

10-1-1946

The Slavonic Luther

Andrew Wantula

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [History of Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Wantula, Andrew (1946) "The Slavonic Luther," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 17 , Article 57.
Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol17/iss1/57>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

... We see the facts before us, and must be mainly content with them. (P. 347.)

The Lutheran Adam is a superior creation to the Calvinistic Adam of Milton. (P. 345.)

Luther was the original discoverer of that set of ideas which Calvin only compacted and systematized. (P. 350.)

Luther was a great man, the great author of the Reformation. (Pp. 410—411.)

Yes, and Luther's "fanatical" and immoral teaching freed this Oxford don himself from the tyranny of the corrupt Pope. Oak Park, Ill.

The Slavonic Luther

By ANDREW WANTULA*

I

Where the largest and mightiest Polish River, the Vistula, rises, lies a small country known as Cieszyn Silesia (Teschen Silesia). After the last World War two Slavonic sister nations, Poland and Czechoslovakia, shared this land between them. To a large extent the river Olza formed a natural boundary between these two nations, and the old capital, the city of Cieszyn, was divided between them. From 1290 until 1653 this country was an independent dukedom. The rulers were the Dukes of Sieszyn of the Royal House of the Piasts. After the death of the last duchess of Sieszyn, Elizabeth Lucretia, who left no successor, the land was incorporated into the Hapsburg Monarchy and remained under that rule until the year 1918.

It is not generally known among Evangelical people outside Europe that in spite of everything the Lutherans of Polish descent maintained themselves there, deeply conscious of their past and equally enthusiastically attached to their faith. They numbered over 100,000 souls. In addition, there were also Lutherans of German descent.

Prior to World War II these Lutherans were organized in seventeen parishes and formed the Diocese of Silesia. It belonged to the Evangelical Augsburg Consistory in Warsaw.

* Dr. Wantula is pastor of the Polish Lutheran parish, London, England. — Ed. NOTE.

THE SLAVONIC LUTHER

729

It is worthy of note that shortly before the war, when the Lutheran Church in Poland became a focal point of nationalistic quarrels, mutual understanding and peace ruled between the Lutherans of both Polish and German descent in the Diocese of Silesia.

How does it happen that Lutherans of pure Polish descent remain in this small country even to the present day? How can we account for this fact, and how was it that they were not destroyed in the savage Counter Reformation, which lasted for about two centuries? Why have they not been submerged in the surrounding sea of Roman Catholicism first in Austria and then in Poland? To give satisfactory answers to these questions, it would be necessary to describe the events of the history of the Reformation in that province, an impossible task in an article of this nature. But as a brief indication of these developments two facts of major importance in Evangelical history may be pointed out. The first of these is that in the sixteenth century the doctrine of the Reformation was accepted in Cieszyn Silesia not only by the duke and townspeople but by the peasantry as well. When the duke returned to the bosom of the Roman Catholic Church in 1610, the townspeople succumbed with their superiors and under persecution from them, but the peasant folk, miraculously steeled and upheld by their faith, kept true to the cause to which they had given their hearts, and nothing could change their steadfastness in spite of the most terrible suffering.

In the first half of the eighteenth century the Jesuit L. Tempes tried unceasingly and by every possible means to convert the Evangelicals to Roman Catholicism, but without success. An entry in his diary describes his dealings with "stiffnecked heretics" ("*durae cervicis heretici*"). Even today there is a proverb in Silesia, "Stubborn as the Lutheran faith around Cieszyn," describing the firmness and conviction of these folk.

A second fact to be remembered is the influence of the Evangelical religious literature. It is worth while mentioning here three books which helped immeasurably in preserving the faith of the Evangelical Augsburg Church in Cieszyn Silesia. These are the Bible in the Polish language, a book of family sermons by the Rev. Samuel Dambrowski, 1625, and the church hymnary of the Rev. George Trzanowski, 1636.

The Evangelical people of Silesia were intensely devoted to these books and relied upon them as their only true friends in times of oppression, friends who never let them down and became their closest companions in times of distress.

The stability and preservation of the Evangelical character of Cieszyn Silesia is due to the untiring efforts and devotion of the Rev. G. Trzanowski, who rightly deserves to be known, as he was later called, as "The Slavonic Luther."

II

Who was this man who played such an important part, not only in the Lutheran Church in Cieszyn Silesia but also in Moravia, Bohemia, and Slovakia?

He was born in Cieszyn on March 27, 1592. His father lived in Trzanowice, a small village near Cieszyn. For many generations his ancestors had lived in the same village, hence his family name. In his autobiography, *Coronis ad posteritatem*, he speaks of his great-grandfather Adam, burgomaster and sheriff in Trzanowice, who, he says, lived 103 years. When quite an old man, he could be heard singing sacred songs, accompanied by the lute. This old man made a deep and lasting impression upon young Trzanowski, who praises him in his autobiography. He prayed to God, not for a long life, but for a life supported by real faith in God, such as his great-grandfather had had.

Trzanowski began his studies in Cieszyn. But soon, taking with him many deep and lasting impressions, he left his Cieszyn surroundings for life at a secondary school, or lyceum, in Guben, Saxony, afterwards going on to Kolberg, Pomerania, where he remained for three years. After matriculation he spent five years at the University of Wittenberg. Here he came under strong Lutheran influences, which had a great and significant effect upon his theological and religious outlook.

His first position after graduation was as a teacher at the Church of St. Nicholas in Prague.

Today it is difficult to imagine the reason for his going to Prague. Why did he not take up a position in Silesia? Perhaps he went there owing to the toleration which the Evangelicals at that time, 1611, enjoyed in Bohemia on the basis of the Act of Toleration of His Majesty the Emperor

Rudolph II, 1609, or he may have been influenced by the fact that the duke of Cieszyn, Adam Wenceslas, forsook the Reformation camp in 1610 and made war against the Evangelicals, or perhaps he was greatly influenced by his friendship with his Bohemian fellow students in the University of Wittenberg.

Suffice it to say that he started his life's work in Prague. Yet he soon became convinced that Prague was not to be the scene of his activity. Before long he realized that amongst the Bohemian Evangelicals there were quarrels and theological disputes. Its Lutheranism was threatened by the Calvinist and the Bohemian Brethren movements.

Trzanowski had been brought up in the spirit of pure Lutheranism, and he was not content to stay in an area of such spiritual storms. Therefore he left Prague after six months and accepted a position as tutor in the home of a member of the Bohemian nobility, where he remained for a whole year. From there he went to Holesov in Moravia, where he held a position as headmaster of a school.

In the year 1615 we meet him again in yet another position as leader of the school at Valasske Mezrici, also in Moravia. Here he takes an important step with regard to his future life, as he is ordained and becomes a pastor in Valasske Mezrici. The ordination took place at Oels in Silesia on April 21 in the year 1616.

As the parish minister of Valasske Mezrici he worked quietly for a few years, and it might have been presumed that here he would end his days. Not so, however. Circumstances beyond his control altered his way of life. In 1618 the Thirty Years' War broke out. After the Battle of the White Mountain, Bila Hora, the victorious imperial armies (Roman Catholics) entered Moravia and captured Mezrici. Trzanowski left his position and, together with his family (he had married in 1615), took shelter at his birthplace, Cieszyn. Not for long did he stay there but returned to Mezrici, where he was imprisoned. After a short time he was released. He now came upon very hard times. Moravia was stricken with a terrible plague. It ravaged the people of Valasske Mezrici, and about two thousand of his parishioners, including two of his sons and a daughter, succumbed. Still Trzanowski remained at his post through this most difficult and terrible time.

His career at Valasske Mezrici ended through a royal imperial mandate in 1624, when the Evangelical clergy were commanded to leave the country of Moravia and the people were instructed to return to the bosom of the Roman Catholic Church within a period of six weeks.

Trzanowski postponed his departure as long as possible, but eventually was compelled to say farewell to his congregation in 1625.

Once more he returned to Cieszyn and from there went to Bielsko, where he found shelter in the castle of Baron John Sunegh. Here he resided until the end of 1627, occupying positions first as court chaplain and later as municipal minister.

The Counter Reformation wave overflowed the lands of the Hapsburgs and forced Trzanowski to leave Bielsko. The Sunegh family took him into the castle of Budatyn, Slovakia, and afterwards Illeshazy into the castle of Orava.

Here he remained for three years, until 1631, when he was called by the congregation at Liptovsky Svaty Mikulas in Slovakia to become its pastor. There he stayed until his death, which came after a long illness on May 29, 1637.

He was quite young when he died, being only forty-six. He was buried in the Church of Svaty Mikulas (St. Nicholas), which now belongs to the Roman Catholic Church. The site of his resting place has not been preserved.

III

Trzanowski was called the "Slavonic Luther." Incidentally the Slovaks called him the Polish Luther because of his Polish descent. The first appellation appears to be the more correct one. Trzanowski belongs, because of his literary work and through the creative activities which he developed, to all the Slavonic-speaking people of the Evangelical faith, whether they live in Bohemia, Slovakia, Silesia, Hungary, America, or elsewhere.

His cradle stood among the Poles; the way of life led him through Prague to Moravia, Cieszyn, and Bielitz, and his ashes rest among the Slovaks. The sound of his lute was heard through the centuries among people living where his feet had trod. Through his creative activities he served all alike, and all the Slavonic Evangelicals owe him a great debt of gratitude. A Slavonic bard! Indeed, a bard above all, and

on this bardic activity his whole importance is based. It was best expressed in the designation the Slavonic Luther.

That he was a loyal, staunch Lutheran he immediately made known to wider circles by his first book, published in Olomuniec in 1620. It was a Czech translation of the Augsburg Confession. Trzanowski appears here as an ardent defender of Augustana principles and gives expression to them in a long foreword with which he introduced the translation. The reason why he decided to make a new translation of this confession was the shortage of previous translations and the inadequacy of those that did exist. At the same time he was also influenced by the religious circumstances prevailing at that time in Bohemia and by the desire to oppose the concessions made on the part of the Lutherans to the Calvinist cause and the Bohemian Brethren. He regards the Augsburg Confession as a "precious jewel," a divine gift in which God compressed His truth. This truth of God should not be put under a bushel but on a candlestick. Trzanowski devotes a considerable part of his foreword to the defense of the Augsburg Confession against different charges. It ought to be added that the above translation was and still is considered excellent. Trzanowski dedicated his work to the burgomaster (mayor) and the city council of Cieszyn.

Trzanowski's rigorous Lutheran attitude finds its expression in his whole further literary activity, but it was especially emphasized in a collection of Latin hymns and odes published in Brzeg, Silesia, in 1629 under the title *Odarum sacrarum sive hymnorum libri tres*. This collection contains 150 hymns and odes, a discussion on Christian "paganism," and remarks on the subject of versification. Trzanowski also added music to the collection, wishing to point out that his odes could be used for singing.

The Latin odes made the name of Trzanowski known and ensured his fame as a bard. Through them he took his place in the sphere of devout Latin post-Humanistic creativeness. He may be placed beside the poet and Wittenberg professor of poetry Fr. Taubmann (1565—1613), whom Trzanowski had met during his stay at the Wittenberg University. He was dependent on him for forms and topics.

To his point of view Trzanowski gave decisive expression in the previously mentioned discussion "*De Christiano-gen-*

tilismo." In it Trzanowski reproaches some of the poets, who, like the Jews, turned their backs on God and bowed down to idols. Of such are the poets who in their songs call upon the pagan idols, such as Jupiter, Apollo, the Muses, as well as on God. This kind of writing had already been condemned by the Apostle Paul and Luther, who called upon men to give praise only to the one true God. Christian poets ought to deal only with Christian history, Biblical history, and not with pagan themes. Trzanowski does not allow the use of pagan metaphors, such as inferno, Mars, meaning battle, and so on.

The most characteristic production of Trzanowski, showing him most clearly as a literary creator, is his principal life work—his hymn book, entitled *Cithara Sanctorum*, published in 1636 in Lewocza by Brewer.

This hymnbook was generally accepted by the Lutheran congregations in Slovakia, Bohemia, and Cieszyn Silesia and exercised a tremendous influence on the people who used it for several centuries. It is enough to say that there have been up to the present time about 150 different editions. It rarely happened that a new edition was an unchanged version of the earlier one. New hymns were continually added. One of them contained as many as 1,151 hymns, while the first edition had only 412. During the religious persecutions the hymnbook was printed in Germany. In 1919 the first American edition was published, and more recently one was brought out in 1928 in Pittsburgh. Indeed, this hymnal is used to this day by the Slovak Lutherans in the United States, Canada, and South America. It is estimated that at present this hymnbook is used all over the world in 365 congregations, embracing about 400,000 souls. It is not now generally used in Silesia, but the older generation still uses it in home services.

The language in which the songs are written is Bohemian, understandable alike to Czechs, Slovaks, and Polish Silesian Lutherans. This assertion, not understood perhaps at first, becomes clear, however, when one takes into consideration the political conditions prevailing in those countries in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. We may pass over this point, as it is of very little importance for us. What is important is that, as the above figures show, Trzanowski's hymn-

book has not yet finished the blessed work which it has been doing for 300 years. It is to this day what it was for centuries — a living book.

As previously stated, the first edition of his hymnbook contained 412 hymns. In this number there are about 100 of his own and about 69 translations made by Trzanowski himself. The rest are reprints from former hymnbooks and various collections of hymns, being either original Czech and Slovak or versions of German and Latin hymns.

Trzanowski divided his hymnbook into three parts. In the first part he put the hymns for the high festivals of the ecclesiastical year, then hymns for Sundays from Advent to Trinity Sunday. In the second part he put the hymns on the subjects of confession of faith, Holy Communion, Apostles, marriage and funeral hymns, and in the third one are found the hymns about the Church, prayer, Baptism, principal articles of the Christian faith, hymns and Psalms of repentance, morning and evening hymns, hymns before and after meals, hymns about the last things, and finally Psalms for vespers.

The greater part of Trzanowski's hymns is characterized by religious objectivity, resulting from the desire to express the faith not so much of an individual as of the entire Church. He thus became the protagonist of religious truths, which cannot be attained by one's own effort, but which have been revealed to mankind by our Lord Jesus. As a poet he was first of all an advocate of God's revelation, but not at all of the experiences and feelings of an individual. This characteristic feature of his poetic activity appeared very clearly in the greater part of his hymns. He wanted not only to comfort but also to teach in his songs. He therefore expressed in them always as clearly as possible the principles of the Christian faith; he preached the Gospel, the truths of divine revelation. From his hymnbook, and even from his own hymns alone, one could reproduce the Biblical stories and the teachings contained in the Holy Scripture, beginning with the creation of the world and the life in Paradise and finishing with the account of the Last Day.

In order to be able to appreciate to the full extent the character of this influence, one must exactly realize Trzanowski's spiritual qualities. Trzanowski's whole production bears the mark of an outstanding denominational enthusiasm.

In all his work he expressed his religious thoughts in Luther's fashion. His personal views and his faith were always in complete agreement with the official creed of his Church. He found no difficulty in believing that which his teachers—the great reformers—confessed and what the Evangelical Church proclaimed, for their faith was truly his most personal belief. The Church's dogmas were the most perfect expression of his own faith. Wishing to express his belief, he most willingly adhered to them. One might therefore have the impression that his whole literary production bears the marks of some dogmatism, perhaps some dryness. In this very dryness and severity, however, is hidden the strength of his works, especially of his hymns and his hymnbook. His whole production is as uniform as if forged out of one mass. From each verse radiates a deep unshakable belief in the truth which he proclaims. Everyone who gets to know Trzanowski through his works realizes with full certainty with whom he is dealing, what is his belief, and what the truth of God is that he announces. His poetic production does not perhaps appeal so much to the emotions; yet it grips the soul by its power of conviction and faith. He preaches indefatigably that basic truth of God confessed by the Lutheran Church, the truth of man's reconciliation to God effected by Christ and proclaimed in the Gospel; he stands for this truth with the whole of his conviction and thus conquers hearts for it. By his rigorously religious attitude, by his Lutheranism with all its implications, he molds and wins the souls and minds of the people. The man who has been once won for the truths which he proclaims knows very well what kind of truth it is and what demands it makes on him. Trzanowski first of all appeals to the intellect and persuades, then gets hold of hearts and masters them. The emotional reasons come only after the intellectual ones.

Could you, therefore, be surprised that in all the religious disturbances, the people of his homeland, using this hymnal, did not deny their faith, but resisted, also during the present war, the antireligious propaganda and all the Nazi attempts of separating them from their Church? When in 1940 the Polish Lutheran pastors were arrested and the Polish language banned from the pulpit, the mothers and fathers gathered their children and their servants round the

family tables and conducted home services, thus holding to the faith of their forefathers. Indeed Trzanowski's spirit has remained alive among these people up to the present day. His literary heritage, in the original and in translations, continues to act here as a leaven and confirms the simple peasant folk in faith.

The Slavonic Luther has not yet been silenced among the Slavonic people. This indeed is the hope for the future.
London, England

Noah's Curse and Blessing Gen. 9:18-27*

By J. ERNEST SHUFELT

This paper has been prepared with particular reference to the modern implications of Noah's curse upon Canaan. With this purpose in mind a rather critical study of the verses noted above has been undertaken. The following notes and conclusions are the result of this study.

Verse 18 begins, "And the sons of Noah, that went forth of the ark, were Shem and Ham and Japheth." These three sons are mentioned together six times in the Bible (Gen. 5:32; 6:10; 7:13; 9:18; 10:1; 1 Chron. 1:4), and always in the same order. This would seem, then, to be the order of their ages: Shem being the first-born, Ham next, and Japheth the youngest.

However, in Gen. 10:21 we read, "Unto Shem also . . . the brother of Japheth the elder, even to him were children born." Now, if this translation is correct, then we must consider Japheth the elder brother of Shem. But going into this matter just a little further, we seem to find good grounds for questioning the correctness of the translation. The Hebrew word *gadol*, here translated "elder," literally means "great." When applied to persons, it means the elder (of two) or the eldest. But some Hebrew scholars tell us that it is correct Hebrew usage to treat this word, not as a modifier of the possessive Japheth, but as a modifier of the whole expression

* This paper takes issue with the exegesis of Gen. 9:18-27 current in our circles. Several brethren who are competent scholars agree with the essayist. Let the paper be given the impartial, objective consideration to which it is entitled. — Ed.