

From Folk Religion To Christian Faith

By Rt. Rev. John Butosi

Editor's Note: This excerpt from [Praise the Lord O My Soul The Autobiography of John Butosi](#) is used with permission of the publisher. One of Rt. Rev. Butosi's concerns was that we, too, might find the Reformed Faith to be much more than a "Folk Religion". Instead we are called to find the Reformed Faith to be the living faith of those who today are being given spiritual life in order to be active members of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ through the preaching of God's Word and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Before I would turn to my last year in Kossuth Gimnazium, I would like to recall the most important event of my Life that happened in Cegléd: how I recognized God's eternal plan for me in Jesus Christ.

The II law of the Reformed Church in Hungary concerning mission (adopted in 1995) starts with the following startling sentence: "The Reformed Church in Hungary is a Folk Church and a Faith Confessing Church at the same time." Surely from generation to generation the members are born into it, and by baptism and confirmation are enrolled as members of our Folk Church, and by conversion and new birth they become members of the (Faith) Confessing Church. This "reality" seems to be contradictory, but in my case it was a reality indeed.

I was born, reared and educated in the best tradition of folk-religion. I was baptized into the Reformed Church when I was 2 days old. Our home was an example of a "Christian" home. I saw my parents pray every day. I shall never forget when my mother came to my bed and audibly prayed for me. She never let a beggar leave our home without a donation. My father was a well-respected person both in church and town who was authorized to issue death certificates even when the physician was in the town. On Sundays and holidays the whole family attended church services and there was no dinner on these days until we the children recite the text of the sermon. Other times too, we read the Bible. (My favorite parts were the apocalyptic writings). Of course, all the children attended the local Reformed School. Yes, we tried to be "perfect", "blending" in

the traditions of folk-religion as Saul claimed to be in the Pharisaic tradition of his fathers.

The trouble was with Jesus, the resurrected, living Jesus Christ. I remember that one Sunday afternoon when I was perhaps 14 or 15 years old, I was reading a pamphlet of Uray Sándor. On one page with great italics stood the sentence “**Jesus Lives!**” I knew that He lived, He died, He was risen, He went to heaven, all in past tense. In present tense, that *He Lives Now, Walks Among Us and Can Meet Us Personally*, that was unexpected, frightening, shocking for me and I did not know what would happen then which might be now!

This problem was raised by my teacher of religion in the gimnazium at Cegléd. “Hit és erkölcsstan” (“Faith and Morals”) was a subject in the gimnazium for the eight years, plus the confirmation instructions in the fourth year taught by a teacher who was committed to emphasize the need of conversion and new birth, sometimes seemed to be unbearable. Who was this man, Czakó Jen?? (Eugene Czakó?). He was born in Northern Hungary, educated in Budapest, had several scholarships and spoke several languages. A brilliant scholar who lived by Christ and was not ashamed to confess his faith and lead others to Christ. He protected me from school discipline for some unacceptable writing.

Add to all these that my puberty and adolescent years were particularly trying and tempting. What was for others (e.g. masturbation) normal growth symptom, approved or even recommended by physicians, for me it appeared in spiritual dimension, proving that I am a defeated soldier, a weak and disposable human being, with the words of Scripture and Creeds, “a miserable sinner” and “a wretched creature”. I read Romans 7:1-24 over and over again but on the ruins of my folk religion I had only one cry, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (24) Oh yes! Sin and death are twins. I was tempted to cut my vein, throw myself before a fast train, or jump down from a high tower.

“How surprised you friends will be my loving Father, not my heavenly Police Officer; that He heals all my diseases just as He forgives all my sins: that He will not punish me with death and hell for He does not punish twice for the same sin and Jesus Christ already suffered in death and hell for my sin; so much so that I can wear the crown of His love and compassion; that He changes my whole life taking away the unsatisfying desires of the old and granting me the Christ like new nature.” I quickly crossed out the David name as the owner of the Psalm, and replace it with my name: This Psalm belongs to John Butosi (Bütösi Jánosé). How true it was! From that moment I lived like a bird liberated from cage, from fetter. Not the presence, but the power of unclean desires was broken for good, and I praised the Lord with my soul, in my innermost being.

A few weeks later another spiritual event followed this one. I went to the rest room to urinate and suddenly, unexpectedly I saw the thorn crowned face of the crucified Christ. It was not a picture or paintings, for His eyes were moving. At least, from those wonderfully mild eyes I could read the message: “We know each other for a long time that I bought you with my blood. You belong to me!” Even if the Tempter whispered – “an exemplary student commits suicide!” I enjoyed ridiculing my religion teacher: “If all the movie stars and sport champions end up in hell, is it not wonderful to go to hell? Or if there is hell at all!...”

Then something happened. The boys of the Suranyi otthon went to see a film. I wanted to go with them but for some reason I decided to stay in our study room. Cleaning my desk, I wanted to put my Bible in the drawer. But somehow the Book opened and my eyes fell on Psalm 103: “Praise the Lord, O my soul, All my inmost being praise His Holy Name, Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits – Who forgives all your sins, and Heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the Eagles” (Psalm 103: 1-5)

I could not read it further, because the boys were returning from the movie. It took me more than 2 hours to “talk it over” with the Lord, to apply His promises to my life, to eat it up (Jer.15:16), but it became blessedly clear that His providential ear showered me with precious benefits until this very moment for He love me from eternity to eternity that He forgives my sin – past, present and future – for, He is — You would have been the only one on earth who needed redemption, I would come and die on the cross for you! Go, I am with you!”

I know what our Reformed theologians and creeds say about such appearances (this is why I kept quiet about it al through my life) but now I must confess that the living Word of God and the risen simultaneity of Jesus Christ have been the two basic theological facts that sustained me in my Christian life and ministry.

But one thing became increasingly puzzling for me: if Folk Religion and Confessing Church seem to live harmoniously together as two phases of the same process (according to the mission law quoted earlier), shy do I experience hostility and hatred from the Faith Religion members, if I confess my faith? My family members asked with great anxiety: “Why do you want to be a ‘believing’ Christian? Can’t you be just a regular Reformed person like anybody else?” I could not expect defense from my pastor in Nyirgyuláj: When a good church member became a “believer” and started reading the Bible daily, Pastor Pataky openly declared that such a practice is not compatible with our historic Reformed Faith. Even Jen? Czakó could not calm my questioning soul. When I asked him, “Jen? Bácsi what guarantee do I have that I made the right choice to follow Jesus Christ in the Reformed Church?” His simple answer was: “John, try it!”

Thus I had to raise the question: “Am I in the right Church. I knew that I belong to Jesus Christ body and soul, in life and death, because by His blood He paid for all my sins and protects me so well, that nothing can happen to me without His will. But am I in my place in the Reformed Church or should I seek for another fellowship of faith, more understanding, more congenial?”

The answer came very simply and naturally “Do not decide unless you know the facts, the true facts!” So I took the two volume book of John Calvin, *The Institutes of Christian Religion*. Like fresh water for a thirsty man, Calvin did not lead me to himself, his own wisdom, and his own ideas! He led me to the Bible and provided in the Institute a map for our Christian pilgrimage His vast knowledge of the Bible, his wonderful organizing ability, and most of all his unwavering loyalty to the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ made John Calvin my trustworthy teacher and faithful friend. First I made an outline of the institutes (still have it). Then I learned pages which were particularly interesting for me. Finally I just let the books (Bible and Institutes) permeate my thinking and shape my decision. I became fully convinced that I saw my place in the Reformed Church, and ripened more and more in my heart the decision that I should enter the Reformed Theological Academy at Debrecen.

“PRAISE THE LORD,
O MY SOUL”



AUTOBIOGRAPHY
OF
JOHN BUTOSI

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