

Evangelical West Pomerania Until 1945

People – Places – Contexts

Summary

On May 5, 1945, “before the Third Reich announced unconditional surrender, shots were no longer heard in West Pomerania. The hell of the war devoured the social and political order prevailing here for centuries¹.” The heirloom of the House of Griffins, taken over in 1648 by the Swedens and Brandenburgers, finally connected in 1815 into one Pomeranian province in Prussia, and later in the German Reich, disintegrated into two parts. The River Oder marked the border between western Poland and eastern Germany, which after the transformation of the Soviet occupation zone into the German Democratic Republic became as of 7 October 1949 the western neighbour of the Polish People’s Republic. For the next forty years, history was being written “anew.” “Numerous and quite successful attempts” to blur the memory were an important part of this process². Many years later whatever was suppressed re-surfaced; after 1989, memory re-claimed its rights, demanding the “spaces” in the sense of returning to reflection on real and familiar topographies to the symbolic processes that accompanied them. It strongly influenced the development of many projects within the framework of the Humanities called, not without reservations, memory-related sciences³. This

¹ H. W. Rautenberg, “Czas wielkich nadziei i klęski”, [in:] *Pomorze Zachodnie poprzez wieki...* Szczecin 1998, p. 336.

² J. M. Piskorski, *O potrzebie historii (zamiast zakończenia)*, ibidem, p. 419.

³ See e.g. E. Domańska (ed.), *Pamięć, etyka, historia: anglo-amerykańska teoria historiografii lat dziewięćdziesiątych. Antologia przekładów*, Poznań 2002. M. Saryusz-Wolska (ed.),

book is part of this research current. It explores the areas of Christian religion in its Evangelical topography, limited to the space of the former Prussian province of Pommern (*Provinz Pommern*), in existence until 1945.

The main goal of this study is the recreation of selected themes from the centuries-long history of Evangelicalism in these areas. The term Evangelicalism used in the title, referring to its use in the Polish language, is narrower than Protestantism. It concerns the denominations that resulted from the Reformation breakthrough in its first phase, i.e. the Lutheran, Reformed (Calvinist) Churches.

The concept of the publication relied heavily on the mnemotopos category, i.e. the symbolically extended extension of the topographical place of memory, referring to the recurrent themes of culture, understood very broadly (e.g. characters, events, literary and artistic works, etc.). In the formation of such communities, mnemotopoi are of key importance, and transported over the next generations can be the foundations of identity, or fragments of remembrance of old times. Evangelicalism was the main confession present in these areas for over four hundred years. In the historical context, it was the Lutheran Reformation that formed individuals and societies on both sides of the River Oder. The concept of mnemotopoi, or a list of key themes I have recognized in the history of the Evangelical Church in Western Pomerania, allowed me to capture many important moments in such a complex matter as the history of the Church. Religion plays a fundamental role in the creation of places of memory and of the mnemotopoi deriving from them. The choice was made on the basis of research findings present in the works of historians of Christianity⁴. The area of West Pomerania, from Szczecin to Słupsk, became the central space, the real topography of the work. Gdańsk Pomerania, due to the different history of this area, has not been included here. The book focuses on people, places and contexts that fit in with the presence of West

Pamięć zbiorowa i kulturowa. Współczesna perspektywa órniemiecka, Kraków 2009. A spectrum of research is provided moreover by the publication: K. Kończal (ed.), *(Kon)Teksty Pamięci. Antologia*, Warszawa 2014.

⁴ Mainly see J. B. Metz, *Memoria Passionis. Ein provozierendes Gedächtnis in pluralistischer Gesellschaft*, Freiburg i. Br., Basel, Wien 2006 and Ch. Marksches, H. Wolf, *Erinnerungs-orte des Christentums...*, op. cit.

Pomeranian Evangelicalism in the broad history of German-language Protestantism. Some of them, such as the figure of Elisabeth Cruciger (1500–1535), an inhabitant of Pomerania (Pommerin), referred to as the first poet of the Reformation even though she left the family and monastery to go to Wittenberg, appears on the pages of the history of the Church, among others because of the song she is the author of⁵. Moreover, the mnemotopos allows us to trace the vehicles of theological content transfer, introduced within the Evangelical Churches. The Bible (1534) in the translation of Doctor Martin Luther, his *Little Catechism* and *Big Catechism* of 1529, were adopted in Pomerania like in other regions of Germany. Invention and creativity of poets, theologians and cantors allowed for the creation of regional cantionals. These, used by successive generations of the faithful, laid the foundations not only for the development of the spirituality of individuals, but also for that of collective piety. Many hymnals were used in the territory of Pomerania, but until the twentieth century, two of them predominated, written by Laurentius D. Bollhagen (1683–1738) and Johann Porst (1688–1728). For over one hundred and fifty years, both hymnals were used by the faithful in Pomerania; they were repeatedly re-issued and revised. The popularity of both collections makes it possible to carefully assess the piety of the inhabitants of the region: it was balanced, not very ecstatic, moderate, and conservative.

Attachment to the religious traditions of Lutheranism can be observed in disputes about the introduction of a new ecclesiastical order that emerged in the 1820s. Resistance to the actions of royal powers, which in the person of the monarch, King Friedrich Wilhelm III, forced the unification of the Evangelical Churches - the Reformed one (represented in Pomerania in only a few places) with the Lutheran one, led to a permanent separation in Silesia and west of the River Oder. Its result was a split in the Lutheran Church, resulting in the creation of a small Old Lutheran Church; with only a few thousand believers, it was free from state supervision and was officially recognized as of 1845. The consequences of this division persist until today, with the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELK) being the heir to Old Lutheran Church in Germany. Emigrants originally

⁵ *Śpiewnik Ewangelicki...*, op. cit., No. 107.

in confessional Lutheranism co-created Evangelical communities in the United States, then in Brazil and Canada.

Studies on mnemotopics, Zbigniew Pasek notes, are mainly directed towards an analysis of literary texts by religious groups selected by the researcher⁶. One can concur with this opinion, although it should be noted that the research demand remains, for example, an analysis of the theological, architectural and iconography program in church buildings created in Prussia, also in the Pomeranian church province under the so-called Eisenach regulation⁷. Buildings erected after 1861 fit into the implementation of the church union throughout Germany⁸. Specific mnemotopoi, e.g. connected with the figures of the Reformers, appear moreover in the artistic programs of the buildings restored in late 19th and early 20th centuries. This issue is not subject to scrutiny in this study and would require a separate analysis.

The proposed selection of mnemotopic issues is justified by the deep embedding in historical and cultural conditions of a given era. Autobiographical notes of the clergy provide such a set of texts. Despite their individuality, they are characterized by high parity of access to universal religious awareness.

The main themes and ideas of ecclesiastical life can be reconstructed on the basis of this kind of writing and – as Christian Hauer has shown⁹ – each text should be treated as a polyfunctional source of history, not confined to a single scientific discipline. The unique character of the personal documents of the clergy involves e.g. reporting on the “professional” duties of their office. More often than not, such notes were not meant for publication, but were rather a form of dialogue with the authors’ own lives and vocation. They were an attempt to find an answer to the question posed by Walter Sparn: “Who is the

⁶ Z. Pasek, *Mnemotoposy polskich protestantów...* op. cit., p. 106.

⁷ P. Kaiser: “Das sogenannte Eisenacher Regulativ von 1861. Ein kirchenrechtliches Phantom”, [in:] P. Raschzok, R. Sörries (ed.), *Geschichte des protestantischen Kirchenbaues. Festschrift für Peter Poscharsky zum 60. Geburtstag. Junge*, Erlangen 1999, p. 114–129.

⁸ K.E.O. Fritsch (ed.), *Der Kirchenbau des Protestantismus von der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart*, Berlin 1893, p. 237–242.

⁹ See Ch. Hauer, “Ego-Dokumente und historisches Lernen”, [in:] S. Handro, B. Schönmann: *Geschichte und Sprache*, Berlin 2010, p. 142.

author of the history of my life?"¹⁰. There are many answers to the above question, but in most of the texts written by theologians, it is God who writes the scenarios of human lives. Biography is itself a mnemotopos, because not only does it bring to mind the individual's life, but also allows it to be seen in the context of the memory of a larger group. The study uses four texts which are personal documents. Each of them refers to a different historical era. The oldest one, the autobiography of pastor Johann Joachim Spalding (1714–1804), a representative of the so-called popular theology during the Enlightenment, is an example of a story of one of the most recognizable Prussian priests born in Pomerania. The text by Carl Gottlieb Rehsener (1790–1862), a minister at Saint John's Church in Klaipeda (Memel), has a completely different status. Written by someone whose ancestors settled down in Gwda Wielka near Szczecinek, it is a testimony to the stubbornness and perseverance of a young man from a simple rural family, who made a career in the Church in East Prussia while being a renowned painter and caricaturist. The next two documents are part of the very extensive mnemotopos of the German Christian Churches. They regard the relations of the Churches as institutions and of individual clergymen to the Nazi state. The selected documents are part of a large corpus of texts studied in the context of the activity of the Confessing Church (*Bekennende Kirche*). The sources referred to in this study are an intimate yearbook-diary of minister Friedrich Onnasch (1881–1945), the superintendent (bishop) of the Koszalin Church District, parish priest of Saint Mary's Church in Koszalin, murdered by Soviet troops in Barlinek in February 1945. A document written on a regular basis, never published, is a detailed account (though coded, due to censorship), showing the experience of the clerical office at a time of totalitarian oppression. The same applies to the letters of Annemarie Winter (1912–1945), a female theologian serving in the vicinity of Słupsk during the Second World War. Deported to Siberia, the author died in a camp on 8 September 1945. The Evangelical clergy and their mnemotopos are part of the Church's service in a very specific place. Friedrich Onnasch is remembered in a 2004 commem-

¹⁰ W. Sparn, *Wer schreibt meine Lebensgeschichte?*, Gütersloh 1990, p. 5.

orative plaque installed at 2 Matejki St. in Koszalin. The uniqueness of the work of Annemarie Winter became part of a larger story related to the history of women in the pastoral office, which dates back to the late 1920s in the Evangelical Church and as such calls for a more detailed study, especially that there were more women theologians working in Pomerania; for example, the trace of Waltraud Engler, serving in the Koszalin parish during the time of minister Friedrich Onnasch, disappears after the war. The superintendent's diary makes no mention of that person, however.

The situation in the Evangelical Church after 1933 or the commitment of minister Friedrich Onnasch and others, e.g. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) associated with Pomerania, in the movement of the Confessing Church, cannot be understood without describing and analyzing the "Aryan paradigm". The depravity of this intra-Protestant heresy in the Evangelical Church in Germany did not omit Pomerania. It is a fundamental part of the mnemotopos associated with the implementation of Nazism into Church structures and doctrine in the 1930s and 1940s.

The doctrine of universal priesthood of all believers promoted during the Reformation found it difficult to permeate the ecclesiastical practice and everyday life. In the nineteenth century, it was promoted in Pomerania, among others, by the von Thadden-Trieglaff family from Trzygłów in Gryfice County. Rooted in the so-called Trzygłów conferences, organized in the family estates of Adolf von Thadden, ideas spread that were supposed to change the reflection on the activities of the laity in the Church. They were mainly implemented by Reinold von Thadden (1891–1976), president of the synod of the Confessing Church in Pomerania and the creator of the Evangelical Church Day, the largest permanent institution of the laity, prepared in cooperation with the Church, but completely independently. Reinold von Thadden, the president for life of the Church Day, made it the flagship project of Protestantism, whose vitality and strength could be seen in May 2017 during its edition related to 500 years of the Reformation, held in Wittenberg and Berlin.

The memory of the Pomeranian Church survived moreover in its mnemotopoi. It should not be equated with the German “extinct tradition”¹¹, as some researchers point out, but one must try to find and discover what has become forgotten, because “writing history is like restoring [...] a memory that is unselective and open to the same extent as the memory of others”¹². The present study is part of such research.

¹¹ See M. Majewski, A. Śliwińska, “Wymarła tradycja. Collegium Groeningianum w Stargardzie Szczecińskim”, [in:] Z. Mazur (ed.), *Wspólne dziedzictwo. Ze studiów nad stosunkiem do spuścizny kulturowej na Ziemiach Zachodnich i Północnych*. Poznań 2000, p. 453.

¹² M. Piskorski, *O potrzebie historii (zamiast zakończenia)*, ibidem, p. 419–420.

