



Faith, Scripture, and Reason: The Debate between Transylvanian Sabbatarians and Christian Francken

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In this study, I present two Sabbatarian texts which were written in response to texts by Christian Francken. Based on the argumentation in the Sabbatarian texts, I try to clarify which writings by the German philosopher they were responding to. I offer an explanation of the ferocity of the Sabbatarian response, and I clarify the reasons why the Sabbatarians found it so important to respond to Francken's ideas. My analysis of the Sabbatarian texts shows persuasively that Francken's attacks were related to the basic and specific teachings of the Sabbatarians. The challenge presented by fashionable philosophical trends at the time compelled the Sabbatarians to face not only the benefits but also the dangers of following the *ratio* in the interpretation of Scripture. Sabbatarian texts arrived at a solution (by drawing a distinction between the concepts of *ratio* and philosophy) which, although formulated earlier in the established churches, was still undeveloped in the Transylvanian Antitrinitarian movement out of which Sabbatarianism grew.

Keywords: Sabbatarianism, philosophical skepticism, early modern atheism, *ratio*

One of the most infamous apostates of the late sixteenth century, the German free thinker Christian Francken, visited Transylvania twice, in the middle and late 1580s, and taught at the Unitarian College in Kolozsvár (today Cluj, Romania).¹ He noted several times in his writings that he had intentionally chosen this part of Europe instead of taking one of the other posts which he had been offered with better salaries because in Transylvania he hopes to “find people that Diogenes was looking for with a torch in broad daylight.” Had his goal had been to make money, he writes, he would have chosen another region.² This self-confident claim must be treated with reservations, as there was practically no other place in

1 The most important literature on Francken from the perspective of this inquiry: Pietrzyk et al., *Antitrinitaires polonais*; Pirnát, “Christian Francken egy ismeretlen munkája”; Keserű, “Christian Franckens Tätigkeit”; Szczucki, “Filozófia és tekintély”; Simon, *Die Religionsphilosophie Christian Franckens (1552–1610?)*; Simon, “Filozófiai ateizmus”; Simon, “A kleitomakhoszi ateista-katalógus recepciója”; Biagioni, *The Radical Reformation*; Francken, *Opere a stampa*.

2 “His, inquam, et multis aliis vitae commoditatibus reiectis, in Transylvaniam rediit, non aliam certe ob causam, quam quod experientia didicerat, citius hic, quam alibi inveniri homines, quales Diogenes clarissimo die quaerere lucernacula sua solitus fuit.” *Spectrum diurnum Genii Christiani Francken, apparens malo*

Europe where he would have been able to move freely to propagate his teachings, and he would not have found such openness for his bold ideas elsewhere in Europe. Francken tried to spread his criticism of Christian churches among the deniers of the Trinity in the guise of Aristotelianism. This philosophical trend seemed familiar to the Transylvanian Antitrinitarian elite, most of whom had been educated in Padua.³ However, this social stratum was open to a wide variety of new ideas, not just those coming from philosophical skepticism. Fashionable trends competed with one another, and the circle of potentially interested parties overlapped. Since the spiritual elite consisted primarily of aristocrats, who were also supporters and patrons with political power and influence, winning them was a serious challenge. Antal Pirnát considered the Sabbatarian debate with Francken a struggle for support and positions.⁴ Although with his presence and work in Transylvania Francken not only aroused interest but also provoked hostility in many,⁵ only Sabbatarians reflected on this in voluminous written texts. These texts try to reach and convince the abovementioned target

Simonis Simonii Genio, Kolozsvár, ca. 1590. Published in Simon, *Die Religionsphilosophie*, 183–203. Original numbering: 47–49. See also the 33.

3 See the list of Hungarians who studied at the University of Padua in Veress, *A paduai egyetem*. Concerning the *peregrinatio academica* of Transylvanian students, see Szabó and Tonk, *Erdélyiek egyetemjárása*, Szabó. “Az erdélyi unitáriusok”; Lovas, “Unitáriusok egyetemjárása.”

4 Pirnát, “Arisztotelianusok és antitrinitáriusok.” The Sabbatarian references to the spread of Francken’s ideas among the elite are consistent with the accusations made by the Calvinist theologian Franciscus Junius, who claimed that Francken, as the servant of Satan, spread his ungodly views among the students of Kolozsvár and like a bat “flies around the houses of the mighty people in darkness.” Pirnát, “Christian Francken egy ismeretlen munkája,” 109.

5 For example, the Bishop Demeter Hunyadi ironically refers to Francken’s followers as “deep minded” in one of his sermons. According to him, the rich and mighty, in particular, are more likely to be tempted by this aberration. The deceived people question the authority of the Scripture, mock those who suffer for their faith, do not believe in miracles, in the existence of Devil, in the religion itself, claim that the function of the religion is to tie or bind the poor, and contend that the world is eternal and belief in the soul is nonsense. Possár. “Újabb adatok,” especially 187–88. There are other references to individuals who came under Francken’s influence. See *Pázmány Péter összes munkái*, vol. 3, 13; Cf. Balázs, “Trauzner Lukács ‘megtérése,’” 12; Pirnát, “Arisztotelianusok,” 371. The secondary literature identifies the person referred to here as Lukács Trauzner, the son-in-law of Ferenc Dávid. Related to this, see Giovanni Argenti, leader of the Transylvanian Jesuit Order: “tandem, inquam, ex Arianismo in atheismum praeceps actus, tantum profecerat, ut in mundi fabrica et gubernatione Aristoteli potius, quam Moysi credendum esse existimaret. Hinc cum aliquando philosophi Ethicam percurrisset, ea de re ad amicum scribens: ‘Etiam si, inquit, libri omnes sacri amitterentur, nihilominus tamen homo suae salutis consulere posset, si vel Ethicas ab Aristotele traditas praeceptiones observaret.’ Licet autem privatim de Deo, uti atheus sentiret, religionemque nihil aliud esse, quam populare frenum a sapientioribus excogitatum arbitraretur; publice tamen Arianismum, in quo consenuerat, profitebatur.” Veress, *Annuae Litterae Societatis Jesu*, 97. I would like to express my gratitude to József Simon for the data mentioned in this paragraph.

audience. One of them indicates in its title the reason why it was written: some “great and noble” people had begun to follow a kind of human, Aristotelian reasoning which questioned the authority of Moses and other holy people of ancient times. The main disseminator of these dangerous misconceptions “gives great courage to many great and noble men to their peril.”⁶ Sabbatarian texts argue with Francken (though without referring to him by name) and not with the aristocrats, whom they address indirectly, presumably in an effort to avoid provoking resentment among them. Thus, it is repeatedly emphasized that the addressees are the deceived people and their “master,” “with the exception of those pious, God-fearing gentlemen and noblemen who do not believe in such lies and seek” to live gracefully.⁷

Sabbatarianism in the 1580s and early 1590s was still a relatively recent, evolving initiative which looked back on a history of only a few years. Theological debate formulated in polemical-apologetic writings was seen as a means of perhaps averting the threat to the very existence of Sabbatarianism.

I work in my inquiry here from the hypothesis that Francken attacked the area of the religion that was most sensitive to the Sabbatarian faith. Francken’s attack was not deliberately directed against the Sabbatarians. His works written in Transylvania imply a much broader target audience, and their intellectual horizon included new ideas in terms of philosophy, nonadorantism, and politics. Although Francken could not have regarded the Sabbatarians as remarkable opponents, the anger which one discerns in the Sabbatarian texts and also the length of these texts can be interpreted as indications that the Sabbatarians felt threatened by his ideas. The purpose of the analysis I offer here, therefore, is to identify the areas in which Sabbatarians found Francken’s attacks the most troubling and how they defended themselves against his ideas. I do this by placing reading the Sabbatarian apologies as polemical texts in debate with Francken’s writings. Although Bálint Keserű, Antal Pirnát, and Györgyi Máté have shown that the Sabbatarian texts are reactions to Francken’s provocative writings, they do not offer any in-depth analysis of the disputed issues or their theological background. Though one cannot speak of a nuanced exchange of ideas among the disagreeing parties, since we have only the responses of the Sabbatarians to Francken’s writings but no response from Francken to their

6 RMKT XVII/5, 513, 515.

7 Ibid., 515.

polemics, the Sabbatarian texts nonetheless offer a clear indication of the impact of Francken's ideas.

I begin with a discussion of Francken's writings, or more narrowly, the texts which seem, on the basis of the Sabbatarian texts, to have been met with such alarm among the Sabbatarians. I then consider the ways in which the ideas found in his writings were recast and rephrased in the Sabbatarian texts, and I consider the Sabbatarian arguments against his tenets.

Francken's Most Debated Texts

The most important among the text by Francken to which the Sabbatarian polemical writings respond are the *Argumenta XXII in Sacram Mosis Historiam* and the *Disputatio inter Theologum et Philosophum de incertitudine religionis Christianae*. In addition, the Sabbatarian texts also seem to have responded to some of the ideas from his *Praecipuarum enumeratio*⁸ and *Spectrum diurnum Genii Christiani*.⁹

The theses of the *Argumenta*¹⁰ have survived along with their refutation by Franciscus Junius, a French professor from Heidelberg. According to Antal Pirnát, the original document was written before 1587, and it was probably taken by Transylvanian students on their study trip to Heidelberg.¹¹ The 22 theses published in the appendix to Junius' writing attack the authenticity of the story of creation and the authority of Moses, setting Aristotelian physics as the only reasonable worldview. The original document was written presumably as a reaction to the so-called judaizer practices that Francken encountered in the court of János Gerendi.¹² Gerendi was the leader of the abovementioned group formed from the aristocratic elite. He was in contact with the most prominent

8 *Praecipuarum enumeratio causarum, cur Christiani, cum in multis modis religionis doctrinis mobiles sint et varii, in Trinitatis tamen retinendo dogmate sint constantissimi*, Kraków, 1584. Modern edition: Szczucki, *W kregu mysliveli heretyckich*, 256–67.

9 *Spectrum diurnum Genii Christiani Francken, apparens malo Simonis Simonii Genio*, Kolozsvár, ca. 1590. The manuscript is preserved in Archives of Székesfehérvár City with County Rights, the deposit of Ferenc Vathay, fol. 17–49. Published in Simon, *Die Religionsphilosophie*, 183–203.

10 The manuscript was considered missing for a long time, until Antal Pirnát found Francken's theses and their refutation in a collection of theological treatises of Franciscus Junius in Debrecen ("Confutatio argumentorum XXII, quae olim a Simplicio in Sacram Mosis historiam de creatione fuerunt proposita, et nostro saeculo ab hominibus prophanis atheisque recocta imperitis obruduntur." In *Francisci Junii Biturgis Opera Theologica* I. Genevae, 1613, 99–120). The Latin theses and their Hungarian translation were published by Pirnát, "Christian Francken egy ismeretlen munkája," 107–19.

11 *Ibid.*, 109.

12 See Dán, "Judaizare"; Újlaki-Nagy, "Judaizing and Identity."

promulgators of Antitrinitarianism, and he supported them financially and also with his political influence. At the time Francken visited him, he was celebrating Sabbath and also observing certain dietary restrictions, presumably for reasons other than the reasons which guided dietary restrictions among the so-called Sabbatarians.¹³ Based on the experiences gained during the visit, Francken promised in a letter to him that he would deal in more detail with the beliefs concerning the writings of Moses.¹⁴

The other important work by Francken on the subject is the *Disputatio*, written during his second stay in Kolozsvár around 1590.¹⁵ This is perhaps the work in which Francken went the furthest in questioning the foundations of Christianity and belief in God. He himself later declared it a dangerous, atheistic, blasphemous text.¹⁶ It was written in the form of a dialogue between a Philosopher and a Theologian. Lech Szczucki aptly called it a “deaf-mute dialogue,”¹⁷ as it is only the philosopher who responds to the theologian’s arguments. The theologian does not even seem to understand his opponent’s objection, who does not accept the Holy Scripture as the authoritative basis for the debate, and he (the theologian) founds his arguments over and over again on the infallibility of Scripture. Consequently, the Philosopher begins most of his replies by pronouncing the theologian’s arguments logically defective. The philosopher’s answers in the *Disputatio* (presumably Francken’s own voice)¹⁸ blame his opponent for ignoring rationality and disregarding the rules of logic and argumentation. According to the philosopher, theologians do not derive the less known from the known, but infer it from an uncertain premise and thus commit the classical fallacy of *petitio principii*. Divine revelation can only be proved from the words of the Scripture, which are precisely what the philosopher requires

13 See Pirnát’s study cited above and from the same author “Gerendi János és Eőssi András.” See also Újlaki-Nagy, “Sabbath-Keeping.”

14 Pokoly, *Magyar Protestáns Egyháztörténeti Adattár*, vol 8, 158–60; Pirnát, “Arisztotelianusok és antitrinitáriusok,” 369–70.

15 The final form of *Disputatio* is thought to have developed in 1593. See Biagioni, *The Radical Reformation and the Making of Modern Europe*, 116–18. The manuscript is kept in Biblioteka Uniwersytetu Wroclawskiego, signature Mss. Akc. 1955/220. Modern edition: Simon, *Die Religionsphilosophie Christian Franckens*, 151–82. The work was found by Bálint Keserű in 1972 in Wrocław.

16 Keserű, “Christian Franckens Tätigkeit,” 79. The arguments are typical erudite libertarian ideas and bear a resemblance to the mysterious and undated text of *De Tribus Impostoribus*. See the debate on whether Francken can be linked to this work: Biagioni, “Christian Francken e le origini” and Simon, “Metaphysical Certitude.”

17 Szczucki, “Filozófia és tekintély,” 114.

18 Biagioni, *The Radical Reformation and the Making of Modern Europe*, 118.

proof for. Thus, an argument based on divine revelation is only an argument for those who want to believe it.¹⁹ This oft repeated accusation is so irritating that it demands the reader's attention and reflection. This may have been the case for the Sabbatarians as well.

Sabbatarian Texts Written against Francken and the Issues Debated

On the divine wisdom of the prophet Moses

Two polemical texts are included in the Sabbatarian codices that were written against Christian Francken and his followers. One is the *On the divine wisdom of the prophet Moses and the worldly wisdom of Aristotle and the various reasonings of men that were now brought forth by the noble orders and presented as true knowledge against the prophet Moses and against the knowledge and understanding of many old saints*, presumably written by András Eőssi and surviving in two early Sabbatarian manuscript collections.²⁰ The first part of the text is for the most part a reply to Francken's criticism of the biblical history of creation, while the second chapter targeted the three other main camps (*secta*) of those who were seen by the Sabbatarians as having erred: adherents of popery, the followers of Luther, and above all, the Adorantists (Antitrinitarians who accepted the adoration of Christ), called *demetriades*. The name of the latter group derives from the Unitarian bishop Demeter Hunyadi, who forcibly compelled his followers to accept the worship of Jesus. The literature dates this Sabbatarian text between May 31 and July 8, 1592 and treats it as a reply to Francken's *Argumenta*.²¹

The text mentions two critiques by Francken and offers polemical refutations of them.

The first critique by Francken discussed in this Sabbatarian text concerns the person and credibility of Moses, who according to Francken (as paraphrased

19 *Disputatio*, the first argument of the philosopher.

20 *Mózes prófétának Istentől származó bölcsességéről és Arisztotelésznek ez világi bölcsességéről és az embereknek küilemb-küilemb okoskodásokról való írás melyet most ez világi fő rendek némelyek elővettek és igaz tudománnak mondanak Mózes próféta ellen és az régi sok szentek tudományok és értelmei ellen*. One of the collections is the codex Mátéfi Kissolymosi, kept in the Kalocsa Cathedral Library under the signature Ms 303 (21 509). The other collection is in the Library of the Romanian Academy Cluj-Napoca with the title *Szombatosok régi könyve* or *Árkosi kódex*, signature MsU. 1290. There is no significant difference between the two variants. The critical edition of the text was published in the Volume 5 of the seventeenth-century series *Régi Magyar Költők Tára*, on pages 513–18.

21 Pirnát, "Christian Francken egy ismeretlen munkája," 107.

in the Sabbatarian text) “talks a lot but proves little.”²² This is not a specific contention found in one of Francken’s works. Rather, it can be seen as a summary of the *Argumenta*, as this work is in general a questioning of the credibility of Moses and the first chapters of the Bible. One finds a similar line of reasoning in the *Disputatio*, in which Francken repeatedly states that only those believe the absurd stories of Moses who want to believe them.²³

Francken’s criticism of Moses and his laws constituted an attack on the greatest authority for the Sabbatarians. The Sabbatarian apology is trivial. It consists mostly of arguments based on the authority of the Bible: Moses was recognized as a divine messenger by the people living after him, by prophets, saints, apostles, and Christ himself. They referred to him as a supreme authority and did not correct his writings. The same is not true of Aristotle, who never enjoyed such acceptance and authority. Moses’ divine mission was demonstrated by the miracles which had taken place before the eyes and ears of an entire people on Mount Sinai and throughout the wanderings in the wilderness. In contrast, Aristotle authority was not proven by any divine miracle or extraordinary phenomenon. The divine origin of the prophecies of Moses are also confirmed by their fulfilment. Everything that Moses said came true, and this could be continuously verified.²⁴

The second problem discussed by the Sabbatarian author in detail is the question of who Cain feared after he killed Abel, as he was the only living son of the first human couple according to the Bible.²⁵ The answer, according to the author, lies in the characteristics of biblical genealogical tables. The author of Genesis mentioned only the genealogy of the godly, the “holy branch,” i.e. of those who were the ancestors of the Messiah, because he knew that God took no delight in murderers. This way of thinking can be observed in the way in which the text mentions that Cain took a wife but does not specify who his wife was. As a consequence, we do not know of any brothers or sons who were evil, nor do we know of any women. The first God-fearing son of Adam was Seth, who is part of the genealogical table. According to the author, another answer may have been Cain’s state of mind following the murder. God gave him “a terrified heart” because of his deed, and ever since, one who spills innocent

22 RMKT XVII/5, 513.

23 Pirnát, “Arisztotelianusok és antitrinitáriusok.” The first argument of the *Disputatio*.

24 RMKT XVII/5, 513.

25 See Gen 4:14.

blood “dreads even the rustling leaf of the tree,” like Lamech who committed a murder similar to the one committed by Cain.²⁶

The author addresses Aristotle: “This does not mean that man existed on other lands in this earth.” And he continues: “God did not have another creation beyond from Adam, despite what you say, Aristotle.”²⁷ These quotations suggest the existence of a theory of creation assuming parallel creations on different continents with different “Adams.” The “critique of Aristotle” formulated here is thus ambiguous. The surviving documents do not contain any reflection by Francken on the story of Cain, however, such an idea wouldn’t be surprising from him, given his critical attitude to the Mosaic narrative.

It seems, however, that the Sabbatarian author struggles against an allegorical theory of creation very similar to the concepts of Jacobus Palaeologus. Palaeologus, who was born in Chios and completed his literary work in Transylvania, propagated *co-Adamism* or *multiple Adamism*, a theory that presumed parallel creations (in opposition to the literal understanding of the story of creation) in his treatise entitled *An omnes ab uno Adamo descenderint* (1573).²⁸ Nevertheless, he did not go so far to question the veracity of the creation story, nor did he mention this view in his later works.²⁹

The Sabbatarian text calls the opponent Aristotle, which, according to the secondary literature, is a reference to Francken.³⁰ It is also conceivable, however, that the author is confronted with a mixture of fashionable ideas in which, although Francken’s influence is obviously felt, Palaeologus is also implicitly present (despite their otherwise appreciative attitude towards the Greek scholar). If the promotion of this theory of creation was nevertheless connected to Francken, it could only be true in the 1580s, since in *Disputatio*, which was written later, Francken denied the necessity of divine creation. According to

26 RMKT XVII/5, 514–15.

27 Ibid, 514.

28 Codex Máté Thoroczkai, Biblioteca Academiei Romane, Cluj-Napoca, MsU 1669-XIXb, 720–21. Modern edition: Szczucki, *W kregu myslcieli beretyckich*, 243–44. Hungarian edition: Balázs, *Földi és égi hitviták*, 135–36. On the history of non-adamic creation theories, see Livingstone, *Adam’s Ancestors*; Livingstone, “The Preadamite Theory.”

29 Cf. Pirnát, “Arisztotelianusok és antitrinitáriusok,” 370; Pirnát, *Die Ideologie der Siebenbürger Antitrinitarier*, 75–76. Szczucki warns that the co-Adamism of Palaeologus formulated in this work should be treated with reservation, as he makes no mention of it anywhere in his later works. Szczucki, *Filozófia és tekintély*, 60.

30 According to Pirnát, the literary education of the Sabbatarian author was too superficial for him to have realized that these arguments did not come from Aristotle. He assumes a fictive dialogue in the background of the text that the Sabbatarian author may have read. Pirnát, “Arisztotelianusok és antitrinitáriusok,” 370; Pirnát, “Christian Francken egy ismeretlen munkája,” 107.

the philosopher of the *Disputatio*, the creation and functioning of the world can be explained on the basis of the immanent reasons operating it, without the acceptance of a concept of God, a primary reason, or the *creatio ex nihilo*.³¹

Towards the end of *On the prophet Moses*, the author informs us that the disseminator of these false theses denied the existence of God and the Devil, as well as resurrection.³² The latter accusation is also present in the next Sabbatarian text, and it is an unambiguous allusion to Francken. The Devil is not discussed explicitly in the abovementioned works by Francken, but he partially explains his view on resurrection and the afterworld in a short work addressed to Gerendi.³³ He claims in this work that literary immortality “is the eternal life all of us must wish for our true friends... We all love the other eternal life [the one in the afterworld] but a secret natural instinct makes us suspect that it is rather uncertain and we would not readily trade one for the other, even if it were possible.”³⁴

The Sabbatarian position follows a traditional Christian argumentation, according to which human nature (conscience and the fear of death) suggests and proves the existence of an afterworld. Francken reverses this line of reasoning, arguing that it is precisely human nature that bears witness to the immortality of the soul and the afterlife. The desire for happiness and immortality can only be a result of the imperfection of nature.³⁵

Francken’s most provocative charge, which the Sabbatarian author does not explicitly mention though he defends his faith against it, concerned the *ratio*. The philosopher of the *Disputatio* disputed the actual use of *ratio* by theologians. This charge obviously disturbed the Sabbatarians, as they were the successors of an Antitrinitarian tradition in which the *ratio* became increasingly important and the effort to follow it became more and more pronounced. Correspondence with *ratio* in their view was a condition of true faith.

The Sabbatarian text responds to the charge of neglecting reason with a kind of differentiation in the concept of the *ratio*. This distinction between divine and human *ratio* appears in the title and runs throughout the text. Understanding

31 *Disputatio*, arguments 27–35. Szczucki, *Filozófia és tekintély*, 114–15. According to Simone Simoni, Francken wrote a text on this subject with the title *Theses de materia prima*. Simon Simonius, *Appendix*, last page.

32 “What could be a more dangerous knowledge than one who dares to say that there is neither God nor Devil, nor resurrection, but as Aristotle says, so it was and will be.” RMKT XVII/5, 515.

33 The title of the work is *Oratiuncula*. Published in Elek, “Gerendi János és Franken Keresztély,” 37.

34 Pirnát, “Arisztotelianusok és antitrinitáriusok,” 386–87.

35 *Disputatio*, 15th argument.

Scripture depends on approaching it with human or divine wisdom. This is, in fact, a rejection of Francken's claim, which is only willing to accept rational and natural philosophical arguments as the basis of the debate on religion and theology. Thus, the Sabbatarian author does not directly refer to Scripture as the absolute authority, but rather claims that the mere notion of following reason does not mean the same thing to him as it does to his opponent. Decisive authority for him is divine wisdom, which obviously includes the perceptive capacity of the mind, but also conceals the written and oral revelation that does not contradict it. Thus, contrary to Francken's method inclining to rationality, the Sabbatarian author when dealing with religious issues may allow himself, under the pretext of divine wisdom, to use other (even scriptural) arguments that fit into his concept of divine wisdom.

As can be seen from the responses in the Sabbatarian text, the polemic treatise *On the prophet Moses...* is not a direct reply to Francken's *Argumenta*. This finding is confirmed not only by the mention in the Sabbatarian text of ideas that are not found in the *Argumenta* (e. g. Cain's fear), but also by the fact that there are no issues in it that are not present in Francken's other works.

The Complaint of the Holy Scripture

The second, undated Sabbatarian apology against Francken is entitled *Complaint of the Holy Scripture against those who started to hate it out of obstinacy, the love of the world or other reasons due to human wickedness* (hereinafter *Complaint*).³⁶ The first 18 arguments (out of 37 arguments for the existence of God) of the theologian of *Disputatio* are thematized and cited in this text. However, like the other Sabbatarian polemic writing mentioned above, this text cannot be considered merely an answer to the *Disputatio*, since the Sabbatarian author also fights against thoughts of unspecified origin and ideas known from Francken's other works. The author does not even refer to a particular work, but his most commonly used formula of address is the plural "your Sophists also say," which may also apply to ideas spread orally.

It could be claimed that the preface of the *Complaint* is a response to the preface of the *Disputatio*, but one should be careful with this claim, since Francken's main argument against Christian theologians discussed here (that

36 This text has survived in the codex Árkosi, forming a separate unit of text and copied with strikingly clear, easy-to-read letters. Published in Máté, "A szentírás apológiája." Máté presumes that the text was written in the mid-1590s. *Ibid.*, 192.

religion cannot be supported by an absolutely certain and doubtless argument) can be found also in his *Spectrum*.³⁷ He asserts that the arguments supporting religion are only of a probable nature, and since probable arguments can be refuted and human cognitive abilities vary, this explains the existence of the many religions.³⁸ He sees the reason for the existence of religion itself in fear of punishment, which suppresses the mind and allows it to be dominated by distorted beliefs.³⁹ Although he is highly critical of religions, he does not reject them completely. In his view, religions are useful tools for society, as they hold people in check and make them easy to control.⁴⁰

The Sabbatarian author formulates this utilitarian thought of Francken, according to which religion is merely a tool, with these words: “religion was only invented for the foolish people.”⁴¹ According to him, bad interpretations lead to the creation of errant religions, but this does not change the substance of God’s word. A true fact may be interpreted in many ways, depending on influencing factors and interests. He takes an example from Transylvanian social practice: if a case is taken to the Diet, Saxons and Hungarians interpret it in different ways according to various factors. However, the truth of the case is independent of the Hungarian and Saxon interpretation, as the truth stands in and of itself. One

37 *Disputatio*, first page. *Spectrum* in Simon, *Die Religionsphilosophie Christian Franckens*, 192–94.

38 Szczucki, *Filozófia és tekintély*, 114, 118; Simon, “Politikai vallás,” 124.

39 *Pracipuarum*, introduction; *Disputatio*, 8. argument and Kapaneus Staius’ statement in the atheist catalogue. See also Simon, “Politikai vallás,” 123.

40 *Disputatio*, 8. argument.

41 Máté, “A szentírás apológiája,” 200. The Sabbatarian author is outraged when he describes the libertine, drinking, and carefree life advocated and practiced by the so called sophists and their master. He calls Francken a giddy, childish man, deficient since his childhood, who does not care about good reputation, honor, or humanity, and he contends that the spirit of the Devil dwells in him and that his teachings and the teachings of his adherents are “some giggles over wine” and “lies clanging like a dulcimer.” He also insists that Francken’s followers are hypocrites, flirtatious rogues, ship sails, reeds etc. *Ibid.*, 204–6. According to the secondary literature, many of these expressions refer to Francken’s dense changes of religion as signs of some sort of opportunism. The philosopher of the *Disputatio* does not explicitly claim that he supports seeking joy and pleasure, but he defends all such positions attacked by the theologian (arguments 12–18) with such vehemence that the Sabbatarian author might easily have read the text as an implicit endorsement of libertine ways. Although the philosopher tries to occupy a neutral position in connection with the issues, he declares that seeking pleasure is not contrary to the law of nature or rationality. The law of nature dictates: “Do what is useful for you and brings you pleasure!” (the thirteenth and sixteenth arguments of the philosopher), “as wise nature instilled us with a desire for pleasure for good reason,” and it is only human laws that forbid it. Thus, Francken implicitly defends practices like homosexuality, the abandonment of unwanted children, the cult of the phallus, and the creation of bordellos (the sixteenth and seventeenth arguments), and this obviously met with outrage.

must make efforts to find the truth, the true religion, and one must look for it at the right place (that is, in Judaism).⁴²

As a counterattack, the Sabbatarian author accuses Francken of covert atheism. He attributes to him a reduced image of God that could not have originated from the *Disputatio*, which rejects even the idea of a God based on the smallest dogmatic minimum, but which must have been closer to the concept of God of the *Spectrum* and was probably spread orally by Francken's followers. The *Spectrum* still keeps a reduced, so-called Anselmian concept of God (“quo nihil sit melius aut maius” – “argumentum Anselmianum” of Anselm of Canterbury) and protests against the charge of atheism.⁴³

The Sabbatarian charge is as follows: “You say that the kind of God you promote with your disciples and Sophists, just to refute the accusation that you are a denier of God, does not feel anything, does not talk to those on Earth, does not take care of or hurt anyone, just sits calmly and is not angry with anyone.”⁴⁴ Although the Sabbatarian author sensed the difference between atheism and Francken's concept of God, he thought that Francken's defense against atheism was artificial, apparent objection. According to him, the existence of a God that Francken's worldview allows cannot be demonstrated with any argument.⁴⁵ The author does not tolerate any other image of God or concept of revelation than the one announced in the Old Testament. This means that, as opposed to the theologian of the *Disputatio*, among others, the Sabbatarian author is against the natural religion. He believes that without oral revelation, nothing is sufficient to prove the existence of a true God.⁴⁶

The criticism in Francken's works that seems to have irritated the Sabbatarian author the most was probably the one concerning Moses and the revelation of the law. It is no coincidence that both Sabbatarian texts deal with this issue at the greatest length. The first text indicates this in its title, and although the title of

42 Máté, “A szentírás apológiája,” 201.

43 See the twenty-second answer of the philosopher. Simon, “Politikai vallás,” 121–22, 124. According to Simon, Francken distinguishes between the political and metaphysical use of the term “atheist.” The Latinized form of the Greek term became fashionable in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe. A dispute arose between Simon and Mario Biagioni about the contemporary meaning of the terms atheist and skepticism. See Simon, “Metaphysical Certitude” and Biagioni, “Christian Francken Sceptical.” See also Simon, “Philosophical Atheism”; Simon, “Se a hit, se a nevelés.”

44 Máté, “A szentírás apológiája,” 195.

45 According to the author, if Scripture is not true, then there is no god, because there is no other who has professed to be the creator of the world. “Thus, you are atheists, as you do not believe me to be true [the personified Scripture is speaking].” *Ibid.*, 195.

46 *Ibid.*, 195.

the second one suggests that its author defends all of Scripture, he also reduces his defense to the person and writings of Moses. The previously mentioned *Argumenta* is entirely a questioning of the history of creation written by Moses and of his intentions and capacities. Francken formulated his arguments in a very provocative way, presenting Moses as someone who “can hardly avoid the stamp of ignorance,”⁴⁷ who “does not understand what he is saying,”⁴⁸ who “demonstrates his total lack of astronomical knowledge” or “any kind of meteorological knowledge,” and who “presents God as an ignorant God who does not foresee anything,” “either because he did not know that there is also air in nature or because he did not want his Jews to know this, and he claims—not only falsely but entirely improbably—that birds were created from water”⁴⁹ and “man is similar to God in body, so Moses believes that God is also a body.”⁵⁰ These statements constituted an attack on the books of the Scripture that were considered most authentic and important by the Sabbatarians and even went so far as to mock the greatest biblical authority, Moses, and present him as ignorant and of dubious intentions.

In his first eight arguments of the *Argumenta*, Francken sets out in his objections to the history of creation with references to details of astronomy, which the Sabbatarian author formulates in the following words: “As the son cannot be born before the father, the day cannot exist before the Sun. But the Sun was created on the fourth day, so it cannot have existed on the previous three days, because the Sun and the Moon make and divide the day and the night.”⁵¹ The *Argumenta* states that the cause of the days is the sun, and light is the quality and attribute of the sun, not a substance but an accident. However, the effect cannot precede the cause, just as the son cannot precede his father, and the accident cannot exist without the subject to which it belongs.⁵² Darkness does not precede but simply follows the existence of light.⁵³ He repeatedly refers to the relationship of the part to the whole and claims that the whole cannot be created without its parts.⁵⁴

47 Pirnát, “Christian Francken egy ismeretlen munkája,” 114.

48 Ibid., 115.

49 Ibid., 116.

50 Ibid., 117.

51 Ibid., 203–4.

52 Ibid., 114, 115.

53 Ibid., 114.

54 Ibid., 115.

The Sabbatarian reply to this is not particularly detailed. It is limited to the distinction between “dies” and “Sol.” According to the Sabbatarian author, at the beginning of creation, on the first day, the duration of a day was determined. The day had some light, but not as strong as later from the sun. Thus, on the first three days, day was separated from night in a way that a furrow separates two pieces of land: it is not as evident as if a great stone had been put between the two to signal the demarcation.⁵⁵

Not only the *Argumenta*, but also the first point of the *Disputatio* discusses the revelation, claiming that there is no evidence for it. Accordingly, the Sabbatarian response is also detailed. The Sabbatarian author seeks to list a number of arguments in defense of divine revelation, the most significant of which he considers to be human remembrance. The existence of generations and empires is built on collective memory, preserved through letters, oral testimonies, and historical chronicles. Nor can the existence of Aristotle be proven in any other way unless we give credit to the writings that perpetuate his memory.⁵⁶ In addition to written memory, however, there is also an oral memory, survived purely only among Jews. The yearly festivals and rites with historical narratives served as aids to keep memories alive and pure.⁵⁷ In order to prove the authenticity of the revelation and the writings of Moses, the author also tries to use psychological arguments. Contrary to the “sophist” charge, according to which Moses wrote and acted arbitrarily, he tries to prove that, like the other prophets, Moses did nothing to seek his own glory. According to the Sabbatarian author, it would be understandable if Moses had attributed the law to himself, issued in his own name to seek his own glory, but he never did.⁵⁸ If the law had been merely a fiction of Moses, it would not have been able to persuade an entire people to follow it. After his death, there would have been little compulsion or reason to obey such a law,⁵⁹ just as it would have been pointless to suffer in the desert for 40 years without any result if Moses had been the originator of all this. It is a well-known argument that it

55 Máté, “A szentírás apológiája,” 204.

56 An example offered by the author of how remembrance works and for its imprints in later times is the story of the wrestling between Jacob and the angel. In remembrance of this event, even thousands of years later, the Jews do not eat the sciatic nerve of some animals. The other example is the Shavuot, the feast of the giving of the law. This feast also proves that Jews celebrate the revelation of the Torah not only on the basis of Scripture, but also because of the experiences of their fathers. *Ibid.*, 198.

57 *Ibid.*, 195–98, 202.

58 *Ibid.*, 197.

59 *Ibid.*, 198.

would have been foolish for the prophets to endure persecution and torture for something they themselves knew was not true.⁶⁰ Scripture cannot belong solely to Moses, because the covenant had begun with Abraham. Moses only continued an existing tradition. If the writings of Moses had been created arbitrarily, the prophets of later ages would have pointed out the unauthentic parts.⁶¹ The author defends only the prophecies of Moses against the accusation by Francken that they were not fulfilled. According to the philosopher of the *Disputatio*, if the facts prove that the prophets were not mistaken, it is due to chance or the existence of magical powers.⁶² The Sabbatarian author, on the other hand, believes that the prophecies had been fulfilled “point by point,” and this can be verified empirically. The miserable fate of the Jews, foretold by Moses as a consequence of their disobedience, is still clearly perceptible.⁶³

The essence of the revelation for the Sabbatarian author is the law, so it is particularly offensive to him that Francken considers biblical law and other religious laws equal.⁶⁴ The philosopher of the *Disputatio* claims that the laws of different nations are equally useful tools of social order, of controlling people.⁶⁵ Although they are not of divine origin, they teach us honesty when interpreted properly.⁶⁶ Francken finds a parallel between Moses and other lawmakers who lied and claimed that they had received their laws from gods, e. g. Zoroaster from the Good Spirit, Lycurgus from Apollo, Mohammed from Gabriel, etc.⁶⁷

In contrast, the Sabbatarian author believes that although divine laws (such as the laws of Adam and Noah) existed outside the mosaic law, they survived only among the Jews and the Caldeans.⁶⁸ Every other law is just human fabrication. He proves this with yet another psychological argument: the omission of human writings does not have an effect on the human soul, as opposed to Scripture, which influences our soul. If you keep its teachings, you will feel good. If not, you

60 Ibid., 196–97.

61 Ibid., 199.

62 According to Simon, while the philosopher attacks the rationality of his opponent’s faith and argumentation, he himself uses irrational means in his reasoning (e.g. magic).

63 Máté, “A szentírás apológiája,” 196.

64 Ibid., 199.

65 Similarly, he treats religions and ritual customs equally, the so-called heretics in the same way as the ecclesiastical authority, since in his view they unjustly place themselves above the other, since after all, the faith of none of them can be proved. *Disputatio*, arguments 19–21.

66 Ibid., sixth argument.

67 Ibid., first argument.

68 Máté, “A szentírás apológiája,” 200.

will be filled with fear:⁶⁹ “It is not possible that the dead Moses does this in the human heart, that he creates a movement and sensitivity... He bears his blessed and damned effects in his conscience, whether he wants to or not... he cannot remove it.”⁷⁰ The hour of death or dying is a great sign of this functioning, as even the “atheist” feels “the sting of eternal death” and is horrified.⁷¹

The Sabbatarian text mentions several so called “sophist” criticisms related to the authenticity of the Holy Scripture which are not found in Francken’s writings. One of these criticisms was that believers in Scripture cannot even say when these books were given the names Scripture and Bible.⁷² The Sabbatarian author tries to give a historical answer, but he is a bit misinformed (according to him, the texts were given these names when the Septuagint translation was completed), and he concludes his line of reasoning with a logical argument: the late appearance of a name is not an argument against the authenticity of the object of the name, just as the New World discovered by the Spanish had existed for a long time, regardless of the fact that it only received its name recently. However, the answer points out that the author considers the Hebrew Scripture to be the Bible and not the Christian one.⁷³

Similarly, the origin of the “sophist” argument that the historical events portrayed in the Bible are not mentioned by other nations is unknown. According to the Sabbatarian author, it is only natural that the revelation was given to only one nation, the nation that was willing to pass it on. Each nation tried to record and pass on the glory of its own nation and not that of others, if it knew writing at all (except the Chaldeans).⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the lack of such texts in other nations does not demonstrate the inauthenticity of Scripture. Just because Mohammed does not write about Attila’s acts and Vlach (Romanian) chronicles do not mention King Matthias, these people and their deeds existed.⁷⁵

Another criticism by Francken which constituted a keen attack on essential aspects of the faith for the Sabbatarians concerns the Jewish people as the

69 In the omitted section, the author refers to suicide as a consequence of breaking the law. This is, according to the secondary literature, an intimation to Francken, who repeatedly blackmailed his Catholic superiors by threatening to commit suicide when they doubted the sincerity of his re-Catholicization. Szczucki, “Philosophie und Autorität,” 242. Cf. Máté, “A szentírás apológiája,” 190.

70 Ibid., 199.

71 Ibid., 200, 205.

72 Ibid., 202–3.

73 Ibid., 192.

74 Ibid., 200.

75 Ibid., 203.

chosen one (*Disputatio*, arguments 3–5). The philosopher argues “on the basis of rationality” that God cannot be closer to one people than to another. If he created all people, he nurtures them all. Everyone is his property, and he takes care of everyone. He must teach everyone if he wants everyone to convert. It is also clear that every nation refers to its own divine miracles and exceptional treatment, and every nation considers itself God’s people and its law divine law.⁷⁶

The Sabbatarian text clearly and firmly defends the Jews as the chosen people. It mentions the usual Sabbatarian argument according to which the revelation and its interpretation were given to the Jews and it asserts the Jews the guides of the blind in this matter, but it also describes the Jews with stereotypical characteristics as an exceptional, blessed nation. They handle work and money wisely and have learned longsuffering and patience at the cost of much misery.⁷⁷

To reinforce his proofs, Francken ends his *Disputatio* with a catalogue enumerating ten theses from ancient atheist philosophers. The Sabbatarian author saw in this catalogue the machination of contrasting philosophy and religious faith.⁷⁸ He rejects this attempt by stating that philosophy is not necessarily blasphemous. Because of the oblivion of true memory among their fathers, the philosophers in question could no longer learn of God. The Sabbatarian author also devaluates his opponent’s skills and character with pejorative words, contrasting him with the ancient “sophists,” who pursued philosophical reasoning on a higher level:

But wise men with a true mind could differentiate between the grunt of a drove of pigs and the song of the nightingale. Read the writings of Coriphees attacking atheists: the philosophy of Lactantius, Philippus Morneus, Joannes Bodinus, Philo. See what Josephus answers to Appion the Grammaticus when Appion had the same opinion of

⁷⁶ *Disputatio*, arguments 4–5.

⁷⁷ “You claim that Jews are fools. Cheat him, if he is fool! If he is fool, why do you borrow money from him? Why does he have more money than other nations, when it has no heritage at all? [...] For he does not want to press clay for noble people, that is why he does not ask for his inheritance. He does not even want to rebel foolishly, seeing that not one, not two nations, but all the nations under the Sun hate him for the *religio*, and he does not want your lies turned into truth, because than they would go fool [...] From experience, they have learned the profit of peaceful sufferance.” Máté, “A szentírás apológiája,” 205–6.

⁷⁸ See the responses in the Sabbatarian text to the atheist catalogue in Máté, “A szentírás apológiája,” 200–1. On the role of the atheist catalogue in the *Disputatio*, see Simon, “A kleitomakhoszi,” 80–82. See also Keserű, “Christian Franckens Tätigkeit,” 76–77.

Moses as you do. Read old histories that I cannot even enumerate.
Were all philosophers atheists? Plato, Socrates and the others.⁷⁹

Although Sabbatarian texts do not have a positive view of philosophy in general, it cannot be stated that they were expressly anti-philosophical. Towards the end of the apology under discussion, the following statement can be found: “Philosophy is thus double: true and false. One is for my followers, one is for yours.”⁸⁰ The abovementioned “grunt of a drove of pigs” and the “song of the nightingale” thus signify the two kinds of philosophy or wisdom, true and false.

One long Sabbatarian treatise begins with the theoretical distinction between human and divine wisdom and brings philosophy into the discourse:

[Those erring] do not make a difference between the two kinds of wisdom, as the wisdom of this world is worldly, the wisdom of the spiritual person is heavenly... That is what Lactantius thinks when he writes: The sages of the world are rightly called philosophers, as they seek wisdom throughout their lives, but they never find it, because they do not search it where it can be found, for out of the nations under the sun God had given it unto one nation.⁸¹

This latter text gives us the Sabbatarian key to true philosophy and wisdom: the Jewish oral tradition, or in other words, the Jewish interpretation of Scripture.

Conclusion

Christian Francken’s works written in Transylvania are of historical and philosophical significance on the European level, especially his *Disputatio inter Theologum et Philosophum de incertitudine religionis Christianae*, the first theoretical atheist work in the history of European philosophy.⁸² The most significant reflection on the works of the German philosopher, at least from the perspective of the length of the texts, came from the Transylvanian Sabbatarians. Therefore,

79 Máté, “A szentírás apológiája,” 201. A similar dispraise can be found on the page 206: “The ratio that you feel too strong against Moses is just child’s play, as you are only the children of old sophists, your Fathers were the bucks...” Unlike Sabbatarians, Francken believed to have philosophical tools that the philosophers of Antiquity did not yet possess, and with these tools, he thought himself able to refute belief in God on a metaphysical level. See Simon, “A kleitomakhoszi” 88.

80 Máté, “A szentírás apológiája,” 204.

81 Újlaki-Nagy, *Korai szombatos íráások*, 32. Cf. *Divinarum institutio*, second book, fifth chapter. Lactantius here declares that pagans and philosophers seek wisdom in the wrong places. However, he does not claim that only the Jews possess correct knowledge of God. Cf. Máté, “A szentírás apológiája,” 202.

82 Concerning this claim, see the monograph by József Simon, *Die Religionsphilosophie Christian Franckens*.

it would be reasonable for the secondary literature to place more emphasis on these polemic texts. Although the impact of the texts discussed above remained local due to their inaccessibility in terms of language and the fact that they remained in handwritten manuscripts, the ideas in these texts were nonetheless significant for the formation of a religious community balancing between Christianity and Judaism.

As is clear from the discussion above, the ideas in Francken's writings which were made the object of criticism by the Sabbatarian author(s) concerned four main theological topics: the existence of God, the authenticity of Scripture and the law, the authority of Moses, and the privileges of the chosen people. Most of these issues, especially the last three, are particularly emphatic teachings for the Sabbatarians. In the defense of these teachings, they could not have relied on other denominations. These were theological issues which for the Sabbatarians were the foundations of true religion and faith on which they built their entire system of teachings. It is thus understandable that they came to the defense of these ideas.

In addition to opposing certain attacks on Scripture and the belief in God, the most important part of the Sabbatarian defense was that the provocative ideas claiming to follow the *ratio* were considered human reasonings by them. Although they may have experienced the presence of the philosophy of Francken as a serious threat and may have detected its influence, this threat did not entail a devaluation of rationality or a total rejection of philosophy by them. In the search for effective answers, they had to make their own way without the help of their spiritual predecessors. They did not choose a solution that subordinated *ratio* entirely to the text of Scripture, but avoided the accusation of anti-rationality by drawing a distinction between philosophy and the concept of *ratio*.

The interaction and influence between the Sabbatarians and Francken could not have been deep or long-term. It was reciprocal in the sense that it stimulated discussion and debate on both sides. Thanks to the law-oriented spiritual trends of the time in Transylvania, Francken was thoroughly immersed in dissecting the authenticity of the Holy Scripture, especially the books of Moses and the law. The result, in turn, forced Sabbatarians of the 1590s into a defensive stance and prompted them to face the challenges of following the *ratio*.

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