

Olga Lukács / Alpár Csaba Nagy / István Péter (eds.)

# From Movement to Inheritance

Hidden Assets from the Treasury  
of Hungarian Reformation



Academic Studies

59



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## Foreword

Neither Hungarian nor universal history and culture are conceivable without the values offered by the Reformation and its churches.

Over the past five hundred years, the spirit of the Reformation has been not only a church-forming factor, but also a force of nation-building and salvation. Our common past, our history, creates a strong bond among Hungarians.

Upon thinking of the five hundred years, we all felt that it was our duty to commemorate the event, which for many of us is more than history, more than an event, a date, a process – it is part of the divine plan, which we, ourselves are part and beneficiaries of.

It is true that the historic moment of the Reformation, when Luther proposed his 95 theses for disputation can be linked to a certain date, but we all know that the Reformation itself is not related only to this historic moment. The representatives of the pre-Reformation have already sought to bring back some of the early church elements, principles, actions in which the church of Jesus Christ would be recognizable. The ideal, the original, the real Church, in which the world of God should be focused upon and all the alien elements of godly thoughts conceived by humans are less likely to appear against the Gospel of Jesus. The constant need to avoid any unnecessary frippery in the relationship between God and man, for it to become up to date, fresh, personal, continuous and a mediator of the divine grace, essentially depicts the Reformation as a much longer period than what we celebrate linked to certain dates.

Luther's act was in fact not the beginning, but the moment when the large faith in people's souls, the irreplaceable need for the search of God shoot out with an elemental force and has been flowing ever since. As in the case of volcanoes, this means earlier "magma activity", "earthquakes" and "the emergence of new break lines" in the depths.

The wording of the newly emerged spiritual need flowed through the nailed doors of the churches and continued as scorching lava throughout Europe, then in the New World and is still flowing on each continent. Initially, it redefined not only the boundaries of the Church, but also some of the political boundaries. At

the same time, however, it opened a new horizon for cognition, knowledge, social relationships, social responsibility, popular education, music, but occasionally for social form as well. It cut out a number of elements of religious life, which, according to the new religious view, did not help in establishing a God-man relationship and strengthening it in faith, but overshadowed it, made it difficult, and encumbered it with superfluous human factors.

One's personal responsibility in living one's life, the quality of that life, the managing of one's relationships, the strengthening of the community norm and the gaining of one's own salvation were completely re-evaluated. The grace received in advance, the continuity of divine providence did not only bring about duties, like the duty of the need for a committed life and responsibility for one's neighbours, but also the security of a grateful and happy life, and the faith-bound security of salvation. There is no more loss, only victory gained in God, in Christ, for which a life "lost" in faith is not too high of a price: to give up the temporary, the imperfect in return for the everlasting, the perfect. Thus, ordinary people have become heroes – the heroes of faith – who considered what they have given to others to be more important than their own profits, for which sacrificing their own life was not too much to do.

Nevertheless, the Reformation has become a force of salvation and spiritual harbour in a period of Hungarian history when the very being of homeland, country, nation and of the individual was endangered. Folk education and nurturing, mother-tongue pastoral care through faith, the use of one's mother tongue in communication with God also made people aware that the boundaries between "great nations" and "small nations" are not heavenly works either, for God speaks and understands all languages in which one speaks to Him. Thus, culture and language have become a divine value for which one can and must fight, as they are the most important and the purest means of interpreting God's Word.

Five hundred years are a long time from the viewpoint of a retrospect. Adding the "years of silent slumber" it should involve even more events. It would be hard to count, to make an inventory of the Reformation's inheritance. It would not be timely either, as one makes a legacy inventory after someone's death.

The Reformation is also a challenge of our times, which warns us that this is not a time of relaxation, of enjoying the abundant wealth, or of frivolous wasting, even if the accumulated legacy is immensely rich. The freshness of the Word obliges us today: to find its topicality in this altered, accelerated world with highly altered values and standards, to see and recognize one's new neighbour, to bear with faith, dignity and humility the immense riches that the grace of Christ and the daily care of the Father provide. These riches mean more than the nationwide product of the welfare society, they are more durable than all human creations, and more necessary than all comforts and luxuries: they can be obtained nowhere else, but in the pursuit of Christ.

The speakers of the conference enjoyed an abundance of treasures. They were trying to move within a frame of interpretation which now, after centuries, offers a glimpse at some true values that have accompanied our past as reformed values, divine gifts. As evidenced by the title and the purpose of the conference, along facts and ideas we have tried to walk through a process, by which we could show at least one pathway of this wide historical stretch. Thus, we can perhaps show, how the mustard seed grows into a large tree, on which the birds will rest. How the spark of the Word of God grows into a tremendous tree, on which the next generations can rest, where they can be refreshed, strengthened in spirit, when the world becomes inhuman, and as one gets weary easily, the Word may be concealed by the cloud of human ambition, grandeur, vanity, pridefulness and egotism, which may tear one away from the only Lord of one's life. All of this happened on the basis of thoughts and ideas of specific fields of science, sometimes on the borderlines of the fields of science, where, next to Theology, social, historical, legal, literary, political and musical approaches were also involved in presenting those altering events, processes, creations, documents, which have been essential and decisive stages of the spreading and the establishment of the Reformation.

Cluj-Napoca was, became and remained an important centre of the Reformation, as significant events took place in its surroundings as well. The Faculty of Reformed Theology of the Babeş-Bolyai University and the Protestant Theological Institute always function in an environment, where the challenges of multi-confessionalism and multiethnicity are also present beside interdisciplinarity. However, these can only be regarded as opportunities in this part of the world and of the country, where the rough road to the development of religious tolerance was already successfully walked on, with lots of lessons learned, thanks to the Reformation itself.

Therefore, we can say that the speakers of the conference were not searching for ways of looking into the past, but for ways of pointing towards the future: ways of leaving an inheritance, and of building a bridge between the past and the future, by the crossing of which we can pass on our riches of culture and faith to the next generation. The goal is to enrich the created world by glorifying God with human gratitude for the immense gifts received within the Reformation.

The editors



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Zsolt Czinke

## The First Hungarian Translator of the Second Helvetic Confession

### Summary

Péter Szenci Csene was the classmate of Albert Szenczi Molnár. Later Péter Szenci Csene became the bishop of the Helvetic denomination in the Cisdanubian territories.

He was the first Hungarian translator of the Second Helvetic Confession. The confession consists of 30 parts, followed by the translations of the Nicene, the Constantinopolitan, the Ephesian, the Chalcedonian and Athanasian Creeds. The printing of the Hungarian version of the confession commenced in Oppenheim on 20 May 1606.

*Keywords:* The Second Helvetic Confession, Péter Szenci Csene, Hungarian translation, confession, the translator.

The Second Helvetic Confession – along with the Heidelberg Catechism – is a confession upheld by every congregation of the Hungarian Reformed Church, as the precise and succinct expression of our Reformed faith based on the Scripture. The Confession was written by Heinrich Bullinger in 1562, and was published 450 years ago, in 1566, as the joint confession of Swiss Protestant cities and cantons. One year later it was adopted by the Synod of Debrecen, and some 400 years ago, in 1616, the first Hungarian edition was published. To celebrate the anniversary, a new translation of the Second Helvetic Confession is underway, making it the fourth of its kind, and yet it is still worth briefly reviewing the circumstances of how the Confession came about, what Hungarian Reformed aspects it had and what role it played in Hungarian church history, with special attention to its first Hungarian-language translator.

## 1. Who was Péter Szenci Csene?

Péter Csene was born in Szenc in 1570, and as it was customary at that time, he later adopted the name of his birthplace as his surname, thus he is known in church history as Péter Szenci (or sometimes Szenczi) Csene.<sup>1</sup> He began his studies in the town of his birth, and he was the schoolmate, and perhaps even the classmate of Albert Szenczi Molnár. In a letter written on 20 March 1609, he himself refers to the fact that Albert Szenczi Molnár was his study partner whom he shared a desk with.<sup>2</sup> As far as Albert Szenczi Molnár's recollection goes, he mentions Péter Csene twice in his journals. First on 14 April 1609, when he took István Laskai from Frankfurt to Marburg, a person whom Péter Csene had spoken favourably about, according to Szenczi Molnár.<sup>3</sup> And second pertinent journal entry is from 10 September 1614, in which the author mentions that when he visited Komárom, the Holy Communion was administered by Péter Csene and Máté Szana.<sup>4</sup>

From 1603 he was a pastor in Jóka, and from 1606 in Somorja, where he must have been very well-liked. Lukács Szíjjártó, in a letter to Albert Szenczi Molnár, wrote that "Péter Csene is still bringing joy to the faithful of Somorja with the word of life, and by the grace of God shall continue to do so until the day of St. George." Csene stayed in Somorja until 24 April 1611, when he replaced the Rev. Miklós Dobronoki in Érsekújvár, while his predecessor went on to serve in Komárom<sup>5</sup> Péter Csene was already serving in Érsekújvár when he undertook the translation of the Second Helvetic Confession.

It was under the direction of Miklós Dobronoki (who served as a pastor in Komját, Érsekújvár and Komárom) that in 1592 a new Reformed church district was formed – originally named after the town of Samarja, but also known as Csallóköz-Mátyusföld Reformed Church District, later renamed after Komárom, and even later called Upper-Danubian – in the southern part of the Archbishopric of Esztergom, originally with five presbyteries (of Drégelypalánk, Barshon, Komját, Komárom and Samarja). Between 1615 and 1622, Péter Szenci Csene, who was the pastor of Érsekújvár at the time, was the second bishop of this new church district. Prior to that, between 1608 and 1611, while serving as the pastor of Somorja, he had also been Dean of the Reformed Presbytery of Samarja.<sup>6</sup> Neither the place, nor the time of his election is known, but a document signed in Komját on 8 September 1615, in which

1 Thury Etele (1998), *A Dunántúli Református Egyházkerület története: vol .1. 1523–1674*. Bratislava: Kalligram, 1998. 407.

2 Dési Lajos (1898), *Szenczi Molnár Albert naplója, levelezése és irományai*. Budapest, 1898. 305.

3 Szenczi Molnár Albert, *Napló és más írások*. Bucharest: Kriterion, 1984. 128.

4 Szenczi Molnár Albert 144.

5 Thury Etele 407–408.

6 Zoványi Jenő (1977), *Magyarországi protestáns egyháztörténeti lexikon*. Budapest: A Magyarországi Református Egyház Zsinati Irodájának Sajtóosztálya, 1977. 519–520.

“the preachers following the Augsburg and Helvetic religion found agreement regarding the Lord’s Supper,” Péter Szenci Csene is referred to as the “bishop of the Helvetic denomination in the Cisdanubian territories”.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. The bishop

Therefore church history writers consider this year to be the beginning of his service as bishop. His ordination for bishop, however, took place on 12 September 1616 in Komjáti within the framework of the Synod, in the presence of Transdanubian Bishop István Pathay and Pál Angyal, Rector of Pápa’s educational institution, among others. István Melotai, Bishop of the Transtibiscan Reformed Church District, in a letter written on 27 November 1617 about the persecution of Protestants, calls Péter Szenci Csene an “orthodox superintendent,” asking for the cooperation of his counterpart in Upper-Hungary and the pastors of the region in addressing the grievances, especially because Szenci Csene’s church district also suffered plenty of grievances.<sup>8</sup> Previously, Péter Szenci Csene received a similar request from the synod delegate who represented twelve counties and attended the Synod of Tasnád held on 19 November 1617, as well as from the Deans of the Presbyteries of Abauj-Torna, Zemplén, Borsod-Gömör and Ungvár: they asked him to represent them with their list of grievances in the National Assembly of Bratislava. He readily agreed to the request, but due to the Catholic counter-pressure, he only succeeded in 1619, after several earlier attempts. He maintained close relations with the bishops of the other church districts. Among others, he developed a brotherly relationship with Transdanubian Bishop István Pathay – they mutually attended each other’s synods. According to church district minutes, the Transdanubian Synod of Pápa held on 17–18 January 1618, was called at that unusual time upon the request of Péter Szenci Csene.<sup>9</sup> Apart from his duties as bishop, Szenci Csene was also active in the field of literature, translating theological and philosophical works from Latin to Hungarian, although these have not survived – there are only references to them. The details of his personal life are not known, all we know about his family is the fact that he had four children: three sons and a daughter. When Szenci Csene died, Imre Pécsely Király’s eulogy mentioned three sons: Gergely, István and János.<sup>10</sup> Péter Szenci Csene died on 14 June 1622, and 82 pastors were present at his funeral.<sup>11</sup>

7 Thury Etele 405–407.

8 Kúr Géza (1993), *A Komáromi Református Egyházmegye*. Bratislava: Kalligram, 1993. 98.

9 Thury Etele 412.

10 Thury Etele 425.

11 Thury Etele 426.

### 3. The translator and the translation

If we ask the question why it was Péter Szenci Csene and not someone else who created the first Hungarian translation of the Second Helvetic Confession, one of the explanations may have something to do with the fact that Szenci Csene, as pastor of Somorja and later of Érsekújvár, worked in the vicinity of Nagyszombat and Esztergom, which were important Catholic centres, and he was motivated by the counter-Reformation movement initiated by Péter Pázmány. He might have seen his translating work and the publication as a form of protection against the attacks underway.<sup>12</sup> It was at this time that Péter Pázmány, in his great work called *Kalauz* [*Guidelines*], spoke out against the Second Helvetic Confession and the people who followed it, therefore the translation carried out by Péter Szenci Csene constituted a reliable source of defence, making it a real *confessio* for ordinary people.<sup>13</sup> This is underlined by the translator's preface, which says the following: “*the countless lies that have been uttered about Christ and His devotees by the unfaithful... How many insults and lies, how much blasphemy and disgrace do you hear, Oh Dear Lord, with a wretched heart, who could even keep count?*” That is why it was so important to create the translation, so that “*the Hungarian nation, most of whom have not known or heard about it, may understand clearly and realize that we have nothing to do with those heretics.*”

The original title of the first edition was *Confessio Helvetica, or a Confession about True Christian Faith, First Written and Adopted in Helvetia, and Also Recommended and Adopted in Hungary in the Year 1567 ... / Translated into Hungarian By Peter Szenci Csene for the Education and Benefit of Ordinary People.*

### 4. The confession in Hungarian language

According to the preface, Péter Szenci Csene completed his work on 19 April 1616, which he dedicated to the congregations of the seventeen Hungarian presbyteries of the Transtibiscan and Cistibistan church districts, which had adopted the Second Helvetic Confession during the Synod of Debrecen in 1567 (namely the Presbyteries of Várad, Érmellék, Máramaros, Makó, Debrecen, Szatmár, Bereg, Szilágy, Nyír, Böszörmény, Nagybánya, Ugocsa, Túr, Károly, Zemplén, Ujvár és Borsod), and also to the ones that had recommended the Confession, which was the majority of congregations in the Transdanubian and Cisdanubian church districts

12 Tóth Endre (1967), “A Második Helvét Hitvallás története Magyarországon”, in: *A Második Helvét Hitvallás története Magyarországon és Méliusz életműve*. Budapest: A Magyarországi Református Egyház Zsinati Irodájának Sajtóosztálya. 20.

13 Tóth Endre 42.

as well as those under Turkish occupation. Five poems of welcome were also included in the publication, even a poem by Théodore de Bèze, translated into Hungarian by Albert Szenci Molnár. The confession itself consists of 30 parts, followed by the translations of the Nicene, the Constantinopolitan, the Ephesian, the Chalcedonian and Athanasian Creeds. The book was published by Szenci Csene's former schoolmate, Albert Szenci Molnár, who received the manuscript from Mihály Kanizsai on 13 May 1616. The printing of the Hungarian version of the confession commenced in Oppenheim on 20 May.<sup>14</sup>

## 5. The heritage

At present, we know of two copies in Hungary of the first complete Hungarian edition, one of them in the National Széchényi Library, and the other in the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The relevance and the widespread use of the work is indicated by the fact that in the same year when it was originally published, a second edition was also brought out in Debrecen by Pál Lipsai, containing the text in Latin and in Hungarian. Further editions were published in 1654 in Sárospatak, in 1679 in Kolozsvár, in 1713 in Debrecen, in 1742 in Kolozsvár, in 1743 in Győr, in 1755 in Kolozsvár, in 1791 in Debrecen, in 1837 in Sárospatak, in 1852, 1853 and 1855 in Pápa, in 1855 in Debrecen and in 1902 in Karcag. It is important to note that apart from the first edition, the name of Péter Szenci Csene as translator is missing from all versions, therefore these publications often omit his preface as well. What makes the 1791 Debrecen edition interesting is the fact that according to Pál Csáji, a researcher of the Confession, this is a revised version of Péter Szenci Csene's translation, while József Erdős is of the opinion that it is a completely new translation.<sup>15</sup> An original copy of this edition can be found in the Library of Calvin J. Theological Academy in Komárom.

## 6. Another Hungarian translations

After the first Hungarian translation carried out by Péter Szenci Csene, another translation by János Samarjai was also published in 1628 in Pápa, under the title: *Hungarian Harmony or the Identical Meaning of the Articles of the Augsburg and Helvetic Confessions, Arranged by Janos Samaraeus*. In this work, Samarjai offers

<sup>14</sup> Szenci Molnár Albert 160.

<sup>15</sup> Módis László (1967), "A Második Helvét Hitvallás magyar és magyarországi kiadásai", in: *A Második Helvét Hitvallás története Magyarországon és Méliusz életműve*. Budapest: A Magyarországi Református Egyház Zsinati Irodájának Sajtóosztálya. 95.

the full text of the Second Helvetic Confession in his own independent translation.<sup>16</sup> The third translation of the Confession came out in 1885 by Dr. József Erdős. It was first published in Lugos, in a series of issues in the monthly journal *Szabad Egyház* [*Free Church*].<sup>17</sup> Since then, it has been republished on numerous occasions: in 1907 and 1922 in Debrecen, in 1932 in Kolozsvár, in 1941 in Debrecen, in 1954 in Budapest, in 1955 in Bratislava and in 1965 in Budapest. The latest translation is the work of Dezső Buzogány, which is expected to be published in the near future.

“D’you wish to read the Helvetic creed?  
Then hasten to look at this book.  
If you thirst for knowledge about this faith,  
About its devotees and guardians,  
This is where you can quench that thirst,  
And see what they teach about salvation.  
This creed has been published in Hungarian  
To bring knowledge to the faithful.  
If you read it, the blasphemies of many  
Will not matter anymore.  
So readers of Hungarian, take this book now,  
translated for you by Péter Csene.”  
(Mihály Kanizsai)<sup>18</sup>

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16 Módis László 91.

17 Módis László 97.

18 Thury Etele 410.

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Attila Lévai

## Notes on Czech–Hungarian Historical Relations – Aspects of the Life and Work of Antal János Valesius

### Summary

Ján Anton Valesius was born around the year 1662 probably in Szaklica, in the Nyitra county as the son of the Czech-Moravian reformed parents. His ancestors with Italian / Waldensian/ roots could emigrate after the Battle of White Mountain into the Kingdom of Hungary, where religious questions were discussed in more tolerant ways. The first decades of the life of Valesius are shrouded in darkness. Probably after private studies in the spring of 1703, he enrolled at the Reformed school in Debrecen. Then he studied at the University of Leiden /1708–1711/. In 1711 he was ordained to the priesthood and became a pastor of the reformed exiled from Bohemia and Moravia. The legal background of his activities was so called an articular space, the Hungarian reformed religious community in the village of Réte /near Szenc/ from where he visited his believers, in other words, where the believers gathered themselves for the majos festive occasions of the Lord's Supper. He moved from Rétet o Csallóköz /the Rye Island/. There he was ministering until the October 2, 1758 also in Ekel, Csallóközaranyos, Nemesócsa and Negykeszi where he died at the age of 95. While ministering in Csallóközaranyos, he was elected the senior of the Reformed Seniorates in Komárom in 1725, and since then he would copy all letters into a big scrapbook what took him 15 years. Then he was arrested /1740/ and sentenced to one year in prison. The outcome of his ministration was 139 letters – human and historical documents. The value of these sources cannot be sufficiently appreciated by many Church historians.

*Keywords:* Valesius, Czech-Moravia, Reformed church, pastor.

Antal János Valesius (also known as Jan Valeš) lived and worked in an era which was not in the least favourable to Protestant churches and congregations. His whole life was intertwined with the sentiments of service and loyalty. Wherever he served, he strived to represent the interests of the Reformed church, and to do so, if possible, without the barriers of language.

## 1. Notes on the History of the Era

The death of George II Rákóczi and the ensuing fall of the Principality of Transylvania opened the way for the overt persecution of Protestants. After the period of extraordinary trials for disloyalty in Bratislava (1673–74), there is no sign of independent church life for the Czech-Moravian community in Hungary for three whole decades. The members of this community who fell victim to the persecution of Protestants in Hungary remain unnamed, but one thing is for certain: they were left without pastors or leaders. It means an incredible amount of faithfulness and strength of soul that this small Czech Reformed community, dispersed in a foreign land, was able to preserve both its faith and its mother tongue, and once the era of horrors seemed to fade, they immediately showed some signs of life. Section 3 of Act XXVI of 1681 issued by the National Assembly held in Sopron designated the settlements of Réte and Pusztafödémés within Bratislava County as “articular locations,” i. e., places where Protestants could practice their religion freely, according to the relevant article of the law. Pusztafödémés became the home of Lutherans, and Réte became the home of the Reformed.<sup>1</sup> Members of the denomination called *Unitas Fratrum*, who lived near the border between Moravia and Hungary – once their own independent congregation ceased to exist – sought out the Reformed congregation of Réte, where they soon had their own pastor, whose name was János Valesius.<sup>2</sup>

Valesius, who was one of the Czech–Moravian refugees, enrolled in the theological institute of Debrecen at around the age of 40,<sup>3</sup> where – being an extraordinary student – he graduated earlier than his peers. (The *Unitas Fratrum*, probably because they had high hopes in George II Rákóczi, wanted to have at least one pastor of their own so that, in the event of a victorious war of independence, they would be considered an official church and thus granted freedom of religion.) From Debrecen Valesius returned to his own countrymen, and after the fall of Rákóczi’s War of Independence, he settled down in Réte, managing the affairs of his brothers and sisters in faith. In 1714, he was appointed by the local Hungarian Reformed congregation as its pastor, granting him the opportunity to visit twice a year the “orphaned” Czech-Moravian community of devotees living near the border, providing them with spiritual nourishment.<sup>4</sup> As the pastor of Réte, and subsequently as that of Ekel, Aranyos, Nemesócsa and Nagykesz (and from 1725, also as the Dean of the Presbytery of Komárom) he

1 Cséplő Ferenc (1995), Réte – bástya és menedék. Helytörténet két egyházi könyv köré építve, Gyurcsó István Alapítvány Füzetek 3. 10.

2 Cséplő Ferenc 23.

3 Thury Etele (1998), A Dunántúli Református Egyházkerület története II., Pozsony: Kalligram. 307.

4 Cséplő Ferenc 24

undertook the care of the “orphaned Czech ecclesia” with great joy and enthusiasm, making sure that his peers of faith and language would prosper as much as possible. (A good example of this is the case of György Jessenius.)<sup>5</sup>

## 2. A Short Detour – A Glimpse at his Life

Although very little is known about his first forty years, he is believed to have been born in 1662 in Szokolca, and he died on 2 October 1758 in Nagykeszi. In his lifetime, he was Dean of the Reformed Presbytery of Komárom, as well as the first bishop of Czech Protestants in Hungary. From 1712 onward, he served as a Reformed pastor in various towns. He settled down in Réte, where the local Hungarian congregation chose him to be their pastor in the spring of 1714. He became the pastor of Ekel in the spring of 1719, and four years later he undertook the ministerial duties of Csallókőzaranyos. From 1725 he worked as the Dean of the Presbytery of Komárom, and in the spring of 1740 he became the pastor of Nemesócsa. In Debrecen he taught the youth, and ordained them after their graduation. On 20 September he was imprisoned in the fort of Komárom for using the title of bishop. He regained his freedom in 1741, pursuant to a decree of Maria Theresa. Between 12 March 1745 and 12 March 1754 he was a Reformed pastor in Nagykeszi, after which he resigned from his duties both as pastor and dean. He went into retirement, and died in Nagykeszi on 2 October 1758. His wife, Erzsébet Kiss was most likely a resident of Nagykeszi.

## 3. The Role of Valesius in the Development of Czech–Hungarian Relations

Valesius spent a considerable portion of his childhood and adolescence during the so-called “decade of mourning” (1671–1681), so he had first-hand experience of the persecution of Protestant pastors and teachers.<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to note that when he died in 1758, reaching the age of 95, the Rev. Ferenc Göntzi of Turiszakállas, who officiated his funeral service, decided not to highlight the struggles, but instead drew a parallel between the life of Valesius and John the Baptist, on the basis of John 1:6–7. He was described in this sermon as someone

5 Kónya Annamária/Kónya Péter (2013), *Szlovák reformátusok a XVI–XVIII. században*. Sárospatak: Hernád. 136–137.

6 And he himself also became a part of it: at the age of 78 he was taken one night and imprisoned for nearly one year because of his work as a pastor. Cf. Hodossi Sándor (2009), “Valesius Antal szerepe a cseh–magyar református kapcsolatok alakulásában” in: Lőrincz Ildikó (2009), *A reneszánsz értékei, az értékek reneszánsza*, Győr: Nyugat-magyarországi Egyetem Kiadó. 696.

whose service and life had become united over the years. And if we come to think of it, there is great power in this statement, as he undertook his services among his countrymen and also Hungarian devotees during trying times and under extremely harsh circumstances, and he did so faithfully, even achieving successes considering the situation at that time.<sup>7</sup>

#### 4. Valesius and his Relations with the Persecuted Czech and Moravian Protestants in Hungary

Following the Battle of Fehérhegy in 1621, an ever-growing number of Czech and Moravian Protestants sought refuge in neighbouring countries. Many of them decided to settle in Hungary, especially in the area of the Hungarian–Moravian border. There were an estimated two thousand people in the first wave of settlement. The largest concentrations were in Puchó, Lednice and Szokolca.<sup>8</sup> Initially, the growing communities had their own pastors, but later there were only travelling pastors who served in the communities, which became more and more scattered over time.<sup>9</sup> Members of the next generation wished to establish relations with the Hungarian Reformed Church or the Slovakian Lutheran Church – as in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century it would have been inconceivable to establish an independent Czech church. As a result, the 1647 Synod of the Upper-Danubian Reformed Church District proclaimed that the Czech and Moravian brothers and sisters who had settled down in and near Szokolca became members of the Hungarian Reformed Church.<sup>10</sup> Réte, having been legally appointed as an articular location for the Reformed community by the National Assembly of Bratislava in 1681, became a town of central significance for the scattered Czech and Moravian Protestants, and the Reformed people of nearby Moravia also oriented themselves towards Réte.<sup>11</sup> For several decades, it was the home of several pastors who held the Protestant community of the *Unitas Fratrum* together, including not only Valesius, but also János Thobián and György Jessenius, the latter of whom went on to play a significant role in the rise of Slovak Protestantism as well.<sup>12</sup>

7 Hodossi Sándor (2009), “Valesius Antal szerepe a cseh–magyar református kapcsolatok alakulásában”. 696.

8 Csémy Lajos (2000), “Valesius és kora”, in: Koncsol László (2000), (ed.), Valesius Antal János: Levelek 1725–1740. Pozsony: Kalligram. 199.

9 Cf. Kúr Géza (1937), Cseh–magyar református történeti kapcsolatok. Komárom. 23.

10 Kúr Géza, Cseh–magyar református történeti kapcsolatok. 24.

11 Hodossi Sándor (2009), “Valesius Antal szerepe a cseh–magyar református kapcsolatok alakulásában”. 697.

12 Kónya Annamária/Kónya Péter 136–137.

The nearly three decades of Valesius's deanship provided him with a good opportunity to educate a new generation of Czech pastors. Many of his *protégés* and their children became students in the College of Debrecen. Valesius's own son, Sámuel also studied there, as well as the son of György Jessenius, Joel, who later served as a pastor in Bohemia before being expelled from the country. In short, Valesius made sure that there would be others to continue his work. It must also be mentioned that he educated three Czech youngsters in his own home at first, later sponsoring their studies in Debrecen and Pápa, and even requesting moral and financial support for them. Once they graduated, Valesius himself ordained them, but before he could do that, he had to assume the title of bishop in 1736. This became the reason for him being reported to the Council of Governors, as a result of which he was arrested by armed soldiers in his residence in Nemesócsa, and the then-77-year-old man was taken to the prison of Komárom Castle. After searching his home, the soldiers confiscated all of his books and documents, including the archives of the presbytery, none of which was ever returned.

## 5. His last years

Valesius regained his freedom a year later, pursuant to a decree issued by Maria Theresa. The same decree also instructed the authorities to ensure that Valesius would not be contacted by the Czech. Furthermore, it prohibited Valesius from appointing anyone to be the new pastor of the *Unitas Fratrum* church, from calling a meeting of any sorts, from exceeding his authority in any way, and from helping anyone with his service.

Valesius continued his service as Dean of the Presbytery of Komárom until the age of 91. He performed his duties with the utmost care and attention, as revealed by his surviving personal correspondence. Amid continued struggles, he watched over the fates of schools, pastors and teachers. He felt a sense of constant worry, but never any despair. He worked tirelessly to organize and enrich the *Unitas Fratrum*, which became incorporated into the Hungarian Reformed Church at the time. They offered their church contribution to the bishop of the Transdanubian Church District, and their leaders studied in the institutions of the Hungarian Reformed Church, primarily in Debrecen and Pápa.

The work of Valesius, which took place in Hungary but also influenced the affairs of Bohemia, contributed significantly to the fact that many people decided to enter the Czech Protestant churches that became once more legally approved due to the Patent of Toleration.<sup>13</sup>

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13 An example for this is the congregation of Horní Čermná near Lanškroun in Northern

## 6. Letters of Dean Valesius 1725–1740

In 2000, a book was published within the series called Csallóközi Kiskönyvtár, presenting the correspondence of Valesius during his time as dean. The manuscript containing a faithful, word-for-word version of all texts by Antal János Valesius, had to be kept hidden after Maria Theresa took the throne, and it spent nearly two centuries among the documents of a church office in Csallóköz. It was then bought by the church historian Géza Kúr, and taken overseas at the end of WWII. A photocopied version has been acquired by the publisher, providing the basis of the first edition. By making copies of his official letters written between 1725 and 1740 before sending them to the recipients, Valesius provided the world with valuable historical insights. The collection of 139 letters portrays in detail the Habsburg consolidation of the age of Charles III – after the Treaty of Szatmár – in the life of the Presbytery of Komárom, and more specifically that of the Reformed community of Csallóköz. A series of inspiring and disappointing secrets are revealed; church events and troubles are described from an intimate proximity. Many of the letters deal with everyday church events, while others are especially personal in tone, assuming the voice not of a church governor, but that of a father, grandfather or other relative, expressing anxiety or worry. One such letter is No. 58, in which Valesius pleads with the Rev. Péter Csehi of Alistál to live a sober life. This historical document provides today's reader with a lot of smile-inducing clues regarding the distorted reality of a pastor's career at that time.<sup>14</sup> Another letter of historical interest – actually a circular letter from 1730 – is No. 66, in which Valesius announces that Charles III wishes to handle the case of the denominations of Hungary himself.<sup>15</sup> Another circular letter (No. 109), dated 1733, was an accompaniment to the *Carolina Resolutio*, forwarded to pastors. Letter No. 129 is from 1737, in which Valesius warns one of his relatives, Rev. István Szoboszlai of Megyerics, that he would cut all ties with him if Szoboszlai refuses to quit drinking.<sup>16</sup>

Valesius and his work, as well as the time he lived in, may provide us with several noteworthy historical facts, and the author of the present study can only express his hopes here, among other places, that in the future church historians will research in more detail the only partially-revealed oeuvre of Valesius.

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Moravia, the first four pastors of which after the adoption of the Patent of Toleration were all Hungarian. See Radomil Jindra (2006), *Historie evangelické cirkve v Čermné*, vydal: Farní sbor Českobratrské cirkvi evangelické v Horní Čermné. 22–32.

14 Koncsol Lázló (2000), (ed.), *Valesius Antal János: Levelek 1725–1740*. 70.

15 Koncsol Lázló 78–79.

16 Koncsol Lázló 145–146.

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