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Note: David is pronounced, "Da-VEED."

For a short time, religious toleration was the rule of the land in 16th-century Transylvania. When his mother died, the newly crowned King John Sigismund found himself ruling a country divided religiously among Roman Catholics, Calvinists and Lutherans. Among the king's advisors were George Biandrata, a Polish physician and skilled politician, and court preacher David Ferencz, known in the west as Francis David.

In the heady times of the 16th century, Christian doctrine was the subject of great debate. King John Sigismund, realizing there was no possibility of compromise among the various interpreters of proper doctrine, issued an edict that each person was free to support their chosen understanding of Christian doctrine. The edict allowed advisor Biandrata, and court preacher David, both members of the Reformed (Calvinist) tradition, to begin to explore questions concerning the doctrine of the Trinity and the deity of Jesus. Their exploration and unorthodox interpretations of Christian doctrine caused considerable concern among other members of the Reformed clergy.

In those days, doctrinal matters in Transylvania were fully aired by convening a formal debate. King John Sigismund scheduled such an event for March 3, 1568. He invited believers in the "Unity of God" position to debate the Trinitarians. The debate lasted ten days, beginning at 5 a.m. each day. Francis David represented the Unitarian position and relied on scripture to buttress his arguments. At the

conclusion of the debate, David's arguments were seen as stronger, and many in Transylvania embraced Unitarianism. A second debate the following year led the King to declare that he himself was Unitarian and there should be religious toleration in the land. By 1571, Unitarianism was given legal recognition in what would turn out to be King John Sigismund's last public act. He died two months later as a result of an accident, and left no heir to the throne.

John Sigismund was succeeded by a Catholic named Stephen Bathori, who dismissed most of the Unitarians at court, while retaining Biandrata as one of his advisors. Stephen Bathori reaffirmed a policy of toleration for those Christian religions named in the 1571 decree, but declared that he would not allow any further religious innovation.

Unitarianism gained more converts in Transylvania during that period, despite the prohibition against doctrinal changes, and an ecclesiastical organization was developed. By 1577, restrictions were placed on Unitarians, but the organization continued to thrive. Francis David, by now the Unitarian Bishop, was still driven toward reform of doctrine rather than development of church organization. He explored questions having to do with the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, infant baptism, predestination and the worship of Jesus, questioning doctrine in all four areas. Biandrata, more concerned with the health of the church than with matters of doctrine, urged David to keep silent. But this was not Francis David's way.

Francis David began to preach his heretical ideas from the pulpit. Biandrata, concerned for the survival of the Unitarian Church, reported David's activities to the ruler. David continued to preach after the Prince ordered him to stop, and Francis David was arrested and tried for the crime of "innovation," questioning and challenging religious doctrine. The prosecutor at trial was Giorgio Biandrata, who dissembled when asked about his own earlier involvement in questioning religious doctrine. Francis David was found guilty of innovation and condemned to prison for the remainder of his life. He died in the royal dungeon in the castle at Deva on November 15, 1579. Biandrata went on to push the Unitarian church toward more

conservative theological positions. By the time he died in 1588, very little remained of his former influence in the Transylvanian Unitarian movement. The Unitarian Church itself was forced into a position of doctrinal stagnation that lasted more than 200 years.