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Articles Review: Political Christianity in Hungary, 1000-1914

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Articles Review: Political Christianity in Hungary, 1000-1914

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
Of Bard College

By

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So very grateful...

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Abstract

The profound influence of Christianity on Hungarian politics can be traced back for more than a thousand years of its history to the creation of the Kingdom, and it could easily be found in modern days politics in the current Orbán administration of the Republic. However, after reviewing the development of Political Christianity, I have found that it has been most significant in four periods of Hungarian history: the creation of the Kingdom in 1000, two invasions of the Mongols and the Ottomans, the struggle between the Old and New Churches, and the transformation to Christian Nationalism. The three events have provided an argument that if Christianity is merely a powerful political instrument for the rulers, and I expect to alarm my fellow Christians to be cautious when they find a similar situation in todays.

Introduction

*Hungarian names are written differently from English; one's family name goes before their given name. I will follow the Hungarian writing in this writing.

Isten, áldd meg a magyart
 Jó kedvvel, bőséggel,
 Nyújts feléje védő kart,
 Ha küzd ellenséggel;
 Bal sors akit régen tép,
 Hozz rá víg esztendőt,
 Megbűnhődte már e nép
 A múltat s jövőndőt!

O God, bless the Hungarian
 With your grace and blessing
 Extend over it your guarding arm
 During fighting with its enemies
 Long torn by ill fate
 Bring upon it a time of relief
 This nation has suffered for all sins
 Of the past and the future!

“Himnusz, a’ Magyar Népal zivataros századaiból,” (Hymn, From the stormy centuries of the Hungarian nation) words written by Kölcsey Ferenc (1790-1838) as a renowned poet in 1823, music composed by the romantic composer Erkel Ferenc (1810-1893) in 1844, is the national anthem of Hungary since 1845. An unusual national anthem that expresses their plea to God, instead of expressing the pride of their nation or the desire for freedom, like most national anthems, appropriately reflects the deep connection between this ancient nation and Christianity.

Compared with other anthems in Europe, one could understand why the Hungarian national anthem is unique: the French Anthem “La Marseillaise,” without any words mentioning God but full of bloody violence and killings; “Das Deutschlandlied,” the German anthem, without any words mentioning God either, projecting an ambitious but vague vision of the prosperity of the federal republic; the famous British Anthem “God Save the Queen” does have the word “God” in it, but the tone is more

demanding than appealing to God, not to mention it is lack of the humbleness of confessing, forgiving, and redeeming sins. The Hungarian Anthem is special because it is religious, self-pitying, and challenging to sing.

The profound influence of Christianity on Hungarian politics can be traced back for more than a thousand years of its history to the creation of the Kingdom, and it could easily be found in modern days politics in the current Orbán administration of the Republic. However, after reviewing the development of Political Christianity, I have found that it has been most significant in four periods of Hungarian history: the creation of the Kingdom in 1000, two invasions of the Mongols and the Ottomans, the struggle between the Old and New Churches, and the development of Christian Nationalism. These events have provided an argument that if Christianity is merely a powerful political instrument for the rulers, and I expect to alarm my fellow Christians to be cautious when they find a similar situation in today's.

The creation of the Kingdom of Hungary was absolutely Christian; the first King, István I, received a crown from the Pope and joined the West as a part of Christendom, after decades of his and his predecessor's efforts to convert the Magyars from its original pagan beliefs to Christianity. Although the progress of conversion, which was started by King István's father, Prince Géza, was not smooth, many clues I collected from the articles I read have led to the conclusion that the conversion to Christianity was not only a change of belief but a significant shift of foreign and domestic policies, as a response to both exterior and internal threats to the Magyars. The shift has been proven to be wise and successful as the Árpáds achieved several political goals they fancied, and have the Magyars finally settled down in the area until nowadays.

If the Himnusz is a classical sonata, and Christianity is the first theme in a major key, then “sins” and “sufferings” will be the second theme in a minor key of the Himnusz. There were lots of misfortunes that happened in the history of the Kingdom of Hungary: it was severely devastated when the Mongols invaded in the mid-thirteenth century; a few decades later, after the Ottomans rose abruptly, the Kingdom was fighting endlessly at the front line against the Muslims, defending other Christendoms in the West, until the crushing defeat at the Battle of Mohács in 1526 which broke the Kingdom into three parts for more than one and a half-century: the western part of the Kingdom was occupied by the Hapsburg, central part was occupied by the Ottomans, and the eastern part, mainly Transylvania, was ruled by the former viceroy of Transylvania.¹ However, while the kingdom was finally reunited after the end of the Great Turkish War (1683-1699), it was no longer an independent kingdom but a part of the immense Hapsburg Empire.

However, the misery of the Kingdom has provided an excellent opportunity for a newly emerged hope. Not long before the Ottomans tore the Kingdom into three parts, another great war had started earlier in Wittenberg, 1517: the Reformation. The writings and theories of Martin Luther were brought to the Kingdom by Germans soon after the publication of the *Ninety-five Theses*, and quite a few Magyar barons had showed interests in Protestantism. Although the pro-Vatican Hungarian government established several laws to prohibit the spread of the Reformation, the King himself, most of his ministers, and many Catholic bishops were killed by the Ottomans at the Battle of Mohács in 1526 and later pillages. Since the regime had collapsed, there was no one

¹ Paul A. Hanebrink, *In Defense of Christian Hungary: Religion, Nationalism, and Antisemitism, 1890-1944* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2006), 10.

left in the Kingdom to enforce the Reformation ban; pastors of the Reformed Church and Lutherans quickly realized that the Muslims were actually more tolerant in religious matters than Catholic Kings, so they soon continued their missionary in the Ottoman-occupied part of Hungary, and Transylvania, which later became a dependency of the Ottomans.

When the Kingdom was reunited in 1699, most people ruled by the Ottomans for more than one and a half centuries, found that the autocratic and Catholic Hapsburg regime was unbearable. The persecution of Protestants had been continued for decades in Hapsburg-occupied Hungary; the cruelty of the persecution even had an impact on international relations in Europe at that time. For those who used to live in Ottoman-occupied areas and Transylvania, the deprivation of religious freedom was dreadful; many of them had become Calvinists or Lutherans, and they might not be able to keep their beliefs, sometimes not even their lives or properties, under the rule of the Hapsburg monarchy.

*From this point to the end of the introduction, also in Chapter II, in order to differentiate between Magyar Hungarians and non-Magyar Hungarians, I am using the word “Magyar” when it is referred to Magyar Hungarians, and “Hungarians” as non-Magyar Hungarians.

Although the administrative persecution of Protestants might have been moderated due to political concerns, the long and influential struggle between the Old and the New Churches was not ended yet. After the outbreak of the French Revolution

in 1789, the desires for freedom, liberation, and nationalism were spread to every corner of Europe, including Hungary. Since the Hapsburgs has always been standing with the Vatican and being reluctant to reformations, either religious or political, many Magyar nobles decided to embrace liberalism to express their resentments against the Hapsburgs and assert their independence, and among the barons most of them were Protestants.

The resentments, demands for liberal reformation, and religious freedom, combined with early nationalism, had caused the 1848 Revolution. Although the revolution failed in the end, it had become an important part of the Magyar national identity. Also, Magyar barons regained many political rights from the Hapsburg, which provided a chance for the liberal Protestant barons to begin some reformations in the Parliament.

However, the Kingdom was far away from a united nation which the liberal Magyar barons dreamed for at the end of the nineteenth century; people in the Kingdom were deeply divided by nationality, religion, and social class. It was the Magyar barons' first priority to eliminate these divisions between the people when they started to govern. This situation had provided extremely fertile political soil for an ideology: nationalism. By promoting the ideology of the separation of Church and State and turning religion into a personal business, they expected this could remove the barrier between different religious groups; moreover, they planned to have nationalism replace religions as "a national secular religion" to unite every Hungarian.

The intersection of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was constantly changing: the Franco-Prussian War changed the International relations in Europe, the

Second Industrial Revolution was in progress which changed the social structure of the Kingdom, and the rapid spread of the revolutionary ideology of Karl Marx which inspired many demand for a radical reformation in every aspects of the society. Not long after the 1848 Revolution, a “new right” and a “new left” were formed in the Kingdom. While a more radical liberals replaced the reformative Protestants and became the “new left,” surprisingly, many liberal Magyar barons who appealed for reformations switched their sides and consisted of the majority of the “new right.” The dramatically changing society significantly threatened their social status; to guarantee their domination in the Kingdom, many barons decided to turn to support a more conservative policy agenda for their own benefits. Antisemitism was quietly growing among the “new right” at the same time; as a part of “the Jewish question” all over Europe, Jewish people were considered to be responsible for all the social upheavals in the society.² When the strong resentment against the Jewish people became mainstream among the conservative Magyar barons, Christian identity was therefore reinforced and became a clear boundary between the new right and the new left: “If the Right imagined a ‘Christian Hungary,’ then the new Left, by the beginning of the twentieth century, was beginning to imagine a ‘progressive Hungary.’”

² Hanebrink 30

Literature Review

To examine these connections between politics and Christianity, I rely on several books and articles: for general historical background, I use *A Concise History of Hungary* as a primary source, with several articles on specific topics: for example, *The Negative Results of the Enforced Missionary Policy of King Saint Stephen of Hungary* has been beneficial to discover more details behind the political conversion in the 1000s. Grischa Vercamer and Leslie C. Tihany's writings are precious sources of the impacts of the Mongol and Ottoman invasions. For the disputes between Catholics and Protestants in Hungary during and after the Reformation, I found *The Kingdom of Hungary and Principality*, a chapter from *A Companion to the Reformation in Central Europe*, extremely helpful in providing many sources. For the persecution of the Protestants and its impacts, *Responses to Hapsburg Persecution of Protestants in Seventeenth-Century Hungary* provides plenty of details. Finally, the first chapter of *In Defense of Christian Hungary* demonstrates the roles the Old and the New Churches played in forming national identity, and how the national identity blended with Christian Nationalism.

Chapter I: Before Reformation

Introduction

The Kingdom of Hungary has a long interwoven history with Christianity since its beginning, even before its creation in 1000 AD. There were multiple nations and peoples had lived, have lived, and still currently living in Hungary, regardless of one is talking about the scope of the Pannonia Basin, the Kingdom of Hungary, the Lands of the Crown of Saint Stephen within the Dual Monarchy Austro-Hungarian Empire, or the modern, post-Trianon Hungary. In this article review, I would only focus on one of the nations, which is the Magyars, since it is the majority of the ethnic group native to Hungary and constituted most of the Hungarian history.

The origin of the Magyars, a nation and the major ethnic group native to Hungary, has been debated for centuries, and there is still no decisive proof to prove any hypotheses proposed. There was a popular hypothesis assuming that the country is called Hungary because of the Huns who occupied the basin during the 5th Century and the Huns were the ancestors of the Hungarians; it has been less discussed these days since the lack of proof. After the collapse of the Huns Empire, the Avars, whose origin was still a myth as well, came to the area and successfully established a relatively long period regime for about two hundred years until it was destroyed by Charles the Great around the end of the 8th Century. The only thing which is convinced by most is that the Magyars moved to the area from the East in the 9th Century, most probably from the Ural Mountains. It was scientifically proved that the Magyar language originated in the area; though most scholars accept the linguistic connections between Magyar, Finnish, and other Ugric languages, the Magyars were quite unwilling to

accept that their ancestors could be some poor, primitive fishermen or hunters in the wild. More Magyars instead believe that there were some connections between them and the mighty Attila or Sumero-Babylon empire³; even some Magyars I met genuinely believe that they are Aliens from other planets; that is why their language is so different from everyone else in Europe.

The Turning Point of the Mighty Magyars

The Magyars were led by their tribe leader Árpád, who was referred to as the “founder of the country” by many Hungarians. Although the reason remains unknown what drove them to head west, once the Magyars arrived in the Carpathian basin, they soon conquered the area and started a series of devastating plunders on Lombardy (Italy), Bavaria, Saxony, Burgundy, even Spain, and wiped off Great Moravia from the map in 906. A quote from *A Concise History of Hungary* could interpret the invincible mighty Magyars at that time: “The Desperate plea, ‘*De sagittis Hungarorum...*’, asking God for protection from ‘the Magyar arrows,’ echoed a Western world terrorized by what Hungarian historiography rather indulgently calls ‘the age of adventures.’⁴ They had been doing this for nearly half a century, until they were crushed by King Otto at Augsburg, 955; afterward the Magyars were greatly weakened and had no choice but to make peace with the Holy Roman Empire.

The defeat at Augsburg, 955, was so painful that it forced the leadership of the Magyars to reconsider their future. Though the honor of being the ‘founder of the

³ Miklós Molnár, *A Concise History of Hungary*, Cambridge Concise Histories (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 23.

⁴ Molnár 40

kingdom' was attributed to King István I, who later became known as Saint Stephen, his father, Prince Géza, undoubtedly paved the way. Before the Kingdom of Hungary was formally created by István received the crown from the Vatican, Duke Géza had conducted his people to abandon their original pagan worship and convert them to Christianity. The conversion he conducted was not merely a change of belief for him but more like a new set of foreign policy. At the beginning of the policy was enforced, he chose to convert his people to Orthodox through the Byzantine Greek Church. It was because during Duke Géza's reign, Byzantine Empire was at its peak; by converting his people to Orthodox, he had shown a gesture of friendship to the Byzantines and hoped it could help to achieve his diplomatic goals.

However, his method of converting his people was more violent than pious; he was not hesitating to execute anyone who refused to follow. Moreover, Géza struggled to choose sides between Rome and Constantinople. Not long later, he found out that it was necessary to maintain friendly relations with Byzantium indeed, but for his people's best interest (their settlements around nowadays Pressburg, Esztergom, and Székesfehérvár in western Hungary nowadays were distant from the Byzantines but closer to Holy Roman Empire), he decided to shift his foreign policy to focus on repairing the relationship with Rome and the Holy Roman Empire, the empire which his people had been attacking and pillaging for decades. The conversion to Christianity was shifted from Greek Church to Roman Catholic Church as a response to his foreign policies, though it took a while for Rome to replace Constantinople. His son, named Vajk initially, was baptized as a Catholic and received the name István, or Stephen in English. Later on, Géza had István marry a Bavarian princess to strengthen the tie.

There were a few more advantages in a political perspective for Géza when he decided to convert his people to Christianity, and later for István to continue: primogeniture, centralization, and national unity. For centuries, the Magyars remained a political entity in a loose coalition of tribes; and the tribal league was led by two leaders: a religious leader, the kende, and a military chief, the guyla.⁵ Both positions were settled on the consensus of tribal leaders, and the positions were not inheritable for families. Although Árpád had combined the two leaderships into one and had his descendant succeed in his leadership, it was always not easy to make any change in the tradition; many tribe leaders, the barons, respectively remained powerful armies and reluctant to acknowledge the authority of the Árpáds. By converting to Christianity, Géza and István saw the opportunity to build their dynasty, following the beliefs of the Divine right of kings, the implementation of Salic law, and a relatively centralized political system, as established in other Christendoms.

As the conqueror of the area, the Magyars and the conquered people were not always getting along well with each other; they were divided along with social and linguistic differences, which made István excessively worry about if his people divided against itself would be able to overcome the challenges. To remove the barrier between his people and unite them, István found that Christianity might be able to achieve it; as in Christian belief, everyone is equal in front of God, and the Lord's mercy is for everyone. This is the first encounter between Christianity and Hungarians; since its beginning, the belief in Christianity has been an entirely political choice.

⁵ Molnár 38

The Resistance

However, it was apparent that not every Magyar was happy about the conversion to Christianity or the political objects under the camouflage of Christianity. King István continued his father's converting policy to Christianity, even more firm and violent; the early literature in the 1300s had recorded that he was an iron-fisted ruler, and only a strong monarch like István could have survived as the first Christian ruler of Hungary.⁶ The resentment from the barons had accumulated enough and finally caused the civil war in 1046.

The reasons for baronial grievances were plenty. From a political perspective, the conversion to Christianity had brought the King closer to the West; this close relationship between the West and the King had consolidated the authority of the King and weakened the barons on the other hand. For instance, in an uprising that happened earlier, István's army, which defeated the baronial opposition, was assisted with foreign helps and led by a German knight, who killed the King's major opponent single-handily in the battle of Veszprém.⁷ Moreover, since the conversion started, powerful positions around the King, for example, advisors, bishops, or administrative ministers, were occupied by Latin-speaking clerics, the foreigners from Rome or Germany; these significant positions were taken by the barons themselves before. From a perspective of national pride, István had already been recognized by the Magyar barons; reaching out to the Pope and seeking a crown from the Vatican was a

⁶ KosztoInyik Z. J, "The Negative Results of the Enforced Missionary Policy of King Saint Stephen of Hungary: The Uprising of 1046," CATHOLIC HISTORICAL REVIEW 59, no. 4 (January 1, 1974): 569–70.

⁷ KosztoInyik 574

humiliation to them and it damaged the sovereignty of the Magyars. As I have learnt, Hungarians are super proud of themselves; King István should not have underestimated the strength of his barons' pride or resentments. On the other hand, the Magyar barons remained no contact with the European community; the Magyar barons cared only about their own selfish interests as they were too unintelligent to be interested in anything else but their horses. ⁸ Thus, for the barons, what the King did was not only unnecessary but harmful to them.

Later on, while István was quelling rebels and pretenders in his newborn kingdom, he wisely used Christianity as a powerful tool. Since István was baptized and the pretenders were not, it became István's advantage to ask other countries to admit the legitimacy of his rule, and he was able to ask the Christendom to help him as a fellow Christian. For domestic ruling, the coronation became an undoubted symbol of his legitimate reign to make him able to continue his father's legacy of centralization. He was canonized later with one of his sons, who died during some pagan revolts. The crown he received from Pope Sylvester II became known as the Crown of Saint Stephen, a symbol of legitimacy. Since then, no king of Hungary was regarded as having been truly legitimate without being crowned with it⁹; the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary within the Dual Monarchy is called the Lands of the Crown of Saint Stephen later. István was decisive in carrying through the conversion policy; he would not allow his successor to revise his will after he died. After the accidental death of his son, Imre, István's cousin Vazúl became the possible successor. However, since Vazúl was not

⁸ Kosztolnyik 582

⁹ Molnár 48

enthusiastic about converting to Christianity, he was captured, blinded, and deported with his three sons; therefore, King István had his nephew to be his heir.

Prehistory of the Mongol Invasion

The Kingdom of Hungary has always been depicted and self-depicted as a misfortune, sorrowful, and suffering nation; this feature could be discovered from its eventful history and the last two verses of the first stanza of the national anthem of Hungary, Himnusz: *“Megbűnhődte már e nép, A múltat s jövődőt!”* which translated to English is: “This nation has suffered for all sins, Of the past and the future!”

For nearly three centuries since István, Hungary became more significant and integrated within the West Christendoms, also became the front line of guarding the Christian World from gentiles. Even before the first catastrophe approached, the Kingdom of Hungary could hardly be considered peaceful; the Kingdom was divided into several princely territories, dukedoms, and the succession of the crown often invoked wars.

Probably recognized it was as destructive as it was impious, though being a significant part of the Christendom, Hungarians were not zealous in the grand event of political Christianity: the Crusades. The Holy King Laszlo I died right before he was about to join the First Crusade, his successor Kálmán allowed the Crusade to pass the kingdom and wisely avoided being a target for the Crusaders to pillage; Géza II even had to bribe the lords who participated in the Second Crusade, so they did not attack Hungary when they pass the kingdom. King Imre actually fought against the Crusaders during the fourth Crusade since the city of Zagreb was allied with Hungary; András II

joined the futile Firth Crusade, and during his reign, the Kingdom started to decline. In this situation, that the successor of András II, Béla IV, had to face the first catastrophe in the history of the Kingdom—the Mongol Invasion, or the “Tartars,” the “people” from hell,” as they are called in European sources in the thirteenth century.¹⁰

It was such a long distance from the Mongols and the Hungarians; the Mongols did not show up in Europe through a wormhole. Before the Mongols stepped on the Hungarian soil, there were several warnings sent from other countries, primarily Islamic countries in the Middle East; however, certainly nobody in Europe at that time took any warnings about a possible Mongol invasion seriously until the battle of Kalka, where the Mongols defeated a joint army of the Ruthenian dukes and the Cumans.¹¹ Moreover, some Europeans even cheered for the Mongols when they heard that the Muslims were crushed; they thought the Mongols were Christian people from the East and were helping them to fight against the Muslims.

The political situation in Europe around the Mongol invasion was a mess: The Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire was fighting for the leadership in the Christendom with the Pope; the English and the French kings were exhausted from internal affairs or were planning for future Crusades. The Poles and Hungarians, standing at the front line facing the Mongol Invasion, soon found out that they stood alone against incoming Asian nomads, lacking support from the West, especially the Holy Roman Empire and the Vatican that they counted as firm allies.

¹⁰ Grischa Vercamer, “The Mongol Invasion in the Year 1241 -Reactions among European Rulers and Consequences for East Central European Principalities,” *Zeitschrift Für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung* 70, no. 2 (April 2021): 228, <https://doi.org/10.25627/202170210926>.

¹¹ Vercamer 234

The Mongols recognized Hungary as the first great bastion of Western Christianity and planned to attack Hungary first. The Kingdom of Hungary was quite divided at that time, as King Béla IV was trying to regain old royal rights that had been given up to the barons by his father, András II; it was not surprising that if some of the barons were happy to see the King defeated so their privileges would remain intact.

The Invasion and its Impacts

Since none of the Christendom had responded to King Béla, Béla IV had to lead his divided Kingdom to face the Mongols alone. His about 60,000 men were crushed by the Mongols at the Battle of Mohi in 1241, the Mongols occupied Buda and most of the Kingdom until their sudden retreat in 1242 because of the death of Ögödei. This invasion had devastated the Kingdom; according to Abbot Hermann, from a German monastery, "Hungary had been wiped out after 350 years of existence." The Hungarians lived through the painful experience during this period of standing alone as the wall of Christianity, and sadly, hundred years later, the Hungarians would have to experience the same again.

During the Mongol Invasion, the Hungarian found that the only thing to stop the Mongols were the stone-built castles; when Béla IV rebuilt the Kingdom, he ordered to construct of lots of castles to be prepared for possible invasion in the future; many of them have remained until today, became popular for tourists. However, the new-built castles exaggerated the dominion of the local barons since they now possessed impregnable fortresses in their land.

Foreigner Kings and Hussite War

The first two kings of the Anjou, Károly I and Nagy Lajos I, had made Hungary more powerful and prosperous than ever, though the pious Catholic Lajos was not popular in the Balkans since he was enthusiastic about converting the Orthodox to Catholics. King Károly I took advantage during the Western Schism; while the authority of the Holy See was weakened and kidnapped to Avignon, Károly I took the papal taxes for his own use. After Lajos I, most of his successors were not Hungarians and were not only the King of Hungary but possessed other titles, they could not entirely focus on ruling Hungary; this situation gave the Magyar barons once again a perfect chance to enhance their power, expand their private lands, and accumulate their private properties.

Lajos I's daughter, Mary, Queen of Hungary, married the son of the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Karl IV, Zsigmond of Luxembourg. Queen Mary died because of a horse-riding accident, Zsigmond became the King of Hungary, and ruled the Kingdom for half a century. Zsigmond played a significant role in the Catholic Church: he worked enthusiastically to end the Schism, finally put it to an end in 1418 at the Council of Constance, having a new Pope elected, Martinus V; however, the Council of Constance also condemned Jan Hus as a heretic and sentenced him to death. The Hussite War soon followed his execution for the next fourteen years and exhausted Zsigmond. Zsigmond is not only the King of Hungary but also the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and King of Bohemia. Since he was busy with the Holy Roman Empire, he did not have time to rule the Kingdom of Hungary; many Hungarian lords had taken the chance to grab more lands and enhance their privileges. Moreover, to gather the

money for the Hussite War and the Crusade of Nicopolis, he had sold out over 90 per cent of the royal land and privileges to his vassals, which had made a considerable decline of the sovereignty, treasury, and army. After Zsigmond, Albrecht II from Hapsburg in Austria became King of Hungary, also the King of Bohemia and Duke of Austria, struggling like his predecessor to put down the Hussites but failed.

The Rise of the Ottomans and the Early Conflicts

Since 1389, the Ottomans conquered the Serbs at the Battle of Kosovo, the last barrier between Muslims and Christendom was gone, and the Kingdom of Hungary became the front line defending the West again. The brutal battles between the Hungarians and Turks continued for almost two centuries; it was the second time that the Hungarians considered themselves “guarding” and fighting for the survival of Europe. Christianity was indeed a significant reason behind these conflicts between the Ottomans and Hungarians, but there were more factors, just like the motivation of the Crusades was not purely religious. However, the image of “defenders of Christianity” became a powerful political capital for future politicians to use.

The cause of the Battle of Varna (1444) was such a shame on Christian values and against the moral teachings: in August 1444, the successor of King Albrecht II, King Ulászlo I just signed the Peace of Szeged (or Treaty of Edirne) with the Ottomans, it was quite a deal for the Hungarians; the Ottomans agreed to make some compensation and to return some of the occupied lands, under the condition that Ulászlo swore that he would not have his men cross the Danube in the next ten years. However, only a few days after he signed the treaty, a cardinal sent by the Pope

instigated him to break his oath which he made in front of God, withdraw the treaty, and march across the Danube, because the Cardinal Julian Cesarini told him that the King's promise to pagans did not count, God would forgive him to break his promise to the Ottoman Muslims. Later on, at the Battle of Varna, God did punish Ulászlo for breaking his promises: he was killed in the battle.

From the Battle of Nicopolis (1396) to the Battle of Varna (1444) and the Fall of Constantinople (1453), the Ottoman Muslims seemed unstoppable, and the Christendom was about to be conquered. However, the Siege of Nándorfehévár (Belgrade) in 1456 had saved the Christian world; the siege became a colossal battle. Hunyadi János, who later became the national hero of Magyars and Romanians, launched a counterattack that wounded Sultan Mehmed II and left him no choice but to retreat. This victory stabilized the southern frontiers of the Kingdom of Hungary for more than half a century and thus considerably delayed the Ottoman advance in Europe. It was a victory for the Christian World as well, as Hunyadi asked all the Catholic Kingdoms for help (though most of them offered spiritual help only—praying). Callistus III, the Pope, was so relieved and ecstatic that he ordered the churches to ring the bells at noon to celebrate the victory; many catholic and old protestant churches are still doing this nowadays.

Not long later, Hunyadi János's son, Hunyadi Mátyás, or Matthias Corvinus, became King after Laszlo V. Although he was politically significant and successful because of his military achievements; Hungary became the second strongest power in the area, he did not have much to do with Christianity.

The Battle of the Mohács

After Mátyás's death, Ulászlo II succeeded and ruled the Kingdom for twenty-five years. However, Ulászlo II was an incapable ruler; during the twenty-five years he ruled, the Kingdom dramatically declined: the royal authority and royal land were once again taken away from the king by the lords, and he disbanded the Fekete Sereg, the mighty Black Army which was an army only followed the king's command formed by Mátyás. While the royal authority was declining, so was the Kingdom's economy and military, and Ulászlo II left this weak kingdom to his successor. While the economy was declining, the Parliament consisted of the aristocracies passed several laws to collect more taxes from the peasants but reduced about seventy per cent of taxes collected from the aristocrats; the result was a peasant uprising led by Dózsa György, the revolt just devastated the Kingdom more.

When Lajos II became King, the Kingdom of Hungary was a mess: most land and mines were controlled by lords who ignored the King; it was nearly an anarchic situation. The government was at the edge of bankruptcy, had no choice but disband more soldiers and stop maintaining the castles and weapons. Compared with the Ottomans, when Suleiman the Magnificent became Sultan in 1520, the empire kept growing and preparing for war. While the Muslims came to Belgrade again in 1521, they took it without effort this time: the way to Budapest was open. Lajos II put his hope on the Pope and the Holy Roman Empire, married the Emperor's sister, and had his sister marry the Archduke of Austria Ferdinand I from Hapsburg, this marriage had granted the legitimacy for Hapsburg to rule the Kingdom later. However, his plan was fruitless.

In 1526, Suleiman led his army to cross the Danube and confronted Lajos II and his men at Mohács. The Hungarians were outnumbered—even the most conservative estimation is that the Ottomans had two times more men. Most Hungarian warriors died, including King Lajos II. This was the turning point of the Kingdom; it traumatized the Hungarians and shocked the entire Christendom. A Hungarian saying the Magyars use nowadays to encourage themselves while confronting frustration, “Több is veszett Mohácsnál,” which means “we have lost way more at Mohacs than the present.” The Kingdom of Hungary was divided into three parts, Ottoman occupied, Hapsburg occupied, and Szapolyai János in Transylvania. The notable part is, that in Transylvania, the authority of the Holy See was unreachd, so the Reformed Church and Lutheran Church were able to preach there.

Conclusion

Prince Géza and King István had recognized the phantom menace approaching, and they had made the correct decision to handle it. Although the means they used to convert their people to Christianity were violent, controversial, and sometimes even unChristian, they made the Magyars survive; unlike other nomads who had ruled the area before but gone, Magyars finally settled in the area and became a part of the Christendom and the European community. One of the converting policies could be observed in nowadays Hungarian language: to encourage his people to attend Sunday Masses, István made a law regulating that markets on Sundays could only be held next to a church; thus, the word “Sunday” in Magyar is “Vásárnap,” which means “shopping day.” After decades of István’s and his successors’ efforts, the Kingdom has entirely

turned into a Christendom; their original pagan beliefs have disappeared and have limited sources for historians to study. To commend István's accomplishment, the Pope also bestowed him a title as "Apostolic King" and the right to use the Patriarchal Cross; until 1918, every Hungarian King bore the name and claimed themselves as apostles, and the Patriarchal Cross became the symbol of the Kingdom and remains on the Coat of Arms of Hungary since 1000AD until today.

The two tragic events deeply traumatized the Kingdom of Hungary and gave an insight into the divided Christendom West. Nevertheless, the Hungarians have survived both catastrophes; their Magyar language, culture, and Christianity belief, all have survived. These suffering and humiliating memories are significant in their national identity forming, and the memories have strengthened their pride in the Magyars and bound them closer to each other. The occupation of the Ottomans also provided an unexpected opportunity for the advent of A New Hope: Protestantism.

Chapter II: After Reformation

Introduction

Since the very beginning of the Reformation, when Martin Luther published the *Ninety-five Theses* in 1517, Protestantism was brought into the Kingdom of Hungary by the Germans, and it had consistently and rapidly developed for years, benefiting from both the internal and external situation of the Kingdom of Hungary. However, in the beginning, peasants and other lower classes public did not have the chance to learn about Protestantism because they did not speak or read the German language. In fact, it was the Hungarian nobles who started to read about Martin Luther's writings at first; however, most of them tried to keep their distance from the Protestants since they sincerely believed that the Hungarians could only defeat the Ottoman invasion with the support from the Holy See. In April 1523, the government established the first anti-Reformation law to execute the Lutherans and confiscate their property. However, the government soon collapsed after the death of Lajos II at the Battle of Mohács, and six of the twelve bishops in Hungary as well; many Catholic Churches and monasteries were destroyed or pillaged by the Ottomans. Of course, the persecution could not continue; it had become an excellent opportunity for the Protestants to start their missionaries.¹²

¹² Howard Louthan and Graeme Murdock, eds., "The Kingdom of Hungary and Principality of Transylvania," in *A Companion to the Reformation in Central Europe* (BRILL, 2015), 93, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004301627_006.

The Spread of Protestantism

The Kingdom of Hungary was divided into three parts after the Battle of Mohács in 1526: the western part was occupied by the Hapsburg Austria, the central part was occupied by the Ottomans, and the eastern part, Transylvania, remained ruled by the Voivode of Transylvania, Zápolya János, who later claimed himself the righteous King of Hungary as János I. The irruption of Islam into Central Europe was contemporaneous with the appearance of the Reformation east of Vienna.¹³ Maybe it was because of the defeat of the Catholics that more and more people became open to the Protestants, seeking consolation directly from the Bible instead of the authority of the defeated Catholic Church. During the Ottoman occupied period, some Protestant missionaries started to compare the Hungarians, suffering from Ottoman invasions, with the Jews in Egypt and Babylon, describing the Hungarians as newly chosen people, able to regain God's favor through demonstrating their faith; In contrast to this attractive explanation, Catholic clerics emphasized that the Ottoman plight had been brought to the Hungarian people as a punishment for their sins. The preaching way of Protestants made lots of progress, especially among those peasants who did not speak German.

Just like everywhere else in Europe, the choice of being a Catholic or Protestant at that time was never a choice of faith but a choice of politics. In the Ottoman-occupied area, the Ottomans did not really care about the difference between Catholics and Protestants; they just wanted to rule the land peacefully and collect more taxes. Thus, Lutherans and the Reformed Church enjoyed much freedom of preaching

¹³ Leslie Charles Tibany, "Islam and the Eastern Frontiers of Reformed Protestantism," *Reformed Review*; Vol 29 No 1 (1975, January 1, 1975, 1.

in the Ottoman-occupied area. For the Ottomans, Catholics were those who had been consistently fighting against them; they found it strategically wise to support the Protestants to check the hostile Catholic Church.

Oppressors and the Oppressed

When the people in the Ottoman-occupied part of Hungary and Transylvania enjoyed a certain degree of freedom of religion in about a hundred and fifty years since the 1560s,¹⁴ the anti-Reformation laws were still enforced in the Hapsburg-occupied part of Hungary. The Hapsburgs remained close to the Holy See as a loyal ally, and they were the strongest supporters of the Catholic Church, enthusiastic about oppressing the Protestants as a way of crushing political dissent. Since then, Catholicism had become a symbol of the oppressor to a certain degree in Hungarian minds until the end of the Dual-Monarchy. Ferdinand II, who started the Thirty Years' War, was especially enthusiastic about persecuting the Protestants until his successor Ferdinand III signed the Peace of Westphalia and reassured the tolerance of the Protestants. The Kingdom remained divided into three parts until King Lipót I won the Great Turkish War and reunited the Kingdom of Hungary as a part of the Austrian Empire in 1699; the Hapsburg brought the freedom of religion to an end in the realm of the former Kingdom, including Transylvania.

For those who had enjoyed the freedom of religion for more than a century in Transylvania and the Ottoman-occupied part of the Kingdom, the autocratic Hapsburg reign was insufferable. They found that the Ottoman Turks were more tolerant in religious matters than the Hapsburgs, as the Protestant Pastor Szigeti wrote to his

¹⁴ Graeme Murdock, "Responses to Habsburg Persecution of Protestants in Seventeenth-Century Hungary," *Austrian History Yearbook* 40 (May 2009): 38, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0067237809000046>.

former Wittenberg classmate from Turkish-occupied Hungary in 1549: “Here, the common people are divided. Some adhere to Christ, others to the pope and defend the papacy tooth and nail. We had many a hard battle to fight, but the Lord has protected us miraculously through the Turkish rulers and governors. Because all their governors and especially their jurists, whom they call *kadis*, are more benevolent to us than are all others!” As another deported Hungarian Protestant priest sadly said: “...that the Turks, though they made them pay dear for it, were mustier and truer to their promises than the imperialists, who called themselves Christian.”¹⁵

Since the Protestants enjoyed the freedom of religion under Turkish rule this much, one can imagine how unhappy they became when the Hapsburgs came. Many Protestants had been forced to fly for protection to the enemies of Christianity because they could trust the Sultan more than the Emperor to keep “whatever bargain they make for their religion.” The persecution of the Protestants was brutal; as Pierre Jurieu described in his book *Prejudices against Popery*, “Hungary became a place like hell for the Reformed.” He appealed to the public to “look at how priests and monks behaved... with cords, whips, gibbets, fires and flames, like the Devil...” and tell him if there was “anything like it in the character of the Christian religion. Thus, the anti-Hapsburg sentiment was sustained among Protestants by these cruel stories about how the Protestants were treated; King Lipót was then easily persuaded by reports of Protestant preachers looking forward to Ottoman liberation from Catholic persecution that Protestants had been at the heart of resistance to his authority.¹⁶

¹⁵ Hanebrink 47

¹⁶ Hanebrink 40

In 1670, many Protestant ministers in the Kingdom were accused of encouraging prayers for the triumph of the Turks and sent to a trial and later to Sicily and sold as galley slaves. However, they were rescued later by the Dutch, a newborn Protestant state at its golden age; the Dutch Mediterranean fleet were sent to Sicily, led by Michiel de Ruyter, to take action to gain the Hungarians' release. Michiel became a hero and a symbol of Protestantism in the Kingdom; the Hungarian even had a square with a statue of him to memorize this heroic resection.¹⁷

The intervention of the Dutch also provided an insight into international relations in seventeenth-century Europe. Although de Ruyter was fighting against the English for about twenty years and had many unpleasant pasts with them, the Dutch and the English went closer after the peace treaty signed in 1674, especially after the marriage of William and Mary in 1677. The resentment against the Catholics rapidly grew in both England and Dutch: in England, the public was furious when they heard that James II (he was Duke of York at the time) had converted to Catholicism; in the Netherlands, Protestantism was deeply combined with nationalism during the Franco-Dutch War (1672-1678), as the Sun King Louis XIV stood as the strongest advocate of Catholicism. Ironically, the rise of the French power had pushed the Catholic Hapsburg to join the Grand Alliance (League of Augsburg), allied with German, English, and Dutch Protestants; the persecution of the Hungarian Reformed Church persists was therefore represented to the public in Protestant countries as an international danger of Catholicism. Due to the alliance, the Dutch and English Protestants were able to demand their ally, King Lipót, to relieve the persecution. For many, the treatment of the

¹⁷ Hanebrink 51

Hungarian Protestants demonstrated that Protestant and Catholic Europe were still “two collective bodies divided in interest and religion.”¹⁸

Those proud Magyar barons, who lost several privileges they used to enjoy under the Hapsburg, had strengthened the resentment in the Kingdom. The resentment had reached the limit, and the result was an outbreak of a series of uprisings: the Kuruc. Kuruc warriors figured prominently as metaphors for patriotism in the political vocabulary of the day;¹⁹ and among the Kuruc uprisings, the most influential one was the Rákóczi War of Independence. The Rákóczi family was a significant noble family in Transylvania for decades and was a member of the Reformed (Calvinist) Church. Rákóczi Ferenc II started an independence war in Transylvania; it was quite successful at the beginning and enjoyed support from many Magyar nobles. However, the Magyar barons gave up when the Austrians returned their religious and political freedom and privileges to them with the condition of admitting the Hapsburg monarchy; the withdrawal of their support, together with the military suppression, put the revolt to an end. After Rákóczi's War of Independence, the Magyar nobles got what they wanted, and the Kingdom remained peaceful for decades under the rule of the Hapsburg Austria. In the later years, From Mária Terézia to József II, and Lipót II, the centralism effort they made included weakening the authority, wealth, and influence of the Catholic Church; to weaken the Catholic Church, providing some support to the Protestants was a policy applied.

¹⁸ Hanebrink 47

¹⁹ Hanebrink 19

Liberal Protestants and Conservative Catholics

At the end of the eighteenth century, the French Revolution changed the world; Hungary was no exception. The idea of “Liberalism,” “Enlightenment,” “Freedom,” “Constitution,” and “Emancipation” was spread to every corner of Europe with Napoleon’s soldiers. These ideologies were deeply embraced, especially by the Protestants in Hungary. Since Catholicism was advocated by the Hapsburg, many gentry nobles embraced liberalism in the first decades of the nineteenth century as a way of asserting their independence in a different way.²⁰ Although some early Hapsburg kings established several laws to weaken the Catholic Church to balance the power between the Church and the State, they were driven by the desire for centralism, not liberal reformations. At the same time, the authoritarian government was threatened by liberalists who demanded to reform, and the Catholic Church was threatened by the Protestants who asked for a complete separation between State and Church²¹; the Catholic Church and Hapsburg monarch found the shared enemy and went close together again.

Among the Protestants, the Reformed (Calvinist) Church was the largest, and with a smaller amount but significant Lutherans; moreover, most of the Reformed Churches members were ethnic Magyars; this phenomenon had provided a fertile ground for the growth of nationalism among the members of the Reformed Church. The Protestant churches had embraced liberalism and nationalism without reservation; many of Hungary’s most prominent liberals were Protestants. Hungary’s Protestant leaders had zealously supported every attempt to expand religious equality and limit

²⁰ Hanebrink 10

²¹ Hanebrink 2

the material, political, and social dominance of the Catholic Church in Hungary. Thus, the large and politically powerful Catholic Church in the Kingdom always saw Calvinism as its most important rival.

The 1848 Revolution has caused a significant impact on the history of the Kingdom; however, it was not much related to religious matters, though leaders of the Revolution were mainly Protestants who firmly embraced liberalism. Besides, the prehistory, causes, processes, and impacts of this tragic event require the entire length of a research paper to cover; thus, the Revolution is not discussed in this article, only a few of the impacts will be mentioned.

Although the Revolution failed in the end, it is one of the most significant events in Hungary's modern history, and it became an essential part of Hungarian national identity-forming, and the day when the Revolution started, the 15th of March, is one of the most important national holidays in Hungary today. For the next nearly twenty years, the Hungarians remained hostile, passively or actively. When Ferenc József was defeated in the Italian War of 1859 and the Austro-Prussian War in 1866, the Austrian Empire was at the edge of collapsing. To avoid the collapse of his empire, Ferenc József went back to negotiate with the Hungarians, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire was created.

For Hapsburgs, the Catholic Church remained what it had been for centuries, a pillar of authority and order and a crucial ally to secular rulers. When frustrated in separating the Church and the State because the liberals changed their tactics, they attempted to raise other Churches like the Lutherans, Reformed Church and Orthodox to an equal level with the Catholic to relegate the significance of the Catholic Church.

However, it was debated very much if they should grant the Jewish the same status or not.

A New Right and A New Left

Only a few decades after the 1848 Revolution, Europe entered a rapidly, constantly, and dramatically changing age, which reached its climax at the outbreak of the World War. So many things had happened during the second half of the nineteenth century in every perspective of the world: ideologies like romanticism, Nationalism, and Marxism started to thrive; significant international events like the Unification of Italy, the Franco-Prussian War, and the creation of the Dual-Monarchy. All of these dramatic shocks happened in less than half of a century, had caused a major political shift in the Kingdom of Hungary; a new right and a new left were formed and constantly having political and ideological battles until the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Surprisingly, those who consisted of the majority of the new right, were those Magyar barons who used to be on the liberals' side demanding reformations. Being shocked, deeply affected, and overwhelmed by the rapidly changing society, the Magyar barons found that their political domination was severely threatened, especially by the growing nationalists of Croatians, Romanians, and Slavs, demanding political rights for the minorities. Supporting the economic and industrial modernization in the Kingdom without reservation in the past decades, many Magyar barons intended to keep their domination in politics. Moreover, the consequences of economic reforms had changed the economy of the Kingdom; therefore many barons found that the way they used to make living were not working anymore. Threatened both politically and

economically, the Magyar barons, who used to be the pioneers of reformation, turned to support conservative policies to protect their own interests.

Among the resentments of the barons, many of them were particularly against the Jewish people, as they were so good at business as always; many believed that Jewish investors were “eagerly buying up property from bankrupt gentry at an alarming rate.”²² Influenced by conspiracies spread in Europe during the time, more and more believed that Jewish people should be responsible for their loss of fortunes. Therefore, if antisemitism did not become a core ideology in the new right, it was a shared consensus at least. However, what is actually different between the Jewish people and the Magyars? It was hard to tell through their look or native languages since many Jewish people lived in the Kingdom for centuries and had Magyar as their native language as well. Thus, the easiest way to distinguish Jewish and Magyar is religion; the new right especially emphasized their Christian identity to alienate the Judaic Jew and depict the Jewish people as foreigners. Began with confronting social-economic threats, Magyar barons formed a “new right,” abandoning their liberal traditions and abruptly turned to embrace an anti-liberal ideology that considered the Jewish nation was the biggest threat to a Christian Hungary.

On the other side, the new left, the working class had snowballed in the Kingdom thanks to the outstanding progress during the Second Industrial Revolution. However, unlike the new right, which was consisted of a certain group of barons, the new left camp was a loose coalition led by a few Jewish elites, consisting of various groups of people from working-class socialists to bourgeois democrats. A shared

²² Hanebrink 31

consensus among them was a feeling that the moderate liberalism that dominated the Kingdom for decades was insufficient to respond to a dramatically changing society in the late nineteenth century. Moreover, they were unsatisfied with the lack of representation of the growing workers and traditional peasants in the Parliament. To build a progressive, modern, and democratic Hungary, the new left demanded several radical reformations in politics, including complete independence from the Hapsburg, universal suffrage, a complete separation of church and state, and giving minorities full citizenship, including the Jewish people.

The political situation in the fin de siècle Kingdom of Hungary was similar to elsewhere in Europe and dissimilar at the same time. The similar part was that the Kingdom faced the same shocks, threats, and problems as other countries in Europe; the different part was the complexity of the system of Dual-Monarchy, the Parliament was monopolized by the nobles, and it was lack of political soil for workers to form a solid political power in the Parliament. Moreover, the churches, both the Old and the New, still imposed strong influence on politics.

The Confused Calvinists

Since the new right and new left formed, the Protestants, especially the Reformed Church Calvinists, found that they were in an awkward position, trapped in between the new right and new left. The situation of the Calvinists was remarkably awkward because they could not decide which side to join. On the new left, the liberal, reforming, progressive camp the Calvinists used to belong to, was full of workers, artists, and intellectuals who had strongly resentment of the status quo, demanding a

way more radical socialist reformation with a non-religious attitude which the Calvinists found difficult to agree with. On the other hand, on the new right's side, there were the old rivals of the Calvinists: the Catholics and Christian nationalists, consisting of those who used to oppose the appeal for reforms requested by the Calvinists. Still, the new left was eager to recruit the Calvinists to join their side, trying to reinforce that the Hapsburg monarchy stood for Catholicism; thus, the new right could not possibly be the ally of the Calvinists.

However, many had been enraged by the new left since they felt the socialists had usurped their role and stained the name of reformation. Protestant liberalism, they identified, had always been a conservative liberalism. "True liberalism, was very different from the progressive libertinism of modern world views, operating without God, and permitting anarchic, radical, in short, the most egregious excesses," as a Calvinist theologian, Sebastyén Jenő argued.²³ Eventually, the Calvinists failed to become the "third option," but tilted toward the new right, convinced by the proposal of "Christian concentrations" with Catholics against secular liberalism.

Conclusion

The struggle between Christianity and nationalism was not only in the Kingdom of Hungary but also everywhere else in Europe before the outbreak of the World War in 1914. Many Hungarians had realized, the future of the Kingdom has not related to the relationship with Vienna anymore but depended on the unknown results of multiple ideological wars inside the Kingdom: a war between the left and the right, between the

²³ Hanebrink 40

liberals and the conservatives, a war between the Old and the New Church, a war between nationalisms of Magyars, Croatians, Jewish, and Slavs.

Either Old or New, Church leaders were all threatened by the spread of secularism and were forced to reconsider their position in the constantly changing World War eve. In order to confront the threats of secularism, the new rose Christian nationalism became an attractive solution, though fully understood the consequences of embracing it.

Conclusion

By reviewing the connections between Christianity and politics in the past of Hungary from 1000 to 1914, I expected to demonstrate that Christianity, or more generally, religion in the political sphere, was only an artificial identity, a political instrument created to mobilize, divide, and to manipulate people. Nothing in the Holy Bible encourages people to draw a line to discriminate between “us” and “them,” regardless of any reason; either Christians or non-Christians, barons or peasants, Magyars or Croatians, or Romanians or Serbs or Slavs, all men are equal in God’s eyes; as St. Paul wrote in his letters to Galatians, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus”²⁴ If those politicians who claimed themselves true Christians, standing with Christians, protecting Christianity, how could they against the teaching of our Lord which was recorded in the Holy Bible?

In the case of Hungary, I have illustrated that Christianity has always been a political identity rather than a purely religious belief among the ruling class. From the tenth century, when Prince Géza decided to convert his people to Christianity, he was driven by political concerns instead of seeking for God’s forgiveness; his converting methods were coercing and sometimes even could be controversially unChristian. For Magyar barons under Géza’s leadership, converting to Christianity was not only a change of belief but abandoning their traditions and culture, adopting different values, and giving up their power to a centralized authority. King István I, who firmly followed his father’s converting policies, was consistent because he realized that the conversion

²⁴ Bible Galatians 3:28

was not a matter of belief either; it was instead a matter of life and death for his people to survive in Europe.

After the Reformation, the spread and persecution of Protestantism were also profoundly linked with politics. Due to the collapse of the pro-Catholic regime, a major part of the Kingdom enjoyed the freedom of religion under the Ottomans' rule since the Ottomans were taking the growth of Protestantism as a tactic to balance the hostile Catholic Church. However, the rest of them whom the Hapsburg ruled were not that lucky; they suffered from moderate prohibition to severely brutal persecution, as the Hapsburg enjoyed the persecution as a method to repress political dissenters. When Catholicism, the pro-Catholic Hapsburg, and the conservative ideology were equalized with persecutors in the minds of the Hungarian people, a Protestant, Magyar, and liberal nationalism became the choice for many.

For decades, Protestant Magyar barons stood for liberal reformations, including a separation between church and state; they led the Hungarians to oppose the Hapsburg regime. However, when the social-economic situation changed, they became the new right that emphasized their Christian and Magyar national identities to protect their domination in the social, political, and economic sphere.

As a Lutheran myself, of course, I would love to see a world in which everyone is Christian; however, Jesus did not tell us we should treat those who do not believe in Him differently, or we should force anyone to believe in Him, or to believe in Him in a certain way. While studying the case of the persecution of the Protestants often reminds me of what I learnt from a course I took relating to the study of terrorism. The Protestants were often accused of heresy, but nowadays, no one would consider

Calvinists, Lutherans, or Anglicans as heresies. It is similar to the difficulty of identifying someone as a terrorist since none of them consider themselves a terrorist, all of them and their supporters firmly believe that they were fighting for their beliefs, freedom, or merely self-defense. Thus, as both are difficult to identify, we should be extra cautious in the “labeling politics” nowadays.

Also, we should be alert when we notice a politician who tries to divide people, not only with the difference in beliefs, but also any other ideologies; for instance, race, social class, capitalism or socialism, liberalism or conservatism, since it is directly against what the Lord teaches us. We should carefully examine those politicians who claim themselves to stand for Christians, are they truly want to be the defenders of Christianity, or are they just like the Magyar kings and barons, utilizing Christianity as a political ideology for their own interests?

It would be delightful to see a Christian country with a Christian government ruling Christian citizens, and it is understandable that many would like to make their visions into reality. However, history has proven that a secular state where the church and state are separated is the best option we have for now. For those who devote themselves to public affairs driven by their faith in Christ, I suggest: let us not forget our Lord’s teachings, let us not forget what the essence of Christianity is, let us not forget what it truly means to be a Christian, later we might be granted to enter the Kingdom of God, which will be as wonderful as we imagined, or even better.

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