals of dying, Extreme Unction

During the three centuries of the “Long Reformation,”¹ differences in religious rites were manifested not only on the occasion of funerals and in the commemoration of the dead; numerous examples from various regions of Europe also show that the deathbed itself became a site of religious strife. The roots of this can be found in the writings of Luther, which introduced practices differing from Catholic tradition.² Significant tension arose if the rite employed during the process of dying diverged from the religious traditions of the dying person or those bidding them farewell. This is particularly true of the Extreme Unction, insofar as this Catholic sacrament was administered to dying Protestants. In the present study, I examine this religious tension, primarily by analyzing the Ego-documents of the eighteenth-century Transylvanian countess, Kata Bethlen.

Religious Struggle for the Dying

Following the Reformation, a dying person might feel their spiritual salvation threatened by an end-of-life rite performed in a manner inconsistent with their own religious tradition; furthermore, the body could lose the right to be interred in a cemetery appropriate to one’s faith. Thirdly, all of this affected the religious identity of those left behind—the family and the wider community. From their perspective, a death and burial conducted with the *proper* rites could reinforce their affiliation. Conversely, *improper* practice could cause distress and make the perceived threat to the survival or spread of the religion believed to be true palpable. Fourthly, the methods of dying and burial articulated in the sermons and funeral orations of various liturgical and paraliturgical occasions—as well as those described in manuscript and printed works, such as *artes moriendi*—could exert an influence on every person who would one day depart. These texts offered a model to be followed for their own eventual dying and funeral. This was often supported by the argument that the further fate of the soul might depend on whether the rites performed during the death throes were deemed correct or practiced wrongly, as well as on burial in the appropriate ground. These texts also emphasized that one must prepare for death throughout

¹ For the term of “long Reformation” see TÓTH, Zsombor: Religious Persecution, Exile and the Making of the Long Reformation (1500–1800) in Royal Hungary, *Philobiblon*, 25, 2020, nr. 2, 205–225; Tóth, Zsombor: Understanding Long Reformation in Eastern Europe: The Case of Hungarian Puritanism Revisited, *Journal of Early Modern Christianity*, 7, 2020, nr. 2, 319–341.

² Cf. NGIEN, Dennis: The Art of Dying: In Luther’s Sermon on Preparing to Die, *The Heythrop Journal*, 49, 2008, nr. 1, 1–19.

the entirety of life, in accordance with one's own religious teachings.

When researching this topic in Hungary, it is worth basing one's approach on those perspectives that take into account the religious differences in the perception of death following the Reformation. In international literature, several scholars have accounted for the confessional differences and tensions regarding the process of preparation for death and the rituals surrounding the dying. They also dealt with the ritual differences in the burial of dead bodies and the conflict over the place and manner of burial.³

Following the Reformation, in the power struggle between Catholics and Protestants it became an increasingly important question whether, according to the beliefs of the adherents of a given religion, the soul of the dying person would reach heaven, and how the performance of the deathbed ritual appropriate to one's own confession—or, conversely, activities contrary to it, including conversion in the final hours before exspiratio—could later be demonstrated. For Catholics, this meant that the person died after receiving the sacraments of Confession, Holy Communion, and Extreme Unction; for Protestants, it most often meant precisely the opposite: that the dying person passed away while keeping these rites at a distance, spending their final hours receiving the Lord's Supper, meditating,

³ WUNDERLI, Richard – BROCE, Gerald: The Final Moment before Death in Early Modern England, *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 20, 1989, nr. 2, 259–275; CRESSY, David: *Birth, Marriage and Death: Ritual, Religion and Life Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England*, OUP, Oxford, 1997; HOULBROOKE, Ralph: *Death, Religion and the Family in England, 1450–1750*, OUP, Oxford, 1998; COX, Margaret (ed.): *Grave Concerns: Death and Burial in England, 1700–1850*, York, Council for British Archaeology, 1998; KOSLOFSKY, Craig: *The Reformation of the Dead: Death and Ritual in Early Modern Germany, 1450–1700*, Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke, 2000; GORDON, Bruce – MARSHALL, Peter (eds.): *The Place of the Dead – Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, CUP, Cambridge, 2000, 131–148; HARDING, Vanessa: *The Dead and the Living in Paris and London, 1500–1670*, CUP, Cambridge, 2002; MARSHALL, Peter: *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England*, OUP, Oxford, 2002; TANKARD, Danae: The Reformation of the Deathbed in Mid-Sixteenth-Century England, *Mortality*, 8, 2003, nr. 3, 251–252; MARSHALL, Peter: Angels Around the Deathbed: Variations on a Theme in the English Art of Dying, in MARSHALL, Peter – WALSHAM, Alexandra (eds.): *Angels in the Early Modern World*, CUP, Cambridge, 2006, 83–103; REINIS, Austra: *Reforming the Art of Dying: The Ars Moriendi in the German Reformation, 1519–1528*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2007; RYRIE, Alec: *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain*, OUP, Oxford, 2013, 460–468; RASMUSSEN, Tarald – FLÆTEN, Jon Øygarden (eds.): *Preparing for Death, Remembering the Dead*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015; BOOTH, Philip – TINGLE, Elizabeth (eds.): *A Companion to Death, Burial, and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, c. 1300–1700*, Brill, Leiden–Boston, 2021.

and praying. Such pressure was perhaps applied more forcefully and more frequently—though not exclusively—to women: on the one hand to those who were dying, and on the other hand to women following childbirth or confined to their sickbeds. In these situations they were regarded as weaker not only because of their gender but also because their physical condition rendered them particularly vulnerable.⁴

In the present study, I argue that in mid-eighteenth-century Transylvania the growing significance attached to the rituals of dying can also be interpreted in the context of power politics and ecclesiastical policy, and that the increasing prominence of denominational elements may in part be understood in light of this development.⁵ Recent church-historical scholarship has become less inclined to describe the period beginning around the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—namely the history of Hungary and Transylvania after their liberation from Ottoman rule—by means of the concept of a “bloodless Counter-Reformation”. Rather, it is more appropriate to narrate this process as one in which the Catholic clergy and the absolutist state power continued to act in alliance with one another throughout the eighteenth century, following a logic similar to that underlying the Protestant persecutions in late seventeenth-century Hungary. What changed in their approach was that they now sought, more tactically and over the longer term, to alter the confessional balance in Hungary and Transylvania to the detriment of Protestants. Even when decrees were issued that in principle were intended to protect Protestants, the secular and ecclesiastical authorities formulated secret instructions in the background—measures that in practice contributed to the obstruction of Protestant religious practice. During this period, particularly from the second third of the eighteenth century onward, it became increasingly common to compel the Protestant party in mixed marriages to sign a letter of obligation, and likewise to force other Protestants to convert by coercive means. Over the course of the eighteenth century it became ever clearer to Protestants that it was far easier to achieve success in every respect as a Catholic. This period of Protestant persecution lasted until 1781, when the

⁴ Cf. BECKER, Lucinda: *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman* Ashgate, Aldershot, 2003.

⁵ The methods of dying have already been examined by Hungarian scholars, but denominational aspects were less studied in early modern Hungarian and Transylvanian context. Cf. S. SÁRDI, Margit: *Ars moriendi és a meghalás gyakorlata*, in: PÓCS, Éva (ed.): *Lélek, halál, túlvilág*, Balassi, Budapest, 2001, 474–487; MATKÓCSIK, Attila: „A haldoklás teátruma” – Erdély haldokló gubernátora, *Kharón: Thanatológiai Szemle*, 9, 2005, nr. 1–2, 74–118; KÖKÉNYESI, Zsolt: „Vég nélkül való Nagyság”: Reprezentáció és önkép a 18. századi főúri halotti beszédekben, *Aetas*, 31, 2015, nr. 1, 162–183; V. LÁSZLÓ, Zsófia: *Példás asszonyok: Női szerepek változása a protestáns halotti beszédek tükrében, 1711–1825*, Ráció, Budapest, 2020.

Edictum Tolerantiale—truly significant from the perspective of religious policy—was issued, and until the Diet of 1790–1791, which adopted Article XXVI placing Protestants under the protection of the constitution.⁶

A Brief History of Extreme Unction

In what follows, I focus on one of the most distinctive Catholic elements among the rites of dying that can be interpreted from a confessional perspective. The administration of the sacrament of Extreme Unction required close bodily contact during the anointing of the individual senses; moreover, according to eighteenth-century source texts, it could even involve a form of penetration, since the giving of the consecrated host made it possible for the priest to place his fingers into the mouth of the dying person. A comprehensive study of this *sacramentum* from the perspective of church and ritual history in Hungary and Transylvania is still lacking. The ethnographic literature concerning the beliefs associated with receiving this sacrament is likewise rather limited.⁷

Earlier international scholarship emphasized that in European Christianity Extreme Unction became widespread as an element of the ritual of dying in the thirteenth century.⁸ It was defined and regulated more thoroughly by the decrees of the Council of Trent (1545–1563), which placed it within the sacrament of the *viaticum*, following confession and communion. This prescription was further clarified and formalized by the

⁶ DIENES, Dénes: Tartható-e még a vértelen ellenreformáció fogalma?, in CSORBA, Dávid (ed.): *Vértelen ellenreformáció*, KGRE, Budapest, 2020, 13–19; TÓTH, Zsombor: Vértelen ellenreformáció: persecutio incurenta? Egy lehetséges értelmezés a hosszú reformáció kontextusában, in CSORBA (ed.): *Vértelen, op. cit.*, 21–34; ERDÉLYI, Gabriella: Confessional Identity and Models of Aristocratic Conversion in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Hungary, *Social History*, 40, 2015, nr. 4, 473–496. – See also previously written monographs and studies, for instance: ZOVÁNYI, Jenő: *A magyarországi protestantizmus története 1895-ig*, Attraktor, Máriabesnyő–Gödöllő, 2004 [the monograph was written in 1948]), vol. 2, 91–108, 130–146; TRÓCSÁNYI, Zsolt: Az ellenreformáció Erdélyben 1711-től a felvilágosult abszolutizmus kezdetéig, *Theologiai Szemle*, 22, 1979, nr. 4, 219–226.

⁷ The lack of ethnographic research on this field in Hungary is mentioned by TÁNCZOS, Vilmos: A moldvai csángók népi vallásosságának kutatása, in: S. LACKOVITS, Emőke – SZŐCSNÉ GAZDA, Enikő (eds.): *Népi vallásosság a Kárpát medencében*, 7, Székely Nemzeti Múzeum – VMML, Sepsiszentgyörgy–Veszprém, 2007, vol. 2, 311–338.

⁸ ISAMBERT, François-A.: Les Transformations du rituel catholique des mourants, *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 20, 1975, nr. 1, 89–100; cf. LEWIS, Nicola Denzey: *Apolytrosis* as Ritual and Sacrament: Determining a Ritual Context for Death in Second-Century Marcossian Valentinianism, *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 17, 2009, nr. 4, 525–561.

Rituale Romanum approved in 1614 by Pope Paul V (1605–1621). This regulation also declares that the order of the rites and the place of Extreme Unction within that were of great importance: „In quo illud in primis ex generali Ecclesiae consuetudine observandum est, ut si tempus et infirmis conditio permittat, ante Extremam Unctionem Poenitentiae et Eucharistiae Sacramenta infirmis praebeantur”. The order accepted after the Council of Trent—and since 1614—(Confession, Holy Communion, Extreme Unction) was expanded by Pope Benedict XIV (1740–1758) in the bull *Pia mater*, issued in 1747, in the chapter *de articulo mortis*, with prayer, the *commendatio animarum*, and the granting of plenary absolution.⁹

The prescriptions of the *Rituale Romanum* were harmonized with Hungarian practice by Péter Pázmány in his capacity as Archbishop of Esztergom. He sought to integrate these regulations with the traditions preserved in ritual books (*rituale*-type liturgical manuals), which transmitted inherited practice. Beyond the strictly liturgical elements, these also reflected local traditions concerning extra-liturgical ceremonies, including the administration of the sacraments.¹⁰ As a result, the *Rituale Strigoniense* was created, and beginning with its 1625 edition it treated the sacrament of Extreme Unction in considerable detail.¹¹ Early modern believers were even less familiar with, and accepted to a far lesser degree, the sacrament of Extreme Unction than that of sacrament of Confirmation. In 1626, during visitations conducted within the Archdiocese of Esztergom at Pázmány's instruction, archdeacons reported not only the absence of Confirmation but also the unfamiliarity with Extreme Unction. For example, records from the Archdeaconry of Sasvár note that in several churches

⁹ Cited by ISAMBERT, *Les Transformations*, op. cit., 91. – The sacrament, which was called *extreme unction* (lat. *extrema unctio*) in the *Rituale Romanum* (1614), was only renamed the *anointing of the sick* (lat. *unctio infirmorum*) in the new ritual by Pope Paul VI (1963–1978), and reinterpreted theologically: *Ordo Unctionis Infirmorum eorumque pastoralis curae* (Typis polyglottis vaticanis, Roma, 1972). – Recent edition, with an introduction to the history of the sacrament: *Ordo Unctionis Infirmorum eorumque spiritualis curae* (S. Sabina, Roma, 2008). – Cf. ISAMBERT, *Les Transformations*, op. cit., 91–92.

¹⁰ RÁJNER, Lajos: *A rituále-kérdés Magyarországon*, Nagy S., Budapest, 1901.

¹¹ PÁZMÁNY, Péter (ed.): *Rituale Strigoniense*, typ. Soc. Jesu, Pozsony, 1625 (RMNy 1346). See: *De sacramento extremae unctionis*, 77–85. Critical edition: VARGA, Beniamin (ed.): *Rituale Strigoniense*, Argumentum, Budapest, 2015, 51–79, URL: <https://vallastudomany.elte.hu/sites/default/files/kiadvanyok/MRH/RitStrig.pdf> – Critical edition of the rituale (1560), before it was reformed by Pázmány: VARGA, Benjámín (ed.): *Obsequiale Strigoniense, 1490–1560*, ELTE BTK, Budapest, 2016, for the unction: 50–51. – Cf. VARGA, Benjámín: *Magyarországi rituálék az újkorban, 1625-től*, MA-thesis, ELTE, Budapest, 2012, URL: http://vallastudomany.elte.hu/sites/default/files/Magyarorszag_i_ritualek_az_ujkorban_1625-.pdf

the Holy Oil used for Extreme Unction was entirely lacking. According to the report, parish priests excused themselves by claiming that they had no need for it, since the sick and dying were not accustomed to receiving Extreme Unction anyway. The same account indicates that some people were not even aware of the existence of the sacraments of Confirmation and Extreme Unction.¹²

Not only immediately after the introduction of the *Rituale Strigoniense*, but even during the nearly century-long period following the 1620s, the actual spread of the administration of Extreme Unction proceeded slowly. In Hungary the consolidation of the decrees of the Council of Trent was delayed until the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Only from that time onward was it possible to convene comprehensive reform synods in the territories formerly under Ottoman rule, as well as in the Transylvanian diocese revived from 1716, and to issue the *statutos* associated with them.¹³ At the same time, a number of Latin treatises dealing with the subject of Extreme Unction had already been accessible earlier. Evidence for this can be found, for example, in the seventeenth-century catalogues of the Jesuit library in Nagyszombat (Trnava, present-day Slovakia).¹⁴

The Re-Emergence of Catholicism in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Transylvania

In Hungary and Transylvania the implementation of the Tridentine principles in practice—through the series of reform synods and the reconstruction of the parish network—took place in parallel with the gradual erosion, from the end of the seventeenth century onward, of the Protestant religious liberty and confessional peace previously guaranteed by law. At the Diet of 1681, Article XXVI regulating the so-called articular places was adopted, restricting Protestant religious practice to two settlements in each county. Since the central part of Hungary was still under Ottoman rule at that time, the law could in practice apply to only eleven of the thirty-one counties.¹⁵ Although the law formally reaffirmed the Peace of Vienna of 1606, its clause preserving “the rights of the landlords” could be

¹² FRANKL (FRANKÓI), *Vilmos: Pázmány Péter és kora, Ráth, Pest, 1869, vol. 2, 253–254. Cited by: BÁRTH, Dániel: Szempontok a bérnökös történeti néprajzi vizsgálathoz, Néprajzi Látóhatár, 16, 2007, nr. 3–4, 191.*

¹³ See BÁRTH, Szempontok, op. cit.

¹⁴ Books of Robertus Bellarminus (1590), Jacobus Keller (1616), Joannis del Castillo (1646), Franciscus Amicus (1650), Rodericus de Arriaga (1655), Georgius Gobat (1664), and Hermannus Horst (1690). See FARKAS, Gábor Farkas (ed.): *Magyarországi jezsuita könyvtárak 1711-ig, Nagyszombat, 1632–1690, vol. 2, Scriptum, Szeged, 1997, 44, 69, 158, 179, 230, 238, 254.*

¹⁵ MÁRKUS, Dezső (ed.): *Corpus Iuris Hungarici. Magyar Törvénytár. Az 1657–1740. évi törvények, Franklin, Budapest, 1900, 284–287.*

interpreted by Catholic landowners to mean that the religious practice of their serfs fell solely under their authority—thus effectively contradicting the very essence of the reaffirmed law, namely the freedom of Protestant worship guaranteed in the Peace of Vienna.

After 1681, and especially following the expulsion of the Ottomans, from the 1690s onward, Protestant religious practice was increasingly suppressed in more aggressive ways. In Transylvania, which in the seventeenth century was still predominantly Protestant and under Reformed princely rule, the resettlement of the Jesuits began in the 1690s, followed by the reorganization of the Catholic bishopric. The legal framework of the Habsburg absolutist church policy aimed at curbing Protestant religious practice—following the Protestant persecutions, show trials, and galley slavery of the 1670s—was established through several decrees at the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries. These included the reaffirmation of the provisions of the Diet of 1681 in 1687, as well as the stricter decree issued in 1691 by Leopold I, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Hungary (1657–1705), known as the *Explanatio Leopoldina*. After a few years of relative freedom for Protestants during the Rákóczi's War of Independence (1703–1711), further absolutist measures detrimental to Protestant interests were introduced. In Transylvania—governed independently of the Kingdom of Hungary and administered directly from Vienna as a separate province of the Habsburg Empire from 1690 onward—these measures were enacted at the Diet convened in 1712; in Hungary they were adopted at the Diet of 1714–1715. The *Carolina Resolutio I and II* (1731 and 1734), issued by Charles VI (1711–1740), applying to both Hungary and Transylvania and intended to settle religious conflicts, in fact contributed to the further strengthening of the Catholic Church and the weakening of Protestant denominations. These decrees entrusted the supervision of the religious practice of *acatholici*—as well as the approval of their participation in political life—to the discretion of the monarch, the landowners, and in Transylvania the Catholic-dominated governing body known as the *Gubernium Transylvanicum*. The religious decree issued in 1742 by Maria Theresa (1740–1780) reaffirmed the measures introduced by her father.¹⁶

¹⁶ KÖBLÖS, József: A pápai reformátusok küzdelmei a szabad vallásgyakorlatért a XVIII. század elején, *Acta Papensia*, 1, 2001, nr. 1–2, 66–69; MAKKAI, László et al. (eds.): *History of Transylvania*, vol. 2, *From 1606 to 1830*, Columbia UP, New York, 2002, 517–521, 569–577, 599–600; DIENES, Dénes, *Carolina Resolutio*, in: KÖSZEGHY, Péter (ed.): *Magyar Művelődéstörténeti Lexikon*, Balassi, Budapest, 2004, vol. 2, 12–13; SHORE, Paul: *Jesuits and the Politics of Religious Pluralism in Eighteenth Century Transylvania*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2007; KURUCZ, György: A Carolina Resolutio és a protestáns vallásgyakorlat, in GUDOR, Botond et. al. (eds.): *Egyház, társadalom és művelődés Bod Péter (1712–1769) korában*, KGRE–L'Harmattan, Budapest, 2012, 11–24; BARÁTH Béla Levente: Az I. Carolina

From the perspective of the present study, it is particularly noteworthy that from the time of the *Carolina Resolutio* onward it was permitted in both Hungary and Transylvania for Catholic priests to administer Extreme Unction even to Protestants.¹⁷ Partly as a consequence of this regulation, the papal bull mentioned above—concerning the blessing and indulgence granted to the dying—was printed in Buda in 1748 on the basis of the 1747 Roman edition. It was also published in Eger sometime in the early 1760s.¹⁸

Countess Kata Bethlen (1700–1759) and her Ego-documents

The Bethlen family of Bethlen was a prominent Reformed noble family in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Transylvania, possessing considerable prestige and extensive estates as well as producing numerous influential politicians. Many members of the family also engaged in noteworthy literary activity. Two examples may be mentioned among those Bethlens who held the office of chancellor during the era of the principality and later under the *Gubernium*: the historical writings of János Bethlen (1613–1678), and the autobiography and numerous other works by count Miklós Bethlen (1642–1716). Their example may also have provided a familial model for countess Kata Bethlen—the granddaughter of the former and the niece of the latter.¹⁹

Kata Bethlen maintained an extensive correspondence, published a prayer book (*Védelmeső erős pais* [*Protective Strong Shield*], Sárdi Press, Szeben [Sibiu, present-day Romania], 1751?, 1759?), and wrote an autobiography. Most of the latter text—edited by her former court chaplain Péter Bod—was also published in print, most likely in a small number of copies (*Gróf bethleni Bethlen Kata életének maga által való rövid le-írása* [*A Short Description of the Life of the Countess Kata Bethlen by Herself*], Sárdi Press, Szeben [Sibiu, present-day Romania], 1759?).²⁰ The continuation of the

Resolútiótól a türelmi rendeletig, in GÁBORJÁNI SZABÓ, Botond (ed.): *Egyházak és egyházpolitika Magyarországon és Erdélyben a 18–19. században: A Carolina Resolútiótól az 1848. évi XX. törvénycikkig*, TTRE Gyűjtemények, Debrecen, 2016, 11–16.

¹⁷ KECSKEMÉTI, Károly: *La Hongrie et le réformisme libéral – Problèmes politiques et sociaux, 1790–1848*, Centro di ricerca, Roma, 1989, 246.

¹⁸ *Benedicto et indulgentiae plenariae in articulo mortis impertiendae...*, Nottensteinin, Buda, 1748; *Bulla Benedicti papae XIV de benedictione in articulo mortis impertienda...*, Bauer, Agria, [early 1760s].

¹⁹ JANKOVICS, József: A bethleni Bethlenek szerepe Erdély íráshasználatában, in GÁBOR, Csilla et al. (eds.): *Nyelv, lelkeség és regionalitás a közép- és kora újkorban*, Egyetemi Műhely, Kolozsvár, 2013, 384–391.

²⁰ For the problem of the publishing and circulating process of Bethlen's autobiography and her prayer book, see my recent study: FAZAKAS, Gergely Tamás: Árva Bethlen Kata önreprezentációi, in HORVÁTH, Iván et al. (eds.): *Magyar*

printed text has survived only in manuscript form: two separate, unconnected fragments copied by Péter Bod, and a further fragment—constituting the direct continuation of the latter—written in Kata Bethlen's own hand.²¹ Bethlen most likely composed the retrospective portion of her autobiography in 1744, reviewing her life up to that point, after which she continued to write approximately once a year. The printed section of the autobiography extends to the year 1751, while the manuscript fragments contain entries up to early 1754. She continued to write or dictate further Ego-documents (meditations, confessional statements of faith, and wills) until 1759.

At the age of seventeen, Kata Bethlen was married to her stepbrother, count László Haller (1697–1719), who came from a prominent Catholic family in Transylvania. Despite the mixed marriage, she retained sufficient freedom to remain in her own confession, resisting repeated attempts to convert her. Of their three children, two survived: Pál Haller, baptized as a Catholic, and Borbála Haller, baptized as Reformed but converted at a young age. After the early death of her husband in the plague epidemic of 1722, the Haller family raised both children from childhood onward under strong Catholic influence—with both ecclesiastical and political support. Over time they became even emotionally estranged from their mother, and their relationship deteriorated.²² After three years of widowhood, Kata Bethlen married a Reformed aristocrat, count József Teleki of Szék (1675–1732). However, all three of the Reformed children born from this marriage died at a young age. At the age of thirty-two Bethlen became a widow for the second time. From that point onward she attempted to independently administer both her own estates and those that had remained in her possession after the death of her second husband.²³ In her writings, she frequently reflected on her widowhood—in

irodalomtörténet, Gépeskönyv, Budapest, 2020–2022, URL: <https://f-book.com/mi/index.php?chapter=1209FAZAARVA>

²¹ The three manuscript fragments of Bethlen's autobiography are stocked in Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület Központi Gyűjtőlevéltára (EREKGy), Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca, present-day Romania), A8 (Árva Bethlen Kata hagyatéka / Legacy of Kata Árva Bethlen). – Description, first edition: MARKOS, András: *Árva Bethlen Kata Vallástétele és Önéletírásának kiadatlan töredékei*, *Református Szemle*, 57, 1964, nr. 4, 308–323; MARKOS, András: *Bod Péter és Árva Bethlen Kata*, *Református Szemle*, 62, 1969, nr. 4, 339–357; cf. FAZAKAS: *Árva Bethlen Kata önreprezentációi*, op. cit.

²² ERDÉLYI, Gabriella: *Confessional*, op. cit., 479, 482, 489–490.

²³ Kata Bethlen's recent biography: BATORINÉ MISÁK Marianna: *Árva Bethlen Kata grófnő (1700–1759)*, in TANÁSZI, Árpád (ed.): *„A tisztességes hírnév örökös vagyok” – A múlt a jövő forrása: A bethleni Bethlenek*, Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület Igazgatótanácsa, Kolozsvár, 2023, 74–85; her biography and the historical context in English: ADAMS, Bernard: *The Life of Countess Kata Bethlen*: Introduction,

her own and her contemporaries' terminology, her "orphanhood." On the one hand, she described its personal dimensions in detail. On the other hand, in her autobiography, prayer book, correspondence, meditations, confessional writings, and wills she represented her "orphanhood" as an allegory of the persecution of the Reformed Church by Catholics—as a form of Protestant martyrdom.²⁴ Kata Bethlen's autobiography was most recently interpreted by Gabriella Erdélyi as "a narrative of religious constancy, and of non-conversion amid the dangers of her religiously mixed marriage," and "in the context of re-Catholicization efforts and propagandistic battles in eighteenth-century Transylvania."²⁵

The Threat of the Ritual of Extreme Unction in the Writings of Countess Kata Bethlen

In what follows, I examine those passages of Kata Bethlen's autobiography and several other Ego-documents (her prayers, wills, and meditations) that testify—within the context of the confessional persecutions and coerced conversions of the middle third of the eighteenth century—that the power struggle between the Catholic and the Reformed confessions was fought not only "for lordship over souls,"²⁶ but also over the bodies of the dying.

1.

On April 4, 1746 Kata Bethlen composed a "confession of faith". This text—an unusual case among her Ego-documents—has survived both in her autograph manuscript and in a copy made by her court chaplain, Péter Bod.²⁷ In response to accusations made by her adult children, who were themselves of Catholic faith, Bethlen carefully refutes the charge that she was a "heretic." She then proceeds to formulate at length and with precision—perhaps with Bod's assistance—the "formula of my true faith and religion," outlining the most important elements of Trinitarian theology.

in *A Short Description of the Life of the Countess Kata Bethlen by Herself*, transl. ADAMS, Bernard, Shaun Tyas, Donington, 2004, 1–9.

²⁴ FAZAKAS, Gergely Tamás: „tetszett az Úristennek [...] a gyámoltalan árvák seregébe béírni”: Bethlen Kata önéletírása és az özvegyek reprezentációjának kulturális hagyománya a kora újkorban, in BALÁZS, Mihály – GÁBOR, Csilla (eds.): *Emlékezet és devóció a régi magyar irodalomban*, Egyetemi Műhely, Kolozsvár, 2007, 259–278; FAZAKAS, Gergely Tamás: Árvaság és mártírium: A gyámoltalan özvegy mint a református egyház metaforája a 17–18. században, *Studia Litteraria*, 51, 2012, nr. 3–4, 198–231.

²⁵ ERDÉLYI: Confessional, op. cit., 474 (quotation above), 482, 489–494.

²⁶ *A Short Description of [...] Kata Bethlen*, op. cit., 63. (ch. 158.) 1.

²⁷ EREKGy, Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca, Romania), A8 (Árva Bethlen Kata hagyatéka / Legacy of Kata Árva Bethlen). – Bod served as court priest to Kata Bethlen in Olthévíz from 1743 to 1749. See: VERES, László: Bod Péter olthévízi élete és szolgálata, 1743–1749, in *Egyház, társadalom és művelődés*, op. cit., 142–157.

Her aim was to demonstrate her “true Reformed faith,” and that she had never “wavered” in it.²⁸

If Kata Bethlen was indeed so steadfast, why did she find it necessary in 1746 to make such a formal declaration of her faith, and why had she already addressed similar issues two years earlier in her autobiography and letters? Most likely in order to demonstrate that she was in no way affiliated with the religion of the Antitrinitarians. Although the accusation may have had some relevance because of the Unitarian faith of her maternal ancestors from the Borsai Nagy family, Kata Bethlen herself was far removed from Unitarian belief. Throughout her life she remained faithful to the Reformed confession; indeed, on her own estate at Olthévíz²⁹ she even attempted, at times forcefully, to convert Unitarians to the Reformed faith.³⁰ More importantly, however, being associated with Unitarianism carried serious risks in the context of Habsburg and Catholic policy after the *Carolina Resolutio* (1731/1734). Namely, in these decades the treatment of Unitarians as heretics and the efforts to marginalize them intensified in Transylvania even more strongly than those directed against the Reformed. It was in this context that the treatise *Gondolatok az Árius-eretnekség Erdély fejedelemségéből kiirtásáról* [Thoughts on the Eradication of the Arian Heresy from the Principality of Transylvania] was written.³¹

The text cited above, written by Kata Bethlen in 1746, concludes with the statement: “This is my declaration concerning my faith and religion made with a good conscience; in this true faith I wish to live; *in this I wish to die*.”³² In this text she does not elaborate on the concrete manner of dying according to the “true faith,” that is, according to the Reformed confession. Yet it most likely refers to what she states explicitly in several later writings cited below—namely, that she wished *not to die according to Catholic rites*.

²⁸ Bethlen Kata vallástétele (April 4, 1746), in TONK, Sándor (ed.): *Árva Bethlen Kata írása és kora*, Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület, Kolozsvár, 1998, 29–32.

²⁹ Hoghiz, present-day Romania. – The village belonged to Nagy-Küküllő County in the eighteenth century.

³⁰ Cf. ILKEL, Ildikó: Bethlen Kata térítése, in *Emlékezet és devóció*, op. cit., 367–371; VERES: Bod Péter, op. cit.; GESZTELYI, Hermina: *Textusok és textílek: Az erényes nő műveltsége a 17–18. században*, TTRE Közgyűjtemények, Debrecen, 2021, 118–133.

³¹ *History of Transylvania*, op. cit., vol. 2, 569–572; TRÓCSÁNYI: Az ellenreformáció, op. cit., 223–224; GÖNCZÖL, Andrea: *A védekezés retorikája: Szövegszervező eljárások unitárius vitáiratokban a 18. század derekán*, PhD-thesis, Szegedi Tudományegyetem BTK IDI, Szeged, 2014, URL: doktori.bibl.u-szeged.hu/2161/1/DOKTORI%20DISSZERTACIO.pdf

³² Bethlen Kata vallástétele (April 4, 1746), in TONK (ed.): *Árva Bethlen Kata*, op. cit., 32. (italics mine)

2.

In a supplication dated February 15, 1751—later published in Kata Bethlen's prayer book—the following passage appears: "Take care, merciful God, also of my body that shall return to dust; appoint the place and hour of my dissolution among people with whom I have worshipped You in this life in one true faith and religion. Do not permit, dear Father, that my mortal remains be defiled by a sacrament imagined by strangers; rather, let even those who judged me to have no true faith or religion behold in me the delightful and precious anointing of Your Holy Spirit."³³ The expressions mentioned in this prayer ("a sacrament imagined by strangers"; "the delightful and precious anointing of Your Holy Spirit") most likely refer to her desire to avoid the Catholic ritual of dying, and thus particularly the sacrament of Extreme Unction.

3.

A more detailed reflection by Kata Bethlen dates from the spring of 1752 and survives in the manuscript portion of her autobiography, in the second manuscript fragment copied by Péter Bod. In this passage, as well as in letters³⁴ she sent around the same time, Bethlen writes about her serious illnesses, the possible prospect of her death, and later her recovery. In this context she recalls the following: „For often when, even in a healthy condition, I have pondered my last end and my being alone, oh, what bitter torments that has brought me: with many bitter sighs I have besought my God to set beside me in my solitude persons of one faith and religion with me, so that *when I depart into the world of shades ceremonies contrary to my religion may not be performed.*"³⁵ The autobiographer records that her Reformed brother Sámuel Bethlen and his wife Klára Nemes "were with me day and night during this long illness," and that the Reformed minister of Fogaras, Mihály Jantsó, was likewise present during her suffering.³⁶ Despite this, Kata Bethlen feared that if she were to be dying, no well-wisher of the Reformed faith might be present beside her. Instead, only her Catholic children—Pál Haller and Borbála Haller—and her son-in-law Pál Teleki might be at her side, leaving her helpless body exposed to Catholic rites:

"I said that I had often been anxious that if my illness took a turn for the worse and only they were with me they would place the extreme

³³ BETHLEN, Kata: *Védelmesző erős pais*, [Sárdi], [Szeben], [1751?, 1759?], 70–71.

³⁴ Letter to Teleki László, Fogaras, May 14, 1752.; Letter to Teleki László, Szeben, June 16, 1752. LAKATOS-BAKÓ, Melinda (ed.): ÁRVA BETHLEN, Kata: *Levelei*, Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület, Kolozsvár, 2002, 111–115.

³⁵ *A Short Description of[...] Kata Bethlen*, *op. cit.*, 97. (ch. 219d.) (italics mine)

³⁶ From Kata Bethlen's letter of May 14, 1752, it is revealed that Jantsó informed László Teleki of her illness. ÁRVA BETHLEN, Kata: *Levelei* (ed. LAKATOS-BAKÓ), *op. cit.*, 111.

unction in my mouth; but now by the grace of the Lord I did not fear that, as my dear brothers were beside me. To that they uttered a great oath that they would not desire to do that, but their priests would do it, as there are enough examples of a poor person dying, and the extreme unction being placed in the mouth of a man no longer aware of the world. And I said that I knew that it would not harm my soul: but let them see and hear from me that I was brought up and had always lived in the true faith established on Christ, and in that true faith I desired to leave this world while memory persists on how a person in that true faith and religion is laid to rest. For I swore to God that I had never had the slightest disposition toward any other religion but my own true faith and religion, for which I glorify my gracious Father. At that they [Kata Bethlen's son and daughter] swore powerfully that they would not permit even their priests [to place the extreme unction in her mouth], if it was in their power. I believed their binding oaths, and it brought peace to my mind."³⁷

In this passage Bethlen makes it clear she did not fear that the Catholic ritual might "harm her soul" if it were forced upon her during her dying moments. A similar formulation appears in the preface written in the same year, 1752, by the Lutheran pastor of Győr, János Sartoris, who introduces a new edition of Mihály Ács's *Boldog halál szekere* [*The Chariot of Happy Death*], an *ars moriendi* first published in 1696: "And even if there were no opportunity for that, and those standing beside you sought to embitter your heart with condemnations and make your death dreadful, do not grieve over it. The Holy Spirit can preserve you even without this, by bringing to your mind the word you have heard during your life (John 14)."³⁸

Although Kata Bethlen did not feel that her spiritual salvation was endangered, the text nevertheless suggests that she feared the possibility that the Haller relatives might impose Catholic practices upon her during her dying moments—especially Extreme Unction—and also the threat that might follow her death: the possibility of a Catholic burial. This may be inferred partly from the fact that she lists similar contemporary cases as examples in her autobiography, and partly from the fact that she returned repeatedly to this issue in several of her wills written during the 1750s, as will be discussed below.

4.

Shortly before—or perhaps at the very beginning of—the illnesses she experienced in the spring of 1752, Kata Bethlen composed a will on March 1. In it she does not address the circumstances of her dying but rather makes

³⁷ *A Short Description of [...] Kata Bethlen, op. cit.*, 98. (ch. 219g.)

³⁸ Ács, Mihály: *Boldog halál szekere*, Siess, Sopron, 1752, B6r. – The 1700 and 1708 editions of Mihály Ács's book *Boldog halál szekere*—which did not yet contain the quoted preface—were found in Kata Bethlen's library. MONOK, István et al. (eds.): *Erdélyi könyvesházak, 1563–1757*, vol. 3, Scriptum, Szeged, 1994, 24, 42.

provisions for her burial, stipulating that she must be buried wherever “the bodies of those who have died blessedly in the same true faith and religion as mine” are laid to rest; she adds that she does not care where this may be.³⁹ She further requests that two of her Reformed brothers, Sámuel Bethlen and Imre Bethlen, arrange her burial rather than her Catholic children. Her distrust of them is concealed in the formal language of the document; she justifies the decision merely by stating that her children are unfamiliar with Reformed burial practices.⁴⁰ Because the will also contains a highly detailed confessional summary of Trinitarian theology, it may be assumed that she sought not only to guard against a Catholic funeral oration but also to defend herself in advance against possible accusations of heresy, particularly association with Unitarianism.⁴¹

5.

About half a year before her death, a further text of Bethlen dated December 17, 1758 survives in which the countess—by then suffering from increasingly severe illnesses—expressed her fear that her approaching death and subsequent burial might be overseen not by Reformed co-religionists (her brothers) but by Catholics, namely her children. In a writing entitled “elmékedése utolsó órájáról” [Meditation on Her Final Hour] she writes: “I have already seen many Christian people who, before their death, lost their speech and spent long periods without any sensation. Blessed God, in such a state what might not those around a person do to such a person!”⁴² The detailed description in this passage of the possible weakening and loss of consciousness during the process of dying appears to be connected with a formulaic expression found in Bethlen’s wills and characteristic of testaments more generally: the emphasis on the testator’s soundness of mind. She stresses that she is *fully conscious* and, in that state, declares her wish that her dying and eventually deceased body be subjected to the rites and burial *practices of her own confession*. In such cases she also seeks to authenticate her capacity by affixing her own signature beneath texts recorded by a scribe but presumably dictated—at least in part—by the testator herself.⁴³

³⁹ BENCZÚR, Gyuláné (ed.): *Széki gróf Teleki József özvegye Bethleni Bethlen Kata grófnő írásai és levelezése, 1700–1759*, Grill, Budapest, 1922–1923, vol. 2, 559.

⁴⁰ *Op. cit.*, 560–561.

⁴¹ *Op. cit.*, 557–558.

⁴² Bethlen Kata elmékedése utolsó órájáról, in TONK (ed.): *Árva Bethlen Kata, op. cit.*, 193.

⁴³ See Kata Bethlen’s wills of March 1, 1752; August 18, 1757; November 28, 1758; May 13, June 6, June 11, 1759; and her letter to the *Gubernium Transylvanicum* of June 11, 1759. BENCZÚRNÉ (ed.): *Bethlen Kata grófnő írásai, op. cit.*, vol. 2, 557, 566, 580, 582, 587; TONK (ed.): *Árva Bethlen Kata, op. cit.*, 199; LAKATOS-BAKÓ (ed.): *Árva Bethlen Kata Levelei, op. cit.*, 188–189.

In the following section of this meditation, Kata Bethlen also recalls a frightening example of coercion directed against a particular woman. She writes about an incident that had occurred decades earlier, when Borbála Huszár, the wife of the Reformed noble János Nemes, fell mortally ill. At that time the woman's Catholic daughter from her first marriage, Borbála Torma, wife of István Haller, entered the room of the dying woman and excluded from it the Reformed children born of Borbála Huszár's second marriage, Domokos Nemes and Mátyás Nemes—that is, her own half-brothers. After this, “she secretly brought in the priest, and when her mother—already speechless and near death—lay there, *he anointed the inside of her mouth with Extreme Unction*. Not satisfied with this, she broke a loaf into small morsels in a little box and put them into [the dying woman's mouth].” In her text, Kata Bethlen refutes an accusation that had once been made against the woman, arguing that Borbála Huszár's recently deceased sons, Domokos and Mátyás Nemes, together with their servants, had themselves testified that the woman had in fact never become a “papist.” Kata Bethlen also records that it was precisely because of this fabricated accusation that Domokos Nemes—the son who had been excluded from the room during his mother's dying moments—became furious. When he realized that the priest was attempting to force Extreme Unction into his mother's mouth, he “wanted to break in” to the room. Bethlen further recalls that the desperate son caused a scandal at Borbála Huszár's funeral as well: “in his great agitation he wanted to set the house on fire while the priest was preaching over his mother,” repeatedly calling the priest a liar during the ceremony and shouting that when his dying mother could no longer speak, Extreme Unction had been forced into her mouth.⁴⁴

Kata Bethlen recounts another case in this same meditation. A certain General Lenturus served as commander in Kronstadt (Braşov, present-day Romania); he himself was Reformed, while his wife was Catholic. When Lenturus was dying and had lost the power of speech, “the Jesuits of Kronstadt anointed the inside of his mouth with Extreme Unction, [and then] went joyfully to his wife to say that [before his death] he had become a papist, and they buried him in the Jesuit's church”. After recounting this episode, Bethlen—fearing something similar might happen to her—addresses God in prayer, asking that He protect her from the possibility of a Catholic deathbed ritual: “Preserve also my body that shall turn to dust, that they may not anoint my mouth with Extreme Unction. [...] I have written this so that, not knowing the place or hour of my passing, nor who will be beside me in that hour, and seeing that in many cases indignities are done to people in their final moments merely in order to bend the weak by such examples. I ask therefore every Christian brother who shares with me the one true faith, the true Reformed religion, not to believe—nor to be

⁴⁴ Bethlen Kata elmékedése utolsó órájáról, in TONK (ed.): *Árva Bethlen Kata, op. cit.*, 193–194.

scandalized—if those of another religion should say anything false about me. For I was born into the true Reformed religion founded on Christ, I was raised in it, I have spent my whole life in it, and I remain in it now, at a time when I do not know in the morning whether I shall live to evening, nor in the evening whether I shall live to morning.”⁴⁵

With this testament-like meditation, Kata Bethlen attempted to prevent a possible future misinterpretation: even if, because of weakness during her dying moments, such a violent penetration—namely Catholic domination over her helpless body at the hour of her death by forcing upon her the sacrament of Extreme Unction—were to occur, posterity should nevertheless know that she had not received the Catholic sacrament by her own decision. The countess may also have feared Extreme Unction because her Catholic relatives might afterward boast that on her deathbed she had abandoned her Reformed faith—a claim that, given the exemplary Reformed life she consciously cultivated,⁴⁶ could have been particularly discouraging for her co-religionists.⁴⁷

6.

Kata Bethlen did not rely only on examples involving others when describing the coercion applied by Catholics to Protestant dying persons; she also drew on her own experiences. In the retrospective portion of her autobiography written in 1744, she recalled an episode from her youth, dating to 1718, when she herself faced a real danger of coercion from her husband's Catholic relatives. In the incident narrated by Bethlen roughly twenty-five years later, however, the issue was not the administration of Extreme Unction, since she was not dying. Rather, she remembered an attempt to force her conversion when, after giving birth to her twin sons, she became severely weakened and, confined to bed for a long period, found herself in a particularly vulnerable and dependent position. At that time, the Catholic Haller relatives „asked him [the husband of Kata Bethlen] [...] if there might be any hope in my regard, that he might be able to make me leave my religion. He replied that he had observed no inclination in me. At that, one and another instructed him what he should do with me, the more speedily to change my mind. Oh my God, Thou hast strengthened

⁴⁵ *Op. cit.*, 194.

⁴⁶ Cf. NAGY, Márton Károly: A példázattá írt élet, *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények*, 115, 2011, nr. 6, 689–705.

⁴⁷ A later example: The month before her death, on June 5th, 1759, Kata Bethlen wrote a letter to her son, Pál Haller, informing him that she forbade him from making arrangements for her own upcoming funeral. She made a will about this on June 6th, and on the 11th she informed the *Gubernium Transylvanicum* about her decision. LAKATOS-BAKÓ (ed.), *Árva Bethlen Kata Levelei, op. cit.*, 186–189; Bethlen Kata pótvégrendelete eltemettetéséről, in TONK (ed.): *Árva Bethlen Kata, op. cit.*, 199–200.

me against all these! Taking advantage of her relationship, the wife of István Kornis, my kinswoman Borbára Gyerőfi, gave him this counsel for my harassment: Dear brother-in-law! Now that she is in childbed treat my young kinswoman harshly, as her mother is now dead and she has none to turn to, and her brothers are far away; do nothing to please her; when Your Honour sees that she wishes to sleep, make a great noise; do not ask whether she has eaten, or better let her not be served from the table, let her come there herself, but say little to her, show your ill humour, do not ask in the morning whether she has slept well, etc. If she asks: Why is Your Honour so ill humoured? you must answer: I have cause enough to be ill humoured, and shall never be otherwise until you leave your religion. That is the best way to the conversion of my young kinswoman, and I was so converted by my poor husband László Gyulaffi. The other kinsfolk, too, supported this counsel and assured him that he should so do and all would be well.⁴⁸

Some Additional Eighteenth-Century Examples of the Threat of Extreme Unction

There are also Catholic accounts from mid-eighteenth-century Hungary from which—perhaps contrary to their will—it can be inferred that Auricular Confession, Holy Communion, and Extreme Unction were forced upon dying Protestants. For example, when the Reformed mother of Dávid Fáy, who had converted to Catholicism around 1730 and later became a Jesuit missionary, lay dying, her other son László Fáy allowed only Catholic relatives and the physician-priest György Bíró to approach her bedside. László hoped that by hearing the teachings “whispered into her ear,” his mother would finally come to a better understanding, and that the sacrificial life of his brother would thereby bear fruit. (Dávid had undertaken missionary journeys to South America and India and frequently prayed for his mother’s conversion.) The relatives urged the dying woman that, “since she already regarded the Roman Catholic Church as the only true one, [...] she should acknowledge that outside this Church there is no other salvation church.” According to the reports of Fáy Dávid’s fellow Jesuits, the pleas of the Catholic relatives—together with the persistent persuasion and a small ruse by György Bíró (who secretly placed a Marian medal under her pillow, which supposedly produced wondrous feelings in the dying woman without her knowing the cause)—eventually succeeded. The woman began devoutly kissing the medal, confessed her sins, summoned the relatives, and recited the Catholic profession of faith.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ *A Short Description of [...] Kata Bethlen, op. cit., 24. (ch. 31.)*

⁴⁹ TÓTH, Sándor Attila – TÓTH, Sándor Máté: Rekatolizáció és katolikus hitvédelem a 18. századi Osztrák-Magyar Jezsuita Rendtartományban, in KÓNYA, Péter (ed.): *Rekatolizáció, protireformáció a katolícka reštaurácia v Uhorsku*, Vydavateľstvo Prešovskej Univerzity, Prešov, 2013, 21–22. – One more example: In 1719, Jesuits established a mission in the territory of the Archdiocese of Esztergom, and the

The Reformed church historian Ferenc Balogh interpreted another well-known event of the period as follows. The Lutheran pastor and superintendent Daniel Krman, who had been imprisoned because of his religion, “after eleven years of captivity as a confessor of the faith drew near to death. Two Jesuits appeared in the prison of the dying man, seeking to compel him to adopt the Roman Catholic religion. When they failed, they forcibly stuffed the host into the mouth of the old man as he lay in the final throes of death, but he died on September 17, 1740, without swallowing it. The Jesuits, however, spread the rumor that Krman had converted to Catholicism in his final hour.”⁵⁰

According to the diary of Ferenc Gyulai, a similar case occurred during the dying moments of Guido von Starhemberg, a Lutheran lieutenant. His commanding officer and the chief priest attempted by every means to convert him to the Catholic faith, yet the lieutenant resisted.⁵¹ Thus, alongside conversion attempts that achieved their goal, one must also take into account those which clearly—or at least plausibly—did not end successfully from a Catholic perspective.

A Reformed Ritual at the Bedside of a Catholic Dying Person

An important passage in Kata Bethlen’s autobiography reveals the opposite direction of the denominational practices surrounding the dying discussed so far. In 1719 it happened that Kata Bethlen remained alone with her husband, László Haller, who was suffering from the plague and nearing death at only twenty-two years of age. According to Bethlen’s retrospective recollection written some twenty-five years later, everyone else—including Catholic relatives and even a passing monk—was afraid to care for the contagious patient. As a result, the situation developed in such a way that Bethlen, remaining beside him, accompanied her Catholic husband through his dying process according to the practices of her own Reformed faith.

“I dismissed others from the house, only a noblewoman and [the] old woman remaining with me, and prayed with him myself. On the Tuesday after dinner until dawn on Wednesday he did not sleep, but prayed after me without ceasing; I caused him to confess properly that he desired

Bishopric of Vác. The Jesuit Annals report a case similar to the one cited above, from an unnamed settlement: Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Aust. 176, f. 88–89. (I am grateful to Orsolya Száraz for the information.) – For a similar incident that happened in Kisvárd, a hundred years earlier, in 1629, see: TÓTH, István György: Olasz misszionáriusok a 17. századi Magyarországon, *Századok*, 135, 2001, nr. 6, 1331.

⁵⁰ BALOGH, Ferenc: *A magyar protestáns egyháztörténet irodalma*, Városi nyomda, Debrecen, 1879, 24.

⁵¹ MÁRKI, Sándor (ed.): *Gróf Gyulai, Ferenc naplója 1703–4*, MTA, Budapest, 1928, 130, 171. Quoted by: S. SÁRDI: *Ars moriendi*, op. cit., 480.

salvation through the perfect satisfaction and intercession of Jesus Christ alone, putting away all confidence in his own merit and the prayers of saints. This continued until dawn. After sunrise he had such fantasy that he knew no one. On the Wednesday evening János Haller [the brother of László] arrived; but by then he was aware of no one, and his heart was greatly affected by fits. On the Thursday morning, as the sun rose, he called out with a great ringing voice, and proclaimed: I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of Heaven and Earth. *At that he straight away died, without any Papist office.*⁵²

From this passage it is clear that Kata Bethlen herself considered it more important that her husband receive a ritual consistent with her own confessional affiliation and personal convictions than that the practice correspond to the dying man's religion. This section of the autobiography, which was published in print, conveyed to readers the author's claim that despite the coercive attempts directed against her, it was not she who became Catholic; rather, her husband departed this life according to the Reformed practice of dying.

A few additional cases are known that resemble Bethlen's attempt, in which members of the Reformed confession sought to impose their own ritual upon dying Catholics. In his monograph, Zsombor Tóth provides two examples. The first concerns the Reformed Mihály Cserei, who believed that the Catholic István Apor—whose *familiaris* and secretary Cserei was—appeared to be declining both physically and mentally “and might therefore be persuaded to convert”. The second, “a milder but similar example of the same mentality, is provided by János Komáromi, who had Imre Thököly, a Lutheran who had secretly converted to Catholicism under pressure from French Jesuits, pray in the Calvinist manner.”⁵³

Conclusion

When reading the eighteenth-century Ego-documents analyzed in this study—and others like them—it is always necessary to take into account the religious affiliation of both the author and the surrounding environment. One must also attempt to reconstruct not only the intentions behind the narrated events but also the aims and purposes that shaped the act of writing itself, in order to be able to draw more accurate conclusions about the possible bias of the reports. Further research should therefore examine a larger corpus of texts in order to survey the history of denominational practices surrounding dying in Transylvania and Hungary, especially the spread of Extreme Unction within the broader political, cultural, and social context of eighteenth-century Catholic expansion. Beyond the

⁵² *A Short Description of [...] Kata Bethlen, op. cit.*, 28. (ch. 41–43.) (italics mine)

⁵³ TÓTH, Zsombor: *A kora újkori könyv antropológiája. Kéziratos irodalmi nyilvánosság Cserei Mihály (1667–1756) írás- és szöveghasználatában*, Reciti, Budapest, 2017, 205.

autobiography, prayers, wills, confessional declarations, and letters of Kata Bethlen, the investigation should also incorporate similar writings by other contemporary male and female authors, as well as texts belonging to additional genres: Catholic and Protestant sermon literature and *ars moriendi* texts, *canonica visitatio* records, synodal decrees, and other documents. Alongside approaches grounded in historical anthropology and rhetorical analysis, a broader interpretive framework for such investigations may be provided by the interconnected perspectives of the history of piety and theology, as well as cultural and ecclesiastical history.