

Court Priests in the Entourage of Queen Mary of Hungary

The queen and her circle

On a June day in 1522, Louis II, King of Hungary and Bohemia (1506–1525) and his wife Mary (1505–1558) were sitting at the dinner table accompanied by the Emperor's ambassador Andrea dal Burgo, Transylvanian humanist Jacobus Piso (ca. 1470–1527), two Czech lords, and the margraves of Brandenburg George (1484–1543) and Albrecht (1490–1568). Somehow or other they came to talk about Luther (1483–1546), and one of the Brandenburgs noted that Luther had learnt practically everything from Erasmus (1466/69–1536) and there was practically no difference of opinion between the two. Piso argued against this, and was able to support his opinion with a letter from Erasmus – the queen was the first to take this from his hands. Piso's account, sent to Erasmus, also indicates that the royal couple's sympathies were more on the side of the "Prince of Humanism" than on that of the Wittenberg reformer.¹

There is not much useful information to be gathered from this, deliberately biased, account (and, unfortunately, the letter from Erasmus did not survive). It matters little which of the Brandenburg brothers made the comment: Albrecht, Grand Master of the Prussian Teutonic Order, who had arrived a few weeks earlier from Prussia for the queen's coronation, or George, who had stood beside Louis' cradle,² and as a Hungarian magnate, he came from Buda along with the court: the opinion quoted above was a commonplace. The most authentic and most informative part of this narrative is the way in which Mary grabs the manuscript of the famous author. The seventeen-year-old queen is well represented by the fragment of a sentence that I once chose as the title to my study on her – the fragment comes from a letter she wrote by her own hand to Albrecht of Brandenburg in September 1522: "I wish to learn everything" (*Ich will alle ding wol erfahren*).³

The brides in the double dynastic marriage between the Habsburgs and the Jagiellos that was devised at the first Vienna Congress (1515), Mary of Hungary and Anne Jagiello (1503–1547), spent their adolescence in Innsbruck and were impatient to play the roles to which they had been appointed (*Ward den baiden Kunigin die Zeit genueg lang zu Innsprugg*, *FRA.S* 1. 451). First Anne was married off to Ferdinand (1503–1564) in Linz (May 26, 1521), then Mary to Louis in Buda (January 13, 1522). The coronation (held in Székesfehérvár and Prague) brought not only fame and glory to Mary but also financial independence and the potential for political action. According to František Palacký,⁴ the coronation in Prague, just like its earlier counterpart in Székesfehérvár, was mainly pressed by Mary herself. Although she soon had to realise that, for the time being, the huge wealth that she had inherited (including the mining towns of Lower Hungary) was only hers on paper, she did all the more to participate in politics on a large scale. She wished to know about everything that went on in Europe and to influence the course of events personally. She indeed had the rank, the contacts and the intelligence for this (coupled, however, with a single-minded stubbornness). Yet, in the shade of the approaching disaster, this ambition appears like a self-important game more than anything else. Queen Mary and her husband had been declared adults, but it was only after the Battle of Mohács that Mary truly left adolescence behind.

It was at her wedding in Linz that Mary first met Casimir, Margrave of Brandenburg (1481–1527), at this time a diplomat and military leader in the service of the Emperor, and George. A year later, in Prague, she met the younger brother, Albrecht. The three brothers were first cousins to Louis. (The Frank branch of the Brandenburg family was blessed with plenty of children: 13 of them lived into adulthood, and the three eldest brothers, Casimir, George and Albrecht, were talented, attractive personalities.) Mary made friends with all of them, and her correspondence with Albrecht (1522–1550) reveals a confidential relationship. During their stay together in Prague they agreed that Mary would admit the fourth brother, William (1498–1563), as Steward in her court. Between 1522 and 1525 he was continually in the queen's direct surroundings (William's name comes up in the royal account books on May 25, 1525).⁵

Reformers of Buda?

It is a mystery as to who was Mary's court priest at this time. According to the 1525 book of accounts, besides "*Magister Albert rector capellae*" there were five chaplains in the royal court: Mattheus (Nagy), Johannes (Zanger? Selbherr?), Blasius, Paulus and Thomas (Gyöngyösi). However, according to Lothar Hoffmann-Erbrecht, this great number of *specialis capellanus* refers to the members of the court choir (*capella*). Indeed, *presbyter* Stephanus, who returned to his home at Easter 1525, was a singer according to the account books.⁶ According to other data (such as György Szerémi),⁷ the king's preacher and father confessor was the Franciscan friar Antal Segesdi, but if we count all those men who are referred to in historiography as the queen's priests (Conrad Cordatus, Johannes Henckel, Johannes Hess, Johannes Kresling, Paulus Speratus and Thomas Stoltzer), we are almost short of posts for them. Another common notion in this tradition of history is that all of these theologians were helped into court positions by George of Brandenburg, and that it was also he who invited Simon Grynaeus (1493–1541) and Vitus Winsheimius (1501–1570). The last statement is feasible. The Brandenburg brothers had an incredible influence over the royal couple. Whomsoever they recommended (mainly nobles of the Empire) was sure to be granted a living, and for the young king the most important thing

was to be surrounded by as many confidential persons as possible. It is well known that this had disastrous consequences on the state budget and provoked the envy and jealousy of the Hungarian nobility. Yet there is not a single indication that the clerics listed above were protégés of George. We also know little about their position in the court.

The only one of them who was definitely Mary's chaplain (*capellanus, magister capellae*) in 1522 is Thomas Stoltzer (1485–1526). The most talented musician of this region, he was invited by Louis II, at Mary's request, to the court in Prague on May 8, 1522. Stoltzer only occupied his post in the autumn, and kept it until his tragically early death. This invitation alone is a good indication of Mary's efforts to win the favours of famous persons for her new court.

We also have contemporary data on the invitation of Johannes Hess (1490–1547). Karl von Münsterberg, the Czech Regent, whose court in Öls (Oleśnica) was Hess' residence at the time, wrote to the Council of Breslau (Wrocław) on September 13, 1523, to say that Hess could not come and become a preacher for them, as he had been invited by the queen and had to accept that invitation.⁸ It is well known that in the event Hess actually accepted the invitation from Breslau and became a reformer there. We also know that a year later similar pressure was exerted by the Duke of Münsterberg, which remained similarly unheeded.

Cordatus (1480/83–1546) and Henckel (1481–1539) are known for sure to have been in the queen's service later on, but certainly not as early as 1522. This was the time at which Henckel occupied the parish of Kassa (Košice), and he only appeared at court in early 1526.⁹ His invitation must have taken place around 1525. A letter written by Elek Thurzó (ca. 1490–1543) to Henckel, then parish priest of Kassa, on April 26, 1525,¹⁰ does not mention the court chaplain's post. In fact, it was probably none other than Thurzó who recommended Henckel, a relative of his, to Mary a few months later. Cordatus, however, who was a priest of the Church of Our Lady in Buda from 1510 onwards, was already working at Körmöcbánya (Kremnica) at the time of the coronation in Prague (in what capacity is not clear, perhaps as a guest preacher). It is unlikely that he received his post in this mining town, owned by the queen, with Mary's assistance, as the queen, fresh in this quality, had different concerns at this time and had practically no influence over the mining towns. Cordatus' departure from Buda coincides with the time when his friend Simon Grynaeus entered the University of Wittenberg in April 1522,¹¹ after a short period of time as tutor in Buda, ending with his arrest on the accusation of (Dominican?) monks. The charge may have had something to do with Louis II's anti-heresy decree of December 24, 1521. It was after this incident that Cordatus looked for safer lands, although it seems that he did not give up his post in Buda.

Paulus Speratus (1484–1551) was on his way to Buda in January 1522 to occupy his post as a priest¹² when in Vienna he came into conflict with theologians of that city. He does not say that his invitation was to the court, and nor is this likely, as at this time the royal couple were setting off for Prague. As a consequence of the preaching that he gave in Vienna, not only did he lose hopes of royal favour, but his plans in Buda were also nipped in the bud.

The court and the Wittenberg movement

Although it remains a mystery as to who preached to the queen in Prague,¹³ it is a fact that Mary was brave enough to invite chaplains into her court who were known to be flirting with the Reformation (Stoltzer, Hess). She wished to learn everything. It flattered her that Albrecht of Brandenburg involved her in his diplomatic plots, and she was enthusiastic in her support to him when he complained that the priests grabbed the anti-Turkish aid money. But the grand master sent her more from Nuremberg than just commentaries on foreign politics – he also sent her books by Luther. The advisors of the royal couple, the margraves of Brandenburg, were known for their sympathies towards Luther. As early as 1523 both George and Albrecht were involved in correspondence with the reformer,¹⁴ and while the first defended the ecclesiastic reforms of the Town Council of Breslau in front of King Louis, the Prussian Grand Master stood up openly for the reformers of the faith at the Imperial Diet at Nuremberg. Albrecht and Luther met personally on November 29, 1523, in Wittenberg, where the grand master also met Speratus and offered him a post as court priest in Königsberg (Kaliningrad).

Although the rather overt aim of anti-heresy laws and decrees (e.g. Act 54 of 1523) was to counteract the influence of the Brandenburgs, at the vital moment the Brandenburg brothers always managed to turn the monarch round to bring in verdicts to the contrary. This is how Speratus was released from his twelve weeks' captivity in Olmütz (Olomouc) where he wrote his choral *Es ist das Heil uns kommen her*, his creed about justification by faith. This is one of the rare instances where the mediation of the Brandenburgs can be proved beyond doubt, as Speratus subsequently thanked Albrecht for his release, dedicating to him the 1524 Königsberg edition of the sermon that got him into trouble in Vienna.

Instructive from this point of view is the fact that after the king sent George of Brandenburg to Silesia in 1522 to restore religious conditions, the latter assured the Town Council of Breslau of his support instead of reprimanding them – nonetheless, soon afterwards he was again commissioned to carry out a similar mission in the same place. Krzysztof Szydłowiczki, the Polish chancellor, doubted the success of the mission (as at the council meeting George had spoken out against reprimanding or controlling the Town Council of Breslau, and he

was not wrong to do so. The assembly of the Silesian principality, at which the duke represented the king, allowed freedom for Lutheran preaching in January 1524. It is no wonder that confidence in the monarch's commitment to Catholicism was shaken. Naturally, we must not credit every bit of libel and gossip, nor György Szerémi's absurd (1490–1550) "information." The queen made very little effort to make herself liked, so she deservedly became a target for malevolence. Let us examine whether there are any plausible details behind the rumours, which are not free of prejudice and political bias.

There is a document dating back to these times that directly attests just how familiar Mary was in Luther's thinking. I wish to present her letter to Albrecht, which was discovered by Vilmos Fraknói,¹⁵ but which was interpreted from the wrong angle for a long time. Most of its readers were outraged by the "frivolous," or "flirtatious" tone of the letter and bypassed the fact that Mary was closely acquainted with the "Lutheran jargon," which for us becomes accessible in Luther's early works. I am talking about the use of words cognate with *fromm* and *Frömmigkeit*, which gained their present-day meaning precisely in the Reformation documents of the 1520s: "just/justness," "god-fearing/fear of god," and "religion/religiousness." Nothing is further removed from Mary than ostentatious piety, but behind her ironic teasing it is easy to recognise the pride of the initiated. Mary does not confess to any faith in these lines, but she indicates that she is totally clear about the teachings of the reformer:

My honourable Prince, dear vicious cousin (*poßer vetter*), greetings to you. My dear vicious cousin (*pößer vetter*), I think you must have completely forgotten about your dear cousin (*die frume muem*), and that must be why you haven't written for such a long time. I have not forgotten about you in my pious prayers: I persevered and asked God daily to make you as just as I am (*frum machen*). Please, let me know whether my prayer helped or not. If it did not, you can buy some justness from me for a few pennies – I will not begrudge it to you; I have too much anyway (*fil zu fil frumkayt*). I would gladly have written more but must go to George's garden to eat, and the messenger wishes to tarry no longer.

Written in Buda in a rush, on the Sunday after Corpus Christi in the 1523rd year of the Lord.

Your truthful cousin (*euer frume muem*), Mary, by her own hand.¹⁶

Mary and Cordatus

From Mary's viewpoint we could label the year 1524 as one spent amid the tensions of personal attraction and grand-scale politics. At some time during the summer a preacher spoke in the presence of the royal couple against the Pope and the cardinals. Mary opposed the royal council and stood up for the preacher, but he was nonetheless driven away by the threats of the nobles, and the king issued a strict decree against Lutherans. It was upon this decree that in early August searches were instigated for Lutheran books in the mining towns and among the Transylvanian Saxons. The report sent by Papal Nuncio Burgio¹⁷ does not reveal whether the sermon came from a court preacher or not – it was probably Conrad Cordatus, priest of the (German) Church of Our Lady in Buda, who got into trouble here, as this is the year when his name comes up on the register in Wittenberg. It was a few days later that his brother Martin Cordatus' servant, Johannes Baumgartner from Upper Austria, was burned, together with the books of the preacher Conrad Cordatus, somewhere in western Hungary. Mary was sympathetic to Cordatus, but this did not stop her from using her secret envoys to encourage the prince-electors of Brandenburg (whose younger brother Albrecht of Brandenburg was) and the Archbishop of Mainz (Albrecht of Brandenburg, the cousin of the Brandenburg brothers) to eliminate the Lutheran sect. This, however, was only one of the aims of this mission. Far more emphatic was the task of tactfully gauging whether the persons visited would be willing to support Louis II instead of Ferdinand in acquiring the title of Roman King.¹⁸ We are witnessing the rare moment when the forever "obedient sister" of the letters (*obediens soror, Votre humble et obeysante seur*) weaves the threads of diplomacy in favour of her husband, against her brother, with the help of the Brandenburg family, and, in order to please the Catholic voters, plays the part of a monarch who eats Lutherans for breakfast.

In 1525 Cordatus returned from Wittenberg and appeared once more at Körmöcbánya, now accompanied by his one-time colleague in Buda, Johannes Kresling (ca. 1489–1549). The sources still refer to them as citizens of Buda, which indicates that they probably did not have any permanent employment in the mining towns but preached on their own responsibility. Kresling figures as parish priest of the St. George Church (chapel) of Buda, while Cordatus appears in a report of the Venetian ambassador Guidoto as *uno Priosto di S. Maria*, that is, a priest of the Church of Our Lady,¹⁹ a position that then became distorted in clerical historiography as that of the court preacher of Mary. Cordatus and Kresling were reported to Archbishop of Esztergom László Szalkai (ca. 1475–1526) by Nicolaus Szebeni, parish priest of Besztercebánya (Banská Bystrica), at Easter 1525. Szalkai had filled the highest clerical office of the country for a year after being Bishop of Vác, but he only now received holy orders from Papal Legate Lorenzo Campeggio (1474–1539) in Esztergom. It was convenient for the prelate, who also filled the post of chancellor, to be able to use this heresy investigation to restore his damaged prestige in the eyes of the party of the common nobility. The only accusations were those concerning the Lutheran sermon and Kresling's marriage;²⁰ in other words, at this time nobody blamed the preachers for the uprising of the miners that broke out at this time. (This was only done a year later by Palatine

István Werbőczy.) The two priests spent 38 weeks in the prison of Esztergom, under terrible conditions, and were only released in the spring of 1526. How their release came about is not known (as there is no sign this time of interference on the part of the queen). Cordatus (and perhaps Kresling, too) went back to Wittenberg, and from the following year onwards they were both working in Lower Silesia: Cordatus taught at the Academy at Liegnitz (Legnica), while Kresling became a pastor in Breslau.

Since Mihály Márkus recently proposed the possibility, already mentioned by Aladár Ballagi, that Conrad Reyss of Buda may be identical with Cordatus, I must pay some attention to this question. In 1525–1526 a short pamphlet was published, in Augsburg, Strasbourg and Zürich, in a number of editions, that clearly represented the theology of Zwingli (1484–1531), by the following author: Conrad Reyss / Cunrad Ryss zu Ofen.²¹ Sándor Payr excluded the possibility of identity on the basis of theological arguments. Márkus' idea, whereby besides the assumed humanist name (Cordatus) Reyss may have been the reformer's original family name, can be discarded, because it is known from Cordatus' autograph, written by his own hand, that his original name was Hertz. Luther, who was equally well acquainted with the above text, and with Cordatus, did not associate the two with each other, either.²² The most likely explanation is that the name and the relation with Buda were fictitious – the author used this persona to divert attention from himself in an environment where taking communion after Zwingli's fashion was not favoured. Contemporaries attributed the pamphlet to the Augsburg pastor Michael Keller (Cellarius), while later philologists ascribed it to Johannes Landsperger. This hypothesis is also supported by the fact that besides the front cover there is nothing in Reyss' work to allude to Buda, and there is no trace of a person of that name in the Hungarian royal city.

In the shadow of disaster

In the meantime, two stormy national assemblies had taken place, foreign ambassadors (such as Guidoto of Venice and the Austrian Schneidpöck) had been expelled, except for the papal nuncio, and a new law had been passed against the Lutherans (Act 4 of 1525), which the party of the common nobility wished to apply mainly to the German courtiers ("who are all Lutheran").²³ Although George von Brandenburg was officially a Hungarian subject, he felt threatened (as besides the Decrees of Rákos, which devoted article 7 wholly to his person, the unrest that broke out in Buda on May 25 also served to justify his fears). In June 1525 he left the country with no intention of returning, and moved to his residence, Jägerndorf in Upper Silesia (today Krnov, Czech Republic).²⁴ Therefore it is not likely that he would have recommended Johannes Henckel, who occupied his post a few months later, as court preacher. The mediator is more likely to have been Henckel's relative Elek Thurzó, who became, from a business rival, one of the queen's closest confidants after she was deprived of her Germans. Henckel, however, was not comfortable in the court; he wanted to be back with his followers in Kassa and, despite the queen's entreaties, returned to them in March 1526.²⁵

Others also tried to leave the sinking ship (or the xenophobic atmosphere). In February 1526 Thomas Stoltzer offered his services to Albrecht von Brandenburg (probably evading his mistress, Queen Mary), and indeed set off to take up his new post. While still in Buda, Stoltzer had put to music Luther's German hymn translations especially at the queen's request. In these motets he used his own devices to declare faith in the evangelical teachings. Examining Stoltzer's compositions, which date back to 1525–1526 (and thus are the first non-Latin polyphonic hymns in musical history), we realise that László Szalkai, Archbishop of Esztergom, was not exaggerating when he stated that the queen was on Luther's side.²⁶ Nor was Cordatus far from the truth when he told Luther the following upon his escape to Wittenberg: Mary is attracted to the Gospel.²⁷ Papal nuncio Burgio, who had made efforts to justify her, blamed the queen for all manifestations of the Reformation after the summer of 1525.

It is easily possible that Luther knew about these compositions. Cordatus had to flee from Hungary on three separate occasions, and each time he headed for Wittenberg (1524, 1526, 1528). On one of these journeys he was probably out to save more than just his life – he was carrying valuable luggage. After Cordatus and his friend were released in Esztergom, Stoltzer set off for the north, but drowned in a flooding Moravian stream beside Znaim (Znojmo).²⁸ The manuscripts of the deceased composer shortly cropped up in Wittenberg. This could either be because in the spring of 1526 Stoltzer travelled together with Cordatus, who successfully reached Wittenberg, or be because the reformer, forced to escape from the Magyaróvár estate two years later, took with him the manuscript, which was officially the queen's property. These hymns were a clearer testimony than anything else could have been in Luther's eyes of the queen's commitment to the "evangelical" faith.

Mary's sister, Isabella, Queen of Denmark (1501–1526), is usually referred to as the person who fostered direct contact between Mary and Luther. During her exile she lived, among other places, in Lucas Cranach's house in Wittenberg, and took communion in both kinds, inspired by the sermon of the reformer.²⁹ The history of the Stoltzer motets puts Cordatus' person in the limelight. After Isabella's early death the further development of this relationship was recorded for posterity by Cordatus, who was the first to start noting down Luther's conversations at table.

Although Cordatus did not become a martyr of the Hungarian Reformation, he is certainly the source of the first martyrology of this country. In his work of 1529³⁰ and in his 1556 *postilla*³¹ he lists the Lutherans who

suffered martyrdom in Hungary: the unknown Gregorius Bra(g)man, his brother's previously mentioned servant, Johann Baumgartner (1524), a member of the Buda bourgeoisie whose name is unknown (1525), and a teacher from Libetbánya (Lubietová), Gregorius by name (1527), whose martyrdom was subject to historical debate until as late as the twentieth century.

Taking the above into account, it seems obvious that Cordatus is behind Luther's words of commendation from 1526: "... thus bidding Your Majesty to preserve courage and good cheer in persevering to foster the true word of the Lord in Hungary, as I have received the good tidings that Your Majesty is attracted to the evangelical faith [*das E.K.M. dem Euangelio geneigt were*], although the godless bishops, who are so powerful in Hungary and hold almost everything, do much to hinder and prevent it, so much so that they have even shed the innocent blood of some persons in their cruel rage against the truth of the Lord."³²

Before the disastrous Battle of Mohács the queen had addressed the Holy See to request honours for her chaplains (!) and her father confessor.³³ Of these persons we can only, conditionally, identify Henckel (as Stoltzer was dead by this time). It is even more characteristic of Mary's attitude that, using her right of patronage as monarch, in her husband's absence she issued a document, signed by her own hand, in which, on August 24, 1526, she appointed her secretary Miklós Oláh (the future Archbishop of Esztergom, lived 1493–1568) as Provost-General of Eger.³⁴ Within but a few days she was escaping from Buda, suddenly widowed.

Beyond her personal loss and the loss to the nation, Mary lost everything that was so important to her beforehand: her own court, and her financial and her political independence. Although she still had some influence, first as a widowed queen and then as the regent of her brother Ferdinand in Hungary, she could no longer tread her own path. In order to distinguish her from her sister-in-law Anne, who was older than her, the 21-year-old widow was given the epithet "old." If anything helped her to accept her destiny, it was probably not the letters of consolation dedicated to her by Luther³⁵ and Erasmus,³⁶ neither of them very personal, but Albrecht of Brandenburg's brotherly lines. Only Mary's reply survives, written on January 26, 1527, in Pozsony (Pressburg, today Bratislava), and this is a document that is incredibly mature, sober and honest. While she assures Albrecht of her unchanged goodwill, she makes no secret of the fact that apart from her goodwill practically everything has altered, and so their relationship cannot remain what it was. Mary entreats Albrecht to pray for her to be able to withstand the devil, the world and her own self. Mary was probably unaware that at this time Albrecht was trying (and failing) to defeat Ferdinand's aspirations in Bohemia.

"Although I must suffer for my faith"

Who was the young widow's priest? Johannes Henckel did not obey her summons, and stayed at Kassa. Besides obvious political reasons,³⁷ his decision was probably also influenced by religious considerations. The parish pastor of Kassa took obvious steps in the direction of the Reformation in 1527. He renounced his clerical estates and gave up the posts of Provost of Eger and Archdeacon of Torna that had secured him a solid living – steps taken, in all probability, as a matter of principle.³⁸ Soon afterwards, taking advantage of an invitation from *magister* Achatius, preacher of Troppau (Opava), he contacted the reformer Johannes Hess in Breslau.³⁹ It is quite possible that at the time when he wrote his letter to Achatius he had been informed of the anti-heresy decree that Ferdinand had issued a week earlier in Breslau. Achatius was commended as the "second Conrad" (after Cordatus!) to George of Brandenburg in Jägerndorf. After his time there he eventually ended up in Selmecbánya, where he was a schoolmaster along with Kresling (!).

As far as Mary's priests at this time are concerned, we have the following data. Her almoner chaplain between 1527 and 1531 was Johann von Neuburg, expected heir to the Archdeaconry of Nyitra, while her confessor in 1527 was a chaplain called *magister* Gaspar, who, similarly to Miklós Oláh, had been made Canon of Esztergom by the "Apostolic Queen."⁴⁰ Her closest confidant was, in all probability, her secretary Oláh, whom she kept in her service even later on in the Netherlands.

I do not wish to dwell at great length on Mary and Ferdinand's 1527 debate concerning Luther's commendation, as the relevant texts are easily accessible and require no comment. In his letter of April 12 (which did not survive) Ferdinand reproaches his sister for allowing Luther to presume that she was attracted to the new teachings. In her first reply⁴¹ the widow deflects the accusation with irony, pointing out that the commendation went into print without her knowledge or approval, and expresses the hope that she did not in any way damage the family's reputation; finally she begs the mercy of the Lord to allow her to remain a good Christian. Her brother urges her to take sides openly in the matter, and requests her to refrain from reading Luther's works and to watch the behaviour of those in her direct surroundings, lest some people should interpret these two conditions as though she were a faithful Lutheran and start gossiping about it.⁴² In her second reply⁴³ Mary puts humour to one side and declares that she has not read anything by Luther for a long time, and nor does she plan to do so. "As far as members of my court [*mes serviteurs et servantes*] are concerned," she goes on to say, "who are supposed to have got involved in this affair – obviously the person who beguiled you to believe this had nothing better to do. I would like to see the person who dares state that they did anything against our faith [*contre nostre foi*] within my awareness. If there is anyone willing to accuse me, please, let me know, so that I may defend myself. If my servants have done anything without my knowledge, I am not responsible for them. I request you,

however, to let me know who they are, so that if they are innocent, they may justify themselves.” In the following section she talks about the fact that although she did eat meat on fasting days, she was forced to do so by health reasons, and thus did not break the laws of the Church. In her letter of May 21,⁴⁴ Ferdinand essentially accepts his sister’s defence and considers the affair as concluded.

Clearly, Mary’s letters should not be seen as documenting her “true Catholic faith” but more as testimonies of her determination to defend her independence against her brother, rejecting his accusations with irony and insulted pride. Naturally, the letters do not allow us to call the queen a Lutheran, either. Nonetheless, we can call her a Christian who gives no heed to the patronage or gossip of others and tries to answer questions of faith by relying on her own resources. A further remarkable condition is that Mary stands up astutely for the people around her who have come under suspicion. She requests information not so as to investigate the rumours that had reached Ferdinand but so as to enable those affected by libel to clear themselves.

From the following year we have definite data, at last, to show that Cordatus was acting as a pastor in the queen’s entourage. At first we are informed by a letter of Luther’s that Cordatus has received an invitation from Mary.⁴⁵ (Cordatus had left Liegnitz either because of Ferdinand’s anti-heresy laws or because of the pressure of the Schwenckfeldians.) Next, in a letter sent by Mary from Magyaróvár, she informs her brother Ferdinand that a migrant preacher has arrived in the area who denies the sacraments. Mary had him driven away, and, in order to refute his teachings, employed an “expert on the scriptures” (*expert en l’écriture*), who, although urging that communion should be taken in both kinds, did not diverge from the “true teachings.”⁴⁶ Mary noted on the back of Ferdinand’s letter sent in reply that the person in question was “her Conrad *prediger*.”⁴⁷ The king also complained that his sister was once more reading a work by Luther,⁴⁸ but Mary evaded his reprimands in the same, partly hypocritical, partly acerbic, style that we know from her earlier correspondence.⁴⁹

These lines also reveal that she had now acquired a pastor who was beyond reproach – the man can be identified as the previously mentioned Johannes Henckel. Henckel, however, had replaced Cordatus in Mary’s court well before Ferdinand took up his pen in the aforementioned matter. This means that the strict Catholicism of the King of Hungary and Bohemia was only an indirect force, urging the queen to remove her pastor, who had been in prison, and to win the services once more of the more moderate reformer from Kassa. The first thing that Henckel did in Mary’s service was to send a letter to Erasmus, to whom he had praised his mistress’ evangelical piety, and request the “Prince of Humanism” to dedicate one of his works to the widow.⁵⁰ Mary’s contact with the Brandenburg brothers did not break even in these months: she gave a gift of a horse to George, while Albrecht gave her some Prussian falcons as a present. This may serve as a sketchy background to the interesting statement that has been debated by research thus far. On January 15, 1529, George von Brandenburg sent a song to Ansbach “sent by Queen Mary, against her brother, because he had driven a Christian preacher away from her”.⁵¹ We are talking about the third version of the choral that begins *Mag ich unglück nit widerstan*, the original of which is attributed by Friedrich Spitta to Albrecht von Brandenburg, using arguments that I find convincing, and dates back to 1525.⁵² The arguments used to refute the authenticity of Margrave George’s opinion about Mary’s authorship are the following: that Mary did not speak very good German, that Mary was loyal to her brother, that Ferdinand had not driven away any of her priests, and that George was not by this time living near Mary.

Although Mary is not known to have written more poems, the letters that she wrote in German in her own handwriting prove that she may easily have been able to transform an already existing poem. The other three arguments may as well be dropped on the basis of what I have written above concerning the events of 1528. Even if neither Albrecht’s nor Mary’s surviving letters mention the song, I find the authorship of the two of them acceptable (in 1525 and 1528), with the reservation that “Queen Mary’s song” is not directed against Ferdinand but an object in the plural (*pisz er erwürgt, die mich seinsz wortz berauben*). This can be seen as referring to the intriguers who, according to the letters exchanged by brother and sister, repeatedly complained about Mary and her people to Ferdinand. The further part of the quotation, according to which the queen was now going to retreat to her estates in Moravia (in Znaim), because they preach the Gospel in the pure fashion there, is also characteristic of how well informed George was.

On August 1, 1528, the Hungarian-Czech King issued another severe decree against the reformers of the faith, which was not without impact. Henckel’s reports of the purges against heretics were sent to his colleague Antonius Transsilvanus in the easy tone of one who does not feel personally threatened.⁵³ He also writes about the evangelical inspiration of his mistress and warns the preacher of Kassa to stay on the path on which he had started out. True, the queen’s court priest enjoyed the favour of Ferdinand, who had compensated him for his income in Kassa by procuring a canon’s post for him in Breslau (probably in July 1529). Although Henckel was involved in some untoward incident, the details of which are not known but which provoked the Emperor’s disapproval,⁵⁴ even this did not alter his position for the time being.

Between Luther and Erasmus

As far as the religious trend followed by Henckel and Mary is concerned, in the context of the years about which we are talking it can be called evangelical, with the reservation that it would be anachronistic to refer to this form of piety as Protestantism before the Imperial Diet held in Speyer in 1529, and it is even less justified to try to

squeeze it into the box of either Lutherans or Erasmians. The paths had not yet separated, Henckel was capable of being on amicable terms with all parties concerned, and the queen wished to learn of all the ideas that stood on the basis of the Bible. This openness was wont to mislead not only later historians but also Mary's contemporaries. It is hard to decide how far we can identify with the opinion of the reformers present at the Imperial Diet of Augsburg (Philipp Melanchthon, Justus Jonas, Johannes Agricola and Georg Spalatin) who thought of the Emperor's sister as being on their side. The most fantastic and therefore least credible details come from Adam Weiss of Crailsheim (ca. 1490–1534), who served in George of Brandenburg's escort. The report of Melanchthon (1497–1560), however, sounds realistic: "The Emperor's sister is a woman of truly heroic soul, highly god-fearing and moral, who is trying to reconcile her brother in our regard but can only proceed with caution and restraint."⁵⁵ The queen's biblically grounded attitude became almost proverbial.⁵⁶ According to information coming from Henckel, in a debate with her brother, Mary burst into tears, speaking the following words: "I should much rather go and be a maid somewhere and do all unclean work than deny my Christ".⁵⁷ Even more weighty are the words of a source speaking from the other side: the recollections of Papal Nuncio Girolamo Aleandro (1480–1542), according to which Ferdinand's influential advisor, Johannes Fabri, Bishop of Vienna (1478–1541), spoke in Augsburg, with an allusion that was impossible to miss, about Moses and Aaron's sister, Miriam the leper.⁵⁸

For Mary herself, the decisive debate was one that was recorded more precisely than any of the evidence mentioned so far. Using the mediation of Henckel and Melanchthon, the queen put five questions to Luther concerning communion in both kinds. The gist of these questions was to find out whether she could remain an adherent of the new faith as a private person, without openly taking sides. Luther rejected the possibility of clandestine reformation, indicating that taking sides could no longer be postponed.⁵⁹ Nor was the appropriate moment far away. The sudden death of Mary's aunt Margaret, Regent of the Netherlands, brought the young widow a new challenge: her elder brother, Emperor Charles V (1500–1558), chose her to take on this important post. Although the Emperor trusted his sister, as he clearly explained in a letter, he did not trust her court, suspected of heresy. Thus Mary was not allowed to take Henckel or Johann von Neuburg to the north-eastern province.⁶⁰ This decision's being due to religious (rather than national) reasons is partly emphasised by Ferdinand's cover letter,⁶¹ and is also revealed by Mary's reply when she defended her servants, shortly to be dismissed, as good Christians.⁶²

I shall not follow Mary's activity in the Netherlands. I shall only treat the later course of her relationship with the reformer and the humanist. A consoling sermon⁶³ written by Luther in September 1531, was probably addressed to Mary. Her response upon receipt of the text was "I see that D.M.L. loved me".⁶⁴ Her need to be consoled was probably pointed out to Luther by the Nuremberg notary Lazarus Spengler (1479–1534). The text corresponds to the changes in Mary's life, the table talk noted down by Cordatus, who knew Mary well, can be taken as authentic, and there is no other letter to which it could be referring. We know of no further contact between Luther and Mary. The new regent in the Netherlands spared no money or effort to try to tempt Erasmus to move back to his homeland. These efforts flattered the "Prince of Humanism" living in Freiburg, but eventually he did not take up the invitation.

Although members of the queen's closest entourage stayed in the east, except for Miklós Oláh, Mary made sure that they were given new posts, mainly in managing her estates. Henckel, who had resigned earlier from the parishes of both Kassa and Lócse, found a living in Silesia. Besides being Canon of Breslau, he became, probably upon Ferdinand's recommendations, parish priest of the town of Schweidnitz (Świdnica) (1531–1533), then *officialis* and preacher of the Bishop of Breslau.

The dismissed court preacher reported to the Chapter of Breslau in early 1531, stating that he would like to take up his post, which caused serious debate among the canons. Since August 13, 1529, it had been the rule that each candidate had to swear that they fought against the teachings of Luther, Zwingli, Oecolampadius and the Anabaptists. Henckel must have become a member of the chapter earlier, in July 1529, and it would have been overly offensive to force a canon to take a retroactive oath. Since it was rumoured, however, that he was a Lutheran, he was invited to take the oath, after all, and Henckel did not decline to do so.⁶⁵

Whether he did this out of financial necessity, or whether he had grown disappointed by this time with Luther's Reformation, is hard to decide. Adalbert Hudak, misunderstanding the text of the minutes, states that Henckel swore of his own volition. According to our data, he acted to the utmost satisfaction of the Lutheran population both in Schweidnitz and during his second term in Kassa (1535–1537), and at the same time he managed to avoid conflict with the severe canons of Breslau. Henckel had an excellent relationship with adherents of both the old and the new faith, and continued to represent the humanist attitude of trying to maintain a balance between extremes even after this moderate trend had been defeated. In order to illustrate this insistence on balance and moderation, Gustav Bauch⁶⁶ provides a quote from a letter of Melanchthon,⁶⁷ as well as describing Henckel's sermon and prayer book.

In Hungarian memory, Queen Mary's relationship with the Reformation and humanist Christianity – which was seen even by contemporaries as complex and contradictory – has always been found difficult to come to terms with. It was only several generations after Mary, at the turn of the sixteenth and the seventeenth century,

that a tradition surfaced – based only on “the words of elders” – that had a significant and long-lasting influence on Church history, with a denominational approach that attributed an important role to Mary in the history of the Hungarian Reformation. Whether this picture of Mary was rooted in the internal affairs of the country before Mohács – such as the Diet of 1525, with its hostility towards, and its slander of, the court – or not, can only be conjectured.

¹ ALLEN V. 80-83, no. 1297.

² At the time of Louis' coronation in 1508, George was the one who held the infant king on his lap. When Mary's coronation took place in Prague, George, Louis and Mary carried the ensigns together.

³ CSEPREGI 2000. 202.

⁴ PALACKÝ 1867. 453.

⁵ *MTT* 22. 180.

⁶ *MTT* 22. 136.

⁷ *MTT* 22. 56.

⁸ *TT* 1885. 352.

⁹ ALLEN 6,249-252, no. 1660.

¹⁰ *TT* 1882. 769.

¹¹ Cf. *MBW*. Nr. 277.

¹² „zu eynem prediger bestellet und auffgenommen”, *ETE* I. 77s.

¹³ Unless it was the *presbyter* Joannes Caltmensis, a Czech court priest of Prague, who is mentioned in the 1525 book of accounts of Buda. *MTT* 22. 199.

¹⁴ *WA.B* III. 8-10, 86s, Nr. 568, 622.

¹⁵ FRAKNÓI 1884. 119.

¹⁶ CSEPREGI 2003. 291-293.

¹⁷ *ETE* I. 142.

¹⁸ Mary's autograph instructions were written in September 1524.

¹⁹ *MTT* 25. 328.

²⁰ *ETE* I. 204.

²¹ *VD* 16. K 648-651.

²² *ETE* I. 202.

²³ *ETE* I. 202.

²⁴ *MTT* 25. 331s.

²⁵ In a letter sent from Buda on March 15, 1526, Henckel wrote that he wished that his lady could become a man to snatch the sceptre from Louis' hand. FRAKNÓI 1872. 17.

²⁶ *ETE* I. 264.

²⁷ *WA* XIX. 552.

²⁸ HOFMAN-ERBRECHT 1974.

²⁹ *WA.B* IV. 23-26, Nr. 976.

³⁰ *Vrsach warumb Vngern verstöret ist / Vnd ytzt Osterreich bekrieget wird.* *VD* 16. C 5056; also see PAYR 1928.

³¹ *VD* 16. E 4599.

³² *WA* XIX. 552.

³³ *Relationes*. 390.

³⁴ WALSH-STRNAD 1998, 85.

³⁵ *WA* XIX. 552

³⁶ ALLEN VIII. 55, no. 2100.

³⁷ ALLEN VII. 29-32, no. 1810.

³⁸ ALLEN VII. 2-5, no. 1803.

³⁹ *TT* 1885. 351s.

⁴⁰ *ETE* I. 334; *Familienkorrespondenz* II. Nr. 97.

⁴¹ *Familienkorrespondenz* II. Nr. 44, April 15, 1527.

⁴² „en bruit d'estre bonne luteriene”, *ibid.* Nr. 45, April 19.

⁴³ *Ibid.* Nr. 49, April 29.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* Nr. 60.

⁴⁵ *WA.B* IV. 402, Nr. 1234.

⁴⁶ *Familienkorrespondenz* II. Nr. 183.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 207.

⁴⁸ Probably *Von der Wiedertaufe an zwei Pfarrherrn*: 1528, *WA* XXVI. 144-174 .

⁴⁹ *Familienkorrespondenz* II. Nr. 208

⁵⁰ ALLEN VII. 418-420, no. 2011; this is what became known as the previously mentioned *De vidua christiana*, and it is from this point onwards that correspondence between Henckel and Erasmus became continuous.

⁵¹ „das des konigs Swester Konigin Maria wider iren bruder gemacht, do er ir einen Christlichen prediger verjagt hat”, KOLDE 85.

⁵² This powerful song, which was for a long time attributed to Luther, served to enrich the Hungarian Lutheran Hymn Book until 1982, when it fell victim to “cleansing” due to its supposed political incorrectness.

⁵³ *TT* 1882. 769.

⁵⁴ Familienkorrespondenz II. Nr. 298.

⁵⁵ *WA.B V.* 461, Nr. 1636; *MBW.* Nr. 965.

⁵⁶ E.g. *WA.B V.* 473s, Nr. 1645.

⁵⁷ „quam meam abnegem Christum”, *WA.B V.* 512, Nr. 1665.

⁵⁸ „Mariam sororem habuisse leprosam”, *NBD IV/2.* 396.

⁵⁹ *WA.B V.* 511, 527-529, Nr. 1664, 1674; *MBW.* Nr. 994, 1011.

⁶⁰ *LANZ* 1944. Nr. 156.

⁶¹ Familienkorrespondenz III. Nr. 446.

⁶² *SPRUYT* 1994. 291.

⁶³ *WA.B VI.* 194-197, Nr. 1866.

⁶⁴ *Ich sehe das mich D.M.L. lieb hatt.* *WA.TR II.* 414, Nr. 2311a.

⁶⁵ *ACW.* Nr. 1833-1834.

⁶⁶ *BAUCH* 1884. 625s.

⁶⁷ *MBW.* Nr. 1378.