MJT 8/1 (1992) 3-71

A REFORMATION WITHOUT DEEP ROOTS

The story of the Reformed faith in Poland

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Of all the events which changed the face of Europe since the days of the apostles none made so great an impact as the Reformation. Together with the Renaissance it ushered in the world we know today.

Its effects proved to be not only permanent and pervasive; often they were also traumatic.

Soon nearly every land was in upheaval. In Switzerland one canton pitted its forces against another. In France a series of brutal civil wars were unleashed. The Netherlands, where tens of thousands perished at the hands of the Inquisition, engaged in an Eighty Years' War (1568-1648) to secure its independence from Spanish oppression. Where papal power prevailed as in Italy, hundreds of its best-educated citizens were compelled to flee for their lives. Nor did the German states, where the cradle of Protestantism stood, know peace until pillage and persecution ended with the Peace of Westphalia. Even England and Scotland could compile long lists of martyrs for the Christian faith as the winds of change swept relentlessly through city and countryside.

How different the story of the Reformation as it began to take root in Poland. Here we read of little officially-instigated and approved persecution; no civil wars were inspired by religious fanaticism to demoralize and devastate its peoples. Preceded only by the semi-independent duchy of Transylvania, Poland by edict of its king and *sejm*[1] was among the first to grant toleration to every creed embraced in those years.

Here, too, the Reformed faith, set forth clearly by Zwingli, Bucer and especially Calvin, seemed to thrive mightily for a season only to fade away with barely a trace. The story is highly intriguing and,

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[1] *sejm* (or *seym* — because of the complexity of the Polish language transliteration into English is not consistent), the diet or parliament which had gained much power in troublous times, especially when in 1502 the decree "Nihil nisi" was enacted. It forbade the king from promulgating any law without full consent of the national diet, composed of clergy, nobility and the lower gentry.

hopefully, instructive and therefore deserving of attention even at this late date.

Possibly the topic comes as a surprise to the reader.

It parallels somewhat the account of Jonah's gourd, which sprang up overnight only to perish within little more than a day.

Of many of the lands in eastern Europe, Poland may be for many among the less well-known. Even though acquainted with people of Polish ancestry, few who profess the Reformed faith can understand and speak their language reputed to be among the more difficult of the several Slavic tongues. Much less are we well-versed in its complicated history, its rich culture and its colorful customs and costumes. As one writer has quaintly put it, Poland seems for most people on this side of the ocean "a land on the other side of the moon." All that strikes home is the deep devotion which most of the people cherish for its own brand of Roman Catholicism.

If this is the case, can any inquiry into the rise and decline of Calvinism be more than of passing historical interest?[2] Can we ever hope to learn lessons which ought never to be forgotten? Is not the contrast between our life-situation and that of those who lived four centuries ago too great to warrant any kind of comparison? And are not our times with their perplexities and intractable problems too far removed from the relatively simple life style of those who lived then? At first glance it appears that any comparison can be at best only superficial.

But let us wait before making a judgment. For those who see more than chance or fate affecting the story of individuals, peoples and nations there may be far more stimulating lessons to challenge mind and heart as the pages of the past are scanned than would first appear.

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The rise and decline of the evangelical faith, also in its Reformed form, cannot be rightly understood and assessed without some background in the history of the Polish people and nation.

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[2]On whether history teaches us any lessons cf. Herbert Butterfield, *Christianity and History* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1949), especially chapter 1, 18-39; John Warwick Montgomery, *History and Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1964-1965). For an evaluation of Butterfield, cf. Wm. A. Speck, "Herbert Butterfield: The Legacy of the Christian Historian" in *A Christian View of History*?, edited by George Marsden and Frank Roberts (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 99-118.

The origin and early development of the western Slavs still lies hidden in the mists of history. While prizing highly the amber found along the Baltic coasts, neither Greeks nor Romans made mention of the people living there. When Charlemagne was crowned in 800 by the pope, he knew less of what was to become Poland than of any other part of the European continent. East of the Elbe and especially of the Oder lived a large number of Slavic clans, all engaged in agricultural pursuits and showing little interest in each other or the outside world.

The largest group lived along the Warta. They were the Polanie, "people of the fields." To the north were the Pomerzanie, "people of the sea," while the south was occupied by the Vislanie among whom the Moravians had made some desultory attempts to introduce the Christian faith in its Byzantine form.

A change in the constellation of European politics, however, brought these loosely organized tribes into the orbit of recorded history. By 955 Otto I — king of the Germans as he was then called — successfully put an end to the several Magyar incursions which had ravaged his lands. Thereupon he turned east to subdue some of the troublesome Slavs. Soon the smaller groups were routed. But coming upon the Polanie, he faced an organized force unexpectedly secure behind a series of well-designed fortifications. The battle which ensued ended in a draw. Shortly afterward when that king became emperor of the Germans, prince Miezko realized what advantages would accrue to him and his people by embracing Christianity in its Roman form. He soon set out to win the hand of Dobrava, a Czech princess. After their marriage in 965, he received baptism and the following year ordered all his subjects to follow suit. Soon monks and priests arrived in large numbers to establish churches and instruct the people, uniting those Poles who lived in the buffer zone between east and west more firmly to Rome. In this way Miezko I became the founder of the Piast dynasty which, despite Czech interference and German colonization and Tatar incursions, ruled in unbroken succession for more than four centuries.

The earliest written account of this prince and his people dates from that time.

It was penned by a Moorish Jew, Ibrahm-Ibn-Jakub. He accompanied the ruler of Cordova in Spain on a visit to the lands of the Slavs. Fragments of what must have been a detailed report are preserved in the works of later Arab geographers. Much of what remains sheds an interesting light on what had developed socially and politically among the Polanie by that time.

> The lands of the Slavs stretch from the Syrian Sea to the Ocean in the north .... They comprise numerous tribes, each different from the other .... At present there are four kings: the king of the Bulgars; Bojeslav, king of Faraga, Boiema and Karako; Mesko, king of the North; and Nakon on the border of the West .... As far as the realm of Mesko is concerned, this is the most extensive of their lands .... It produces an abundance of food, meat, honey and fish. The taxes collected by the king from commercial goods are used for the support of his retainers. He keeps three thousand armed men divided into detachments .... In general the Slavs are violent and inclined to aggression. If not for the disharmony amongst them, caused by the multiplication of factions and by their fragmentation into clans, no people could match their strength. They inhabit the richest limits of the lands suitable for settlement and most plentiful in means of support. They are especially energetic in agriculture ....[3]

On social customs this observant traveler details the importance of the dowry system; having several daughters became a source of wealth for the father while sons added greatly to the prestige of his family. He also comments on their moral standards.

> Their women, when married, do not commit adultery. But a girl, when she falls in love with some man or other, will go to him and quench her lust. If a husband marries a girl and finds her to be a virgin, he says to her, 'If there were something good in you, men would have desired you, and you would certainly have had someone to take your virginity.' Then he sends her back and frees himself from her ....[4]

Coming from the sunny south of Spain, Ibrahim found the lands inhabited by the Poles extremely cold and inhospitable in winter. But already in his day, despite what German and English historians have argued, evidences of pomp and a measure of military prowess were by no means lacking.

> Their kings travel in great carriages on four wheels. From the corners of their carriages a cradle is slung on chains, so that the

[3]Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 3.

[4]Davies, *God's Playground*, 3-4.

> passenger is not shaken by the motion . . . . The Slavs wage war on the Byzantines, the Franks and Langobards, and on other peoples, conducting themselves with varying success.[5]

Hardly, in the light of this detailed rehearsal, could these peoples have been the barbaric or, at best, the semi-civilized and incompetent folk which others lusting for their lands have made them out to be.

Soon Miesko I insured good relations with his neighbors. He gave his daughter Swietoslawa in marriage to Eric, king of Denmark and Sweden. Upon his death she married Swein Forkbeard to become the mother of Canute who visited Poland in 1014 to hire three hundred horsemen to help him regain his kingdom in England. Miesko reinforced his policy of independence and expansion by absorbing the territories of the Slenzanie. Shortly before his death he drew up the *Dagome Iudex*, which defined with care the boundaries of his realm. Then he placed it under the direct protection of the pope.

This policy was carried through successfully by his son, Boleslaw the Brave (992-1025). To him Pope Sylvester I sent Adalbertus, a Bohemian prince, to convert the heathen Prussians who lived near the mouth of the Vistula. Promptly this non-Slavic tribe put the missionary to death. His corpse, purchased by Boleslaw for its weight in gold, was then interred in Gniezno's cathedral. Hearing this sad news the pope canonized the martyred monk, raised Gniezno to the rank of archbishopric and created three new bishoprics.

The emerging Polish church was now freed from German influence and control which in turn strengthened the state. Boleslaw, as his father before him, greatly expanded the realm not only to the south where the Moravians lived but especially to the east and southeast, incorporating for the first time a growing number of Ruthenians. Soon, however, it became apparent that this young state could not digest all its conquests. Under the next rulers, regionalist tendencies developed to threaten the unity of a kingdom whose swift rise to power and prestige had amazed much of the rest of the continent.

Upon that early "golden age" there followed, according to an early chronicler, "a leaden one" which lasted for nearly three centuries.

During this time few rulers of prominence appeared on the scene. The church expanded its influence and wealth. Hundreds of monasteries were established to preserve what learning had been acquired.

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[5]Davies, *God's Playground*, 4.

Repeatedly the land suffered attacks by German princes who looked with disfavor on its early success. Meanwhile conspiracies within the royal house induced Boleslaw the Wrymouth (1102-1138) to carve up Poland into five duchies, each ruled by one of his sons. Hardly could this compromise, made in the hope of avoiding civil war, prove successful. Soon the nobility as well as the *szlachta,*[6] whose fortunes had grown with improving economic conditions, began to distrust every form of higher government in the land.

While the political situation remained far from satisfactory, agriculture and commerce in spite of some reverses advanced markedly. From time to time large numbers of Germans, Flemings and Walloons entered a land which had been for far too long under-populated. As early as 1040 the capital was removed to Krakow. Soon it became the largest and most attractive city of the land. Here trade flowed to and from all parts of the country and from far across its borders. Imposing churches, now largely of stone which was always at a premium, were erected. The nobility also vied with each other to build elaborate residences. Other cities, too, like Sandomierz, Kalisz, Wroclaw, Poznan and Plock as well as Gdansk[7] on the sea, began to charm travelers by their growing opulence.

Although the church contributed significantly to the rising educational and cultural levels of the upper classes, its hold on the common folk was far from strong. In many areas pagan rites survived long after the land had been officially Christianized. More threatening, however, were pagan Pomeranians, Prussians and Lithuanians who frequently raided across the borders.

But for Poland worse was in store, when the hordes of Genghis Khan like a pack of ravening wolves rode in from the east. With little resistance they devoured Kievan Russia, then devastated much of Poland. Large areas were depopulated. Krakow was sacked and burned to the ground. Only news of the death of their leader sped them back

[6] *szlachta*, large group of lower nobility and gentry, their position regarded as hereditary and inviolable. Many of them, as also the envoy of Queen Elizabeth wrote home, were arrogant, disputatious and envious of their status. They insisted they were a cut above all other Poles as descendants of the ancient Sarmatians. Often the more impoverished among them wielded power as delegates to the lower diets of the nobility who preferred their leisure to the acrimonious debates which marred many sessions.

[7] Except for leading persons well-known in the west and capital cities, this essay usually uses the Polish or Lithuanian forms. Confusion is difficult to avoid; e.g., the capital of Lithuania is known as Wilno, Vilnius or Vilna in English writings.

to their homeland. But in 1259 they returned to plunder Lublin, Sandomierz and Krakow again. Three decades later they came once more to put everything to fire and sword, leaving only Sandomierz and Krakow unconquered. For the princes and people who had survived little hope of ever seeing the land rise again to its former prosperity remained.

Happily, however, the tide turned.

Again growing numbers of Germans took over much of the west where the Polish population had been decimated. With their coming several devastated cities took on a new lease of life. Anti-semitism had raised its ugly head throughout much of western Europe in consequence of the Crusades, so that many Jews looked for a safer haven in Poland.[8] Here they engaged successfully in banking and commerce, both frowned on by medieval theologians as occupations unworthy of devout Christian believers. By 1264 Boleslav the Chaste (1243-1279) granted their communities a royal charter which permitted them to dress as did others and govern themselves as a separate community with their own customs and laws.

But not until the reign of Kazimierz III (1333-1370) were the several Polish duchies, often at odds with each other and involved in dynastic disputes, successfully reunited. Of all the Polish rulers, he as the last scion of the Piast dynasty is the only one honored by the title "the Great."

While much of the continent was suffering the traumas of the Babylonian Captivity, the Hundred Years' War and especially the Black Death (1348-1354), this nation entered a new period of peace and prosperity. Castles were soon rebuilt. Cities were greatly enlarged and enriched. Deposits of iron, lead, silver, sulphur and rock salt were opened to exploitation. Everywhere canals were dug, enlarged and even

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[8]On the role of the Jews in Poland-Lithuania cf. Gershom D. Hundert and Gershom C. Brown, *The Jews in Poland and Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984). Heatedly debated has been the question whence they emigrated. The above volume takes the position, "Even if some of the earliest Jewish settlers on Polish lands came from the east, as refugees from Byzantine persecution, as merchants from Kievan Russia, or as part of the Khazar diaspora, the evidence supports the notion that the overwhelming majority of Polish Jews came from the west, from Bohemia, Moravia, and the German territories. . ."(40). Two essays of more than passing interest are discussed by the authors: "Jewish and Christian sectarians: Existential Similarity and Dialectical Tension in 18th Century Moravia and Poland-Lithuania" and "The Reformation in Contemporary Jewish Eyes," because of the temporary accession of not a few Jews to the Reformed churches there while the anti-trinitarian controversy was going on.

rerouted to give access to many parts of the land. Timber, grain and manufactured cloth were now exported to satisfy the needs of beleaguered lands to the west. An ardent patron of culture and learning, Kazimierz founded the university of Krakow, antedated in central Europe only by Prague. Elsewhere such schools had evolved from ecclesiastical institutions; Krakow, however, pursued that secular pattern which earlier had set its stamp on Bologna and Padua to make way for the beginnings of Renaissance influences. With chairs in medicine, law and liberal arts but none in theology, it opened wide Poland's windows to those winds of change which for the next two centuries would reshape the face of Europe.

After a long and illustrious reign Kazimierz died in 1370. Four times he had married without begetting an heir. This should have produced no difficulty since throughout the country there were still Piast princes aplenty. But the king had looked beyond his borders for a successor. His choice fell on a nephew, Louis of Anjou, that wise, cultured and far-sighted ruler of vast Hungarian territories. This choice marked a decisive turning-point for the history of the Polish people and nation.

Upon attending Kazimierz' funeral, Louis returned to his own realm to leave Poland in the hands of his mother, a sister of the late lamented king. But she could only govern when supported in her aims and ambitions by the Lords of Krakow in whose hands, by a series of royal concessions, now lay the choice of any future sovereign.

Quite unexpectedly Louis of Anjou died in 1382, leaving two daughters as heirs to his vast patrimony. His intention had been to seat the older of the two, Maria, married to Sigismund of Luxemburg, on the Polish throne. The Lords of Krakow, with every show of legality, had plans of their own. They insisted that ten year old Jadwiga (Hedwig) be brought to Poland to be trained under the care of her grandmother. Two years later she was crowned "king" of a country still strange to her. But her poise and winsomeness had so won the hearts of the nobility that they felt it no disgrace to recognize her as their sovereign.

The Lords of Krakow, however, had far more in mind. To secure the stability of the land she must be married appropriately and with their full approval. Earlier she had, at a very young age, been betrothed to Wilhelm of Hapsburg. The power-brokers in the capital looked on this with much distaste and disfavor, fearing any such close relationship with the Austrian dynasty. When Wilhelm then came to claim her hand in marriage, he was given no occasion to see her in the castle on Wawel hill. Soon he was sent packing, and the Lords of Krakow looked

elsewhere for a husband who would more profitably serve their purposes.

Quickly their choice fell on Jogaila, the Grand Duke of neighboring Lithuania. Appraised of this choice for her, the young girl took fright and pleaded against being forced into a union which to her seemed most repulsive. At thirty-five Jogaila was far older than she. Neither his reputation nor his physical appearance were reputed to be attractive. Fearing a man she thought of as "a hairy heathen," she prevailed upon her counselors to send a favorite knight and friend, Zawisza of Olesnica, to inspect the duke at his ablutions in the bathhouse. He reported favorably to her on the details of his body!

With this the way was cleared for the destinies of Poland and Lithuania to be entwined for generations to come, an episode with important consequences also for the spread of the Reformation a century and a half later.

Closer connections between these two adjacent countries had appealed to their rulers for some decades. Lithuania was being pressured from the east by the expanding power of the Russians, while from the north the powerful Teutonic Knights often raided far into its territory. But Poland also needed a strong head of government as well as a larger army to keep its borders inviolate.

Differences between the two peoples with all their attendant difficulties, however, had to be faced. For longer than four centuries Poland had been Christianized. It enjoyed periods of economic prosperity as well as a cultural level far in advance of its neighbor. The Lithuanians were a Baltic people with a forest culture. Stubbornly they had resisted every attempt to woo them to the Roman faith and the western world. Fiercely independent, most of its inhabitants were still deeply mired in superstition, worshiping trees and streams as well as stones, fire and snakes. Even the few cities with their castles seemed little more than insignificant villages. But the Lords of Krakow convinced both themselves and the grand duke of the advantages which closer ties would achieve.

By early 1386 arrangements were finalized. The two peoples were to be joined under one ruler in the form of a constitutional monarchy. So that the marriage might be appropriately contracted Jagiello (the Polish form of his name) received baptism as Wladyslaw. Three days later he and Jadwiga.were married. Less than two weeks later he was crowned King of Poland while retaining his title as Grand Duke of Lithuania. This set the stage for "the Golden Age" when, little more than a century later, Renaissance and Reformation contributed to raise the nation to its greatest heights of glory.

Jadwiga did not live long after her marriage. At the age of twenty-seven she died childless in 1399. Yet her memory still spreads its fragrance among those Poles who cherish their history. Much of her time was spent in religious devotions and a loving care for the poor. As a well-educated and cultured lady she also gave new impetus to the developing university of Krakow.

Upon her death in accordance with agreements made Jagiello ruled alone. Soon he married again. His fourth wife, Sonka (Sophia) of Holszany bore him several children to secure the future of the dynasty. With courage, cunning and a measure of chivalry he subdued all who threatened the independence and integrity of the kingdom. Although never fully accepted by the Polish nobility and people, so that the title "the Great" was not accorded, he ruled wisely and well for almost half a century (1386-1434). Two sons who succeeded him fared less well. Meanwhile Lithuania underwent rapid and rewarding changes. Commerce began to flourish. Several cities with patrician houses and noteworthy churches and synagogues sprang up. Many of the earlier disorders which had plagued its borderlands were defused. And especially the upper classes, following the lead of their grand dukes, embraced Christianity in its Roman form.

A degree of tension always remained, however, since the Polish nobility repeatedly sought to restrict the powers and privileges of the restive Lithuanian magnates. But by the end of the fifteenth century the dual monarchy had sufficiently stabilized to win the grudging but growing respect of its neighbors.

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As the sixteenth century began Poland-Lithuania under two influential monarchs entered its Golden Age. Zamoyski in *The Polish Way* summarizes their contributions,

> The last two Jagiellon kings gave their subjects and their country something of inestimable value. Zygmunt I or the Older, youngest son of Kazimierz IV, succeeded in 1506 and died in 1548. His son, Zygmunt II, Augustus, became Grand Duke of Lithuania in 1532 and King of Poland after his father's death . . . . They encouraged every form of creative activity throughout the most dynamic period of Europe's artistic development, and they graciously allowed their subjects to do everything they wanted except butcher each other in the name of religion. They institutionalized a spiritual and intellectual

> freedom which still lives, and they steered their country away from the storm which was blowing upon the horizon.[9]

Few historians would care to challenge this characterization of life within the Polish realm. Yet deep within it lay seeds which later sprouted to bear the bitter fruit of national dissolution. So complex and at times incomprehensible are the events of that time that without reference to the ethnic, political and religious conditions little of the historical unfolding can be disentangled.

By 1500 the state had grown to an impressive size. Now it was second only to those territories which were at least nominally under the rule of Muscovy. Because of growing prosperity the population could be estimated at somewhere between ten and twelve million, exceeded only by that of France.

This was also a time of comparative political and military stability. Traditional enemies still lurked along its extensive borders. But soon the last of the Teutonic Knights to the north were largely secularized and more closely allied to the kingdom. Muscovy continued to be restless from time to time, and pressures from the Holy Roman Empire with its aim of expansion to the east could not be ignored. But during this period Poland's strength was impressive enough to keep its foes at bay.

While Silesia and western Pomerania had been lost to the Germans, the state had by a series of dynastic and military moves assumed control over large areas to the east and southeast. Here lived Ruthenians, Ukrainians and Byelo-Russians who practiced the Orthodox faith and looked to Constantinople's patriarch rather than to Rome for spiritual guidance. Sizeable communities of Armenians, engaging in profitable trade with the East, lived in its growing cities. Also the number of Jews increased rapidly, especially after their expulsion from Spain in 1492 and from Portugal in 1496. Even more surprising to visitors from the West were the almost one hundred mosques in Lithuania proclaiming the loyalty of descendants of those Tatars who had remained in that land after their earlier forays. Except for a few who enjoyed Polish connections these peoples had no voice in the government. But left to themselves they were largely content with their lot.

During the previous century the cultural level, especially among the Poles and some Lithuanians, had risen appreciably since the first Jagiellon had ascended the throne. Krakow's university had been

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[9]Adam Zamoyski, *The Polish Way: A Thousand Year History of the Poles and Their Culture* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1988), 73.

revitalized to become the acknowledged and respected center of learning for central Europe. In growing numbers young Poles also toured the West, made contacts with persons of importance and enrolled in universities there to round out their education. These introduced new ideas avidly discussed by the nobility and those of their ladies who read Latin with a degree of ease. And shortly after moveable type had been invented in 1455, the first printing press was assembled in Krakow to facilitate changes which would unsettle the lives of princes, priests and people for more than a hundred years.

Meanwhile the land had not shown itself to be the most dutiful daughter of Rome, despite close attachments which dated from the days of the first Piast princes. At the Council of Constance in 1415, which condemned and put to death John Hus, Polish representatives because of their ethnic ties with the Bohemians had not been hesitant to express their disapproval. Living close to the Orthodox, whose lower clergy married and raised families and whose faithful received Communion "under both kinds," numbers of priests agitated from time to time for change. Meanwhile the higher clergy, strongly pro-Rome, showed far greater interest in political power than in the spiritual welfare of the people. Under their influence the Roman church with its monasteries had absorbed extensive properties to the disadvantage of the numerous *szlachta*. The bishops frequently were venal, often grossly unspiritual and even openly immoral. Priests in the villages, always poorly educated, became a byword among the people for their drunkenness and debauchery.

Nor were conditions in Lithuania any better. The people had nominally embraced that faith soon after Jagiello and his nobility had received Christian baptism. Yet large numbers, especially in the fields and forests, clung to their ancient gods as they worshiped in woods and beside streams. Nearly a hundred years later Gedroyc, assuming the bishopric of Samogitia, reported,

> In very extensive areas of my bishopric, one would search in vain for a single person who has ever been to confession or Communion in his life; a single person who knows how to say one prayer or make the sign of the cross; a single person who has the faintest idea of the Mysteries of the Faith.[10]

[10]Zamoyski, *The Polish Way*, 78.

For this the higher ranks of the hierarchy were largely to blame. Little had been done to educate those aspiring to priesthood. They failed to impose an approved Roman Catholic life-style on either themselves or their people. Much of this may be attributed to the unique relationship of the Polish church, which at that time included somewhat less than half of the total population, to the papacy. Bishops were appointed by the king who then submitted his candidates for Rome's approval. Here the monarch was largely guided by political considerations in order to control the cities with their growing numbers of foreigners and the *szlachta* who often attempted to override his decisions. To strengthen his position even further he did not hesitate to choose as secretaries and advisors men of plebeian origin, including some of Jewish extraction lest the bishops and more powerful magnates could compel him to their will.

In that complex situation several factors combined to prepare for the Reformation and its rapid spread at an early date.

The first was the Renaissance which had flourished in Italy since the late fourteenth century. Several teachers at the university had come from that land; still others were educated there to return to their homeland with hopes of raising Poland's culture to a higher level. The spirit of questioning the old order soon pervaded the air to which the church offered little resistance. Several bishops set themselves up as patrons of the arts — notably poetry, painting and music. The archbishop of Lwow even established in his residence a court imitating that at Urbino. Here he surrounded himself with scholars who led a life of luxury and intellectual refinement. Other Italians followed in the wake of the scholars, serving as physicians or tradesmen to stimulate the adoption of foreign food, clothing and customs.

Not to be ignored was the influence of queen Bona Sforza, the well-educated but cunning and even malevolent wife of Sigismund I. In her entourage were many Italians who encouraged her ambitions and spread their ideas among all who sought the queen's favor. Well had she learned lessons at her father's court. She prevailed upon her husband to choose men of her choice for important political positions. At times she worked at cross-purposes with her husband. Before his death she succeeded in having her son crowned as Poland's next king. Because of her encouragement of Renaissance art, architecture and education, a few have attempted to rehabilitate her reputation. But her presence cast lengthening shadows over the last years of Sigismund's reign and haunted for ill much of the life of her son. About that we shall hear later.

More indirect, to be sure, but far more persuasive for Poland's intellectual and religious climate during these years were the writings of Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536).

Widely has he been recognized as "the arbiter of Christian humanism" who sought to bring the two sides in a growing religious conflict together. Far too little attention has been given to his far-reaching significance for the spread of radical Anabaptism and Anti-Trinitarianism, in so many regards brothers-under-the-skin. Both groups greatly muddied Reformation waters throughout Poland and Lithuania especially after 1550.

In 1516, the year he accepted his post in the service of Emperor Charles V at the Imperial Court in Brussels, Erasmus published his epoch-making Greek New Testament with a translation into Latin. He aimed at doing for ancient Christian sources what the Italian humanists had accomplished for Greek and Latin classic literature. He removed, on the basis of its absence from Greek manuscripts at his disposal, from 1 John 5:7 its opening phrase on the trinity: "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit." Commenting on this he wrote,

> According to dialectical logic [in the context of nominalism], it is possible to say there are three gods, but to announce this to the untutored would give great offense.[11]

Also in the Latin translation for the term *Logos* he chose instead of *Verbum* (which the Vulgate used) the more theologically imprecise and colorless term *sermo*.

His sustained anti-doctrinal bias appears even more clearly in his *Epistolae*. Here one can read his views which seemed so sweet and solacing to many who eagerly drank in all he wrote.

> Is it not possible to have fellowship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, without being able to explain philosophically the distinction between them and between the Nativity of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit? If I believe that there are three of one *natura*, what is the use of labored disputation? If I do not believe, I shall not be persuaded by any human reasons .... You will not be damned if you do not know whether the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son has one or two

[11]George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), 9.

> beginnings, but you will not escape damnation if you do not cultivate the fruits of the spirit, which are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, long-suffering, mercy, faith, modesty, continence and chastity . . . . The sum of our religion is peace and unanimity, but these can scarcely stand unless we define as little as possible, and in many things leave each one free to follow his own judgment, because there is great obscurity on these matters.[12]

To the above must be added his rejection of monastic vows as well as his views on church reformation, pacifism, the limits of a "just" war, and above all the freedom of man's will. All these and similar notions found fertile soil by way of Servetus, Castellio, the more radical Anabaptists and especially the two Socini throughout Poland which long had prided itself on a toleration enshrined in custom and law.

Meanwhile calls for church reformation and renewal — fainter and more faint-hearted than those issued in western Europe — were not unknown in the Polish church. Here and there abbots tried to bring their monasteries more in harmony with their original ideals. Occasionally some bishops and priests encouraged the faithful under their care to a deeper spirituality. Stimuli to such activities have become almost impossible to trace. Suggestions that some Dutch and Flemings, who had settled earlier along the lower reaches of the Vistula, had been influenced by the *Devotio Moderna*[13] seem rather unlikely. More likely was the spread of the Hussite movement with its insistence on change in ecclesiastical teaching and usage from neighboring Bohemia into parts of Poland,but even this was a somewhat later development.

Often those who urged reform could be found among the lower nobility. They longed for a greater voice in ecclesiastical affairs and looked with jaundiced eye on the vast estates which swelled the coffers of the church's prelates. In Kujavia, for example, no less than fifteen percent of the land, some of it the most productive, was now in their hands. Among the more spiritually-minded the low morality which prevailed throughout the land gave great offense. Every late medieval effort at conciliarism and church renewal had failed. And reports brought back by Polish visitors and students about the licentiousness characteristic of the courts of some Renaissance popes contributed to

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[12]Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 10.

[13]On *Devotio Moderna* cf. Albert Hyma, *The Brethren of the Common Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950).

a greater and growing dissatisfaction with the church at home. Clearly the time for change had come.

But no one could predict with any reasonable certainty which direction this would take.

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In its earliest form the evangelical faith entered Poland by way of Germany.

Luther had nailed his ninety-five theses to the doors of the Castle Church at Wittenberg in 1517. Two years later the pope excommunicated and anathematized him. But soon his fame spread throughout the western reaches of Poland.

Elblag accepted the Reformation by 1523. That same year Luther at the request of Albert of Brandenburg commissioned two preachers to proclaim the gospel in Kaliningrad (Königsberg). Also the city of Torun embraced the new faith. In Gdansk, chief city and seaport in that area, Luther's followers became so numerous that five churches were assigned to them by 1524.

Immediately Sigismund I retaliated with a royal edict, hoping thereby to restore the old Catholic order and to suppress what he deemed heretical. But this failed to stem the swelling tide. While the countryside and villages were still left largely untouched, the city folk were more than eager for a change. When central Poland began to be infested, the Diet also took notice. The king, a few of the more influential bishops and several of the upper nobility convinced themselves that these foreign German notions threatened the foundations of both church and state. And when Livonia — soon to be incorporated in the Polish realm — became almost overnight overwhelmingly evangelical, the situation appeared even more critical.

Yet Lutheranism left much of the land unchanged. With few exceptions it appealed only to the German-speaking population. Far too long had the Poles lived in fear of influences from the west which could jeopardize their national territory and integrity.

More significant for the spread of Protestantism among the Polish people were the Bohemian Brethren.

These people, known by several names, were descendants of the followers of John Hus, Prague's popular teacher and preacher. For decades they had lived a tempestuous and troubled existence in their native land. Increasingly waves of persecution by their king, closely allied to the House or Hapsburg, threatened their extermination. Many

now felt the urge to emigrate. At first they looked to open lands north of Poland, territories then still under the weakening control of the Teutonic Knights and not averse to the evangelical faith. But their affinity to the Poles as fellow Slavs enticed them to stop half way. When they first arrived, a measure of toleration for them as dissidents from the Roman church was sufficient to insure safety for themselves and their families.

In matters of faith they were closely akin to other evangelicals, especially to the Reformed. No confession of faith, so several reformers acknowledged, was more consistently biblical than theirs. Also the simplicity and sobriety of their lives won for them the admiration of many. Within a few years they were to join hands with the Calvinists in ecclesiastical fellowship.

How the Swiss Reformation, under the leadership first of Zwingli and later of Bullinger and especially Calvin, began to impinge upon the already complicated religious situation in Poland is more difficult to trace.

For nearly a century many of the sons of the nobility and the *szlachta* had been attending universities in the west. At first they were invariably attracted to Italy where the Renaissance had taken its earliest and deepest root. Many, however, became disgusted with corruptions in both church and state there. For them, they believed, little could be learned which could be of benefit to Poland and its aspirations.

Large numbers found their way to Strasburg, that early center of the Reformation where Calvin spent three-years in exile from 1538 to 1541 while ministering to a small but thriving French congregation. Here the youthful Poles were both charmed and challenged by Johann Sturm whose reforms in the field of education had won for him wide-spread acclaim. Stanislaus Drojewsky, when spending a few months with a friend in Padua, wrote that he could not wait to return to Strasburg and Sturm. Christopher Tretko (Thretius) also continued his studies there for two years. Upon returning to his native land he established after a few years an academy at Krakow where, as one writer states, "the flower of Polish youth" studied during the years of its existence.

Meanwhile the "new learning" had thrown wide open the windows of Poland to the western world. In every leading family books in Latin, French and even German were avidly read and then passed from hand to hand. When Calvin's works were published in growing numbers these, too, found an interested readership. Even educated ladies were eager to hear what he had to say, since here was Christian doctrine applied especially in his sermons to daily living. Growing support for the

Reformed faith was achieved when the famous Radziwill families, paladins of Vilna and princes of Lithuania, were won over.

Because of these many contacts correspondence involving the Swiss reformers with Polish affairs increased with each passing year. In this no one was more assiduous than Calvin. What Jules Bonnet says about his letters in general holds with equal force of those addressed to the ever-changing scene in Poland.

> Nothing can exceed the interest of this correspondence in which an epoch and a life of the most absorbing interest are reflected in a series of documents equally varied and genuine . . . . From his bed of suffering and of continued labors, Calvin followed with an observant eye the great drama of the Reformation, marking its triumphs and its reverses in every State of Europe . . . .[14]

As early at 1541 we find him making mention of that country in a letter addressed to his colleague Farel. Writing from Ratisbon, which conference he attended in the hope of promoting greater unity among the evangelicals, he expressed distress occasioned by papal intrigues throughout Europe and the menacing presence of the Turks in Hungary after the ill-fated battle at Mohacs (1528). Apparently his hope was fixed on the Polish army, then in control of that kingdom's southern province of Wallachia now seriously exposed to invasion. From that time we find him, as well as Bullinger, writing numerous letters to stir up the king and other leaders in Poland to undertake the reformation of Christ's church.

On May 23, 1549 he dedicated his Commentary on the *Epistle to the Hebrews* to young Sigismund Augustus who had only the previous year assumed the throne. After an appropriate and detailed address Calvin explains the reasons for this dedication.

> Perhaps this [i.e., the commentary itself] will be a new encouragement for Your Majesty, inasmuch as you are already concerned for the restoration of the kingdom of Christ, and in so many who live under your sovereignty to take it up. You have a kingdom which is extensive and renowned, and which contains many glories, but its happiness will only have a firm foundation as it takes Christ as its supreme Governor to be

[14]*Letters of John Calvin*, edited by Jules Bonnet, translated by David Constable, (Edinburgh: Thos. Constable and Co., 1855), I.v.

> defended by His faith and protection. To submit your scepter to him is not inconsistent with the high estate in which you are set, but would be far more glorious than all worldly triumphs.[15]

Then the writer sketched in some detail the urgency for a thoroughgoing reformation from Rome's corruptions, where "the truth of God lies buried under innumerable lies . . . the power of Christ misused to support the unrestrained tyranny of the ungodly."

This opened the way for him to express his hope for both the Polish king and people.

> The fact that you recognize, Your Majesty, that for Christ to take full possession of His kingdom there must be a complete purge of all superstitions is a mark of your singular wisdom, and that you undertake and attempt what you thus judge to be really necessary for this end is a sign of rare virtue. There are many signs which give an almost certain hope to all good men, that you are divinely chosen to be the image of another Hezekiah or Josiah soon to restore in the Kingdom of Poland the pure teaching of the Gospel which has been spoiled throughout the whole world by the craft of Satan and the betrayal of men.[16]

This dedicatory epistle could hardly fail to impress the king. Meanwhile not a few of the nobility already professed the Reformed faith openly. In several parts of the land churches had been organized. By 1550 these were sufficiently numerous to unite, be it somewhat loosely, on a regional and national basis. But preachers were sorely needed. Of these there was, quite in contrast to the ever-growing number of Roman clergy, a great dearth. The threat to Rome's influence was not taken lightly by the bishops. Regularly papal nuncios arrived from Italy to urge that every effort be made to conciliate the nobles and so stem the tide which was fast flowing in the evangelical direction. But the ecclesiastics soon over-stepped themselves. Their procedures against Stadnicki, a highly respected nobleman, infuriated many of his peers. Thus, at the suggestion of the king the *seym* at Piotrkow dissolved for one year all clerical courts, a prohibition regularly repeated for several successive years.

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[15]John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), xx.

[16]John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, xxii.

About this time Calvin began his correspondence with John à Lasco.[17] Born on the family estates in 1499, he received much of his education at the court of his uncle. This man, also called Jan Laski, served for years as both primate of the Polish church and chancellor to Sigismund I. In 1505 he compiled the *Laskoi Statuta*, the first official edition of Polish law. By 1510 he had been elevated to the rank of archbishop of Gniezno. Although an opponent of all that smacked of heresy, the cardinal insisted on the urgent need for ecclesiastical reform and labored diligently for better training of priests in theology. In this atmosphere, redolent of wealth and prestige, the man who was to strengthen the Reformed movement in his own land grew up.

Although destined for high office in the Roman church, young John after his ordination in 1521 was able to travel widely throughout western Europe for a few years. Here he met Zwingli, Farel and especially Erasmus with whom strong ties of friendship sprang up. Returning to Poland, he received ever greater honors. But as the years passed his religious convictions changed radically. Breaking with the Roman faith we find him next in East Friesland. Here he worked faithfully to strengthen the Reformed church at Emden under the protection of countess Anna. To the ministers of that region Calvin had dedicated one of the editions of his *Catechism.* With a change in that court à Lasco left for London to minister to Reformed people there who had fled persecutions in France and the Netherlands. Here Calvin's contacts with him were intensified.

The French-speaking church in London, likely at the prompting of à Lasco, had addressed two questions to the reformer of Geneva: "May the Virgin Mary be called the Mother of God?" and "May prayers be offered for the pope?" The responses were not long in coming. Calvin wrote, "I cannot take that such language is either right or more becoming or suitable than to speak of the death of God." To use such terms would leave the people still mired in superstition. And while prayers might well be offered for the pope's person, none of the titles

[17]On John à Lasco cf. Abraham Kuyper, *Johannis à Lasco Opera*, 2 vol. with critical preface (Amsterdam-the Hague: Muller and Nijhoff, 1866). When press of duties made it impossible for Kuyper to provide a definitive biography of the reformer, this was undertaken by Hermann Dalton, evangelical pastor at Riga, Latvia. He also has provided materials on the acts and proceedings of the Reformed Church in Poland during those years. Because of à Lasco's influence there as well as on the development of church order and liturgy in the Dutch Reformed churches an up-to-date and definitive volume in English is highly desirable, since Dalton's works are difficult to obtain.

with which he and his predecessors had bedecked themselves should ever be ascribed to him.

The following year, upon the accession of Bloody Mary to the English throne, à Lasco and many in his congregation were forced to flee. Their painful and perplexing sufferings Calvin watched with profound sorrow of heart. Although the Danish king at first welcomed them, the situation quickly changed because of pressures from the Lutheran clergy. Westphal and Bugenhagen spoke of them as "infidels" and as "the devil's martyrs." After being refused safe haven in Lubeck, Hamburg and Rostock, the group finally found some peace at Frankfurt. Here Calvin addressed them in a letter. He bemoaned what he called the "diabolical fury" of those who professed to be evangelicals and commented that this must, indeed, be "a joyful and pleasant spectacle to the Papists." He concluded with high praise for the leader and his followers who had endured their sufferings "with no less calm discretion than composed dignity" and rejoiced that now at long last they had found "a tranquil harbor."

Some months later à Lasco wrote Calvin for advice. Should the story of their persecution at the hands of several Lutheran theologians and magistrates be made public? While Bullinger thought it wise to remain silent, Calvin deemed that at least something should be told the world at large for the sake of their own defense since they and their faith had been much maligned. In the same response he mentioned Westphal by name, who, by going far beyond anything Luther had taught, now again "inflated the sacramentarian controversy" which in his judgment could well be settled satisfactorily as it had been a few years earlier between Zurich and Geneva.

Shortly afterward Calvin penned his first personal letter to Sigismund Augustus. In it he announced that the first duty of every Christian sovereign is that of seeking the reformation of Christ's church. Both the pretensions of papal supremacy and of episcopal succession — centerpieces in Rome's attack on the evangelicals — are ably refuted. Sorely needed in Poland, according to the writer, is the restoration of the church to doctrinal purity and of the priesthood to its spiritual duties. Soon a national synod was to be convened in Poland in the hope of recovering some measure of unity. Therefore Calvin, already aware of the difficulties which distressed the king, added,

> For when Christ wishes even his humblest disciples to be like lamps suspended in a lofty place, that send out their light to a distance, what does he require of a king, whom he has placed at

> the summit of human dignity, that he might shine before all others? . . . It is not enough to produce abundant fruits of yourself, unless you study to propagate the same seed to thousands of men . . . .[18]

The letter is a long one, yet urgent while moderate in its appeal and careful in its composition. For the ruler there is commendation "now that you proceed to deliver the people from the shameful dispersion of Popery to the obedience of Christ." Nor does Calvin expect miracles overnight. So long as a form of episcopal rule in the church may seem advantageous in the troubled Polish situation, he will not object if the bishops "do not lord it over others . . . . For it is not possible that the government of the church can be all at once changed." As in many of his letters he closes also this one with a special prayer,

> May the Lord, our heavenly Father, most excellent king, by the hand of His only-begotten Son, direct your majesty, guard you by His protection, support you by His power, and govern you by His Spirit.[19]

Calvin also concerned himself about those who influenced the Polish monarch. To Bullinger he wrote about Francis Lismanini, a native of Corfu, who, while in Italy, had embraced the Reformed faith. This person had visited Poland and was charged by the king to visit Switzerland and Germany to inquire about the progress of the gospel. His eagerness to promote unity at all costs could easily lead to compromises which imperiled the gospel of grace.

While à Lasco made valuable contributions for the establishment and organization of the churches, Calvin did not agree with some of his views. In a letter to Peter Martyr he spoke of this but added, "Let him enjoy his own interpretation, provided he does not require any more of me what I cannot accord." Hardly was he as rigid and doctrinaire as many have made him out to be.

At this time the reformer also entered into correspondence with Nicolas Radziwill, one of the most distinguished nobles of the land and a confidant of the king. Upon embracing the Reformed religion in 1553, he not only engaged in ardently promoting the faith but also caused to be translated and published at personal expense the first Protestant edition of the Bible in the Polish tongue. It was dedicated to his

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[18]*Letters of John Calvin*, III:100.
[19]*Letters of John Calvin*, III:109.

sovereign whom he adjured in energetic language "to abjure the errors of Rome." Of this handsomely printed work very few copies remain, since when his son returned to the Roman fold he exerted himself to find every available copy and burn these publicly in the marketplace of Vilna. The letter to this nobleman is tender and highly complimentary.

> But it belongs to your wisdom, most illustrious Prince, to reflect first that you pay nothing to God which he may not claim as justly due to him, and that not only because you stand indebted to him . . . but because he has bound you to himself, so much the more as he has raised you to higher dignity . . . .[20]

Soon another letter was sent off to Sigismund Augustus whom Calvin believed guilty of too much temporizing in the cause of church reform. Although the address throughout is respectful, his fears did not remain hidden. Again the king is admonished,

> Since then in Poland true religion has already begun to dawn on the darkness of Papacy, since many princes and wise men, having cast aside impious superstitions, voluntarily aspire after the pure worship of God, I whom the King of kings has appointed a preacher of his gospel and a minister of his church call upon your majesty in his name to make this work above all your special care.[21]

No pressures, from whatever side they might arise, ought to deter him from proceeding without delay. "Ought kings then to loiter whom God has set on high for this very purpose, that from their elevation they might send forth their light to all people?"

For Calvin the time was now ripe. Hence the admonition, ". . . for if the opportunity afforded by God is neglected, you may afterwards have to stand in vain before a door that is closed."

Before continuing the story of the growing influence of the Calvinistic reformation in Poland, attention must be directed to other dissidents from the Roman church. These were adherents of what is commonly called the Radical Reformation. Although holding widely divergent views, they showed themselves bedfellows in their individualistic opposition to Christian doctrine and ethics as professed by the classic reformers. Their presence within the Reformed churches for a

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[20]*Letters of John Calvin*, III:135.
[21]*Letters of John Calvin*, III:245.

season proved to be, fully as much as any other factor in the ecclesiastical tangle of those days, a force which destroyed all hope for any strong and sustained evangelical unity in Poland and Lithuania.

Only in recent decades has this movement, which often upset the balance in both church and state throughout the sixteenth century, received the serious attention which it deserves.

Before considering its influence in the eastern regions of Europe, especially the kingdom of Poland, some general comments should be inserted. That it was, because of the ever-changing ideas of its leaders, an amorphous group makes any definitive assessment of their guiding principles and activities very difficult. In many instances these groups consisted of comparatively few disciples who followed a gifted leader. Here we find both Anabaptists and Anti-Trinitarians, all of whom claimed that their avowed goal was the restoration of primitive Christianity. To them, with one accord, the Roman church had so corrupted the teachings of Christ and the apostles that it rightly deserved, as not a few stated openly, the designation of "the whore of Babylon" (Rev. 17) because it persecuted the faithful. And the "magisterial" Reformation, in both its Lutheran and Calvinistic forms, was in their opinion little better. Some, and Calvin seems to have been one of the first to recognize this clearly, were far more evangelical and biblical than others. In this diverse company were fanatics who stirred up the populace with apocalyptic fantasies. Others sought to bring in "the kingdom of God" by violence. Always, even among the more gentle and godly, they viewed with critical and jaundiced eye the established order in church, society and state in their day. For this, in one form or another, they usually paid a heavy price.

The sudden explosion of so many dissidents of various kinds in those years should surprise no one. The roots from which their ideas as well as their patterns of conduct sprang lay deep within the medieval church; in fact, many of their positions could, whether the leaders recognized this or not, trace their ancestry back to early "heretics" whose views had been condemned by the ecumenical councils of the church as well as to ideas and ideals championed by the followers of Marcion, Montanus and the Donatists. Everywhere in that confused and confusing century civil and ecclesiastical authorities took strong action against them, regarding them as "troublemakers" and "rebels" who deserved to be harried out of the land. Williams in *The Radical Reformation*, a volume which deserves widespread and careful study, affirms,

> The proffered landscape may, at first glance, seem like a close-up of the crowded mounds of a prairie-dog town, but this will not be because we are surveying the life and work of a diminutive race of reformers and their followers. For good or ill, the Radicals were to shape the contours of the world that was to come after them far more than they or their Catholic and Protestant opponents realized.[22]

Within the space of a few years many of them found their way into Poland where for a season, at least, they could speak and write and live with greater freedom than elsewhere.

The first Anabaptists in that area arrived from the Netherlands. Here they settled in the lower reaches of the Vistula, reclaiming its marshlands because of their unique ability to drain and cultivate lands otherwise worthless. Since this brought a measure of economic prosperity to surrounding cities, even the bishop of Chelmno tolerated their presence. Of what type they were, whether evangelical or revolutionary, seems difficult to determine. But their refusal to take the oath and to bear arms indicates that, for the most part at least, they were pacifists. In 1549 Menno Simons visited them for "a number of weeks to settle differences among his far-flung followers and organize them." Not until 1572, however, were these groups known as Mennonites.

Of far greater significance for the emerging and developing Reformed churches were those with Anabaptist characteristics who arrived in Poland by way of Bohemia and Moravia as members of the Bohemian Brethren. To trace their radicalization in the direction of anabaptistic unitarianism is far too complicated to rehearse here. But soon it became apparent that the Reformed Church in both Poland and Lithuania could not remain united containing within its fold such radically divisive teachings on matters of doctrine and practice. Added to this was also the coming of several Italian intellectuals, fleeing their own land and staying for a while in Switzerland to wear out their welcome in both Zurich and Geneva because of their incipient anti-trinitarianism. On them and their activities more will be said later.

By 1555 there were enough Reformed pastors and churches to hold a synod at Kozminek. Here the Reformed and Bohemian Brethren united to make common cause for the progress of the evangelical faith. Meanwhile the diet of Warsaw granted every Polish landowner

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[22]Williams, *Radical Reformation*, xix.

permission to introduce that pattern of worship which he desired. Late the same year Lismanani was elected to serve together with Cruciger as "superintendents" of the fast growing churches. But finding Sigismund Augustus unwilling to give him royal support, he was forced into hiding and was thus unable to provide leadership in a young church torn by growing dissension. The next year, 1556, a synod was convened at Secymin. Here Peter Gonesius openly declared his allegiance to the views of Servetus. Schism resulted with the Major Reformed Church adhering unswervingly to the orthodox Reformed confessions; the Minor Reformed Church in Poland veered increasingly in the direction anti-paedobaptism, pacifism and anti-trinitarianism.

Even more complex and confusing was the situation in the vast expanses of Lithuania, traditionally anti-Roman and anti-Russian. That land was even more ready for ecclesiastical changes. Here lived large populations of Byelo-Russians and Ruthenians professing at least outwardly the Orthodox faith. Much of the initial stimulus for change came from Nicholas Radziwill (also, Radvila) the Black, voivode of Vilna and chancellor for that country. Before he embraced Calvinism, he attempted with Capodistria to establish with royal approval a Lutheran church which would embrace all who dissented from Rome. This ended in complete failure. But many of the Lithuanian gentry with him had acquired, likely by acquaintance with Erasmus' writings, taste for a broad, ecumenical and humanistic approach to Christianity. This appealed not only to Orthodox priests and monks but also to many of the folk who lived and worked on the estates, quite understandable since Orthodoxy in its Russian form had experienced infection by dissenting, rationalizing and even Judaistic strains. Under such leadership the Minor Reformed Church became wide open to further radical defections from the historic faith of the churches. Within a generation or two these seeds, now so assiduously sown, yielded the harvest of sharply divided loyalties within families and clans. This helped to destroy all hope of a strong Reformed or Calvinistic church in those two lands.

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Picking up the threads which we left earlier, we find by the time of the synod of Secymin and Pinczow John à Lasco making ready to go back in his homeland.

This return did not take place without great difficulty. Although urged to assume his new field of labor, à Lasco had been engaged in

conferences intended to heal the growing breach between Lutheran and Reformed. On his hopes he had written in some detail to Calvin who, because of excessive delay in the forwarding of letters, could not respond until more than six months later. But the letter then sent is of interest because both indirectly and directly it refers to Polish affairs.

Nothing had been achieved even by the pleas of Vergerio who longed, as noted earlier, for the establishment of a Lutheran church throughout Poland-Lithuania which would unite all evangelicals. And while Calvin expresses himself as "favorably disposed to every measure of moderation" in the renewed sacramentarian controversy, he chides à Lasco on one score.

> Nothing, however, gave me greater dissatisfaction than your mixing yourself up with the designs of Vergerio, whose vanity I am surprised you were not sooner acquainted with. Certainly whatever he attempts is suspicious.[23]

The inevitable consequence of compromising with such high-church Lutheran theologians as Westphal would be the alienation of Bullinger and the Zurichers from Geneva and thus destroy the precious unity of the Reformation in Switzerland and in turn produce adverse reactions in the troubled Reformed churches in Poland. He urges à Lasco also to undertake work in that land without any further hesitation.

> For if what Lismanani writes to me be true, the Polish nobility who have embraced the gospel, have decided three months ago, that you should be sent for . . . . I also recollect what fear presented an obstacle to your departure. But when I see the king willingly seated between two stools, and yet that the pious are making progress with his consent, I think you should by no means delay your departure . . . .[24]

Meanwhile the Polish nobles had addressed a letter to Calvin urging him to come in the interests of the Reformed faith. But months again passed before he received and could respond to the invitation. Pressing duties in Geneva would now keep him in his appointed field of labor. Nor was there any longer need for his coming since, and here follows high praise for that leader who had suffered so much for the gospel,

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[23]*Letters of John Calvin*, III:265.
[24]*Letters of John Calvin*, III:267.

> At present, that by the blessing of God, you have it in your power to profit by the labors of that most excellent and faithful minister of Christ, John Laski, I do not see any reason for your so ardently desiring my presence among you.[25]

What they now think they may lack by his absence he promises to "make up by the aid of my prayers."

Although the Reformed churches continued to make progress, this was not unattended without great difficulties even with the return of à Lasco. Papal nuncios together with some in the upper echelons of the Polish hierarchy conspired against them whenever they had access to the king's ear. Although Sigismund had suspended the exile of Lismanani and even courteously received à Lasco, he continued to vacillate. But few opportunities were given this man of noble birth, excellent scholarship and wide acquaintance with political and religious conditions in the west by the sovereign for "private conferences and familiar conversation." Also "false brethren" were disturbing peace within the churches by their deviant opinions. All this Calvin learned from a lengthy letter addressed to him by the exiled Flemish nobleman, Jan Utenhoven.[26] He had accompanied à Lasco as a fellow-refugee and now gladly went with him to Poland for a season to assist in spreading the gospel and strengthening the congregations in what to him was a strange land.

As one year made way for the next the frustration of the Swiss reformers, including Calvin, with lack of progress in reforming Poland's church increased. Correspondence continued but on a lesser level. One of the reasons was their increasing preoccupation with the renewal of fierce polemics on the issue of the sacraments by Gnesio-Lutherans which destroyed hope of any rapprochement among evangelicals throughout Germany. Even more painful was the rising tide of

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[25]*Letters of John Calvin*, III:318.

[26]Utenhoven, Flemish nobleman born in Ghent 1520, fled the Inquisition in 1544 and soon became acquainted with Bucer, Peter Martyr, Bullinger and Calvin. As a friend of Cranmer he was able to organize the French refugee congregation at Canterbury and the Dutch refugee congregation at London in 1550. Here he greatly assisted John à Lasco, translated his *Compendium doctrinae* and his catechism into Dutch.

Also with Van Wingen he translated the Scriptures into Dutch and produced an early versification of the Psalms for congregational use. Accompanying à Lasco and others when fleeing persecution by Queen Mary and the Lutherans, he relates the story in his *Narratio*. After a brief stay in Poland he returned to London where he died in 1565.

persecution of the Reformed in France. All this deeply grieved Calvin's heart and demanded much of his time to respond to the flood of letters from those who needed advice and encouragement. Yet the cause of Poland was never shoved aside lightly.

That letters addressed to Sigismund Augustus became noticeably fewer is not surprising. All the exhortations from Switzerland seemed to have little effect.

Here we do well to remember the tragedies of that king which throughout the years marred his life. Although born to high estate, he at an early age seems to have fallen victim to the wiles of his mother, that forbidding creature who, as some have claimed, debauched him.[27] His education was largely under her control. She it was who gave him the title "Augustus," perhaps so that he would think of himself as the equal of Francis I, her cousin who ruled the prosperous kingdom of France, and of Charles V, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, another close relative. Herself growing up at the Milanese court, she acquired an evil reputation for intrigue and the use of poison.

In 1543 the young man married Elizabeth of Hapsburg. Two years latter she died, allegedly of poison administered at the instigation of her mother-in-law. Soon afterward Sigismund fell deeply in love and eloped with Barbara Radziwill, that beautiful sister of one of Lithuania's powerful magnates. At no time did this happy union meet with the approval of the higher Polish nobility who since the early days of Jadwiga cherished the right of having at least something to say about whom their sovereign should marry to provide the kingdom with an heir to the throne. Nor could those in the Polish hierarchy, still unswervingly loyal to Rome, look with favor on this marriage. Four years later the lovely lady died, leaving the king to mourn his devastating loss for the rest of his life. Because her death was so unexpected, again Queen Bona Sforza was suspected by many of having employed her wicked arts.

At first the king, realizing that everyone expected him to marry for a third time, considered the possibility of seeking the hand of Mary Tudor, next in line to the English throne should frail Edward VI pass away. But in 1553, just when the Reformed faith was making rapid

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[27]Zamoyski, *The Polish Way*, 85, adds that at Bari in Italy "appropriately enough, she was herself eventually poisoned." Also on Sigismund and his third wife, "The Seym begged the king to attend to his wife, repulsive or not, and the Primate actually went down on his knees in the chamber to beseech the king either to possess her or cast her off, breaking with Rome if need be." The queen strongly opposed any idea of a divorce as much or more for political than religious reasons.

progress throughout his lands, he married his first wife's sister, Katherine of Hapsburg, widow of the duke of Mantua. She was an epileptic and repelled him from the first. At no time was he willing to have any intimate relations with her.[28]

During the rest of his days Sigismund Augustus was a melancholy figure always dressed in an unrelieved black. After some time Bona Sforza left Poland for her homeland, taking along not only some crown jewels but also many art treasures which had adorned the palace. Hardly could it be expected, then, that this deeply troubled man would press vigorously for church reform. In a brief statement Searle sums up the consequences for the evangelical faith.

> Tolerant and cultured, although often indecisive, he showed an early favor to Protestants which was not maintained, and towards the end of his life he allowed important aspects of the Counter Reformation to be introduced, in particular the Trent decrees and the papal nuncio Commendore.[29]

Equally frustrating for those who pursued the ideal of restoring "pure religion" in the land were the attitudes and actions of the *szlachta* or lower nobility. In large and growing numbers they had embraced the Reformed faith. Many of them had in earlier decades been dispossessed, either legally or illegally, of their lands by some of the Roman bishops. Increasingly they pressed in the diets of the land for their "rights" as spelled out over the years by a series of royal edicts. When reading the writings of Erasmus, Zwingli and also Calvin on the inherent dignity of man, they convinced themselves that they had now found a champion for their cause. This produced a politicizing of the cause of the Reformation which submerged those spiritual and religious ideals with which the Swiss reformers sought to challenge them. Among the *szlachta*, then, there could be found little respect and even less concern for the welfare of the peasantry who labored on their lands. With this the gold of the faith which had so cheered the hearts of the reformers was soon tarnished. This, fully as much as the vacillation of their sovereign, enabled the Reformation within less than half a century to make startling gains without any heart commitment on the part of many belonging to this class.

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[28]Zamoyski, *The Polish Way*, 85.

[29]G. W. Searle, *The Counter Reformation* (Totowa, NJ: Bowman and Littlefield, 1973).

Nor could strong support for the evangelical cause be expected from the higher nobility who with a few bishops realized that the Polish church and state were passing through a severe crisis.

In this company was Count Tarnow, Governor of Krakow and Commander-in-Chief of the Polish armies. Although exhorted from time to time by Calvin, the man despite his influential position did little to advance the cause of the Reformation while still urging the reformer to remember him in personal prayers. In a letter dated 29 December 1555, we listen to Calvin's remarks,

> Some time ago we were led to entertain tolerable hopes of recalling the kingdom of Poland to the pure and genuine faith of Christ; and though by the crooked devices of Satan, manifold obstacles have been interposed to the progress of this good work, yet at length God has opened a door for his Son, by which he invites all reverently to receive him.[30]

To this is added an admonition,

> But you, most excellent sir, who are invested with the highest authority, and on whom the eyes of the king, as well as of others are fixed, it would but ill become to remain quiescent, or to advance with tardy steps . . . .[31]

No less than Christ deserves the count's devotion to this cause, himself having professed an interest in church reform. This requires "an open and unambiguous profession" of the teachings of the gospel,

> . . . lest the grace once offered, if slighted through slothfulness, should at last be withdrawn because it frequently comes to pass that joyful beginnings, which promise a prosperous issue, produce in many men a sluggish disposition, every one should prudently beware not to extinguish the light which has begun to break forth.[32]

In fact, noting with what courage the opposition was contending for their own power and privileges, the count should show greater activity "in vindicating the glory of God than they do in destroying it."

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[30]*Letters of John Calvin*, IV:424.
[31]*Letters of John Calvin*, IV:424.
[32]*Letters of John Calvin*, IV:425.

Meanwhile the king continued to dally, thinking that the pope, too, was interested in church reform. On that score several of the nobility did not share with their sovereign such illusions. This is preserved in the fragment of a letter which à Lasco sent to the reformer,

> The king and the order of the nobles now seem to differ a little respecting the cause of religion . . . . The king wishes to determine nothing without having first consulted the Pope, whom he entreats to send deputies to the first Diet . . . . The nobles demand, that whether the pope send, or do not send his representatives, the true religion be restored.[33]

This prompted Calvin to address another letter to Sigismund a few days earlier than the one sent to Count Tarnow. As always the sovereign is approached with propriety and high respect. But the purpose for which the message was sent is unmistakably clear.

> But now, when the Lord begins to deliver it [i.e., Poland] from that foolishness and infatuation with which the whole world has been struck, it is necessary that all — the highest like the humblest — should awaken from their lethargy. Ought kings then to loiter whom God has set on high for this very purpose that from their elevation they might send forth their light to all people? Besides, of what importance we should deem undefiled religion through which a tribunal is erected among us to Christ — of what importance the legitimate worship of God, in which the symbol and lively image of his presence shines forth — your majesty knows too well to require to be reminded of it by me.[34]

To that exhortation are added the godly examples of David, Hezekiah and Josiah each of whom "had an arduous and severe contest with the contumacy of their people; whereas in our days the greater part of the Polish nobility shows a prompt and cheerful disposition to embrace the faith of Christ."

Correspondence with John à Lasco also took a new turn. That reformer, who suffered often for his loyalty to the gospel, had been exerting himself at the expense of his health for the restoration of ecclesiastical peace in Germany. But the manner in which this had been attempted disturbed Calvin.

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[33]*Letters of John Calvin*, III:245.
[34]*Letters of John Calvin*, III:245-246.

The Zurichers were adamantly opposed to a proposed conference with the German Lutherans. And while Calvin yearned for greater concord among the evangelicals, he quoted with approval from a lengthy letter of Bullinger to himself,

> For here is the dilemma which he lays down: If we deviate ever so little from the pure and simple profession of our doctrine to curry favor with the other party, nothing would be more disgraceful for us, and far more troubles would immediately spring up out of that concession.[35]

Calvin still would try to persuade the Zurichers to attend such a conference if there were opportunity for some degree of moderation to prevail. But he still saw little hope of this because of "the influence of those hot-headed individuals, who with their tumultuous clamors disturb the peace of the world."

— 5 —

When à Lasco in poor health finally returned to his native land, the Reformed churches were in a state of confusion. Although they and the Bohemian Brethren had agreed on a common confession, little unity seemed to prevail. A number of Italian rationalists, all professing to be evangelical, were disturbing the peace of the congregations. With them à Lasco, assisted by a few pastors and elders, had to contend during the few remaining years of his life.

Among these opponents of Reformed orthodoxy several require more than passing mention, also because of their earlier contacts with the Swiss reformers.

All could trace their roots to the humanism and rationalism of the Renaissance. Without support from princes and city magistrates, Italians who in the interests of church reform urged a return to primitive Christianity met together in conventicles to discuss Christian doctrine and conduct. First they were called "Lutheran." They, however, soon showed stronger affinity for the more radical break with Rome which they believed could be found in Zurich. Thus when the Inquisition began its work in Italy, they fled to Switzerland. Here for a short season they sustained cordial relations with Bullinger until their growing deviations from orthodoxy became apparent.

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[35] *Letters of John Calvin*, III:266.

One of the first was Camillo Renato (Paul Ricci) who lived from 1500 to 1572. He advocated a stern predestinarianism, attacked Romish teachings on the sacraments, purgatory and the mediation of the saints, and advocated a form of soul-sleep. Tried for heresy on several counts at Ferrara, he escaped prison with the assistance of duchess Renata. In the Rhaetian Republic, closely allied to the Swiss cantons, he found safety. Here the first Italian Reformed congregations were organized, soon to be rent by a series of devastating schisms. Others like Laelius Socinus (Sozzini) also found a temporary haven in that mountainous area. All conversed with Renato to endorse some while rejecting other of his strange views.

Francis Stancaro (1501-1575) had won acclaim as a Hebrew scholar for his *De modo legendi Hebraice institutio brevissima* published in Venice in 1530. In turn this man had been a monk, then a priest and soon a violent enemy of all that smacked of Romanism. His chief talent, however, was the ability to stir up dissension wherever he went. A Venetian with whom he resided for a time likened him to "a snail which leaves behind it a trail of slime." With Blandrata he posed as a true defender of the gospel only to be exposed for his errors by Calvin.

Because of scholarly competence he was repeatedly given professorships only to be shortly dismissed because of his deviant opinions. By way of Transylvania, enjoying the friendship of the widowed Isabella who was sister to Sigismund Augustus, he went to Poland to be warmly welcomed at court. Bishop Maciejowski, knowing nothing of his errors, appointed him professor of Hebrew at the university of Krakow. When Hosius, then bishop of Chelmno, heard of this and became acquainted with his lectures on the Psalms, Stancaro was summarily dismissed and imprisoned. Eight months later a few Polish nobles, much impressed by his learning and loquacity, smuggled a rope ladder into his cell by which he managed to escape. Banished to ducal Prussia, he taught Hebrew for a while only again to fall afoul of the authorities. With this he turned to Germany debating acrimoniously with Osiander on justification and related themes and later with Musculus on the mediatorship of the Lord Jesus.

By 1559 we find him once more in Poland. Here he settled at Pinczow, at the time an influential center of the Reformed faith. Again his audacity and arrogance knew no bounds. Within weeks he penned a slanderous pamphlet against Melanchthon, always held in high esteem by many Reformed leaders, especially Calvin. He not only accused the German reformer but also the Polish preachers of Sabellianism. Soon the disputations reached fever pitch in the ecclesiastical assemblies,

despite an edict which forbade any religious debate without royal permission. At one point, in desperation, the otherwise so mild and moderating à Lasco hurled a heavy Bible at Stancaro's head hoping somehow to get a little sound doctrine into that thick skull. With dispatch he was then excommunicated. Any pastor agreeing with his views was also to be summarily deposed. Now even those who had been impressed by his ceaseless flood of words abandoned him. Cruciger and Lismanani, serving as superintendents of the Reformed churches, agreed with à Lasco that Stancaro's heterodoxy had to be publicly exposed for the sake of unity and peace. This was done by publishing a confession of faith dealing with the points at issue as well as in a series of letters.

Within months, on 8 January 1560, à Lasco died. One of the few Stancaro supporters bruited about that the reformer's lips had strangely grown together as proof that God himself wanted that evil mouth stopped. To expose the lie his casket was opened. When news of the sad controversy reached Calvin's and Bullinger's ears, they were dismayed, the latter asserting,

> Our Polish brethren are wondrous and burdensome. They ask all kinds of questions which no one can answer. Often it is like trying to find a needle in a haystack.[36]

A much earlier emigré from Italy was George Blandrata (1515-1590). This Piedmontese physician who specialized in female diseases found a comfortable place for himself at the court. Here he soon made friends with Lismanani, father-confessor to queen Bona Sforza, and stayed until she left Poland in haste. After a brief stay in Transylvania he returned to Italy until suspected of heresy by the Inquisition. Seeking asylum in Geneva, he was elected elder of the Italian church and began debating with its pastor Marinengo. Repeatedly he plagued Calvin with abstruse questions on the Trinity, until the reformer's patience wore thin. When the Italians, in order to restore some peace in their congregation, were ordered by the city magistrates to assent to an unambiguous confession on points in dispute, both Alciati and Gribaldi refused and narrowly escaped difficulties. Seeing which way the wind was blowing, Blandrata had earlier taken to his heels. Another pesky fly in the ecclesiastical ointment, Gentile, did not fare so well. Imprisoned for a short period he publicly recanted his heretical opinions only, after reaching Lyons, to attack Calvin in his *Antidota* which he dedicated to

[36]*Letters of John Calvin*, III:266.

the Polish sovereign. Perhaps this helps to an understanding why at times the reformer spoke of these troublesome folk as "dogs returning to their own vomit."

By 1558 he was again in Poland to become a member as one, supposedly a true evangelical, who could serve the Pinczow church well. Taking a sharp stand against Stancaro, he urged all to avoid the language of the ecumenical creeds and simply accept what the Bible said. It was he, however, who by his explanation of Matthew 28:19 began to lead certain leaders in the direction of tri-theism to safeguard, as they thought, our Lord's divinity. For the clergy he wanted no voice in church government because, as he claimed, they "wish to dominate us as once the Pope through his bishops." Because of the endless disputations, he with others of like mind were expelled from Poland to seek freedom for their ever-changing ideas in Transylvania.

At first he joined forces with Francis David, already in trouble with the Hungarian Reformed Church, to advocate a consistent Unitarianism. After falling out with his early colleagues on theological points, he looked for friends among the Jesuits in the royal court. He died in 1590 murdered, as some claimed, by a nephew who as the sole heir coveted his estates.

Mention should also be made of the Sozzini, both the uncle and the nephew, from whom derives the name "Socinians."

Theirs, too, was a greatly troubled existence because of frequent wanderings from one country to another on account of their developing anti-trinitarianism. Each in turn and especially the latter became deeply involved in the Polish disputes.

Also they were influenced by views of prominent Italian humanists of the previous century. Lorenzo Valla, the philologist, had exposed the forgery of the *Donation of Constantine,* long a pillar in Rome's pretensions to supremacy in the affairs of both church and state. He also questioned the authenticity of some ecumenical formulations on the Trinity. Of greater significance for developing Arianizing opinions was Marsilio Ficino (d. 1499) who earlier than Erasmus insisted on translating "Logos" in John 1 as *sermo* rather than *Verbum.* For him Jesus Christ was simply the "voice" of God, not an eternal person one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Like so many of their fellow Italians the Sozzini urged that in the interests of arriving at truth everything might and should be submitted to rigorous questioning.

Laelius Socinus (1525-1562) was born into a family of prominent lawyers at Siena. Early he turned his attention to theological issues. This was whetted by his contacts with Renato in Italian-speaking Switzerland.

At Zurich and Geneva he met, among others, Bullinger, à Lasco, Vermigli, Calvin and Jan Utenhoven. In France he visited Margaret of Navarre in her Nerac residence and in Germany Philip Melanchthon at Wittenberg.

Coming to Poland he stayed with Lismanani at Krakow and acquainted himself with conditions in the emerging Reformed churches. From here he corresponded with Calvin. In his writings it became clear that he, too, endorsed soul-sleep upon death as well as unorthodox views on predestination and baptism. He also raised the question whether a Turk converted to Christianity should have his male children baptized, since these had already been circumcised. Irritated by so many of these questions, Calvin advised him "to lay aside the foolish itch for inquiry" and to stop the meddling in abstract and abstruse issues. Returning to Italy, he failed to recover his father's estate and then retired to Zurich where he died, leaving papers, books and a voluminous correspondence to his nephew who had these published.

Far more involved in Polish affairs, although at a later date than Laelius Socinus, was his nephew Faustus (1541-1604).

Orphaned at an early age he came under the care and tutelage of the uncle, often by way of correspondence. His, too, was a life of wandering. Compelled to leave the homeland in 1559 for personal safety, he resided for a time in Lyons, thereafter in Zurich and at last, by way of Transylvania, in Poland by 1579. At that time those espousing Anti-Trinitarian views, both in the Polish Reformed and among the Lithuanian Brethren, were in hopeless disarray. What little leadership was left after schisms and expulsions continued, at times unabated, their infighting while seeking approval of the gentry (*szlachta*) as well as converts from Byelo-Russian and Ruthenian Orthodoxy where among dissidents from official doctrine some Judaizing tendencies had gained ground. In vain Faustus set himself to unite the parties. Some were pacifists, others not so strongly; some followed Stancaro, others the views of Blandrata; many insisted on rebaptism by immersion, others deemed this quite an indifferent matter. When after the Minor Reformed church became organized as Unitarian or Socinian, Faustus was refused membership, since he would not be publicly rebaptized by immersion.

In 1598, when his views were fully exposed, the Roman hierarchy took steps to silence his voice. They incited a group of students to waylay him. They left him for dead and, seizing his papers, burned these in public. To escape further attempts on his life, he took refuge in the small village of Luclewice where he died.

After the wanderings in France and Germany, this man returned to Italy and outwardly conformed to the Roman church. For twelve years he was in the service of Isabella de Medici in Florence.

By 1578 his *De Jesus Christo servatore* was ready for publication. Here in a systematic way it became clear to what lengths some who espoused the "Radical Reformation" were ready to go in departing from the historic faith. In it, among other matters, are complete restatements of the doctrines of God, man, salvation and the future life. Of genuine evangelicalism rooted in Holy Scripture little if anything was left. Together with his *Christianae religionis brevissima institutio* (1604) it formed the basis for the Raccovian Catechism.

Against this rather detailed background we can appreciate the confusing and confused situation which plagued the Reformed churches in Poland and Lithuania during à Lasco's last years and for some time afterward.

Attention was called to this by various reports coming from Simon Zachius, superintendent of the large Wilno congregation. Anabaptist and Anti-Trinitarian views together with a congeries of other heresies had infiltrated the churches in that part of the land. Under Lismanani's leadership Peter Gonesius was condemned as an Arian by a 1556 synod, despite his credentials from the influential prince Nicholas Radziwill who was hardly aware of the deviations. This man was a Podolian. Studying under Gribaldi at Padua, he acquainted himself with the writings of Servetus. But with these he mixed anabaptist ideas on property, pacifism and baptism inconsonant with the Reformed confessions. Thus with indignation Zachius could write:

> The Evil One swells so powerful his bagpipe — the Anabaptists, the Libertines, the Enthusiasts, the followers of Schwenkfeld, Servetus and Gonesius, the neo-Arians — that he depresses by their deafening yelps the spirit of many pious and virtuous Christians.[37]

Complicating this were the efforts made by the Reformed nobles and gentry, especially prince Radziwill, to win over many of the Orthodox priests, monks and leading members to the evangelical cause. Much of the impact for this was spearheaded by one Simon Budny. Educated at Krakow, he was fluent in Polish and knew Lithuanian well. As a Byelo-Russian he wrote a catechism in that language which raised

[37]Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 648.

questions about the Trinity and baptism. So strong was his influence in that area that Zachius in a mixture of disgust and dismay left his post. When the Brest translation of the Bible became available in 1563, this enabled Budny and his friends to interpret isolated texts in a way congenial to their own views. This trend was greatly strengthened when prince Radziwill closed all Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches on his vast estates, quite legally in accord with the principle of "eius regio, cuius religio" as earlier adopted to suit Polish conditions. Hopefully this would bring serfs as well as clergy and minor nobles into the Protestant fold.

Sorely needed, if the Reformed churches were to preserve any degree of confessional orthodoxy and integrity, were clear-cut decisions on synodical level, also after the rather untimely death of à Lasco.

The two leading defenders of the Reformed faith were Christopher Tretko, whom we met earlier as an educational leader, and Stanislaus Sarnicki, an elder who sought to have his rival, Gregory Paul, exposed as a heretic. Again Calvin was appealed to for advice. At one point those who defended the ecumenical creeds with their formulation of orthodox doctrine against those who usually emphasized only a few isolated texts for their opinions, some pastors came dangerously close to embracing tri-theism. Aghast at such a perversion of the Christian faith Calvin said of Gregory Paul, a follower of Blandrata, that "to avoid the absurdity of Stancaro (he) falls into the more fetid error of tri-theism." By this time also Alciati and Gentile, after their difficulties in Geneva, arrived in Poland to muddy the waters still more. And Zachius' reports on the Lithuanian churches sounded an alarm which could not go unheeded.

At a series of synodical meetings the Reformed leaders realized that within their fellowship they could no longer tolerate those who, while arguing vehemently for their soundness in faith, championed doctrines and practices at variance with the creed of the churches. By 1563 the strict Calvinists were able to check much of the influence of the dissidents. In this they were heartened when by the edict of Parczow a sizeable number of Anti-Trinitarians were expelled from Poland, not only because of their teachings but especially because the sovereign saw peace in his realm seriously undermined. Soon Alciati, Gentile, Neri and Ochino once again fled, Blandrata having left for Transylvania a year earlier. When prince Radziwill died in 1565, he was succeeded as head of his large clan by an ardently Romanist son. Thereupon the radicals in his domain also took flight. Early that spring the final breach between the Major and the Minor Reformed churches occurred, the

latter soon to be recognized in Poland as Socinian and in Hungary, chiefly among the Szekely, as Unitarian.

With the ecclesiastical air purified, the Reformed churches enjoyed a measure of peace and grew in influence. Eagerly, also because of pressures from the side of Rome and its defenders, they sought closer cooperation among the three leading evangelical groups in the land: the Lutherans, those Brethren who had not defected to anabaptism or Anti-Trinitarianism and themselves. This resulted in the *Consensus of Sendomir* which, in the words of Philip Schaff,

> acknowledges the orthodoxy and Christian character of the three parties, and pledges them to cultivate peace and charity, and to avoid strife and dissension which greatly hinder the spread of the gospel. They should seal this compact by exchange of pulpits and of delegates to general synods, and by frequent sacramental intercommunion; each denomination retaining its peculiarities in worship and discipline which are consistent with the unity of the Church.[38]

The document was signed by all the clergy and nobles who attended.

Some weeks later the agreement was publicly ratified at Poznan together with a few supplementary articles which forbade using the pulpits for polemics. With tears, so we are told, the people who had suffered grievously because of the dissensions gathered in great numbers outside the hall where the delegates were in session. When informed of the happy outcome, they joined in singing the "Te Deum." From that day the *Consensus* was regularly reaffirmed by synods of all three churches until 1595.

By the time Sigismund Augustus died in 1572 Calvinists were able to wield considerable influence in the government on several levels. Knowing that a new king would have to be elected, they with fellow evangelicals agreed that no diet would be convened for this purpose, until their religious liberties were fully assured. In January 1573 the senate together with the chamber of deputies gathered at Warsaw. Here the *Pax dissidentium*, as it was called, received a place in the confederation. Its significance for the next century of Polish history may not be overlooked. On the issue of freedom in religious matters, the following

[38]Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3rd ed., 4 vol. (New York-London: Harper and Brothers, 1884), I:588.

was approved by nearly all lay and clerical delegates. The appropriate passage read,

> Since there is in our Republic no little disagreement on the subject of religion, in order to prevent any such hurtful strife from beginning among our people on this account as we plainly see in other realms, we mutually promise for ourselves and our successors forever, under the bond of our oath, faith, honor and conscience, that we who differ with regard to religion will keep the peace with one another, and will not for a different faith or a change of churches shed blood nor punish one another by confiscation of property, infamy, imprisonment or banishment, and will not in any way assist any magistrate or officer in such an act.[39]

Any future king would then have to swear on oath his readiness to observe also this article at the time of his coronation. In this way the Polish leadership, powerful as they had become, hoped to preserve peace and promote greater unity throughout the land.

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As encouraging as was the spread of evangelical Christianity throughout the two lands by 1570, its decline together with that of the once-flourishing Polish kingdom was even more startling. Increasingly Lutheranism, found only among the German-speaking element, was reduced to powerlessness. The Reformed faith in less than a century was virtually exterminated. Meanwhile the glory of that nation, despite Roman Catholic triumph as a church, declined until by its dismemberment (1773-1795) it was wiped off the map.

How did this come about? What causes occasioned the eclipse of Protestantism specifically in its Reformed or Calvinistic branch? In most references to Polish evangelicalism in the English language we read that its adherents simply "agreed to disagree among themselves." And the truth of this statement cannot be controverted.

Much more, however, was involved than internal dissensions. Intertwined with religious disagreements were the far-reaching social and political disturbances which added fuel to a smoldering fire.

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[39]Glenn D. Kittler, *The Papal Princes* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1960), 223-224.

Within the space of fifteen years three political crises arose to rob a growing Calvinistic party of its strength.

The first occurred in 1572-1573.

Sigismund II Augustus died in 1572 with no heir to ascend the throne. According to the law of the land, therefore, the magnates and *szlachta* — presided over by Gniezno's bishop as primate of the Roman church — searched for a suitable sovereign.

Several candidates were proposed by the sharply divided parties.

The Romanists, led by the bishops, urged the election of Prince Ernst of the house of Hapsburg. This would join Poland's future intimately with that of Austria and the Holy Roman Empire. The age-old dread of German expansionist policies stirred most of the members of the assembly to reject him. By far the most popular candidate was Jan Firlej, an ardent Calvinist who by his leadership as field marshal had won the hearts of most of the Poles. Successfully he had led the armies against possible invaders from the east, the south and the west. The third candidate, Henry of Anjou, was prince of the French blood and known to have participated in the infamous St. Bartholomew's massacre of the Huguenots only a few months earlier. Hardly would it seem possible that a foreigner from so far away and an ardent Roman Catholic at that could win the crown of this kingdom which prided itself on its policy of religious toleration. Yet this is what happened.

Nor is the reason for his success obscure.

The Calvinistic party, which for fifteen years had successfully elected Reformed men as field marshals and leaders in the Polish diet, now was bitterly divided. Only a year earlier, when a new paladin of Krakow had to be elected, Peter Zborowski, also a Calvinist, had lost out to Firlej. His bitter disappointment at losing so influential a post stirred him to gather a following determined at all costs to prevent Firlej from becoming Poland's next king. Thus when all the votes were counted, Henry of Anjou was offered the crown.

In those strange circumstances, however, the Poles sought to safeguard the internal peace of the kingdom as best they could. Henry had to pledge that he would respect both the religious liberties of the people and the rights of the nobles within the national assembly. At no time would he be allowed to reign in absolutistic fashion as did the French sovereigns in those days.

Amid great splendor the coronation took place in 1573 in Krakow's imposing cathedral. But the young prince, secretly pressured by the Romanist party, was not minded to take the required oath. During the ceremony, administered by the primate of the church, he hesitated to

repeat this part of the pledge. Firlej then took the crown in his own hands. In the presence of the whole assembly and in a voice which rang loud and clear throughout the church, he declared, "If you will not swear, you shall not reign!" Whereupon the vacillating candidate acquiesced. So passed the first crisis for Poland and its liberties.

The second arose shortly thereafter.

Within a year Henry's brother died. Now the French throne was vacant leaving Henry the legitimate heir-apparent. Secretly and with undue haste this lawfully elected and crowned king forsook the land which he had pledged to serve. Undoubtedly he deemed it wiser for himself and his descendants to rule over the country of his forefathers than to cling to a throne too much subjected to the pressures of the several opposing Polish parties.

Not long did the Polish leaders mourn their loss. After some time the choice fell on Stephen Bathory, prince of Transylvania. At that time it was the only part of the once vast Hungarian kingdom which still enjoyed a measure of independence. Also there a large measure of religious toleration was allowed by law. Elected in 1575 he proved to be one of Poland's better and nobler rulers. But his reign was too brief to be permanently effective in recovering for that nation the prestige which it had once enjoyed among the European governments.

During his years, however, the influence of the Reformed faith began to decline. The king, himself a Roman Catholic, had promised to safeguard the religious freedoms of all his subjects. In the main he honored the oath which he had sworn. Greater tolerance was now accorded the many Orthodox who lived in the eastern and southern parts of the realm. He curtailed the influx of Scottish merchants and peddlers, thus affording greater opportunities to the Jews.

But his reign also marked the growing influence of the Counter-Reformation, led largely by the Jesuits. Many among the higher and lesser nobility together with their families were reconciled to the Roman church. With a discretion to be admired these "shock troops" of the pope penetrated the land which for some two decades had seemed ripe for Calvinistic victory. In 1581 no less than fifty Protestant leaders were won over; in 1585 the number rose to seventy, the following year by another fifty. Included were all the sons of Radziwill the Black, the family of Radziwill the Red remaining largely Reformed in their allegiance for several generations. Also a nephew of Jan Laski, Poland's greatest reformer, returned to the arms of "mother church." Even more startling was the conversion of the son of paladin Firlej. The Jesuits were doing their work well. With low-key but persuasive salesmanship

they urged that only by rallying around the Roman Catholic banner could Poland's greatness be safeguarded. All this was achieved during Bathory's reign without any open persecution, a situation comparing very favorably by way of contrast with a similar situation in France, the Netherlands and several parts of Germany.

But suddenly Stephen Bathory died in the midst of his years.

Once again the Polish throne was vacant. Although elective rather than hereditary, the diet soon chose the Swedish crown prince, Sigismund III Vasa, son of Johan III and Katerina Jagiello a sister of Sigismund II Augustus.

During his long reign from 1586 to 1632, darkness for the evangelical faith began inexorably to deepen.

Although his father had temporized with Rome and its agents, the son actively and ardently championed the Roman Catholic religion. Soon his became the dream of ruling in the absolutistic fashion of the kings and emperors of western Europe. Even his staunchest defenders cannot deny that he "was scantily gifted, obstinate, and a devoted servant of the Catholic Church" even to the point of bigotry. And in this he was abetted by those Jesuits whom he appointed to high positions at court, notably Peter Skarga.

Equally dark were the prospects for Poland as a nation. Soon the new king threw his country into a series of unnecessary and fruitless wars. He antagonized large segments of the Polish, Lithuanian and Ruthenian population by his intolerance of their religious differences. Again and again the nobility saw their power restricted and their ancient rights trampled under the royal heel. Riots between Roman Catholics and evangelicals also broke out, resulting in a few deaths and the burning of Protestant homes and churches in Krakow and Wilno.

When his father died in 1592, Sigismund III left Poland for Uppsala with Malaspina, the papal nuncio, to assume the Swedish throne. Fondly but foolishly he hoped to restore that nation to the Roman fold. Although he took the required oath of defending the Lutheran faith and church at his Swedish coronation, he informed the nuncio that he felt justified to disregard it. But worst of all, in an eagerness to insure the return of Poland in its entirety to Rome he plotted to surrender that crown to an Austrian archduke while by ascending the Swedish throne he intended to achieve the same result in the Lutheran land of his birth.

These secret negotiations were exposed by the statesman Zamoyski. Through his efforts the disgraceful plot culminated in the king's being summoned to account before a special "Court of Inquisition." No Polish sovereign had ever been so humiliated and that by his own

intrigues which bordered on treason against the people whose rights and privileges he had solemnly pledged to protect.

Throughout Sigismund's reign the Catholic party under Jesuit leadership began to work much more openly. Much of the initial gentleness was laid aside. Funeral processions of Protestants from church to cemetery were at times harassed. Whenever, with or without any show of right, their schools could be shut down and expropriated, this was done with dispatch. Nor were penalties inflicted on those arsonists who set fire to Protestant houses of worship. The days of the "golden age" under Sigismund II Augustus were never to return.

Indeed evangelicals under Calvinist leadership attempted to defend those liberties guaranteed by law. In 1606 the Polish gentry revolted under the leadership of Nicholas Zebrzydowski against the king. But within a year this uprising was suppressed and not without reprisals. The light in which Poland for a season had basked was fast vanishing. Not only was the gospel losing its influence among many; many of the traditional freedoms were slowly but surely eroding. The weakness of Protestantism in that land had been exposed. Only once more would another, a last, opportunity present itself.

— 7 —

Why did Poland, which at first seemed such promising soil for the Reformation, return so wholeheartedly to the Roman church thereupon to decline socially, economically and politically until its dismemberment in 1795?

Several reasons have already been mentioned in some detail.

Religious enmity among the ethically divided population always loomed on the horizon. The self-seeking of large numbers of both nobility and *szlachta*, even when embracing the evangelical faith, stood in the way of influencing the common folk for good. Much has been said about the vacillation of Sigismund II Augustus whose life was shadowed by repeated personal tragedies. Nor did we overlook dissensions on Christian doctrines and life style which for some years threatened to tear the Reformed church apart. What the evangelical movement lacked was a reformer of the stature of Luther or Calvin, or even of Melanchthon, Bullinger and Bucer. For this John à Lasco returned too late and died too soon. Thus the glorious springtime of the first years which promised an even richer summer of ripening fruits soon faded into blustery autumn to produce a long winter of discontent and distress for the people of this unhappy land.

The decisive blow against winning Poland for the Reformed faith, however, was the success of the Counter Reformation. That it greatly reshaped much of western Europe and especially Poland, not only religiously but also culturally and politically, is a fact too obvious to be overlooked.

On the reasons for its unexpected rise and its specific aims we find little unanimity among historians, especially in bygone years. Protestants have usually claimed that it was simply a reaction to the vigor of evangelical faith which finally aroused Rome from its indifference. Roman Catholics, on the other hand, have argued that its seeds lay deep within the medieval church and only needed time to sprout. With neither explanation need we quarrel, since the one without the other tells a story which would be less than truthful.

During the late middle ages calls for radical reformation in both doctrine and morals had been sounded throughout the church. We need only mention the Waldensians, Wycliffe with some of his friends as well as John Hus whose followers long after his dastardly execution raised voices against corruptions within the church. Even Italy had, beside its humanists, a Savonarola. Apart from stifling such dissent, church authorities continued their merry way on the road which could ultimately cause its ruin.

Kittler supplies a glimpse into which unspiritual depths the papacy with its cardinalate had sunk shortly before Luther appeared so surprisingly on the scene. Its nadir was reached with the papal election of Giovanni de Medici. Already at thirteen he had received the red hat. At thirty-eight he was chosen to sit on Peter's throne.

> A true Medici and therefore a flamboyant humanist, Leo X turned the Vatican into a playhouse. The place was overrun with artists of all kinds, and plays and ballets were performed nightly. Leo also liked to hunt, and he was out in the fields after game more than he was on his throne. He was anxious for progress on St. Peter's . . . expanding the design in beauty and majesty far beyond anything even Julius had in mind . . . . All this cost money, much more than the Vatican's normal income provided. Fresh funds had to be found somewhere. Leo had made some bishoprics available — for a price. Then he remembered a fund-raising campaign Julius had started for St. Peter's. To encourage

> contributions Julius had granted an indulgence to all those who donated. . . . It was Leo who opened the floodgates. . . .[40]

Discontent spread like weeds in lush summer, especially in Germany where its bishops were not a whit better morally than in Rome. Finally the common folk, together with a few clergy, felt they could bear no more, about which Kittler adds,

> Strangely, churchmen in high places seemed ignorant of the public sentiment. Only a few voices were raised in warning of what might happen if the fundraisers hit the people too hard.[41]

But the warning went unheeded. Only Lutheran "heresy" and English "schism" shocked the Roman leadership into realizing that without radical reform that once grand medieval structure might well crumble to leave little trace of its glory.

Unexpectedly the first stirrings were felt in the church with the election of Alexander Farnese as Paul III in 1534. Because of family ties he had been appointed cardinal in 1503 and lived a sexually promiscuous life until his ordination to the priesthood in 1519. Now the weight of office changed his life for good. Those cardinals who managed his election also seemed interested in reform. From Paul they expected great things to stem the tide towards deterioration. Immediately, but not without strong opposition from the self-indulgent, he began to sweep clean what early reformers had not hesitated to call "those Augean stables reeking with corruption and filth."

Sixty-nine years old when elected, he met throughout his years as pope both studied indifference and open hostility. Not a few expressed the hope that this old man would not live long. Others viewed his efforts as a joke to be ridiculed in plays produced to titillate the superficial people of the city. But with a surprising tenacity, much to be admired in a man of his advanced age, he persisted in his work of rescuing a moribund church. In the face of the repeated setbacks, Paul III managed to summon the first session of the Council of Trent. He died long before its final sessions, when Roman Catholic dogma and practice were firmly fixed for the next four centuries. Without its work Poland, too, would have been lost to that church.

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[40]Kittler, *The Papal Princes*, 224.
[41]Kittler, *The Papal Princes*, 225.

In *The Renaissance and the Reformation*, Henry S. Lucas mentions several factors which contributed to the amazing success of the Counter Reformation in many lands:

> (1) the persistence of traditional piety among the lower classes; (2) zeal of the Spanish rulers and other princely families; (3) ardor of cultivated Italians, the finest product of the Renaissance; (4) rise of new religious orders; (5) reforming efforts of the papacy which were stimulated by the rise of Protestantism and which began with the accession of Paul III in 1534; and (6) the Council of Trent (1545-1563).[42]

As these strands were more firmly woven together, the success of this movement assured the recovery of much territory that had been lost, Nowhere was this achieved more speedily and effectively than in that land which straddled East and West.

Without the lives and labors of a trio of determined men this could not have been accomplished.

The first to serve the cause in Poland, but only indirectly, was Peter Canisius (1521-1597).

Born into a staunchly Catholic family in Nijmegen, the Netherlands, he like Calvin was destined by his father for law. Even a marriage which promised wealth was arranged for him. But while studying at Louvain, he took a personal vow of chastity. Returning to Cologne, then in danger of becoming Lutheran, he began his studies in theology. Two years later, in 1541, he met Alvaro Alfonso, a Spanish Jesuit who introduced him to one of Loyola's earliest disciples, Pierre Favre. This occasioned a decisive change in the young student's life. So impressed was he with Favre that he wrote,

> Never have I seen nor heard such a learned and profound theologian nor a man of such shining and exalted virtue . . . . I can hardly describe how the Spiritual Exercises transformed my soul and senses, enlightened my mind with new rays of heavenly grace . . . . I feel changed into a new man.[43]

Six months later he joined the Jesuit order.

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[42]Henry S. Lucas, *The Renaissance and the Reformation* (New York-London: Harper and Brothers, 1934), 622.

[43]John Patrick Donnelly, "Peter Canisius" in *Shapers of Religious Traditions in Germany, Switzerland and Poland, 1560-1600*, edited by Jill Raitt (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1981), 142.

All the rest of his years he devoted himself unstintingly to the cause of Rome. Central and southern Germany together with Austria became his assigned field of labor. Here Protestantism had made rapid advances. But as teacher, preacher, writer, provincial of his order and counsellor to Catholic princes Canisius reaped a rich and rewarding harvest. Shortly after the Diet of Piotrkow (1558) he visited Poland as papal nuncio to confer with Sigismund Augustus. What he saw in Krakow and elsewhere shocked him. Bishops and clergy were largely indifferent to the people's needs, avaricious and antagonistic to church reform. Eight years later he returned at the time when the first Jesuit college was opened.

Education in the faith, by way of catechisms for the children and academies for young people, he saw as the entering wedge for the renewal of the Roman church. These were to be undergirded by disciplined seminaries for those aspiring to the priesthood. By such means the population at large could be strengthened to resist the temptations offered by evangelicals. While in Poland on two occasions, he found a loyal friend in Stanislaus Hosius. Between the two a fellowship of some thirty years developed. Together they determined that Poland would be won for a reinvigorated and restored Catholicism.

Of signal importance were those catechisms. With these, and he penned several, he sought first to reach the clergy, whose knowledge of matters biblical and ecclesiastical was little short of abysmal. With others he reached the educated and finally the children. Never, however, was Canisius able to state matters simply and succinctly. One of these works ran to more than 750 pages! Others, using the wealth of material which he had so patiently accumulated, adapted this both in form and content to serve the cause effectively.

His catechetical writings provide a clue to the Jesuit approach to re-educating the people. They are free from polemical rhetoric; at the same time they are distinctively Roman and consistently anti-evangelical. For him all sound doctrine consisted of two parts: "wisdom" and "justice." The first dealt with "faith" (the Apostles' Creed), "hope" (Lord's Prayer together with Hail Mary) and "love" (Decalogue and church precepts). The second, while briefer, stressed a piety which consisted of good works to the almost complete obliteration of God's grace in Christ.

Canisius, while recognizing individual Protestants as men of sincerity and virtue, deemed their faith a deadly plague which could only destroy the soul. But he warned Rome against using coercion with the common folk who like sheep had been too unknowingly led astray by hirelings.

His ambition was to drive out all Protestant preachers and replace them with kind and faithful priests. Viewing with alarm the flood of Protestant literature which flowed from Europe's printing presses, he urged the authorities whose ear he caught to regulate and restrict such by any means at their command. In the schools which he established and could supervise all such "bad" books were to be summarily banned. Full freedom of the press was for this ardent Jesuit the source of most of the church's woes. Placing such and similar approved church teachings in every hand was far more needful and salutary than Holy Scripture.

The man who laid firm foundations for the Counter Reformation throughout Poland-Lithuania was Stanislaus Hosius (1504-1579). Appropriately has he been recognized by his countrymen as "the savior of Catholicism."

Although born in Krakow, he grew up in Wilno. There he learned to know the Lithuanian people and situation well. By private tutors he was educated in Polish, Latin and German. In spite of stern objections by his father, he joined the Dominican Order at a youthful age. But love of learning brought him into the Erasmian circle at Krakow's university for a time. Although unordained, he received several benefices from churchmen. These enabled him to continue his education also in Italy. In 1538 he was appointed royal secretary to Sigismund I, giving him access to the king's ear together with additional ecclesiastical benefices. Not until fifty years of age did Hosius receive priestly ordination. With this he resigned all secular duties and took a stand against Lutheranism which for a time had swept across the land.

Always an ardent nationalist, he insisted on church reform without breaking ties with the papacy. Soon his gifts together with his determination to regain Poland for the Roman faith became widely recognized. At an early date he was commissioned by an ecclesiastical conclave to respond to the challenges thrown out by evangelicals with their catechisms and confessions. Within four days he wrote the *Confessio Catholicae fidei Christiana*, by far his most influential work. During his lifetime it appeared in no less than thirty editions together with translations into several languages.

So widely known did he become that pope Paul IV summoned him to Rome and Vienna in 1558 to assist in preparing for the prolongation of the Council of Trent. Here he met Canisius. With him in company also of Nuncio Commendone he returned to Poland. After the final sessions of that effective council for the Roman faith, it was he who persuaded Sigismund Augustus to introduce the Tridentine decrees and open his country to the Jesuits. Against Peter Paul Vergerio, who aimed

at Lutheranizing the entire commonwealth, he wrote his *De expresso Dei verbo libellus* (1558). That same year he also attacked the Erasmian views on social and political issues urged by his former friend Modrzewski which, if endorsed, would diminish and in time destroy papal ambitions. Nor was he ready to make any concessions in the church to clerical marriage, communion under both kinds and liturgy in the vernacular, all of which were practiced by the Orthodox and now proposed for the Polish church by many of the clergy and nobility. Although often conciliatory in his speech, even appealing to all dissidents from Rome including Socinians "to board the barque of Peter" and so avoid any disruptions of a religiously divided society as was happening in France, on official Roman doctrine he was adamant.

So strong was Hosius' antipathy to every form of dissent, that he opposed the Bathory's election to the throne, because while ruling Transylvania he as a Roman Catholic had surreptitiously upheld the legal rights which Protestants enjoyed there. While remaining a Dominican, he long admired the Jesuits for their learning, their zeal and especially their fourth vow of unswerving loyalty to the pope. In many respects he followed much the same pattern as they. While rightly charged with more than a tinge of religious fanaticism, he in his labors showed deep concern for those wandering and wayward sheep who were feeding in pastures which, according to him, produced only noxious weeds.

That he played his role well cannot be questioned. Whether this augured well for Poland's future as people and nation is quite another matter.

We pause for some comment on the Jesuits, that "Society of Jesus" whose influence loomed so large in restoring Poland's throne, leadership and people to the papacy. Immeasurably was their activity strengthened by the introduction and application of the decrees of Trent. In this company, especially in its earlier years, were men of great compassion: a piety which, although misguided, put many a Protestant leader to shame; they were willing to suffer anything for the cause which they served. Here is no attempt at rehabilitating their reputation. For that the record which they left behind is far too black. Responsible only to the pope and under strict leadership, they carried out their aims with subtlety and in secrecy. Frequently their plots against evangelicals were not uncovered until too late. As confessors of queens and mistresses they gained the ears of kings to change the course of kingdoms. Soon the dictum that "the end justifies the means" seemed an integral part of Jesuit policy. Small wonder, then, that at last they were expelled from

every country and were even stopped in their tracks for a season by the pope. Not only did Protestants fear them; many Catholics turned from them in disgust. Upon several occasions that order was rent by internal dissensions. Members of other prominent religious orders feared them. But apart from their presence and persistence Poland would hardly have returned to the Roman Catholic faith. This company stamped a new kind of personal devotional piety on the soul of that people. Highly intelligent, they raised social, educational and even moral levels throughout several reclaimed lands.

Of the three leaders Peter Skarga was the last.

Living from 1536 to 1618, he more than any other became "the very embodiment and implementation of the Counter Reformation."[44] Few excelled him in his day as preacher and polemicist, hagiographer and, be it belatedly, a defender of the urban poor and sadly oppressed peasantry.

With this last he turned against the *szlachta* into whose ranks he had been born. They numbered no less than thirty percent of the population in his native province. Always that class thought of itself as a race set apart with inalienable rights. They challenged crowns, bishops and the higher nobility when they thought their privileges were in jeopardy. But for the needs of those who toiled on their lands few had any ear and still less heart. When Skarga, as he grew older and hopefully somewhat wiser and more compassionate, saw through their pretensions, he served church and society as social critic in a voice which refused to be silenced. His sermons, published repeatedly in large quantity, are reminiscent of the Old Testament prophets. Not without good reason these, when divested of strident Romish tone, compare

[44]George Huntston Williams, "Peter Skarga" in *Shapers of Religious Traditions*, 180. Few, even among the ardent Jesuits, excelled Skarga in his defense of papal absolutism which rooted also for him in the papal bull "Unam Sanctum" issued by pope Innocent IV in 1302 "For by the witness of truth the power spiritual must institute the power temporal and must judge if it be good Therefore if the temporal power errs, it shall be judged by the power spiritual This authority, though it be given to a man and exercised by a man, is not human but divine, granted by God's word to Peter, confirmed to him and his successors in whom Christ called the rock In consequence of which we declare, assert, define and pronounce that it is entirely necessary for salvation that all human creation be subject to the Pope of Rome," quoted by Searle, *The Counter Reformation*, 12 Not only was he adroit in using ambiguities to gain his end for the greater glory of Rome and the papacy, he was also guilty of palpable misrepresentations, asserting that Lutherans and Calvinists believed that a king was to be obeyed only "when in a state of grace" and accusing the Puritans in England of denying the immortality of the soul!

favorably with similar messages preached by Calvinist contemporaries in western Europe. This coupled with the massive volumes on saints and martyrs endeared him to those who heard and read his words. Even today and far more in earlier centuries few excel the Poles in their veneration of the saints and especially the blessed Virgin.

But the road which he traversed was long and hard.

After a thorough education, he entered the priesthood in 1574 at Lwow with its Orthodox and Armenian as well as Roman Catholic bishoprics. Soon his sermons won praise as well as his faithful visitation of the sick, the dying and the imprisoned. Not long after ordination he also joined the Jesuits. Throughout his long life he remained a doctrinaire Romanist. For him dissidents of every kind were "schismatics" and therefore "heretics." Toleration of such was an offense to God, a threat to the soul's welfare of all who listened to their glaring falsehoods and, most of all, a deep, dark stain on the nation's legal code which cried for a complete change. At the same time he could speak in conciliatory tones, when seeking to win back some to the church. One of his first successes as a Jesuit was reconciling a growing number of the Radziwill family, then Calvinists, to Rome. Even his sympathetic biographer, while commending Skarga's "charity and reasonableness," mentions also his "fierceness." Often he dealt less than fairly with his opponents, arguing that the Reformed rejected any "real presence" in the Lord's Supper.

For the *Pax dissidentium,* which afforded breathing space to evangelicals, he showed strong distaste and distress. Nor was his position clear when addressed on the question whether "faith is to be kept with a heretic." As long as people could be won by persuasion, he approved. Where this did not succeed, his views on coercion were at best ambiguous. Few dared to trust him as far as political as well as religious freedoms were concerned. Absolute rule in the state was as essential for the stability of the nation as it was for the strength of the church.

This impression seems quite inescapable from writings which appeared in the early years of Sigsismund III Vasa. The intrigues of that fanatical Roman Catholic ruler have been mentioned earlier. Skarga gave his account and evaluation of the tragic Krakow incident in *Warning to the Evangelicals and jointly to all Non-Catholics.* This was "published anonymously because there was widespread criticism of the Jesuits at this moment, even among Catholics," as his biographer informs us.

That event occurred on Ascension Day, 1591. A large company of Catholics engaged in a procession to celebrate Christ's victory over the devil. Led by students, they decided to march also in front of the house where Calvinists were accustomed to worship. This served to stir the smoldering embers of antipathy which for years had lain somewhat dormant. Watching along the street was a crowd of loiterers. Calvinists, warned of what might happen, also arrived and not without arms. Two were killed and a large number were wounded. Who struck the first blow no one rightly knew. But the Roman Catholics immediately blamed the Calvinists and took the law into their own hands. They burned that residence to the ground and then demolished a nearby chapel of the Polish Brethren. When this was done with impunity, the sizeable Calvinist church in Wilno was destroyed by fire a few weeks later. All the blame, according to Skarga, rested squarely on the evangelicals. After calling for Christian charity, he did not hesitate to warn,

> My very dear brethren, ye evangelical brethren, have supplied Catholics with a clear motivation to destroy the chapels of Krakow — a motivation grave and invincible for the more susceptible among them.[45]

His respect for edicts on religious toleration sank to even lower level in matters dealing with men in the armed forces. Sigismund III Vasa had unleashed some foolish and ill-fated wars on his borders. Here Roman Catholics and dissenters served jointly to defend the fatherland. But how were the "faithful" to treat those who were schismatics and heretics? His counsel, which appeared in print, was that all united against the common foe should be tolerated. After all, they needed each other in the heat of battle. But implicit, at least in a translation which soon appeared, was advice that one need not keep faith when the worst is over.

Much the same ambiguity appears in Skarga's involvement in the prolonged efforts to bring the Orthodox into a firm union with Rome. Hardly is this surprising in his case because of the preponderance of these "schismatics" in large areas of the Polish realm as well as the attraction which the Reformed faith had for many of them. On this issue he wrote no less than three times over a period of decades under the title *On the Unity of the Church of God under the One Pastor* (the

[45]Searle, *The Counter Reformation*, 147.

pontiff, of course). At first he, like all Jesuits, of that day, was adamant against any concessions in the direction of married clergy, communion under both kinds and liturgy in the vernacular. But seeing how greatly their conversion would enhance the church he served, his position became less confrontational. Even here, however, he seemed to take back with one hand what he offered with the other.

By the time the Union was officially proclaimed at Rome in December 1595, after many synods on both sides, Skarga insisted only that the Orthodox endorse the *filioque* in the Creed and recognize Rome's bishop as supreme Head of the church. All other differences between these two branches of Christendom could well be tolerated. Large numbers of Ruthenians, Byelo-Russians and Ukrainians living on the commonwealth's soil entered the Roman Catholic church to solidify its prestige and power. The Reformed, in so far as they were aware of what was at stake, could only view this development with growing dismay. No longer could they hope that future kings would uphold the *Pax dissidentium.* Even the sovereign who had sworn the oath now felt quite free when this suited his purposes to disregard what he had pledged.

The Jesuits had done their work well. Inspired by Skarga's determination, they exerted a growing influence throughout the kingdom and concentrated on works of charity among the lower classes in the cities and among the peasantry. The Jesuits specialized in educating sons of the middle and upper classes to take their place in society, church and state. Beginning with one school in 1566, they established more than twenty before the close of the century. There some ten thousand youths were well trained. So effective was this effort that a papal nuncio could write back to Rome,

> A short time ago it might have been feared that heresy would entirely supersede Catholicism in Poland. Now Catholicism is bearing heresy to its grave . . . .[46]

[46]How serious were these early oppression of the evangelicals is noted in some detail by H. Daniel Rops, *The Church in the Seventeenth Century*, translated by J.J Buckingham (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1963). Commenting on Sigismund III Vasa, he writes, that he "completed the transformation of this country into a citadel of the Roman faith in the heart of Lutheran and Orthodox territories . . . . The Convention of Warsaw, set up in 1573, to lay the foundations of a compromise between the rival religions, soon became a dead letter. The Protestant communities had, in fact, lost the right of public worship long before they were officially deprived of it in 1632. The reformed writers were reduced to silence, while Catholic pamphlets multiplied rapidly . . . " (160).

Hopeful prospects for recovering any of the earlier power which they had enjoyed as Reformed were dim indeed.

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Nothing seems to be more painful than watching an individual, once robust, gasping for what may well be the last breath. With the Counter Reformation resolutely and relentlessly increasing in influence this describes somewhat the story of Protestantism in eighteenth century Poland. Especially the Calvinists, far more numerous than Lutherans, Anabaptists and those Anti-Trinitarians who remained, experienced growing pressures which spelled their decline almost to the point of extermination. Schools established by them were being closed. At times church buildings in which they had worshiped were being dispossessed.

But despite suppression and oppression of several sorts, the Reformed churches continued their existence in spite of their diminishing numbers.

In 1645 a ray of light shone to drive away the deepening gloom.

That year a gathering of representatives from the several evangelical bodies, including Calvinists, was convened in the hope of easing the growing tensions. That assembly, including also Roman Catholic delegates, we know as the *Colloquy of Thorn.* Without rehearsing what took place there the story of the Reformation in Poland would be incomplete.

It met at a very strange time, towards the close of the fearful Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) which devastated much of central Europe. Geographical boundaries had become fluid as armies advanced and retreated. Everything — political, social and economic as well as religious — was in a state of flux. It was the last of those religious conflicts which had pitted Roman Catholics against Protestants for a hundred years. Even the barbarities of World War II (indescribable as they indeed are) were no worse than the inhuman and inhumane cruelties perpetrated upon a largely helpless populace for three decades. And Poland, quite removed from the chief theaters of violence, did not remain unscathed.

Gustavus Adolphus, great champion of the Protestant cause, had the interests of fellow religionists in Poland also at heart. They looked to him for help in retaining what freedoms were still theirs under a Polish king who had foolishly plunged the nation in a series of border wars. Meanwhile the Reformed fought side by side with Roman Catholics for the fatherland. But when Gustavus Adolphus met an untimely death on the battlefield near Lutzen, their hopes were dashed.

Surprisingly the next sovereign, Wladislaus IV, also a Catholic, summoned the Colloquy.

Born and trained as a Pole by his mother of the Jagellion dynasty, he soon became immensely popular. Not without good cause has he been called "the wisest of all the Polish Vasas." By a series of constitutional reforms, sorely needed, he sought to restore confidence in the crown and so unite his people so deeply divided both religiously and ecclesiastically.

Three years before his death, then, he summoned leaders of the several confessions for this "fraterna collatio" or "colloquium caritativum," as he entitled it.

Representatives of the three major groups arrived. There were twenty-eight Romanists, including eight Jesuits. They were determined to defeat every attempt at peace and concessions to the Protestants. The Reformed sent twenty-four delegates, headed by two electoral chaplains and a Moravian bishop, the renowned Comenius. At first the Lutherans had only fifteen representatives, increased within a few days to twenty-eight. But this group was sharply divided between the "mild" party sympathetic to the ideals of Melanchthon and the "strictly high-church orthodox" led by Calovius of Gdansk and Hulsemann of Wittenberg. The former were eager for a measure of cooperation with the Calvinists; the latter detested them as little better than Arians, Socinians and even Turks.

The sessions were presided over by Prince George Ossolinski, the king's chancellor. No less than fifty thousand guilders were spent by the city, which had suffered so much from the war, to host the conference. The king ordered that each party was first to receive ample opportunity to present a definitive statement of the doctrines which it professed. Already at the second assembly that of the Roman Catholics was read in full and duly noted in the official records. On that same day the Reformed testimony was read. Immediately some of the Catholic party objected vehemently to its title, "Declaration of the *catholic* doctrine of the Reformed churches." That term, they insisted, was their sole prerogative. So persistent were they that this statement of faith was excised from the acts. When the Lutheran confession was ready for public reading, the opportunity to do so was denied its representatives.

Without tarrying the Protestants sent a deputation to the king. He received them with much kindness and courtesy. But the Romanists did not sit still. They demanded that before peace could be pledged the evangelicals were to compromise their position to the imperiling of any influence in the land. Meanwhile the Lutherans fell out among

themselves. In this way the possibility of their acknowledging the Reformed as also evangelical was summarily cut off.

When the conference adjourned on November 21, all realized that no progress had been made towards healing the discords threatening the foundations of the Polish state. New fuel had now been added to the fires by controversy within the Lutheran camp.

Of this assembly Calixtus, a Lutheran of broad evangelical sympathies, said, "The Colloquy was no colloquy at all; certainly no *colloquium* of caritativum but of *irritativum*." Perhaps its character was best summed up in a Latin *distich.*

Quid synodus — nodus;
Patrum chorus integer? — aeger;
Coventus? — ventus;
Gloria — stramen. Amen.[47]

Out of it, however did come the *Declaration of Thorn.* It is one of the most balanced and ecumenical of the Reformed confessions. Over against the Lutherans and especially the Romanists the Calvinists desired to demonstrate the *catholic* character of their faith. In full harmony with the ecumenical creeds which all parties claimed to honor and leaning heavily on Augustine, they hoped to diffuse suspicions raised against their teaching of the holy gospel. Soon it was signed by a sizeable number of clergymen and nobles representing the churches of Poland, Lithuania and neighboring Brandenburg. Few, however, were listening attentively to any of the other party.

The Reformed were now so hopelessly outnumbered that any recognition of their influence in the land was no longer likely. Rome especially with its large accessions from the Orthodox Church had the upper hand. After the death of Wladislaus IV the Counter Reformation could move ahead with little of the suspicion and resistance which it had earlier encountered. Throughout the countryside crosses, shrines and wayside chapels sprang up to witness that Poland was overwhelmingly returning to the Roman church.[48]

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[47]Rather freely translated the "distich" reads: "What that synod? — a knotty thing. The voice of the fathers unified? — a sickly affair. The gathering together? — (only) wind. Its glory? — straw. Amen."

[48]How completely the religious temper of the Poles was changed during the Counter Reformation by those "soldiers of the Cross" is rehearsed in detail by Zamoyski who informs us that in 1556 the town hall of Karakow was rebuilt. In its bedrock was placed a copy of Erasmus' New Testament. But when repaired in 1611 this was removed to be

With this social and political changes also appeared. Only rarely after 1650 did Poland make contributions to the stability of western Christendom.[49]

For a hundred years Ottoman Turks had ravaged the Christian countries of southeastern Europe. In spite of repeated appeals for a crusade against them by the popes, they advanced irresistibly. Now they were standing at the gates of Vienna. In 1683, when the crisis was at its highest, Polish forces under the brilliant leadership of Jan Sobieski led an attack which routed the invaders. With this victory Austria and the Holy Roman Empire could feel at greater ease.

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replaced by a Roman Catholic version of the New Testament together with a relic of St. Stanislaus Kostka, the first Polish Jesuit to be canonized. He concludes, "The symbols could hardly have been more apt. One vision of life was replaced by another, the spirit of enquiry by one of piety, humanist principle by post-Trindentine conformism" (*The Polish Way,* 144). Add to this the suppression of Protestant publications while by 1600 already no less than 344 separate books had been printed under Jesuit auspices, often on saints and martyrs; note also the spectacular increase in the number of monasteries from 220 in 1573 to 565 by 1648.

[49]So intimate was the growing decline in Poland's social and political conditions with the change in religious affiliation under Counter Reformation influence that the one cannot be rightly assessed without the other. In *Europe in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966), David Maland claims,

> Poland in the seventeenth century was the sick man of Europe . . . a kingdom dominated by nobles. They alone had the wealth . . . . They also had the political power. No matter how cunningly the kings played off one group against the other or employed the art of intimidation, flattery and bribery, rulers always needed the obstinate approval of those whose resistance could not be overcome by the votes of the majority" (362).

Meanwhile the masses sank into ever greater subjection and poverty, also at the hands of the Roman hierarchy. H. Daniel Rops notes in his work, *The Church in the Seventeeth Century*, "And also the clergy were powerful. They owned 800,000 serfs, and one archbishop was made the proprietor of sixteen towns" (308). To which accounts W. F. Reddaway in *Cambridge History of Poland* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1951) adds, "The instinct for rational unity which was grotesquely frustrated by the Polish State seemed to seek appeasement in the Polish church . . . . the Polish masses now believed . . . that fellow-countrymen outside the national church were untrustworthy and even wicked, and that connivance at dissent imperilled their own salvation" (195). O. Halecki in *A History of Poland* (New York: Roy Publishers, 1961) also dates the quite irreversible decline of the nation to the death of Wladislaw IV Vasa, whose goals of restoring a measure of religious accommodation within the country and of defusing Cossack belligerence by enlisting them in a crusade against the Muslims were frustrated by the diet. Thus, "the most penetrating historical intuition has found only one significant word: 'deluge' with which to characterize the series of catastrophes which, from 1648 onwards, shook the foundations of the Polish State" (153).

After this Poland slipped slowly but surely into a political ineptitude which opened the way a century later for Russia, Prussia and Austria to dismember that unhappy hand. In *The Polish Way* Adam Zomoyski sketches the decline.

> The ruling classes and their institutions were inward-looking, preferring to remain in a state of diplomatic hibernation, oblivious to and aloof from what was being planned at Versailles, Schonbrunn or Whitehall. In her moment of crisis, Poland could count on the sympathy of every state in Europe and on the support of none . . . . The civilized world was horrified. Here was surreptitious power-politics at its worst. Three crowned heads aspiring to the name of enlightened monarchs had haggled greedily over the spoils before committing an act of cannibalism which cut across every concept of legality, morality and honor held at the time.[50]

Nor did the situation improve when Napoleon created the kingdom of Poland out of what Russia had swallowed up. With his downfall conditions only worsened for the people, especially for the Jews who long had possessed special privileges under the old constitutional monarchy. The Austrian sector, inhabited largely by Ruthenians, enjoyed more local self-government but sank into a morass of economic poverty. The Prussians aimed ruthlessly at Germanizing everyone under their control. Efforts to restore any semblance of independence were immediately crushed. Hundreds of thousands emigrated during the last half of the nineteenth century to escape vicious efforts to stifle all that smacked of being Polish. In these years Chopin composed his musical masterpieces to fill Polish hearts with longing for a better day. Meanwhile, the Jews experienced some of the worst pogroms in European history at the hands of the Cossack soldiery.

Independence came in 1919. But the country was torn again with internal dissensions, suppressed at the cost of life and liberty by a military government. What happened in the decades following 1939, first under Nazi barbarity and then under Soviet brutality, is too painful even to rehearse. With the demise of Communism the future for the Polish nation, now more homogeneous than ever before, remains at best problematic.

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[50]Zamoyski, *The Polish Way*, 4.

With this historians have at times been less than kind in their assessment of the Poles. Not too surprisingly the way was led by Germans soon to be followed slavishly by some English and Americans. Their views, glibly accepted, seem less than fair even when critical of German and Russian aggression together with French and English failure to rise in Poland's defense. Zamoyski, to quote him again, summarizes the prevailing opinion.

> To the average inhabitant of western Europe (and led us add, the Americans) the history of Poland is a yawning chasm whose edges are obscured by an overhand of accepted commonplaces — that the Poles are a romantic people, good at fighting, riding, drinking and dancing, pathologically incapable of organization or stable self-government, condemned by geography and their own ineptitude to be the victim of history.[51]

To redress the score he set himself to write his account of their history.

For Zamoyski that nation is other than the hapless victim of its location, open as it is to invaders from every side. Nor, since other nations have fared worse, is it a victim of its historical vicissitudes. The Poles, he affirms did undergo a psychological, a profoundly spiritual change largely because of the Counter Reformation. Even the secular historian will agree. Among these people in distinction from earlier centuries we now discover an inwardness, a devotion springing from the heart which through appeal to the saints and especially the Virgin sought escape from its sorrows and sufferings, a flight from realities too painful to face with full awareness what was taking place.

Recognizing this factor we ask whether Poland possibly missed a grand opportunity to retain and then increase its place under the sun when it repudiated the evangelical faith also in Calvinistic form.

A comparison by way of contrast with the Netherlands may not be completely out of place. That little land — far smaller in size and population than Poland — also lay exposed to larger and equally greedy neighbors. Its independence was hard-won while that of Poland seemed to come quite easily. It, too, opened its arms wide to refugees from many lands: first the Flemish, then English nonconformists and Jews from Portugal, thereafter Huguenots fleeing for their lives. Nearly all, without losing their identities, were assimilated to make that nation

[51]Zamoyski, *The Polish Way*, 4.

even stronger. When against its will the Dutch became embroiled in the welter of European power-politics, they successfully withstood English assaults, French invasions and German tyranny. Was strength and stubbornness of character etched upon the soul of that nation solely by the unending struggle against the sea? Or did the Reformed faith, never wholeheartedly embraced by more than some fifteen or twenty percent of the population, make a contribution which should not be discounted?

Although Poland's history since 1650 has been deeply marred by tragedy, we marvel that among the common folk so much that is genuinely Polish in custom and culture could survive the traumas of the passing years. But would, perhaps, that nation have escaped some of its long festering wounds if crown and nobility had ceased their temporizing, embraced the Reformed faith with its life- and world-view, and then persuaded dwellers in cities and countryside to follow their leadership? The question continues to haunt any student of history who takes the religious factor in the life of a nation seriously. The answer is far from clear-cut, more like a riddle within a riddle ever to remain insoluble.

But if Poland's story has any lessons to teach us, evangelical Protestantism once so strong throughout much of Europe and North America would do well to take heed. Its foes are far more insidious than foreign legions: individualism, relativism and materialism in times of economic prosperity. Against such a faith without deep and ever-deepening roots cannot long endure.

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The time has come to draw up somewhat of a balance sheet. Did the Reformed religion, swift in its phenomenal rise but soon to be eclipsed, make any significant contributions to Poland?

For those who admit no intelligible cause-and-effect relationship in the lives of men and nations the question itself is ludicrous. Facts, even if somewhat sorted out, are for such persons only fortuitous; they are meaningless except for whatever meaning anyone may care to give them.

For the Christian, taking his stance on Holy Scripture, such an approach to history is a denial of the very faith which he claims to profess. As a believer he confesses the self-existent and sovereign God who stamps every event with its own ineluctable meaning and purpose without in any way obliterating the moral and spiritual responsibility of every individual involved. But facts, especially those of the past, are not only "stubborn things"; often they are elusive, since not every thought, word and deed of those involved is on record. And though the one true

God had adequately revealed himself in his dealings with mankind, he does "move in a mysterious way his wonders to perform." Still there are lessons to be learned, however tentatively, from history's pages. The Lord God requires this of those who take him seriously so that they may rehearse his mighty deeds to their children and their children's children.

The story of Poland's encounter with the Reformed faith, therefore, has something significant to say to us today.

Why, then, did those who agreed with its ideas and ideals see success slip so soon out of their grasp?

The attacks from without have been recounted in detail. At first subtle, they became more severe as the decades passed. But Calvinism was weakened much more effectively from within. Had faith taken deeper root in the hearts and lives of those who claimed to embrace it, its cause might not have suffered such overwhelming defeat.

First, from the outset evangelicals were plagued with a dearth of preachers. On this need Calvin had written at length to the king in 1556. He urged as a temporary expedient the appointment of four *doctors* (professors of theology, as we know them) to train those aspiring to the gospel ministry. Hardly could Poland's people be won by a foreign-born ministry. But in spite of the schools established by Tretko and Wolanus few Poles seemed interested in such service. Nor was Calvin's suggestion ever followed by the king. Although at the zenith of their strength Reformed congregations numbered more than five hundred throughout Poland and Lithuania, faithful pastors were at a premium. This contrasted sharply with the growing number of monks, priests and young men studying for the priesthood who served the Roman cause.

Not a few of those who did serve as Reformed pastors gave poor account of themselves. They catered to the whims of the landlords who appointed and paid them. Seldom did these show interest in the peasantry. Much of the evidence for their love of ease and at times low moral standards derives, indeed, from the opposition. But ample evidence, allowing for overstatements, abounds that in many congregations not all was well. Even those who sprang from peasant stock insisted on fine clothing, changed their surnames to indicate higher rank and spent their days in card-playing, drinking and attending parties. Meanwhile a new and dedicated priesthood under Jesuit tutelage began to supply the spiritual needs in Poland's cities, villages and chapels on landed estates.

Jealousy within the ranks of the Reformed nobility added immeasurably to the frustrations which those who loved the Reformed faith were facing. When crises arose this gentry sold out for the sake of personal and social gain. They might read with a nod of approval what the Swiss reformers wrote on remedies for familial, social and political ills; far too few seemed eager to put these into practice. Possibly they should not be censured without some understanding. In few lands during the sixteenth century did those who tilled the soil, who spun the cloth, who served their lords and ladies in castle, kitchen and stable count for much. Privileges together with the right to a better life were reserved for the upper classes. Changes in the almost indescribably wretched condition of the masses had to wait another century or two. Switzerland, Great Britain and the Netherlands — lands favorable for the Reformed faith — already had an emerging middle class. Under reformatory preaching this was greatly enlarged and enhanced; something which did not occur in Poland where trade had been left largely in Jewish hands.

Here could be found little aggressive and abiding devotion to the new evangelical faith. Education and educational opportunities for many were not lacking. But the cultural achievements of the Renaissance were far more to the liking of nobility and gentry than the principles and piety championed by the Reformation. In princely houses, like the Radziwills and others, too many lived lighthearted, fickle and unstable lives. Some were charmed and soon carried along with each new wind which blew their way. Of the gentry, and this included Calvinists as well as Catholics and Orthodox, Sir George Carew, after spending time in Poland on his way to serve England's queen at the Swedish court, stated his impressions. He found them insufferably proud, spendthrifts who failed to pay their debts but quick to take offense at any affront whether imaginary or real. In so far as such attitudes characterized some who regarded themselves as Reformed, these did little to help the cause.

This lack of strong religious and ecclesiastical loyalties is mentioned by several writers who have immersed themselves in Poland's story.

One example may illustrate this. In the princely Zborowski family we meet Christopher who as a professed Calvinist married a Greek Orthodox lady; Peter, for a time voivode of Krakow, who protected the heretic Stancaro but affiliated himself with the Reformed church; Jan of Gniezno, a Lutheran of the strictest kind; Andreas, who remained loyal to the Roman faith. These four brothers had a sister Elizabeth. And she was a convinced Unitarian! For good measure, we remind ourselves of what happened in the Radziwill, Laski and Firlej families. As Lutheran princes, chameleon-like, could become Roman Catholic

overnight to win the Polish throne for themselves, so Reformed families saw their sons and daughters defect from the evangelical faith whenever this might please them.

Internal disarray, coupled with defections year after year, undermined any hope that Calvinism in any viable ecclesiastical form could ever flourish on Polish soil. Yet in the face of all the difficulties and dangers which hounded their history, a few Reformed churches managed to survive the centuries. The latest available statistics — dating from about 1940 and none too precise — lists twenty or thirty thousand Calvinists in Poland with about five thousand in Lithuania. With the territorial and ethnic changes since World War II, followed by long years of Soviet oppression, only a remnant may still remain.

One question, however, asks for an answer.

Did the evangelical faith in its Calvinistic form make any lasting impression on Poland?

Some evidence exists that this can be answered with at least a qualified affirmative. The ideals championed by the Swiss reformers and seemingly so eagerly embraced by a large number of Poles did not fail to leave their mark. We suggest that this was done in three ways.

Calvinism is and always has been, as those acquainted with it in more than a superficial way will admit, a distinctly ecclesiastical movement. In sharp contrast to Rome, it insists that only by the pure preaching of the gospel is there hope for individuals and nations. Hence the need for a well-trained and, hopefully, pastorally sensitive ministry. Without discounting pressures for reform of the priesthood by Roman Catholic bishops at the time, the rapid spread and strength of the Reformed movement in Poland during the sixteenth century undoubtedly added a much-needed impetus.

Even more, the Reformed or Calvinistic insistence on a God-given right to national identity, independence and self-determination did not leave the Polish people untouched. Much of this is also attributable to early Slavic aspirations as well as to Renaissance humanism. But without some religious inspiration these are seldom attained, much less maintained, with any degree of success.

We need not be surprised, then, that among the Poles long after the Reformation and first in the United States this has happened. Under the leadership of Francis Hodur immigrant priests and parishioners joined to constitute the Polish National Catholic Church in 1897. *The Handbook of Denominations* (1985 ed.) supplies the information.

> Roman Catholic in background, they objected that in the United States they had no bishops and few priests who were Polish, that they could not teach Polish in their parish schools, and that under the ruling of the Roman Catholic Council of Baltimore in 1884, they had no right to establish parishes of their own. All this, they felt, gave the Roman hierarchy and priesthood an unwarranted religious, political, financial, and social power over the parishioners and permitted 'an unlawful encroachment upon their right to private ownership and paved the way for the political and social exploitation of the Polish people.' [Some scholars feel that the cause of dissension has its roots farther back, in the demand during the Reformation for a Polish National Church.][52]

Nor is this a dwindling group; numbering 162 parishes in five dioceses with 272,082 members. It helped give birth a few years after organization to the Lithuanian National Church. It also began work in the homeland in 1919, resulting in more than fifty parishes by 1939 with a theological seminary in Krakow.

Its break with Rome was complete, even though retaining many of its ceremonies and customs. Yet the differences are not to be minimized. Besides Scripture and tradition, it acknowledges only the first four ecumenical councils of the undivided church as binding. From the beginning it opened participation to the laity in parish and diocesan affairs as well as a place on that church's supreme council. While maintaining seven sacraments, it recognizes as the seventh "hearing the Word of God proclaimed." In no sense is it doctrinally akin to the Reformed churches. Yet some similarities in emphasis are immediately apparent. This body confesses "the Holy Spirit as the ruler of the world and the source of grace" as well as "the necessity for spiritual unity of all Christians." Rather than private confession to a priest, a general confession of sins is deemed sufficient for adults. In its liturgy, too, the Polish language gradually supplemented the Latin.

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[52]*Handbook of Denominations in the United States*, revised by Frank S. Mead, Samuel S. Hill (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985). To the above should be added the "Mariavite Old Catholic Church" in Poland since 1906 and in the U.S. since 1930 which also broke with the papacy. This church is characterized by its aesthetic-mystical devotion to the Virgin Mary. It denies papal infallibility, the immaculate conception and the assumption of the Virgin as necessary doctrines for salvation. On this continent it numbers 158 parishes with 358,560 adherents (180).

We are on much surer and safer ground when speaking about a lasting influence of the Calvinistic reformation on Polish language and literature.

Again, impetus to literary development came first from those Italian scholars attracted by queen Bona Sforza to the university of Krakow and to the court. But these men with their Polish disciples continued to write in Latin. Among Protestants the vernacular soon became the vehicle for their talent. As Luther helped to shape the German and Calvin the French language, so several of the Reformed made the use of Polish respectable for literary expression. The author of the article on "Poland" in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, who can hardly be accused of harboring Protestant sympathies, notes that "gradual effacement of Reformed creeds removed a powerfully creative intellectual and literary factor from Poland's life."[53] This statement is corroborated by events which he records concerning that land in subsequent years.

Of great importance, also for the stabilization of the Polish language, was the translation of Holy Scripture into that tongue in 1563. This was the first one translated by a committee of scholars. After most copies were destroyed, it was replaced by the Danzig edition as a cooperative venture by Lutheran and Reformed men.

The year 1543 remains a landmark for Polish literature. About that time Nicolaus Rej of Naglowice embraced the Reformed faith and began a rich and remarkable series of poetical works, including a translation of the Psalms. Some of his more mature writings also deserve mention. In *The Image of an Honest Man's Life* we find his religious and moral ideals set forth in a manner which appealed to life in the countryside cherished by the *szlachta*. Somewhat the same is found in greater detail and depth in his *The Mirror*.

Even more popular were the writings of Jan Kochanowski who returned to his homeland after years in Paris. In *The Satyr* he dealt with the serious political problems of that day. With these he, as secretary to the king, was altogether too well acquainted. His *St. John's Eve* or *Sobotka* is replete with delightful pictures drawn from nature, a far cry from Roman preoccupation with the soul and the saints. One of the masterpieces of Polish lyrical poetry is his versification of the Psalms, rivalled only by *Laments* composed in memory of his daughter Ursula who died at an early age.

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[53]*Encyclopedia Britannica* (1941 edition), 18:162.

With the rise of Polish poetry we can find a corresponding use of the vernacular in prose. Soon the printing presses were kept busy, stimulated by the religious and political controversies of the sixteenth century. In this way writers could appeal to a larger readership. To this Calvinists made their contributions, publishing not only catechisms and devotional materials but also essays and books which served the schools they established. Much of this, however, has been lost beyond recall under Counter Reformational influence. Already early publications in the national language by Roman Catholics outnumbered Protestant writings in number; later, with the various products of Skarga's fertile pen their quality increased in effectiveness and elegance according to their subject matter.

What Calvinism did contribute to Poland during those years was a growing sense of nationalism and national unity. This they claimed to draw from Holy Scripture. To them it taught clearly not only God as sovereign, Creator who made of one blood all peoples who live on earth, but also the rights and responsibilities of national self-determination. Here, then, the Reformed view of differences among tribes and tongues, peoples and nations takes sharp issue with the universalistic ideals upheld by the papacy. Those ideas constituted a strong and defensible reaction against that quarreling between church and state which marred so much of medieval history. Of course, not every Protestant ruler and court escaped the temptation to self-aggrandizement when wars broke out. But the fact is incontrovertible that the dictators of the twentieth century were without exception nominally Roman Catholic or Orthodox and trained in such schools.

But when all is said and done, the preserver of Polish national identity was not the Reformed but the Roman Catholic church.

For that its people did pay a heavy price.

As the skies grew ever darker in that land for evangelicals of several persuasions, so too did the strength and stability of the nation. But even in the darkest days after dismemberment and later under Soviet strangulation, a sense of Polish identity endured. Credit for this belongs largely to those bishops and priests who often at severe cost to personal ease and safety kept the flame of Polishness burning brightly in many a heart and home.

Whether Poland, had Calvinism won the day under Sigismund II Augustus, would have survived its many crises cannot be convincingly answered. What remains clear, however, is the undeniable fact that large numbers who heard the pure gospel never allowed its life-giving and life-sustaining power to take deep root in their hearts and lives. Such

faith, no matter how quickly it sprouts or how luxuriantly it flourishes for a season, soon withers only at last to die — a lesson which all who profess to be Reformed do well to remember.