

Janusz Tazbir

Philip Melanchthon in the Writings of his Polish Contemporaries

Over thirty years ago Oskar Bartel, a distinguished scholar of the history of the Polish Reformation, bemoaned how little was known about the relations between *preceptor Germaniae* and the movement. In an article about the familiarity with Melanchthon, both as person and his oeuvre, in Poland, Bartel wrote: “wir besitzen einige Werke, meist Broschüren über Luther, Calvin, sogar Hus und Zwingli, aber ich habe keine über Melanchthon gefunden”.¹ Bartel’s article provided a recapitulation, if somewhat incomplete, of the state of research at the time, and essentially stopped at the death of the Reformer. Therefore, in this study I would like to point to the results of the last thirty years of research, on the one hand, and highlight the post-mortem impact of Melanchthon’s writings and the reflection of his person in the memories of the next generations, on the other.

The new information about the contacts Melanchthon had with Poland that has come to light since the 1960s is scattered across a number of articles or monographs; there is to date no separate study devoted to the German Reformer. Only a handful of contributions have been published. No wonder therefore that twenty years after the publication of Bartel’s article, Roman Nir begins his study of correspondence between Melanchthon and Krzycki thus: “Relatively little

¹ O. Bartel, “Luther und Melanchthon in Polen,” in: *Luther und Melanchthon. Referate und Berichte des Zweiten Internationalen Kongress für Lutherforschung, Münster, 8.–13. August 1960*, ed. V. Vajta (Göttingen, 1961), p. 177. It is – as regards Melanchthon – an abridged version of an article in *Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce* 6 (1961): *Filip Melanchthon w Polsce*, pp. 73–90.

is known about the contacts between Philip Melanchthon and Poles, about his relations with our culture, and about the impact of the eminent Wittenberger on the religious and intellectual life [here]”.² Some light has been shed on the matter by the volumes of sources published after 1960. These include *Acta Tomiciana* (a volume of diplomatic letters from 1532–1534), letters of Stanislaus Hosius from mid-sixteenth century, and the relevant volumes of *Acta Nuntiaturae Polonae* (covering the years 1519–1557, 1565–1568 and 1572–1578).

Though the plea to publish the correspondence between Melanchthon and the Poles was made as early as in the first organisational meeting of the Society for the Study of Reformation in Poland in 1920, the publication has not taken place to date. However, extensive passages from his works – *De philosophia oratio*, *Oratio de Aristotele*, *Philosophiae moralis epitome libri duo*, and *Liber de anima* – have now been published in the Polish translation for the first time in an anthology of philosophical and religious thought of the Reformation.³

The reprint of Jan Mączyński’s Latin-Polish dictionary of 1564, published in 1973 thanks to the efforts of Reinhold Olesch, brought back to attention Melanchthon’s letter on the origin of Slavs, included in the dictionary. He located their origins in Paphlagonia, a land abutting the ancient Troy. The area was purported to be inhabited by the tribe of Enetae or Henetae, who later settled in much of the East-Central Europe. The glory of this people was the Kingdom of Poland, where “there have long flourished, adorning it, laws and justice, virility and the martial skill (warfare expertise), learning and religious zeal”, wrote Melanchthon, ascribing a Greek origin to its inhabitants. For over five hundred years, it had been a bulwark for Germania and Panonia, defending these kingdoms against the incursions of the Tartars.⁴ Thus, the German Reformer (who, incidentally, located the western border of Germany on the Oder), whose disquisitions gained much popularity among the Polish historians of the second

² R. Nir, “Próba nawrócenia Melanchtona przez biskupa Andrzeja Krzyckiego,” *Studia Płockie* 8 (1980 [1982]), p. 169.

³ *Mysł filozoficzno-religijna reformacji XVI wieku*, ed. L. Szczucki (Warszawa, 1972), pp. 234–276.

⁴ Cf. B. Otwinowska, *Język – Naród – Kultura. Antecedencje i motywy renesansowej myśli o języku* (Wrocław, 1974), pp. 157–158. See also L. Regner, “Erotemata Dialectices Melanchtona...,” *Ruch Filozoficzny* 25, no. 1–2 (1966), pp. 88–90; J. Legowicz, “Próba humanistycznego spojrzenia na człowieka u F. Melanchtona,” *Rocznik Pedagogiczny* 9 (1984), pp. 165–172.

half of the sixteenth century, contributed to the creation of as many as two national myths. One consisted in the belief in the Sarmatian origin of the Polish nobility. Sarmatia was purported to have been founded by Henetae, whom Melanchthon identified with Slavs. The other was the view of the Commonwealth of nobles as the bulwark of Christendom, defending the part of Europe built by a culture which was Christian in its content and Latin in its form.⁵

Melanchthon described himself as an admirer of Slavs (*Gentis Henetae laudator*), and claimed that the neighbours of Germans, Poles and Czechs, “superseded other nations in their laws, courts, towns, social discipline, and also the magnificence of their nobility and the perfection of their art of war”.⁶ He also took an interest in the origin of Kashubians. His thoughts on the matter, laid out in Carion’s Chronicle, have recently been brought into focus.⁷ Melanchthon, as we know, ran a guesthouse of sorts in Wittenberg, offering lodgings to youths recommended to him, dining with them, and giving them private lessons. This was not an entirely disinterested favour; he viewed these youths as apostles of the new faith. Next to the Scandinavians and Czechs, the most numerous group were arrivals from Poland and Bohemia. Many would later make their mark on the history of literature, education, and in the religious life of various Churches. Out of professors teaching at Wittenberg, Melanchthon was the most popular among foreign students: kind and approachable, he took newcomers in his care and encouraged them to study. In the sixteenth century, around 500 Poles are estimated to have stopped at Wittenberg, putting the university ahead of Heidelberg (around 300 between 1562 and 1620) and Basel (around 150 between 1570 and 1613), and after Leipzig (around 580 in the sixteenth century).

Among Melanchthon’s students at Wittenberg, there were also those who failed to fulfil the hope the Master had for their religious role. Thus, alphabetically, Stanisław Brzezicki (1541–1613) became an avid champion of Counter-Reformation; in 1571, he joined the Jesuit order, where he became famed for his orthodoxy (often being appointed censor). Catholic polemics was much invigorated by the demagogic pamphlets of Stanisław Orzechowski (1513–1560), a master

⁵ Cf. J. Tazbir, *Poland as the Rampart of Christian Europe: Myths and Historical Reality* (Warszawa, 1989), p. 22.

⁶ *Corpus Reformatorum* 9 (1842), pp. 1058–1059.

⁷ M. Kwapiński, “Pogląd Filipa Melanchtona o pochodzeniu Kaszubów,” *Pomorania Antiqua* 13 (1988), pp. 249–252.

at finding a common language with nobles. He was most likely the Pole who, staying in Wittenberg in November 1533, visited Melanchthon.⁸ The leader of Lutheranism extolled the intellectual culture of Orzechowski, writing that there was no-one “among the Poles that he saw as more worthy of loving”, given his intellectual horizons, refinement, and erudition. Another of Melanchthon’s Wittenberg students (between 1559 and 1560), Jan Dymitr Solikowski (1539–1603), would later place his talents and his writing skills at the service of the Counter-Reformation. He went on to be a successful diplomat and Archbishop of Lviv, and showed glaring intolerance to dissidents. Similar things could be said of Stanisław Warszewicki (around 1530–1591), who joined Jesuits after studying at Wittenberg (1550) and Padua.

Equally, the hopes of Melanchthon were frustrated also by those of his students who later joined “the Arian schism”. They included such eminent individuals as Marcin Krowicki (around 1501–1573) and Grzegorz Paweł of Brzeziny (around 1525–1591), one of the initiators of Polish Antitrinitarianism. Admittedly, the latter was already critical of what he saw and heard in the capital of Lutheranism when he attended Melanchthon’s Wittenberg lectures in 1550. Similarly, if later accounts are to be believed, Melanchthon too saw much skill in Grzegorz, as well as a “contrarian head”, which led him to prophesy that the man “would cause much tumult in Poland”.⁹ In turn, Jan Mączyński (ca. 1515 – before 1584) retained respect for the master, whose high regard he earned while in Wittenberg: “he is bright and skilful in the liberal arts [...] he will be useful to the Commonwealth”. Melanchthon cared about Mączyński also after the latter’s return to Poland, explaining to Polish officials that “es ist von Nutzen für den Staat, solche Geister zu beschützen und zu fördern”.¹⁰

Those that would later become Calvinists included Jakub Niemojewski, Sarnicki, Trecy, and Andrzej Trzeciecki the younger. It was under the tutelage of Melanchthon that Niemojewski (d. 1586) acquired a thorough knowledge of humanist and classical literature, so important to his polemical writings; these, incidentally, was largely directed against Jesuits. Eminent exponents of Polish Calvinism also

⁸ Hypothesis proposed by H. Barycz, “Dwa epizody różnowiercze z listopada 1533 r. 1. Tajemnicza wizyta nieznanego Polaka w Wittenberdze,” *Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce* 19 (1969), pp. 141–142.

⁹ K. Górski, *Grzegorz Paweł z Erzein. Monografia z dziejów polskiej literatury ariańskiej XVI w.* (Kraków, 1929), pp. 20–21.

¹⁰ Bartel, “Luther und Melanchthon,” p. 170.

included the religious polemist and historian Stanisław Sarnicki (1532–1597), who studied at Wittenberg from 1547. Krzysztof Trecy (ca. 1530–1591), later a Helvetian theologian and translator, also stopped at Wittenberg (1556). Andrzej Trzeciecki the younger (d. around 1589), translator and poet, and an activist of Calvinism in Lesser Poland, matriculated at the same university in 1544. Later, the group of Melanchthon's supporters grew to include Jan Krzysztoporski (1518–1585), the future Castellan of Sieradz, who studied at Wittenberg between 1537 and 1539. It was to Krzysztoporski that Melanchthon dedicated his treatise on purgatory, which did not stop the former student from becoming a pillar of the Calvinist Church in Lesser Poland. Krzysztoporski was recommended to Melanchthon by Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski.

It could be said that Melanchthon, educating the future ranks of propagators and defenders of the new faith, did it least of all for his own Church. The names of Hegendorfer and Trepka are exceptions here, however. Krzysztof Hegendorfer (1500–1540) was confirmed in his Lutheran beliefs by the lectures of Melanchthon he heard at Wittenberg (1521). On his return to Poland, he was appointed to the chair of Latin rhetorics in the Catholic Academy of Lubrański, which existed in Poznań. However, he was forced by confessional opponents to leave the city, his works were publically burned, and some were placed on the index. A student of this school, Eustachy (Ostafi) Trepka (ca. 1510–1559), accepted Lutheranism also under the influence of Melanchthon. From 1556 onwards he remained in the Kingdom of Poland, acting as liaison between the city and Lutheran centres in Greater Poland.

Already during their stay in Wittenberg, many of the Polish arrivals were lavished with much praise by Melanchthon. There was much Humanist exaggeration in it (just as in the praise heaped by John a Lasco / Johannes Alasco on Melanchthon). There was also a dose of personal ambition in that praise, grounded in Melanchthon's conviction that someone he had singled out could not possibly have been unworthy of such favour. At any rate, the opinion Melanchthon expressed (1539) of prematurely deceased Mikołaj Anian, whom he saw as "the apostle of Poland" in the Protestant spirit, was just as enthusiastic as his view of Orzechowski. Equally warm was the recommendation that he made to Bucer of Michalo the Lithuanian, the future author of the chronicle *De moribus Tartarorum, Lituanoorum et Moschorum* ("the most zealous in religion and exceedingly eager

for learning”¹¹). Melanchthon was, however, capable of an enthusiastic assessment of his religious opponents. One recurring example is his opinion of Stanislaus Hosius, of whom he wrote that “were he not a papist, he would be the first among the scholars of the age”.¹²

As is well known, in the sixteenth-eighteenth centuries, intellectual influence (as well as propagandising) was exerted – apart from books and pamphlets – by dint of voluminous correspondence. Melanchthon wrote (or dictated) up to ten letters a day, which makes for a total of around 9,000 (more than Erasmus of Rotterdam, who authored some 8,000 letters).¹³ A percentage of this total, published (if partly) in print only in the next centuries, was addressed at the residents of Poland and Lithuania, or individuals remaining in direct intellectual contact with those two countries, in practice forming one state. One must not, of course, be swayed by today’s political map of East-Central Europe; Western Pomerania, which belonged to Brandenburg in the sixteenth century, remains therefore beyond the scope of our research.¹⁴ It would be difficult to leave out Silesia, however, especially Wrocław (Breslau), whose Lutheran residents took a keen interest in the progress of the Reformation in Slavic countries. Melanchthon’s correspondence with key exponents of Lutheranism in the Silesian capital – Jan Hesse and Ambroży Moiban (Ambrosius Moibanus) – started quite early. He also wrote to Wrocław bishops favourably disposed towards him: John V Turzo and Balthazar of Promnitz. Though Turzo (1506–1520) formally remained a Catholic, he clearly supported “religious novelties”, which led Melanchthon and Luther to dub him “the best bishop of the century”. The appointment of Balthazar of Promnitz to the see (he was bishop between 1539 and 1562) was greeted with much joy by Protestants. Melanchthon sent his congratulations, describing the Wrocław Church as “the most tranquil Church in the Empire” (of Germany). Understandably, present-day Catholic historians have a low opinion on the orthodoxy

¹¹ Cf. *Acta Tomiciana*, vol. 17, ed. W. Pociecha, W. Urban, A. Wyczański (Wrocław, 1966), p. 266; S. Kot, *Polska złotego wieku a Europa. Studia i szkice*, ed. H. Barycz (Warszawa, 1987), p. 491.

¹² B. Elsner, *Der ermländische Bischof Stanislaus Hosius als Polemiker* (Königsberg, 1911), p. 11.

¹³ Cf. R. Stupperich, “Melanchthon und der polnische Humanismus,” in: *Fragen der polnischen Kultur im 16. Jahrhundert*, ed. R. Olesch, H. Rothe, vol. 1 (Gießen, 1980), p. 367.

¹⁴ On this K. Harms, “Melanchthons Beziehungen zu Pommern und sein Einfluss auf die pommersche Kirche,” *Baltische Studien* NS 47 (1960), pp. 91–107.

of both princes of the Church.¹⁵ It should be remembered, however, that both were active before the Council of Trent, which put paid to the hopes that the conflicted Christianity may be reconciled. This explains the attempts made from 1530 by two other bishops, Krzycki and Johannes Dantiscus, to have Melanchthon come to Poland.

Both bishops were poets and statesmen, and so members of the then Humanist elite. They dreamt of appointing the German reformer to a chair at the Cracow Academy. In this way, they wanted to liberate him from the influence of Luther, give him independence, “und so die Reformation einer grossen Stütze zu berauben”.¹⁶ It was thanks to the mediation of Melanchthon that, during his 1523 stay in Wittenberg, Dantiscus was granted an audience with Luther, whom he found “a man sharp of mind, learned, and articulate”.¹⁷ Negotiations on bringing the Preceptor of Germany to Poland were given a cautious approval by the papacy. Initially, Krzycki did not demand that Melanchthon make a formal break with Lutheranism. He began his overtures in 1530 and renewed them in 1532–1535,¹⁸ each time receiving polite but evasive answers from Melanchthon, who continually delayed the decision. A present-day Catholic scholar (R. Nir) therefore describes the German reformer as insincere. Writing in 1923, Stanisław Kot reached similar conclusions. He believed Melanchthon was not for a moment considering leaving Wittenberg for Płock or Poznań (“all the illusion was on the side of Krzycki”). If, however, he maintained the correspondence with the Polish bishop, this was done – like in the exchange with Albrecht, archbishop of Mainz – in the hope that agreement on breaching the Church schism can be reached; Kot also believed that Melanchthon’s letters “to the bishops were not filled with sincerity”.¹⁹

¹⁵ Cf. *Historia Kościoła w Polsce*, vol. 1: *Do roku 1764*, Pt. 2: *Od roku 1506*, ed. B. Kumor, Z. Obertyński (Poznań, 1974), p. 46.

¹⁶ Bartel, “Luther und Melanchton,” p. 171.

¹⁷ Z. Nowak, *Jan Dantyszek. Portret renesansowego humanisty* (Wrocław, 1982), pp. 122–123.

¹⁸ Cf. K. Morawski, “Beiträge zur Geschichte des Humanismus in Polen,” *Sitzungsberichte der kais. Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien philosophisch-historische Classe* 118 (1889), pp. 22–26 (offprint). Two previously unknown letters from Krzycki to Melanchthon (of 10 January and 5 April 1535) were located by J. Starnawski, “Polonika rękopiśmienne Biblioteki świętej Genowefy w Paryżu,” *Roczniki Biblioteczne* 21 (1977), p. 936.

¹⁹ S. Kot, *Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski. Studium z dziejów kultury polskiej w. XVI* (Kraków, 1919), p. 30.

Catholic milieux in Germany expressed fears that, were Melanchthon to come to Poland, a new centre of the Reformation might be established there. Such fears were expressed by among others Cochlaeus in a letter to papal legate Girolamo Aleandro (of January 1535). The latter in turn sought to fetch Melanchthon to Rome or a university in another Italian city. In his polemical writings, Cochlaeus compared master Philip to a treacherous fox and a siren who wins over people with her sweet, adulatory speech. Melanchthon was to deploy various stratagems to “attract human hearts to himself, using sweet talk to play their hearts”. He was not to be believed – Cochlaeus wrote – when he wrote he did not approve of everything Luther was teaching, in fact Melanchthon had a very high opinion of him, “fatally deceived by the apostate monk”.²⁰ At Cochlaeus’ request, Bishop Piotr Tomicki supported him financially, donating (1533) 20 Hungarian guilders to print these pamphlets.

Nor was Erasmus of Rotterdam favourably disposed to the plans of bringing Melanchthon to Poland. In his letter to Johannes Alasco (5 March 1534) he writes: “One of your bishops has informed me that he invited Melanchthon to Poland. I find it quite surprising. Though Melanchthon writes less aggressively, but he is not removed one jot from Lutheran principles. He is, if I may say so, more of a Lutheran than Luther himself”.²¹ The bishop was Andrzej Krzycki, already mentioned above, who – like Dantiscus – dabbled, successfully, in poetry. His orthodoxy, too, was the subject of much doubt in the more staunchly Catholic milieux. The intentions of both bishops amounted to little, which did not prevent Dantiscus in March 1547 from giving condolences to his German friend, Georg Sabinus, on the death of his wife Anne, Melanchthon’s daughter.²² Even in 1556, the chapters of Lesser Poland and Mazovia, imploring Lipoman to oppose the arrival of key heresiarchs to Poland, mentioned on the same breath Calvin, Alasco, and – Melanchthon.

Melanchthon did not of course write only to Catholic bishops; he also stayed in close contact with Polish nobles and magnates. Of most interest to scholars, Polish and German alike, is understandably his correspondence with Johannes Alasco and Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski. The latter studied (from 1531) largely on his own, at the same

²⁰ Ibidem, pp. 28–29.

²¹ *Korespondencja Erazma z Rotterdamu z Polakami*, ed. M. Cytowska (Warszawa, 1965), pp. 271–272. Cf. also Stupperich, op. cit., pp. 368–370.

²² Nowak, op. cit., p. 264.

time seeking to bring closer Melanchthon and Alasco, Modrzewski's patron. Though after 1535 Frycz left Wittenberg, he remained in close contact by letter with Melanchthon. They shared common views on a number of matters, such as a conciliatory stance on religious disputes. Stressing this commonality, Melanchthon praised Modrzewski, who "often in difficult matters helped [him] and supported with counsel and persuasion".²³ Under his influence, the Polish political and ecclesiastical writer turned to ethical issues, imbibed Stoic-Christian ethics, and was moved to study the Bible more seriously. Like Melanchthon, he advocated the primacy of customs over laws and emphasized the significance of reason in solving social and religious problems. In contrast to the orthodox stance of Luther, or even more so of Calvin, Frycz accepted after Melanchthon "the natural ability of man to achieve the human dimension of moral perfection", thus advocating state reform via a moral renewal of society. His understanding of predestination is, too, closer to the moderate and optimistic view of Melanchthon than the austere and rigorous stance of the spiritual dictator of Geneva. Both reformers also acknowledged the right of the state to intervene in Church relations, though unlike Melanchthon, Frycz believed that both institutions had equal status. The two met again in 1547 in Wittenberg, as we read in Bucer's letter to Melanchthon.²⁴

Having briefly outlined the contacts between Modrzewski and Melanchthon, I would like to present in a similarly cursory fashion his relations with Alasco, the sole figure of the Polish Reformation to have gained renown across Europe. These relations are discussed at length by Oskar Bartel in his biography of Lasco, published also in German.²⁵ After Bartel, let us reiterate that Alasco maintained very lively correspondence with Melanchthon, whom he held in high regard for "das tiefe Wissen, die Bescheidenheit, Frömmigkeit und Mässigung in den Äusserungen zu theologischen und kirchlichen Fragen der Zeit". In one letter, he goes so far as to call him "the glory of our times".²⁶ In 1537, Laski spent several days in Leipzig talking to Melanchthon "about dogmas". He would return to the conversation

²³ Kot, *Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski*, p. 42.

²⁴ S. Piwko, "Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski: ideologia religijna a myśl polityczna," *Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce* 21 (1976), p. 15.

²⁵ O. Bartel, *Jan Łaski. Leben und Werk des polnischen Reformators* (Berlin, 1964), passim.

²⁶ Idem, "Luther und Melanchthon," p. 171.

ca. 20 years later, when, on his way back to Poland, he visited Melanchthon in Wittenberg (November 1556). Incidentally, both Reformers died in 1560, Alasco on 19 April, Melanchthon on 8 January.

Oskar Bartel writes that Johannes Alasco saw Melanchthon at first as “mehr den grossen Humanisten als den Theologen”.²⁷ Another contemporary researcher, Lech Szczucki, rightly reminds us that Protestantism “was both a religious and mental movement, which made a great effort – mainly thanks to the work of Philip Melanchthon – to re-evaluate the former cultural heritage, while paying a special attention to Renaissance Humanism, and creating in effect an exceptionally lively and highly attractive kind of culture”.²⁸ The thesis is supported by the great impact of the German teacher’s programmes and textbooks on the Lutheran secondary schools in Royal Prussia. The view of Marian Pawlak, which can be found in his essay on the Elbląg *gymnasium* (a lower secondary or middle school, operating between 1535 and 1772), presenting it as “a secondary school of humanities, based on Melanchthon’s education programme”, can also be attributed to some extent to the gymnasia in Toruń (1568–1793) and Gdańsk (1580–1814).²⁹ Rectors and professors of that school, being mostly Philip Melanchthon’s students, had taken great care to implement the programme there.

Philip’s recommendation letters often determined students’ educational path. Marian Pawlak writes that many students, who were coming back to Royal Prussia, would seek Luther and Melanchthon’s recommendations in order to get recruited by local parishes and schools. Andrzej Aurifaber was inspired by Melanchthon’s education ordinance already in 1539 (when preparing an analogous law for the Gdańsk gymnasium). NB: Between 1526 and 1600, at least 122 of Gdańsk citizens studied in Wittenberg, while there were only 14 of them at the Cracow Academy at that time. In total (sixteenth through eighteenth centuries), 592 Royal Prussian students enrolled in that school, which gives 14.6% of the total number of young

²⁷ Ibidem, loc. cit.

²⁸ L. Szczucki, “Aspekty myśli polskiej XVI wieku,” in: *Filozofia i myśl społeczna XVI wieku*, ed. L. Szczucki (Warszawa, 1978), p. 10.

²⁹ M. Pawiak, *Dzieje gimnazjum elbląskiego w latach 1535–1772* (Olsztyn, 1972), p. 40; I. Dąbmska, “Logika w Gimnazjum Akademickim Gdańskim w pierwszej połowie XVII wieku,” *Rocznik Gdański* 15/16 (1956/1957), pp. 201–202. Cf. also J. Domański, Z. Ogonowski, L. Szczucki, *Zarys dziejów filozofii w Polsce wieki XVI–XVII* (Warszawa, 1989), p. 264.

people from the region, who went to study abroad. In a very ambitious six-grade education programme at the Toruń gymnasium, dialectic was taught in accordance with Melanchthon's famous textbook (*Erotemata dialectices*). The teachers also used his lecture on Aristotelian logic, and referred to the chronicle of John Carion (one of the most popular sixteenth-century textbooks), compiled by Melanchthon, to teach history. His textbooks were also used for theology lessons. Influenced by Melanchthon (and Luther), the Protestant gymnasiums in Royal Prussia considered music an integral part of the programme, devoted mainly to religious education. In both gymnasiums (Gdańsk and Toruń), portraits of the German Preceptor could be seen hanging on the walls already in the sixteenth century: one of such portraits, painted by Lukas Cranach, was in possession of a Gdańsk townsman, Jan Ernest Schröder.³⁰ In 1540, in a school procession in Elbląg, a student disguised as Desiderus Erasmus was followed by another one dressed up as Melanchthon. Both reformers were present in W. Gnapheus' play entitled *Triumphus eloquentiae* (printed in 1541).

Today's research perspective should not conceal the fact that although from the sixteenth through eighteenth century Melanchthon was basically seen as one of the outstanding leaders of the Protestant Reformation, he was perceived as a witness and bearer of God's will by the Protestants, and as a dangerous heresiarch by the Catholics. His books were burnt at the stake with other works of dissident literature (in 1534, Mateusz Drzewicki wrote to Maurycy Ferber, the Bishop of Warmia, that he found works of Luther and Melanchthon at the fair in Gniezno and ordered to incinerate them). A bishop of the Age of Enlightenment, Ignacy Krasicki, whose library collection held some works by Melanchthon, wrote about him in his *Zbiór potrzebniejszych wiadomości* (A Collection of More Necessary Information): "A student and companion in spreading Martin Luther's fallacies", he became "the leader of confessionists, adiaphorets and melanchthonists, as he would often change his maxims of faith."³¹ He always remained in the shadow of "Doctor Martin". However, when on the 4 February 1535 Sigismund I of the Jagiellon dynasty issued a decree prohibiting studying in Wittenberg, he did it to a great extent under the influence

³⁰ Ch. Ogier, *Dziennik podróży do Polski, 1635–1636*, Pt. 2 (Gdańsk, 1953), pp. 125, 197.

³¹ *Zbiór potrzebniejszych wiadomości*, vol. 2 (Warszawa and Lwów, 1782), p. 147.

of anti-melanchthonian propaganda, actively enacted by the Canon from Wrocław, the afore-mentioned Johann Cochlaeus (Dobeneck).

Cochlaeus sent brochures to Polish bishops and other dignitaries, in which he warned them against the Lutheran plague, and especially against the teachings of Master Philip. He wrote that many young noblemen went to Germany and their parents believed they studied in Catholic Leipzig. In fact, they got their education in Wittenberg, where they fell into Melanchthon's trap. To defend the attacked reformer, one of his students praised Melanchthon, as teacher, in a letter to Krzycki. The author of the refutation stated that Cochlaeus' fervour resulted not from his devotion to religion or the Republic of Poland, but rather from his hatred to Melanchthon and dislike of all scientific study. According to Stanisław Kot, the defence was written by Maciej Konarzewski, the latter Canon from Gniezno, who used to study in Wittenberg at the time of the raging debate (1537).

However, the alarm was premature, as Melanchthon would not exert any influence on the development of Polish reformation for the next several years. His advice and help was sought after only during the consolidation of the movement, i.e. in the late sixteenth century. It turned out indispensable at the time of Antitrinitarian schism, which caused the break-up of Polish Calvinism. The spokesman of Polish Arians, Peter from Goniądz, who came to Wittenberg in February 1556, failed to attract Melanchthon for their views. Having received a cold welcome from Melanchthon and being accused of upholding the heresy which had brought Servetus to the stake, Peter was soon made to leave the city.³² His lack of diplomatic skills proved to be a matter of no little significance. Melanchthon perceived the Polish envoy as an irony-prone man. Peter used irony as a kind of self-defence against attacks and derision of the environment that was reluctant to approve of his doctrine. "He might have presented one of his mocking smiles when he stood before Melanchthon, declaring that the Lesser Poland community sent him there for conversion."³³

Unsuccessful attempts to resolve from a distance religious conflicts flaring up in Poland prevented Melanchthon from going there, despite two invitations from affluent Reformation patrons (Stanisław

³² Kot, *Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski*, p. 28.

³³ K. Górski, *Studia nad dziejami polskiej literatury antytrynitarskiej XVI w.* (Kraków, 1949), pp. 77–78.

Ostroróg and Rafał Leszczyński). His death passed unnoticed by the circles of various creeds in Poland (yet, Cochlaeus and H. Moller honoured his memory with a special poem). Although only a few smaller works by Melanchthon were published in sixteenth-century Poland, most of them were obviously well known. They can be found both in the libraries of theologians and religious polemicists, and on the shelves of laymen, and especially among the prosperous bourgeoisie. Posthumous inventories, which have been retrieved from the archives, contain many of Melanchthon's work. His name appears in all Catholic and Protestant postils printed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. When saying that – according to the dissenters – “Philip Melanchthon's words are greater than the words of God”, Papists bore unwilling witness to his authority in the Protestant world. And Krzysztof Kraiński, a Calvinist, would be unsuccessful in explaining that “Brenz and Melanchthon are not evangelists for us”.³⁴ As for Catholics, Melanchthon's authority was a proof of a considerable break-up of Protestantism. In 1551, Martin Kromer wrote that one “sticks to Melanchthon”, and the other to Zwingli, Calvin, Brenz, Bucer, or to the teachings of Anabaptists.³⁵ One of the first Protestant postillographers, Jan Seklucjan, draws extensively on Melanchthon's postils (1556).³⁶ Samuel Dambrowski follows his steps in the successive century. Judging by his sermons, as well as by homiletic texts written by other authors, “Melanchthon was for them not only an honourable classic, but still a highly influential teacher. If somehow, although it is much doubted, Melanchthon's writings had been disregarded, they could have been learnt via other authors...”³⁷

Nevertheless, Melanchthon was mentioned both by his adherents and opponents in faith as one of minor Reformation leaders. He has

³⁴ K. Kolbuszewski, *Postyllografia polska XVI i XVII wieku* (Kraków, 1921), pp. 143, 195.

³⁵ Ibidem, p. 10. A similar view was expressed by a supporter of Antitrinitarianism Andrzej Lubieniecki, who thus wrote of the first generation of Arians in his chronicle (*Poloneutychia* [Warszawa, 1982], p. 51): “w naukach naśladowali jedni Zwinglijusa, drudzy Melanchtona, trzeci Illirium Flaccum...”

³⁶ After A. Warmiński's 1906 monograph, Seklucjan was not analysed until T. Wójak's study “Jan Seklucjan – życie i dzieło,” *Rocznik Teologiczny* (ChAT, Warsaw) 26, no. 1–2 (1984); 27, no. 1 (1985), which devotes much space to the impact of Melanchthon on the writer.

³⁷ J.T. Maciuszko, *Ewangelicka postyllografia polska XVI–XVIII wieku* (Warszawa, 1987), p. 312.

never been counted among the greatest heresiarchs, such as Calvin, Luther or Zwingli. After his death, he was not “praised” by any Catholic pamphlets; neither is he found in any pictures presenting the fall of the main reformation leaders into the depths of hell. The exception is a copperplate engraving by Tomasz Treter, published in the late sixteenth century, with the *preceptor Germaniae* among the men drowning in the infernal pitch. Yet, as some scholars maintain, his impact on “our cultural life of the sixteenth century was at some point much greater and stronger than the influence of Luther and Calvin, and after the death of Desiderius Erasmus, he affected our intellectual life to a much greater extent than many famous people of the sixteenth-century Western Europe”.³⁸ According to M. Welte, as far as Bohemian and Polish lands are concerned, “Melanchton für diese Länder wichtiger war als Luther”.³⁹

In the sixteenth century, his *Confessio Augustana* had three translations into Polish (two in 1561, and one in 1594). The text was fully accepted by the Polish dissenters. Many of them estimated that Sigismund Augustus himself would recognize *Confessio...*, as in 1556–1557 he allowed free expression of Lutheranism to the citizens of Gdańsk, Elbląg and Toruń on the basis of the text. *Das Augsburgische Bekenntnis* has become one of the foundations of the so-called Sandomierz Consensus, an agreement reached in 1570 between the Lutherans, the Bohemian Brethren and the Calvinists.⁴⁰ The preface addressed to the king characterised the historic meaning of the document: “Not only do we confirm by confession [...] that it is true and honest, and founded on the Apostolic Teaching, but we also declare, accept and sign it as our own, in accordance with the former common reunion with them.” During the talks in Sandomierz, Mikołaj Gliczner referred to the confession prepared by Melanchthon as to “the matrix and provider for the sons of God”.⁴¹

³⁸ Bartel, “Filip Melanchton,” p. 73.

³⁹ M. Welte, *Giovanni Bernardino Bonifacio marchese d’Oria im Exil, 1557–1597. Eine Biographie und ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Philippismus* (Genève, 1976), p. 14.

⁴⁰ Cf. U. Augustyniak, *Konfesja Sandomierska. Wstęp historyczny* (Warszawa, 1994 [annex to a reprint of the Sandomierz Confession]), passim.

⁴¹ J. Lehmann, *Konfesja sandomierska na tle innych konfesji w Polsce XVI wieku* (Warszawa, 1937), p. 37; O. Halecki, *Zgoda sandomierska 1570 r. Jej geneza i znaczenie w dziejach reformacji polskiej za Zygmunta Augusta* (Warszawa, 1915), p. 182.

Different religious communities, starting from Catholics (Cochlaeus, Possevino, Lubelczyk) and ending with Antitrinitarians attacked Melanchthon. The knowledge about his socially moderate approach did not prevent them from claiming that the main leaders of the pugnacious branch of Anabaptists (Münzer and Karlstadt) had only enforced the slogans professed by Luther and Melanchthon. At the same time, however, Melanchthon gained a post-death victory over his opponents, since the influence of the so-called Philippists proved to be strong in Royal Prussia in the late sixteenth century. And later, despite the triumph of Lutheran Orthodoxy, the town authorities adopted a conciliatory position, consistent with the attitude of Philip Melanchthon. It is no wonder that an eager promoter of religious consensus, Bartłomiej Bythnar, reached for Melanchthon's authority. In *Fraterna et modesta... exhortatio*, he reminded about the provisions of the Sandomierz Consensus (Covenant), whose signatories had taken an obligation to refrain from invectives and scandalous religious disputes. "This way of conduct, Bythnar noted, was once recommended also by Philip Melanchthon, may his soul be blessed, who wrote in one of his letters: 'It would be much better if the rulers did not allow violent religious disputes, and ordered both sides to remain silent'."⁴²

In the epilogue to his old article, Oskar Bartel added with regret that: "Es ist merkwürdig, dass Melanchthon nach seinem Tode sogar unter den Protestanten Polens in Vergessenheit geraten konnte". What caused Melanchthon harm in Bartel's opinion were adverse emotions in the Protestant world that would not accept his conciliatory approach towards the Catholic Church, on the one hand, and to Calvinism, on the other hand.⁴³ The scientific world remembered Melanchthon indeed as a teacher and author of rhetoric writings. It was only in the era of ecumenism that the works of the writer, who advocated the need of mutual tolerance and suggested replacement of repression with persistent agitation and patient persuasion, were understood. For that reason, a contemporary Catholic scholar praises Krzycki's initiative to bring Melanchthon to Poland. Both of them shared the same view on "a crucial issue of freedom of belief". "The main concern here is the value of reminding people continuously of

⁴² *Filozofia i myśl społeczna XVII wieku*, ed. Z. Ogonowski, Pt. 1 (Warszawa, 1979), p. 611.

⁴³ Bartel, "Luther und Melanchthon," p. 177.

the evangelical love duty and the importance of undertaking conciliation activity when religious doctrines are not yet defined precisely.”⁴⁴

Melanchthon’s conciliatory approach had, however, its limits. Influenced by him (and by A. Osiander), Martin Luther came to a conclusion that Anabaptists, i.e. incorrigible blasphemers posing a serious hazard to social peace, should be punished by the death penalty, yet the “right of sword” should be attributed to princes. Melanchthon claimed later on that Antitrinitarians, who persistently held on to their fallacies, should be punished in the same way.⁴⁵ Due to those reasons, he did not condemn Servetus’ execution, what was referred to by propaganda of, e.g., Polish Counter-Reformation.

Melanchthon also called for lay interference towards the promoters of the heliocentric theory of Nicolas Copernicus. Like Luther, and next Calvin, he condemned the absurdities of the “Sarmatian astronomer, who moved the Earth and stopped the Moon”. However, it had not affected Melanchthon’s popularity in Copernicus’ immediate environment. Upon his knowledge and approval, a nephew of Bartłomiej Tiedeman Giese (1480–1550), the Bishop of Warmia, Eberhard Rogge, took a dissertation *De regno Christi*, together with Giese’s obsequious letter dated 6 June 1538, to Wittenberg. What the Catholic bishop had in mind was a critical evaluation of his life’s work. He first asked Desiderus Erasmus for it. When Erasmus’ fatal illness did not allow him to review his work, Giese turned to Melanchthon.⁴⁶ He, however, did not view the doctrinal content of the *De regno Christi* positively; the work received even worse welcome in the Catholic circles. Several years later, Stanislaus Hosius found “terrible heresies” in the treaty. It speaks a lot about the spiritual atmosphere of the epoch, in which a Catholic dignitary does not hesitate to ask one of the Reformation leaders for evaluation. It therefore comes as no surprise that Melanchthon thanked Johannes Dantiscus for his kindness (in a letter dated 5 September 1533), when he had failed to receive help from his closest ones in a situation when moderate

⁴⁴ Nir, op. cit., p. 177.

⁴⁵ J. Tazbir, *A State without Stakes. Polish religious Toleration in the sixteenth and seventeenth Centuries* (Warszawa, 1973), p. 20.

⁴⁶ Admittedly, in a letter to Hosius (12 August 1550) shortly before his death, Giese wrote that his work had been written over the years before his appointment to the see, and he no longer held the views contained in it – A. Kempfi, “W kręgu Mikołaja Kopernika (Tydman Giese a Filip Melanchton),” *Rocznik Teologiczny* 15, no. 2 (1973), pp. 75–86.

conduct of both sides was the only thing he had in mind.⁴⁷ He was obviously less interesting to the Polish people than Luther, yet certainly received much greater interest than, e.g., Bucer.⁴⁸

Trans. by Bartosz Wójcik

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⁴⁷ *Acta Tomiciana*, vol. 15, ed. W. Pociecha (Wrocław, 1957), pp. 603–604.

⁴⁸ On him recently H. Gmiterek, "Bucer und Polen," in: *Martin Bucer and Sixteenth Century*, vol. 2 (Leiden, 1993), pp. 547–556.