HUNGARIAN REFORMED CHRISTIANITY AND CALVINISM

THERE is no doubt that the attention of the Reformed Churches of Western Europe was first drawn, in an intensified degree, to Hungary and the Hungarian Reformed Church by the tragic and catastrophical turn of affairs in this country following the Great War. However, in certain narrower circles sympathetic interest in the Hungarian Reformed Church was never lacking. This interest, we may say, has travelled and grown parallel with the renewal of interest in Calvin and Calvinism. As the study of the great Genevan Reformer and of the influence which his life-work exerted on Europe was undertaken with renewed intensity in the second half of the nineteenth century, the interest of Calvin's Western disciples grew accordingly in the Hungarian Reformed Church, which represented that part of Eastern Europe where Calvinism on its eastward march enthralled what was just a little short of a whole nation, while farther east it could only capture *individuals*, such as even a Patriarch of Constantinople, Cyrillus Lucaris. When Emile *Doumergue*, the foremost student of Calvin, published his excellent book, *La Hongrie Calviniste* (Toulouse, 1912), written from personal experiences, he satisfied an eager interest which had been growing for decades. Owing to his work and to numerous previous publications by foreign authors and by Hungarians who wrote in foreign languages and also to the personal contacts which began in the sixties of the last century and deepened and became more and more frequent as the century marched on, the Hungarian Reformed Church represents to the mind of the Western Reformed Churches the easternmost bulwark of Calvinism.

Yet we cannot say that this interest has been entirely satisfied. The disciples of Calvin abroad, who have a casual or a closer acquaintance with Hungary, are often puzzled by difficult questions which arise from the study of the Hungarian Reformed Church. Take, for instance, the constitution of the Hungarian Reformed Church, and Calvin's Western disciples will be at a loss to explain how an episcopal form of church government can exist in our Church. How can we account for that unique phenomenon in the history of the Reformed Churches

that in a Church which regards herself and is regarded by others as " Calvinistic " the office of the bishop has persisted from the very beginning to the present day ? This question has a special importance to-day when the Reformed Christians of Germany, taking their ground on the Word of God and their Creed, are valiantly struggling against an imposition of episcopal church government. But there are other phenomena equally puzzling to the mind of the Reformed Christians abroad. Let us take the Hungarian Reformed Church liturgy which, neither in its older nor in its latest form, issued a few years ago, has any closer relationship with the Genevan, the Huguenot, the Dutch or the Scottish Books of Worship, these classical " Calvinistic " liturgies. Then we take the ancient creeds and confessional writings of the Hungarian Reformed Church—many of which are published in older or more recent foreign collections—and we shall be amazed to find that the influence of the specifically Calvinistic theological ideas and systematizing principles is very little in evidence. Let us study the *Confessio Catholica* which is published under the title *Erlauthaler Bekenntnis*, in an abbreviated form, in E. F. K. *Müller's* excellent *Die Bekenntnisschriften der reformierten Kirche* (Leipzig, 1903), and we shall feel the same surprise. This work stands out among the other confessions on account of its great bulk (and also of its lack of system). It dates from 1562 and is the work of several hands, but in all its essentials of one author, Peter *Melius*, Minister and Bishop of Debrecen and the most energetic organizer of the Hungarian Reformed Church whose epithet is " the Hungarian Calvin ". Now, in this bulky piece of work, the teachings of the Reformed Church do not appear in a Calvinistic cast ; in fact, Calvin's influence on it is practically negligible. On the other hand, it is permeated by the spirit of an antiquated type of scholastic formalism which is entirely absent in other Reformed creeds, and we find numberless references to the Church Fathers, medieval theologians, synods and the Canon Law, and what is still more amazing there are twenty appeals in the work to the authority of the *Council of Trent*. With this evidence in hand the question naturally arises, how did the Hungarian Reformed Church which did not follow the Calvinistic principles either in the laying of the foundation stones of her theology, or in her polity, or in the shaping of her liturgy, become what is called the " bulwark of Calvinism " ?

The purpose of this essay is to answer this question and to cast a little more light on the relationship between the Reformed type of Christianity in Hungary and Calvinism than foreign students of our Church hitherto have had through the study of the works at their disposal.

I

Let us begin our survey with the outward forms of church life. The constitution of the Hungarian Reformed Church has not been shaped after the classical Genevan and Huguenot patterns. It assigns the task of church government from the earliest times and during the subsequent two hundred years to the clergy and to smaller or larger synodical meetings constituted by the ministers. The lifelong moderator of the smaller synods and of the corresponding smaller church districts was later generally called "*Senior*". (The Hungarian word for this office is "*esperes*" which originated from the word "archi-presbyter".) The lifelong moderator of the larger, provincial synods and of the corresponding and constituent church provinces was the "*Superintendent*" who was also called from the earliest days "*püspök*" which is the Hungarian form of "*episcopos*". The Superintendent as well as the Senior (in the earlier days one man could hold both offices) were ministers of their own local congregations which they governed themselves in the same manner as any other members of the clergy in these days. For two centuries only sporadically, and up to the beginning of the seventeenth century nowhere, do we find traces of "kirk sessions" constituted by lay elders who would work together with the ministers in the government of their churches, neither do we have any data that the individual congregations were represented at the synods both by lay members and ministers, whereas this has always and everywhere been the fundamental principle and practice in churches adopting the synod-Presbyterian type of church constitution. Consequently the important duty of church discipline, which Calvin calls the "nervous system" of the Church, fell to the person of the minister, according to the oldest Hungarian Reformed church constitution, and the ministers were assisted, in more serious cases, by the congregation and the higher church authorities, or by the civil authorities, and not by elders, who, as I have already said, did not exist in these days.

The easiest and most natural explanation of this divergence of the Hungarian Reformed church constitution of the sixteenth century from the Calvinistic type is to point to the geographical distance and other similar reasons which prevented the Hungarians from knowing Calvin's church government intimately. I must say, however, that this explanation does not square with the facts. As a matter of fact there was some connection between the Hungarian Reformed believers and Geneva even in Calvin's day, and their organizing synods held in the sixties of that century adopt not only the confessional works and books dealing with church polity of their own theologians, but at two synods, one held in the north of Hungary and the other in Transylvania, in 1562-3, they also adopted Theodore Beza's great confessional work, originally prepared for private purposes, *Confessio Christianae Fidei et eiusdem collatio cum papisticis haeresibus*, and published in both Latin and Hungarian. It is remarkable, however, that only the strictly theological portions of this purely Calvinistic document were taken over bodily by the Hungarians, while the articles dealing with church polity were considerably abbreviated and even these abbreviated portions were remodelled, so that this Hungarian adoption of Beza's work (the Latin text of which is to be found in E. F. K. *Müller's* collection above referred to, under the title *Ungarisches Bekenntnis*) does not give at all a clear picture of the Genevan-Huguenot church government drawn in the original. It is characteristic that paragraph 23 of Chapter V is reduced to an insignificant and short article, the very essence of it being left out : i.e. the enumeration of the church offices in the New Testament, according to Calvin's interpretation (although slightly divergent from the original Genevan pattern), furthermore, the protest against the distinction between the ecclesiastics and the laity and against the application of the word "*clerus*" to ministers is eliminated. In a similar fashion, the Hungarians omit those lines from paragraph 29 of Chapter V in Beza's original work which, speaking about the various names applied to the Superintendent, declare : "*alii nuncupant Superintendentem, ad vitandam, opinor, Episcopalis tyrannidis invidiam.*" These deliberate omissions indicate a conscious attitude on the part of the Hungarians ; and not even this Hungarian adoption of the synod-Presbyterian system taken from Beza's confession, although in a very much abbreviated and modified form, went into actual practice. The

development of the Hungarian church polity was not directed by this confession but rather by the original resolutions of the Hungarian synods which were passed during the sixteenth century and chiefly under the influence of Peter Melius. These synodical resolutions convey the impression of a Church governed exclusively by the clergy, in fact, some of these synodical canons apply the word "*sacerdos*" to ministers, and "*clerus*" to the body of ministers in an utterly anti-Calvinistic fashion.

The question arises: what was the reason for this obviously deliberate and conscious disregard of the Calvinistic form of church government on the part of the Hungarians in the century of the Reformation?

The development of the Anglican or the Scandinavian church constitution does not furnish a parallel to what took place in the Hungarian Reformed Church. In England and in the Scandinavian countries the matter of Reformation was taken in hand by the State and the result was a firmly established State Church. The retention of the traditional Episcopal system was, to a large extent, a political expediency. On the other hand, in Hungary the Reformation was begun and consolidated without the aid of the State. In the century of the Reformation a great national disaster befell Hungary which was unparalleled in the history of the country with the exception of the catastrophe following the World War. As a result of this disaster Hungary was split into three parts: the Hapsburg kingdom of the west and north-west; the Turkish dominion; and Transylvania, which was in turn a Hapsburg or a Turkish suzerainty, although, in a relative sense, she had a fairly independent state existence. Transylvania in those days included, beside Transylvania proper, the eastern and north-eastern parts of Hungary. No explanation is needed why the State failed to give aid to the cause of the Reformation in those parts of the country which were under Hapsburg or Turkish rule, while in Transylvania, the State support given to the Reformation was not permanent. There was one among the Transylvanian Princes who died a Protestant, even an ultra-Protestant, but the others were all staunch Roman Catholics. The great Reformed Princes, Stephen Bocskay, Gabriel Bethlen and the Rákóczys, gained ascendancy only in the seventeenth century. By this time the major portion of this little country had long become Protestant in spite of the strong counter-Reformation efforts which

had been made previously. Therefore, neither the Reformed, nor any Protestant body, has become a State Church in any part of Hungary, consequently no State influence was ever exerted towards the development and consolidation of the Episcopal system.

On the other hand, the peculiar development of the Hungarian Reformed church constitution was very strongly influenced by the fact that, before the Reformed Church could get hold of the people, in the sixties of the sixteenth century, and after a decade's struggle, Lutheranism had already spread all over the country and had been organized from the early thirties of the sixteenth century. The Lutheran Church has persisted to this day chiefly in those parts of Great Hungary which have German settlements, especially in the north of Hungary and in Transylvania, while it has practically disappeared from the purely Hungarian territories. The Hungarian Lutherans, of course, took the nearest pattern for their form of church government which they found in the German Empire. This form of church government was based on the clergy, while the supreme ecclesiastical power was seized by the Prince (as the " emergency Bishop ") or, in the chartered cities of the Empire, by the City Magistrate. In Hungary, as we have already seen, the supreme authority of the Prince, with the exception of one case above referred to, never became Protestant in the sixteenth century. The City Magistrates, however, who at this time enjoyed considerable privileges, and the feudal lords, who exercised many of the State prerogatives over the majority of the population, such as taxation, jurisdiction and enlisting men for their armies, came, with a few exceptions, under the influence of the Reformation. Therefore, in these days of political and ecclesiastical disintegration, the political power and much of the actual ecclesiastical authority fell to the feudal lords and to the political organization of the nobility, the county (*comitatus*) and to the Magistrates of the chartered towns and cities. These—according to the German Lutheran pattern—left the actual management of the Church's affairs to the clergy, to the Seniors and Superintendents —who were elected from the clergy—and to the clerical synods. But all rights pertaining to the supreme administration in all such church matters which did not come into the category of spiritualia, i.e. questions of doctrine and liturgy, were reserved to themselves in the same way as we see it in the German Lutheran Consistorial system.

This situation did not change when the majority of the population had accepted the Reformed creed. The feudal lords, these ardent supporters of the Reformed faith, saw no reason for changing the constitution of the Church. Their serfs had practically no political rights, and to introduce the Presbyterian form of church government would have meant giving full rights in the ecclesiastical sphere to these underprivileged people. This would have required such a spirit of self-effacement on the part of the feudal lords, as, in this century, we vainly search for not only in Hungary but elsewhere as well. The City Magistrates, even in those rare cases when they adopted the Reformed creed—such as first of all Debrecen—felt no inclination to change the form of church government to the Calvinistic type. The spreading of the Reformed faith was chiefly due to German-Swiss influence, and in German-speaking Switzerland, as we know, the political and ecclesiastical powers were interwoven, and Calvin's "*consistoire*" (kirk session) which, in the matter of discipline, was relatively independent from the civil authority, was not imitated. Therefore the feudal lords and City Magistrates jealously guarded their power and influence in ecclesiastical matters which they were willing to share only with the clergy and not with any independent ecclesiastical organizations constituted by their serfs or by the burghers of the towns such as the kirk sessions and synods constituted thereby would have been.

Thus the consolidation of the episcopal system in the Hungarian Reformed Church was chiefly due to this cause. However, there are several other causes as well which we must take into account. First, the Hussite movement had made considerable headway in certain parts of Hungary before the Reformation. They could not build up an independent church organization, as they were violently suppressed, but fragments of this movement, in a latent form, especially among the Slav population of the country, lingered on for a long time. These small groups kept in touch with the congregations of the Bohemian Brethren. These Bohemian Brethren, as we know, adopted and adhered to the Episcopal system, while in other respects they had already conformed to the Reformation, especially to its Calvinistic form. Their example undoubtedly influenced the Hungarians. This influence reached Hungary not only from the direction of Bohemia and Moravia, but from Poland also, where,

beside the Calvinistic, Lutheran, Anabaptist and Antitrinitarian tendencies, the exiled Bohemian Brethren also played an important rôle in the reformation of the Polish Church. At this time there was a constant intercommunication between the two countries through the eastern and north-eastern boundaries of Hungary, and it is likely that the early efforts to organize the Reformation churches in Hungary were affected by Polish influences. In Poland, as we know, the pure Calvinistic form of church government could not take root owing partly to the same causes which obtained in Hungary. We must also remember that the ancient medieval organization of the Roman Catholic Church was annihilated in the part of Hungary which was under Turkish rule, and due to the constant political disturbances, it had come very near to complete disintegration in the other two parts of the country also. The Turks simply would not tolerate the Roman Catholic bishops in their territories, for the bishops in those days were not only ecclesiastical, but also political potentates, feudal lords, and, if necessity required, they were powerful military factors also. Transylvania, in order to increase the power of the Prince, secularized the Transylvanian estates of the bishoprics. The Roman Catholic Hapsburgs also had to draw often on the ecclesiastical resources for military purposes, and when the feudal magnates of their realm did the same thing, only in a more violent fashion, the Hapsburgs had no power to check them for fear that, if any energetic steps were taken, these feudal lords would give their allegiance to the Turks or to Transylvania. Consequently the old Roman Catholic organization had disintegrated in most parts of the country and had given place to the new without any resistance. However, *the new building was built of the old bricks*: the power of the bishop, as a charismatic power, had disappeared, only to give place to the supreme administrative authority of the bishop, although now the bishop had to share this power, in a Protestant spirit, with the ministerial synod and with the Seniors. The office of the Senior as well as the synod had their antecedents in the organization of the medieval Church. Where the episcopal power of the Roman Catholic Church had given way or had lost its political influence the new organization replaced the old without resistance. However, in the western, northern and north-western parts of Great Hungary, where the episcopal power of the Roman Church had been shielded by the Hapsburg

kingdom and had not only survived the serious vicissitudes, but had even been able to make counter-Reformation efforts from the middle of the century onwards, there were—in spite of the support of the feudal landowners—far more obstacles to surmount in the way of organizing the Protestant movement. Consequently the episcopal system could not take root either among the Reformed or the Lutheran believers of the north and north-west during the entire sixteenth century (not even in the seventeenth century as far as the Reformed Church is concerned), and their churches were under the inferior government of the Seniors and all rights pertaining to the office of the Protestant Bishops or Superintendents elsewhere (primarily the ordination of ministers) were in these parts of the country exercised by the Seniors. On the other hand, where the Roman episcopal power had dwindled away, the political factors were indifferent towards the organizing of Protestant episcopacy. The Protestant Bishops had no political power to arouse the fear or jealousy of the Turks. In Transylvania the development of Protestant episcopacy was even promoted by the political powers, the reason being that a new Hungarian state came into existence here in the sixteenth century, and, in order to maintain the balance of its organization, it seemed necessary that the four denominations which had received political equality, namely, the Roman Catholic, the Lutheran, the Reformed, and the Unitarian, should be placed under a strong and centralized government to be controlled and influenced by the State. Consequently the Protestant episcopal sees were codified in the Transylvanian constitution (the Roman Catholics, whose number had greatly fallen off, were allowed to have—owing to the secularization—"*vicarii*" only) and the Protestant episcopal power was given during the seventeenth century such a high recognition (the Reformed Princes, of course, gave this to the episcopacy of the Reformed Church first) that this rise of episcopal power could but lend prestige to the Protestant episcopal sees of other Hungarian territories also, and those in episcopal authority—they were human, too !—were often stimulated by the Transylvanian example to increase their administrative powers, sometimes in an entirely Roman Catholic fashion.

Now, the above-sketched church polity was obviously not Calvinistic, yet our known sources furnish *no data of any contradiction or opposition* to its development in the sixteenth century.

However, as the European horizon of the Hungarian Reformed people broadened, more and more opportunities presented themselves to get acquainted with the Calvinistic type of church government, in its different varieties and developments. From the seventeenth century onwards this acquaintance has resulted in vigorous criticism and in efforts to reform the polity of the Hungarian Reformed Church. The Hungarian students of the University of Heidelberg got to know the constitution of the Palatinate Reformed Church, and under its influence, introduced in the first third of the century, the disciplinary kirk session into several Reformed Churches of the Western Hapsburg kingdom. The turmoil of the Thirty Years' War rendered the study at the German Reformed theological schools increasingly difficult. Therefore the mass migration of Hungarian students to the Dutch universities began. A few of them moved farther on and visited England also. These students returning to their homeland started a powerful movement, chiefly in the territories under Turkish or Transylvanian rule, i.e. in the east and north-east, which aimed at reforming all activities of the Church, the liturgy, pastoral work, higher and lower education; the chief object being, however, the transformation of the church polity. They wanted to organize a kirk session in every congregation and to abolish the offices of the Superintendent and of the Senior as anti-Scriptural. The movement was thus of a Puritan-Precisian spirit and therefore fundamentally Calvinistic, but owing to the rugged and persevering opposition of the conservatives and retrogrades, resulted in an interior struggle lasting for decades and ending in a compromise. The National Synod of 1646 recognizes the kirk session in principle, but makes no effort to translate their finding into universal practice. Kirk sessions were organized in many congregations, but the synod-Presbyterian principle was not carried through consistently, and the form of church government based on the clergy—the ministers, Seniors and Superintendents—persisted essentially in its sixteenth century form. That was all these enthusiastic reformers were able to accomplish. Their partial failure was due not only to the natural conservatism of those in actual church authority, but also to the fact that the power of the Transylvanian Prince—which was at this time at its climax—was not favourable towards the Puritan-Presbyterian efforts because of the revolutionary development of affairs in England. For the same reason the

majority of the feudal landowners also lacked confidence in the movement. The City Magistrates, who not only governed the Reformed Churches under their jurisdiction *in externis, but also exercised church discipline—this latter with the ministers*—felt no need for organizing kirk sessions which would have only been parallels to their own church authorities already in existence. Apart from this, the times were not suitable for making fundamental changes in the church constitution. In Hapsburg Hungary, the movement of counter-Reformation had already been gathering great strength from the earliest years of the seventeenth century. First, it reduced the former powerful majority of the Protestants in the western part of the country to a minority. Then, when after the expulsion of the Turk and the fall of the independent Transylvanian Principality, the eastern parts of Hungary were also attached to the Hapsburg rule, the work of re-catholization was undertaken with great energy in those parts also, and the chief aim was to break the back of the Reformed Church as by far the biggest Protestant Church and the least favoured by the Hapsburgs because of her pure Hungarian constituency. In these critical circumstances, of course, there was no time for experiments in church government, therefore the episcopal-seniorate system, in several places but not everywhere amplified by the kirk session, was taken over to the eighteenth century. This was the century of the "*Aufklärung*", yet the work of counter-Reformation was continued in Hungary with unabated vigour; it was less brutal than in the previous century, but all the more systematic. There were still certain legal safeguards for the free exercise of religion of the Protestants, especially in Transylvania which, although under the same monarch, enjoyed a separate political existence, but, as a matter of fact, the only places where the Protestant churches could live in comparative peace were where they could draw on social and political powers beside the paper-guarantees of the laws. Such were—apart from the reduced number of Protestant City Councils—chiefly the estates of the Protestant landed nobility and of the Transylvanian magnates who had, in a large majority, remained Protestant (while most aristocratic families outside Transylvania had, with a few exceptions, already returned to Romanism by the end of the previous century). These noblemen alone could stand up successfully for the oppressed Protestant churches, which were vexed in a thousand ways at the meetings

of the Diet and in face of the state authorities which were promoting the interests of the Roman Catholic clergy, and it was owing primarily to their courageous and resourceful action that in the eighteenth century Evangelical Protestantism in Hungary had not met the same fate to which it was doomed in France and Poland. However, it was only natural that these defenders of the Church, while they exerted great energy in defending the Church against outward forces, were equally energetic in claiming and actually exercising certain prerogatives in the management of the interior affairs of their churches. Thus immediately after the fall of the Prince's power in Transylvania the magnates secured for themselves a decisive influence in the affairs of the Transylvanian Reformed Church as the "*curatores saeculares*" or "*curatores laici*" of smaller or greater church districts or of schools. They recognized the local kirk sessions while reserving in them prominent places for themselves as the "*patroni*". On the other hand, they practically limited the authority of the ministers, Seniors, Superintendents and of the ministerial synods to the matter of "spiritualia". *Of course, these phenomena are not to be attributed to the influence of the Calvinistic synod-Presbyterian principle.* At any rate, this century of "*Aufklärung*" was not the opportune time for propagating the Calvinistic principles! They were rather due to the special Hungarian circumstances which made the churches together with their ministers more dependent on the support of the noble laity than ever. This example of Transylvania was freely followed in the other parts of Great Hungary also from the second quarter of the eighteenth century onwards. The Protestant nobility of these parts also began to demand that their influence in their churches should be *institutionally* secured by the establishment of the "*curator's*" office (or "*inspectores*" in the Lutheran Church) which had hitherto been unknown in the Hungarian Protestant Churches. These efforts were vigorously opposed by a certain group of the ministry, especially in places around the city of Debrecen, as this was the part of the country where the burden of oppression was least felt and the churches were least dependent on the permanent aid of the nobility. The interior struggle around the constitution of the Church began afresh. However, *the warfare was not waged any longer about the issue of Calvinistic principles as in the previous century.* The ministers opposing the curator's office stood on their historical rights, and their leader,

Professor Nicolas *Sinai* of Debrecen, a man of great learning, furnished incontestable historical proofs that the oldest Hungarian Reformed church constitution was a form of government exercised exclusively by the clergy—the ministers, the Seniors and the Superintendents—and the influence of the laity (*saeculares*) was not *institutionally* established. *Sinai*, during his long travels abroad, spent considerable time in England also and it seems that he adopted the Anglican episcopacy as his ideal form of church government, and in his opposition to the above efforts he not only stood on the ground of the peculiar historical development of Hungarian Protestantism, but went the length of defending the exclusive right of the clergy in the government of the Church *on principle*, in an entirely High Church way of reasoning. Alas, those on the other side, the nobility supported by many ministers, did not appeal to the Calvinistic principles and historical patterns either, but stood on the right of use and wont with regard to the place of the laity in the Church which right had been evolved in the last fifty years. Furthermore, they produced a preposterous and hybrid pattern : a church constitution which had been suddenly thrown together for the small group of Polish Protestants emerging from under Roman Catholic oppression after the first division of Poland, a constitution which was a cross between Lutheran Consistorial and Reformed Presbyterian elements, securing an absolute supremacy to the nobility and generally to the laity over the clergy. In spite of the passionate opposition of the ministerial party the noblemen succeeded in setting up at the end of the eighteenth century, using this Polish pattern, a church constitution which codified the office of the "lay" curators both at the lower and higher courts of church government and carried through consistently and rigidly the principle of "*parity*" of the laity and clergy in all governing and administrative offices of the Church. This resulted in *double chairmanship* at practically all church meetings which has persisted to this day as a special feature of the Hungarian Reformed Church. It took a century and many interior struggles till this constitution, after many modifications, could eventually take root in the Hungarian Reformed Church and assume the shape essentially in which we find it to-day. This form is the result of a series of compromises. The ancient scheme of a form of government exercised by the clergy—the ministers, the Senior and the Superintendent—is still preserved

in this constitution, but at the same time it is duplicated by the "lay" curator and other lay officials. There is a kirk session in every congregation, but in the higher governing and administrative bodies and meetings (presbytery, district, conventus, synod) *the synod-Presbyterian principle is not carried through in a consistent and purely Calvinistic manner*, while the principle of "*parity*" is applied with a mechanical rigidity. Only by continually balancing the heterogeneous elements of many centuries of development was it possible to develop such a system which, although not Calvinistic, is undoubtedly strong and vital. The atmosphere of most parts of the nineteenth century was not suitable for asserting the pure Calvinistic principles either. Owing to a very peculiar illusion, the words "Reformed", "Calvinistic" and "Presbyterian" applied to the government of the Church suggested "Liberal", "Parliamentarian" and "Democratic" to the nineteenth century Reformed mind. But there was also another obstacle in the way of stressing the special features of Calvinism. That was the *ideal of a union between the Protestant Churches* inspired by the ideas of Rationalism, Romanticism and, in a very small degree, of Pietism. The nobility was aiming at evolving an *essentially identical constitution* for both the Reformed and the Lutheran Churches with the explicit purpose of preparing the way for the complete union of their respective denominations. This, however, did not take place, yet the fundamental scheme of the constitution of both churches is essentially identical and is based on a type of church government which dates back to the century of the Reformation and is amplified by later elements and the development of which is marked by a series of compromises. It is a future task of the Hungarian Reformed Church to give a fuller recognition to the Calvinistic synod-Presbyterian principle. It is an urgent task, and while to stand on the ground of a venerable historical tradition and to preserve the *status quo* is altogether laudable, what we need most is determination and courage to stand up for the Kingdom of Christ, amid many outside and interior difficulties and temptations, not for the sake of the present or of the past, but of the future. This attitude can only be maintained in the Church Reformed according to the Word of God either in Hungary or anywhere else, if the constitution of that Church is based on the Word of God, patterned after the offices of the Church as described in the New Testament, freed

from all hierarchy and Lutheran Consistorialism and from the very shadow of Democratic and Parliamentarian ideas, that is, in one word, essentially Calvinistic in its conception.

II

The above-sketched development of the church polity may have already suggested the hindrances which stood in the way at all times, including the time when the foundations were laid, of giving full recognition to the theological ideas of Calvinism and its principles of church constitution in the Hungarian Reformed Church. Space does not permit me to show in detail this retarding effect in the liturgy and other aspects of practical church life. With regard to liturgy I only wish to make the observation that its development was, generally speaking, under German-Swiss influence, and its Roman Catholic, or rather Lutheran, survivals were only eliminated by the impact of the Puritan-Presbyterian movement above referred to, from the second half of the seventeenth century onwards, and that its most Calvinistic element which has persisted to this day was incorporated at the same time. This element was the singing of the metrical Psalms of Marot and Beza, in Hungarian translation, to the original and mostly French tunes. This metrical version soon became endeared to the heart of the Hungarian Reformed people and has remained popular to this day. The doctrinal and moral discipline was exercised in the Hungarian Reformed Churches from the very beginning for a long time with a truly Calvinistic severity. Even a Roman Catholic priestly church historian of the last decades had to recognize the difference of moral standard of Hungarian Reformed and non-Reformed towns and cities of olden times, altogether in favour of the former. However, we must admit that this successful and energetic maintenance of discipline was due to the moral energy and authority of individual ministers, or perhaps of some prominent laymen (chiefly the members of the City Council), and *not to the autonomous and conscious activity of the congregation, this "chosen generation" and "holy nation"*. Even the Puritan-Presbyterian reform movement was unable, owing to the coincidence of many adverse circumstances, to develop sufficiently this self-expression of the congregation, whereas, apart from the transformation of the church polity, this movement aimed especially at this. The lack of this conscious and autonomous

activity is still felt in the Hungarian Reformed congregations as a challenge for the future.

I wish to speak more extensively about the development of the Hungarian Reformed theological thinking.

As to its foundations there was a positive and a negative factor of decisive consequence. Their influence is still felt. The negative factor was that *among all significant Reformed Churches of Europe, it was the Hungarian which had the least contacts with the Genevan Reformer.* There were one or two Hungarians who met Calvin or corresponded with him, and there are no data as yet to show that these had any appreciable influence upon the development of the Hungarian Reformed Church. As far as we can see to-day the attention of the Hungarian theologians was drawn to Calvin especially by his polemical writings concerning the Lord's Supper which were directed against the extreme Lutherans (Westphal, Hesshusius). There was appended to one of these polemical writings, which was a short pamphlet written against Hesshusius, a Form of Concord drawn up by Calvin, and as far as we know, this Form of Concord was the first writing of Calvin which was brought to Hungary and which was also used in the course of the Reformed Lutheran controversies. This writing came to Transylvania shortly before Calvin's death, and it is likely that it did not come from Geneva directly but through Polish mediation. Beside this negative circumstance, namely, that the personal contacts and theological interviews with the Genevan master were few and of a late date, we must also consider the other equally important positive factor: that *the founders of the Hungarian Reformed Church, without exception, received the shape of their theology from Melanchthon, in Wittenberg, and they came under the theological influence of the German-Swiss theologians—not through personal contacts but through literary studies—only after they had gone through Melanchthon's school.* Of these Bullinger especially showed particular interest in the development of the Hungarian Reformation. He was the first adviser on questions of liturgy and church polity in the days when the first uncertain and vague efforts were made to consolidate the Reformed Church in Hungary, and as a recognition of his theological authority his confessional work, originally intended for private use, the *Confessio Helvetica Posterior*, was adopted by the largest Superintendential Synod (that around Debrecen) as the official creed as early as

1567. This excellent confessional work met a similar recognition later on in the other parts of the Hungarian Reformed Church which called herself through many centuries "*The Church of the Helvetic Confession*" after Bullinger's work which is still in official use as a creed of the Hungarian Reformed Church. Thus the founders of the Hungarian Reformed Church received their formal schooling from Melanchthon, while the content of their theology bore the decisive impress of the Reformed theologians of German-speaking Switzerland, who, while influenced by Calvin's spirit, were essentially Zwingli's spiritual successors. Therefore the impact of Calvin and of the authentic Calvinistic theology was, in the critical period of laying the theological foundation of the Reformed Church (1550-70), of a secondary significance. This is obvious from the study of those two theologians who had the greatest merits in laying the theological and constitutional foundations of the Hungarian Reformed Church. The first of these was *Stephen Szegedi Kis* whose theological works, written in Latin, reveal a vast reading and were, after his death, published abroad in numerous editions. One of these works was even translated into German. The other, *Peter Melius*, was his junior but died in the same year (1572). In all likelihood he was won for the Reformed faith by *Szegedi Kis*. He became the most successful defender and promoter of the Reformed faith against the Roman and Lutheran opponents and then against the Antitrinitarian forces which were being marshalled from Transylvania and Poland. Yet *neither Szegedi Kis nor Melius can be regarded as Calvinistic theologians, although both are consistently Reformed in their outlook and uncompromisingly Predestinarian.* (In this latter respect they do not at all take Bullinger's cautious attitude which was the result of his Humanistic training.) Their method and delivery is Melanchthonian, and their works, especially Melius's, are characterized by an extreme type of dialectical formalism which preserves and develops several aspects of the Aristotelian Scholasticism. Their theological argumentation—again primarily under Melanchthon's influence—dwells too much on the patristic evidences and on the ancient and medieval doctrinal tradition of the Church. (Melius again carries this to the extreme.) As far as their ideas are concerned it will suffice to point out that neither their doctrine of predestination nor that of the Lord's Supper is of a Calvinistic spirit and structure, and both

show that, while Szegedi Kis and Melius may have had *some* knowledge of Calvin's works (perhaps *least* of the *Institutes*), these failed to make any deeper impressions on them. For instance, in their doctrine of the Lord's Supper they conceive of the spiritual nourishment by Christ's body, contrary to Calvin's mind, as a primarily *mental* and not as a *real* process. They have an apparently conscious disregard for the most typically Calvinistic ideas of the believer's mystic union with the glorified Christ. In their discussion of predestination they set out, contrary to Calvin, not so much from the Biblical facts of Revelation, as rather from certain abstract philosophical theories, in Melanchthon's, or rather especially in Zwingli's manner. It is likely that Calvin would have disagreed with Stephen Szegedi Kis's procedure when he wove into his doctrine of God the "*Itinerarium mentis ad Deum*" of the mystico-scholastic Bonaventura. Calvin would have yet more emphatically disapproved of what I have already mentioned above, viz. that Peter Melius appealed to the witness of the Council of Trent in his defence of the Reformed faith in the otherwise strongly Reformed and fervently anti-Roman document, the *Confessio Catholica*. The explanation of this curious phenomenon may be that Melius and his fellow editors had no first-hand knowledge of the resolutions which the Council of Trent passed on justification and on faith and works, and to which they appealed. They may have had a vague notion that the Council of Trent tried to capitalize Augustine's authority in the same way as the Reformation, and the *references to and quotations from Augustine, moreover, the identity of certain formulae lured them into the presumption* that the Council of Trent taught essentially the same thing about justification, faith and works, which they themselves taught. The reason why they capitalized this unwarranted assumption exactly in their *Confessio Catholica*, an assumption which is otherwise absent from all their other works, was that they wanted to emphasize their "catholicity" to the Emperor and King Ferdinand I, and to Maximilian, the presumptive heir to the throne, to whom this confession was tendered by the Reformed garrison of Fort Eger (Erlau—a fortress highly significant from the point of view of defence against the Turks), in order to justify their religious position. Thus Szegedi Kis and Melius represent a specifically Hungarian, strongly eclectic and traditionalist variety of Reformed theological thinking which was

influenced, apart from their personality, by the special Hungarian circumstances as well. As far as those thoughts of Calvin are concerned which are not of a *par excellence* theological nature, his influence is still less traceable on these two Hungarian theologians. It seems, for instance, that neither of them ever got acquainted with the remarkable teaching of Calvin in regard to taking interest on money; he was the first among the Reformers to break with the medieval and we may almost say dogmatic notion of the sterility of money. Both Melius and Szegedi Kis teach this medieval theory—the former with a measure of leniency, while the latter with utter rigidity—following the footsteps of the older Reformers and in spite of the fact that both were in their reforming activities backed by the merchant society of the Hungarian Plain, especially of Debrecen, who were, at that time, very well-to-do.

After Calvin's death a closer intercommunication began between the Hungarian Reformed people and Beza's Geneva. Through several decades, before the migration of Hungarian students to Holland and England began, numerous young Hungarians visited Geneva. Beza was highly interested in the struggles of the young Hungarian Reformed Church, and he followed the controversies against the Antitrinitarians with a sympathetic and approving attention. But it is interesting that he was dissatisfied with the theological method of Melius, whom he scolded mildly yet firmly for using the traditional and particularly the patristic arguments in an extravagant and somewhat rash manner against the Antitrinitarians. The spiritual leaders and organizers of the Hungarian Reformed Church, while they highly respected Beza, struck independent paths not only in their church polity, as we have already seen, but in their doctrinal teaching also; and when they adopted Beza's Confession, to which I have already referred, in 1562-3, they simply omitted another of Beza's characteristic teachings contained in the 45th paragraph of the original work. This teaching is not only Calvinistic, but goes beyond Calvin in asserting the right of active resistance against the tyrannical and godless ruler, which doctrine, as we know, attained in its subsequent development to a very high political significance. The reason for this omission was that this teaching was not needed in Hungary. The state authority in Transylvania was favourable towards the Reformers in any case, and they hoped obedience would be of

more avail in the Hapsburg kingdom than a provocative assertion of their right of resistance. This conscious disregard of the established political principles of Calvinism at the laying of the foundation of the Reformed Church in Hungary, which principles are not expounded in the writings of Melius and Szegedi Kis either, accounts in itself satisfactorily for that curious phenomenon that the typically Calvinistic theologico-political principles are either absent, or only casually recognized in the religious and political wars of independence of the seventeenth century in Hungary in spite of the predominantly Reformed leadership.

Under the influence of Beza's Geneva and of the German Reformed Universities which were frequently visited by Hungarian students, the Hungarian Reformed theologians had, by the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, acquired a fuller possession of Calvin's authentic spiritual inheritance and were endeavouring to make use of it in their own work. Beside the Second Helvetic Confession the Heidelberg Catechism soon attained recognition and its content, which was deeper and more Calvinistic than that of the Second Helvetic Confession, though it tacitly passed by certain special features of Calvinism, was suitable to balance by its Reformed features the German-Swiss onesidedness of the previous theological development. The full Hungarian translation of Calvin's *Institutes* (1599 Edition) was published in 1624. This translation was made by the same indefatigable *Albert Szenci Molnár* to whom the Hungarian Church is indebted for the Hungarian rendering of the metrical Psalter of Marot and Beza. Thus Hungarian theological thinking began to absorb more and more Calvinistic elements. However, this development was soon stopped. The migration to the Dutch Universities began in an ever-increasing volume until the end of the eighteenth century. As a result the Hungarian students were confirmed in the Calvinistic theology and church ideal at first, but then soon Coccejanism became the vogue among the Hungarian youth. Coccejanism at its outset stood on the ground of the Scripture, but it was divergent from Calvinism. This divergence was hardly noticeable in its first expounders, but it went to such an extreme later on that certain representatives of this school turned to the Cartesian philosophy for a metaphysical foundation. By the end of the seventeenth century this combination of Coccejanism and Cartesianism had become the leading theological tendency in the Hungarian Reformed

Church, and the vigorous protest of those adhering to Calvinism or generally to the older orthodoxy had by this time faded away. The most eminent ministers, church governors and professors—though not without exceptions—were in the Coccejan ranks and there was a Reformed minister of a universal learning and culture, Nicolas Apáti, whose last charge was Debrecen and who died in 1724, a philosopher and theologian, who was not only a follower of Descartes, but also an enthusiastic devotee of the eminent mystic, Peter Poiret.

Thus the study at the Dutch Universities not only failed to strengthen permanently Hungarian Calvinism, but it also prepared the way for the theology of the Illumination. During the eighteenth century, religious and theological thinking was completely rationalized in Hungary as well as everywhere else in European Protestantism. From the middle of the century even the most conservative authors, and those most faithfully adhering —relatively speaking—to the Scriptural and confessional theology began to appeal more and more frequently in their writings to the "prudent reason", "common sense", as an organ of religious knowledge, even indeed a criterion of Revelation. *A particular dislike was shown towards the doctrine of predestination.* This was shared even by those ecclesiastical authors who were most Scriptural in their thinking. This was the condition of the Hungarian Reformed Church at the time when she passed into the nineteenth century, the spirit of which was pre-eminently marked by the lack of theological principle. In the course of this century the older type of Hungarian Rationalism, which was inspired by the idea of church union, a union not only of organizations but of the Protestant creeds as well, was displaced by a motley conglomeration of various "liberal" theological tendencies launched under the influence of Hegel, Schleiermacher, Baur, Strauss and Renan. This liberal school held its sway practically to the end of the century not only in the teaching of theology, but also in preaching and religious education. Those in the Church who had kept some of their old loyalty to the Scriptural and confessional spirit never ceased to protest, but all they could achieve was that they prevented what was very impatiently urged by those demanding a thorough theological reform, namely, the formal and official rejection of the part of the Church of the Second Helvetic Confession and of the Heidelberg Catechism. Unfortunately, the rising Scriptural and

confessional reaction to the presumptuous demands of this " modern theology " was for a long time unable to develop what we may call the backbone of its theology. From the eighties of the nineteenth century, however, among the most serious-minded people of the Reformed Church, whose religion was more than a mere traditionalism, an evangelical fermentation of religious life began under the influence of the English-American revivalism, the German and Swiss " *Gemeinschaftschristentum* " and, last but not least, of the Scottish church life ; yet, while all these impacts resulted in powerful ethical and emotional stirrings and practical enterprises of " *Innere Mission* " (efforts to awaken the evangelical spirit within the Christian society), a decisive and inclusive theological leadership was still lacking. The renewed study of Calvin and Calvinism had already begun in the fifties and sixties, but only as an isolated phenomenon. However, it received a new impulse at the beginning of the twentieth century. A new and excellent translation of Calvin's *Institutes*, then the influence of the Dutch Neo-Calvinism (the Hungarian translation of the great Abraham *Kuyper's What is Calvinism ?* has become one of the most popular and best read books), furthermore, the present dialectical theology of Karl Barth, with its powerful challenges and bold testimony about the Word of God, combined their impacts to lead an ever-growing number of Hungarian Reformed ministers and laymen, following the footsteps of the Genevan teacher, back to the Bible and the Creeds.

Yet even in those days when the spiritual life was at its lowest ebb, and theology had become of the shallowest, there was somehow a subconscious feeling in the mind of the Hungarian Reformed people that their spiritual father and leader to Christ was, after all, John Calvin. This is expressed in that interesting and somewhat odd phenomenon that *the name " Calvinist " has nowhere attained to such a popularity as in Hungary.* Originally it was a nickname here as well as everywhere else, applied by the Roman Catholics and particularly by the Lutherans to the Reformed people, who hotly resented it for a long time. However, from the second half of the seventeenth century onwards we notice that the Hungarian Reformed people began to be proud of this nickname chiefly because of certain political and racial connotations which it had developed since in the national risings led by Bocskay, Bethlen and the Rákóczys it was the racially pure Hungarian and religiously Reformed people who

took part in the greatest numbers and with the most untiring energy, and consequently were most distrusted and even hated by the absolutist Hapsburg monarchy which supported the work of re-catholicization. Therefore, since the eighteenth century the word " Calvinist " has had no reference to one's theological position, but chiefly to one's intensified and resolute patriotism, unwilling to give in either ecclesiastically or politically to Vienna. That was the reason why the national liberals of the nineteenth century had such an appreciative affection for the Hungarian " Calvinists ". Remarkably enough, the great and tragic figure of the liberal awakening, Louis *Kossuth*, a Lutheran, was, for a while, very seriously contemplating the idea of affiliating himself with the Reformed Church in order to emphasize his patriotism, as in his own Church, which had many Slav members, certain pan-Slav stirrings began to crop up. There was an unconscious humour in the situation that the name " Calvinist " attained to its highest esteem at the very time when the Calvinistic backbone of theology had wasted away and the practical life of the Church was anything but purely and consistently Calvinistic. Thus the average Hungarian Reformed believer of to-day, especially if not a trained theologian, is likely to take the word " Calvinism " for concentrated patriotism, firmness of resolve to the extent of stubbornness, anti-Hapsburgism, anti-Romanism, liberalism and democracy and a certain kind of faith in Providence with a subtle suggestion of Fatalism. He will be surprised when one begins to explain to him the deeply Scriptural character of Calvinism, the majestic truths of " *Soli Deo Gloria* " and " *Regnum Christi* ", or the *real* meaning of predestination. On the other hand, we must not overlook the fact that *at least the name of Calvin* has always been held in high esteem, even in those days when the departure from his spirit was the greatest, and this is a possible point of contact for initiating an ecclesiastical and theological reform of a genuinely Calvinistic spirit. The preliminaries of this are being carried on with good prospects in the last two or three decades. This reform will be *really* Calvinistic for the reason that it will be Calvinistic *in its essence* and not in its name. (Who then is Paul and who is Apollos ? 1 Cor. iii. 5.)

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Albert Szenczi Molnár, whom I have already mentioned, the memorable translator of the metric Psalter of Marot and

Beza and of Calvin's *Institutes*, on one of his many wanderings in his student days arrived in Geneva and visited Beza, this patriarch of European fame, who was approaching his eightieth year. This grand old man received the Hungarian youth, who was in his early twenties, with great cordiality and entertained him at his modest table, and then led him to Calvin's portrait and pointed, with tears in his eyes, to his immortal master, then resting in his grave for a generation: "*Ille me progenuit in Christo!*" This scene was indelibly impressed on the mind of this enthusiastic young Hungarian. It is likely that the resolution was conceived in his mind at this time to bring Calvin closer to the heart of his Hungarian nation, for as he wrote in the preface to the translation of the *Institutes*[1]: "This man has yet never been really listened to by the Hungarians." There is something fatal about the circumstances that sixty to eighty years had to pass after Calvin's death, which approximately coincided with the birth of the Hungarian Reformed Church, before the tidal waves of Calvinism reached the Hungarian nation, and this late tide was soon followed, owing to a great turn in the spiritual life of Europe, by a sudden, but lasting, ebb. Those melancholically inclined may speculate how different the spiritual and theological character of the Hungarian Reformed Church would have been, had the Hungarians but known Calvin personally and not by his portrait alone and had Stephen Szegedi Kis and Peter Melius had the opportunity to sit in the company of Knox, Marnix de St. Aldegonde and Caspar Olevian, among his Genevan disciples and had they also been able to confess at the evening of their life and with tears in their eyes: "*Ille me progenuit in Christo!*" But there is no room for melancholic fancies in the world of reality which is God's world and the mirror of His glory. The past is a sealed document and its final disposal will not be revealed until the Judgment Day. Calvin is a real servant of Christ for the very reason that he always, to-day also, points to the future: "*Donec adveniat, quod nunc absconditum est, Domini regnum*", and the way of *this* future is open to the Hungarian Reformed Church with more magnificent possibilities than even in the past.

IMRE RÉVÉSZ.

University of Debrecen, Hungary.

[1] On the frontispiece of this (1624) translation of the *Institutes* there is a well known distichon written by a Hungarian minister, Paul Thuri (died in 1579):

Praeter apostolicas post Christi tempora chartas
Huic peperere libro saecula nulla parem.