

Matthias Paul*

Perspectives on a Controversial Date: The Year 1525 in the Context of the Extended Görlitz Reformation

Spojrzenia na kontrowersyjną datę – rok 1525 w kontekście szeroko zakrojonej reformacji w Görlitz

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Introduction

In 1725, a Reformation anniversary was celebrated on the Friday after Jubilate, April 27, in the Saxon Sechsstadt in Upper Lusatia. It was a distinct date and a distinct celebration—independent of October 31—as had been customary in Electoral Saxony since 1617. It highlighted a distinctive feature of Upper Lusatia and Görlitz [Zobel 1925, p. 50; Schäffer n.d., f. 347–362]. To this day, the associated anniversary ceremony in St. Peter's Church is visibly recorded on a drawn map. In 1925, it seemed appropriate to commemorate it once again. Over 11,000 people marched from what is now Lutherplatz to three festival venues: the City Hall, St. Peter's Church, and Trinity Church [Paul 2024/2025, pp. 173–220]. It was also the year in which the findings of local and regional Reformation research at the time were summarized in a comprehensive essay—or rather, a monograph—and put up for discussion [Zobel 1925/1926, pp. 133–314]. A century years later, international Reformation research, with its insights, methods, and interdisciplinary approach—not least due to the 500th anniversary in 2017—stands on a level of sophistication that is scarcely comparable. And when, in 2025, at the conference of the Society for Silesian Church History in Görlitz, the renowned church historian and Reformation scholar Thomas Kaufmann presented his contribution to public perception and

discussion in the so-called crypt of St. Peter's Church, new horizons of inquiry and research findings became apparent that would have seemed almost unthinkable in 1925 [Kaufmann 2024/2025, pp. 97–122]. At that time, for example, people did not speak of “Reformations,” but were more denominationally oriented and focused on territorial characteristics [Müller 1908]. Research into the Reformation in Upper Lusatia from a church-historical perspective came to a standstill with the outbreak of the Second World War. Thomas Kaufmann is aware of this and describes his analysis regarding the year 1525 as “preliminary” [Kaufmann 2024/2025]. Nevertheless, in his view, the “ambivalent character of the protracted Görlitz Reformation”—given the celebration of the Lord's Supper in both forms in 1525—certainly allows for a corresponding anniversary to be commemorated in 2025.

It took a long time before regional and territorial Reformation research on Upper Lusatia (and also Silesia) could once again work unrestrictedly on the basis of sources. As recently as 2005, historian Lars Behrisch had access to only a fraction of the Görlitz sources available before 1945 [Behrisch 2005]. It was not until the publication of Christoph Speer's dissertation in 2011 that one gained the impression that material formerly available or studied in Görlitz was once again comprehensively accessible [Speer 2011]. We are talking here about meters of files and books, in Wrocław alone.

* Ph.D., parish priest of the Evangelical Parish of the City Center of Görlitz

* dr, proboszcz Parafii Ewangelickiej Śródmieścia Görlitz

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On the History of the Reformation in Görlitz

It is well known that authors such as Christoph Manlius (1546–1575), Martin Mylius (1542–1611), and Bartholomäus Scultetus (1540–1614) shaped a narrative of “Reformation” events in the second half of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, which authors such as Christian Gabriel Funcke (1658–1740) and Christian Knauth (1706–1784) built upon in the eighteenth century, adapting them to their respective eras. Only these authors then confidently applied the term “Reformation” to Görlitz or Upper Lusatia. The first source-based access to this was provided by scholarly works such as Hoffmann’s *Scriptores* or Grosser’s *Merckwürdigkeiten* [Grosser 1714, p. 16; Hoffmann 1719]. It is also known that Johannes Hass’s famous handwritten annals were not published until the nineteenth century [Hass 1852, 1870]. I am not aware of any planned new edition. Extensive efforts at historicization spanned the second half of the nineteenth century through the first third of the 20th century and were personified by names such as Naumann, Struve, Jecht, Weber, and Zobel. People are increasingly distancing themselves from the Protestant triumphalism that was on display during the anniversary year of 1875 [Introduction of the Reformation 1875, pp. 132–134, 137–139] and which had already permeated the early nineteenth century. Even before and during the First World War, local discussions of the Reformation in Görlitz and Upper Lusatia referred to a development marked by transitions, and later, around 1925, to a “process” [Weber 1913, pp. 544–576]. Nevertheless, the year 1525 is regarded—not merely symbolically—as one that is meant to signify, time and again, an introduction, a culmination, an acceleration, an upheaval, or a breakthrough. It is likely no coincidence that Zobel appears as the first to examine the history of research in Görlitz and Upper Lusatia, as well as the history of the Görlitz Reformation anniversaries. In a location that seems somewhat remote from today’s perspective, he presented the sources from 1725 in 1925 [Zobel 1925]. Given the circumstances of the time, it is not surprising that no celebrations are to be assumed for the year 1625. Upper Lusatia and Görlitz became a theater of war and, in the midst of the Thirty Years’ War, came under Saxon rule. The city subsequently honored the officially designated Reformation Day accordingly (presumably for the first time on October 31, 1717).

Zobel had, however, discovered a source in Knauth’s History of the Reformation and noted it accordingly [Zobel 1925/1926, p. 249, note 4; Knauth 1767]. He had no access to it, however. It is a work by Abraham Scultetus (1566–1624), the famous Silesian theologian and court preacher to the Winter King. It bears the title: ABRAHAMI SCULTETI ANNALIVM EVANGELII PASSIM PER EUROPAM DECIMO quinto salutis partæ seculo rennovati DECAS PRIMA. AB Anno M. D. XVI. AD Annum M. D. XXVI. HEIDELBERGAE. (1618). The section of interest to us begins as follows:

“In the MARCHIONATU LUSATIE, the elegant city of GORLITIUM and the nearby town of LAUBA accepted the change of religion.”

First, there is a report on the priests’ convention of April 27, 1525, in Görlitz. This is followed by a detailed account of the events in Görlitz: “In purifying their own church and abolishing impious and superstitious rites, M. Franciscus Ænobarbus (Rotbart or Rupert) Gorlicius, born to a tanner, formerly a deacon in Sprittavium, under Consul Georgio Roslero, was the first to exert his efforts. Having been removed in previous years, he was recalled this year through the intercession of several fellow craftsmen, and arrived in Görlitz with the Senate’s permission on the fifth of April. Soon after, many superstitious ecclesiastical rites were abolished, whether the Senate willed it or not. The altars are no longer washed with herbs, as was the custom before. On Palm Sunday, the donkey with its idol is no longer paraded. On the Feast of the Savior, the Savior is no longer carried in procession through the temple; however, consecrated bread is placed in the tomb of Christ. On the Easter Vigil, the fire is not consecrated, nor is the image of the risen and triumphant Christ carried through the public hall of the new forum, where salt is sold, on the following night. On Easter Sunday, an Evangelical confession is held in the chapel known as St. George’s, and about two hundred people confess; at the high altar, about thirty. The Sunday following Easter, which was the twenty-third of April, the Pastor announced from the pulpit that if anyone henceforth wished to receive Communion under both forms, or desired to have their children baptized in the vernacular, they would be free to do so. And both of these things were done at that time. Furthermore, the annual processions that are usually held each year were abolished this year; Masses and Vespers for the dead were also abolished. The priests no longer permitted the shaving of the head; nor was the image of the Ascension of the Lord Christ drawn up by ropes through the ceiling, but instead a sermon was held at noon in place of these trifles; finally, few observed the old rites” [Scultetus 1546, p. 289f.].

Abraham Scultetus’ knowledge was apparently transmitted orally or in manuscript form. It seems likely that he obtained his knowledge directly from Görlitz [Zobel 1925/1926, p. 249].¹ And indeed, in his preface to the reader, Abraham Scultetus expresses his gratitude, among others, to a Gregor Richter from Görlitz, whom he calls a theologian [Scultetus 1546]. It is therefore very likely that this refers to the Görlitz pastor primarius Gregor Richter (1560–1624), who is famous above all for his actions against Jacob Böhme. In the aforementioned section on the Reformation in Görlitz and Lauban, he cites Richter’s three-volume magnum opus—the **Axiomata historica** (3 vols., Görlitz 1598–1602). For now, this means that a Reformed theologian was the first to report on the history of the Reformation in Görlitz and Lauban in a printed publication. For the people of Görlitz, the year 1525 was identified as the decisive date.

It is worth comparing these accounts with those of Mylius or Bartholomäus Scultetus. They are similar, and not only in their identification of the year 1525. This is a first indication that city politicians, scholars, and clergy in the city spoke with one voice.

Mylius: “The people of Görlitz and Lauban were the first to change their religion. ... M. Franciscus Ænobarbus (Rupertus) Gorlicius, born to a tanner, formerly a deacon of Sprottaviu[m], was the first to devote his efforts to the people of Görlitz in purifying their church and abolishing impious and superstitious rites. When he had been removed in previous years, this matter was renewed this year by the guilds of artisans, and he came to Gorlice with the Senate’s permission on April 5. Soon after, many superstitious ecclesiastical rites were abolished, whether the Senate liked it or not.” This is followed—in somewhat greater detail—by the events as described by Scultetus. The passage above described the priests’ council. The section ends as in Scultetus: “few observed the old rites.” In Mylius, the account of the city fire then begins [Hoffmann 1719, pp. 26ff].

We present the passage from Scultetus’s *Chronicon* here, which has recently been cited frequently in scholarly research. According to this source, he perceived the events in Görlitz in 1525 “merely as a ‘transformation of religion and ceremonies’” [Speer 2011, p. 363], but not as a breakthrough or a decisive milestone of the Reformation. Locating this source has proven difficult [Christ 2021, pp. 92–114].² I was only able to view a copy.³ I have not yet been able to verify the original—if it is indeed located in Wrocław. It seems to me, however, that recent research has not even been able to examine the copy in greater detail [Behrisch 2005; Christ 2021; Speer 2011, pp. 363–398].⁴ It is documented that Richard Jecht examined the original in 1909 and compared it with the copy. His conclusion was that the copy of the second volume corresponded “for the most part” with the wording of the original [Jecht 1909, p. 182]. Now, then, the copy:

“On the Transformation of Religion and Ceremonies in Görlitz”

In the year 1525, the citizens and others of the council requested the return of their former pastor, M. Franciscus Rupertus, who was thus reinstated on April 5. Thereupon, many old customs were abolished, regardless of whether the council approved or not.

1. On Maundy Thursday, April 13, the altar was no longer washed as had been done previously.
2. On Palm Sunday, the Lord God and the Palm Donkey remained standing in the corner, April 9.
3. On Good Friday, the Lord God was not carried around the church. Instead, a blessed host was placed in the tomb on April 14.
4. On Easter Eve, no fire was blessed. Also the following night, the custom of carrying the Easter images around the salt chamber was abolished. Today,

Protestant confession was also held in St. George’s Chapel, and about 200 people were heard, with about 30 people at the high altar.

5. The last Sunday after Easter was April 23. The pastor announced from the pulpit that anyone strengthened in the true faith who could now give his confessor a good account, desiring the sacrament in both forms, and likewise children to be baptized in the German language—who had previously always been baptized in Latin—should have it done according to their desire,
6. This year, the processions from one church to another have been discontinued, as was previously customary on St. Mark’s Day.
7. On St. Mark’s Day, the first infant was baptized in the German language; the father was named Paul Gürtler, from Bamberg.
8. The vespers and Masses for the souls of the departed, which had previously been dedicated to the souls of the deceased, were discontinued.
9. The priests also set aside the caps they used to wear during Carnival and did not have any plates made for their heads. Few of them kept the old custom.
10. On April 27 (Thursday) of Quasimodo, all the parish priests from the villages in the Weichbilde region came to Görlitz; very few remained behind. They agreed henceforth to no longer obey the Bishop of Meissen as they had done before. And so, instead of the Requiem or Mass for the Dead, they sang in harmony fine hymns of the Holy Trinity, praising the one God of heaven and earth.
11. On the day of the Ascension of the Lord, the Easter image was no longer hoisted in the rainbow above the vault of the church with poles as before, but a sermon was held in front of it after noon.
12. In the year 1526. On March 21, Maundy Thursday, the Holy Sacrament was given to the students in both forms. Among them was Wentzel Weyeman’s son, a clothmaker, followed by several apprentices of Hans Frentzel, and with him Caspar Leder’s son from Breslau. After them came women and maidens” [Scultetus 1546, fol. 76b–78b].

So much for this section. It is by no means the case that all of this pertains to the Görlitz Reformation as described by Scultetus in the aforementioned *Chronicon*. He examines several factors both before and after, including some that, in my opinion, have scarcely been studied in detail by researchers.

For example, he describes the appearance of Nikolaus Zeidler in 1524 as the successor to Franziskus Rotbart. He is said to have “abandoned papal customs” that year. His sermons attracted the people. Therefore, it was impossible for the council to “suspend” him [Scultetus 1546, fol. 71a–b]. But that is not all. He contrasts Zeidler with a clergyman named “Johann Bress,” who was a “hired hand.” “He did not respect the office of preaching, wherefore he was finally dismissed. He used to say that he would not hand over his office; he would first undertake a knight’s procession.

For at that time, the people of Görlitz had fine, costly ceremonial cloaks made of gold-embroidered pieces, which a pastor needed especially for the high feasts.” From the corrupted lines in the transcript, it can at least be inferred that he performed such a knightly procession during a “procession or Stations of the Cross” and suddenly found himself surrounded by an angry and mocking crowd. He and the holy water had to be rescued by servants of the council. “Many old church customs were subsequently abolished” [Scultetus 1546, pp. 71b–72a]. Knauth is also familiar with the story, though he claims to have read it in Johann Hass: “He (Press) did not respect the office of preaching, which is why he was eventually dismissed. He used to say. He did not want to hand over his office unless he had first performed a knight’s procession, for at that time the people of Görlitz had very splendid ceremonial robes, which a pastor needed especially for the high feasts” [Knauth, 1767, p. 23]. Knauth associated the Procession, or Circuitas, or Procession of the Cross with an ancient ceremony in St. Peter’s Church, which had survived in traces of popular piety up to his time. Many left the church in large numbers after the sermon and upon the recitation of the words of institution during the Lord’s Supper.

Scultetus dates the heading “Transformation of Religion and Ceremonies” to the year 1525. The translation “mutatio religionis et ceremoniorum” follows naturally and corresponds to the formulations found in Mylius, Gregor Richter, and Abraham Scultetus. For all of them, it is not a location-specific term but is used just as frequently for other cities and countries. Richter addressed the term in detail in his *Axiomata historica*.⁵ A *mutatio religionis* [Richter 1604, pp. 131–140, 193, 515, 615f., 837] generally denotes a religious-ecclesiastical upheaval in a city or country, usually accompanied by catastrophic circumstances, causes, or consequences. Richter draws on traditional salvation history. He is unfamiliar with what we understand today as “development.” The world that has fallen away from God remains the same; only the actors change. To substantiate this, Richter drew upon biblical as well as ancient authors. His chain of examples extends to contemporary wars and catastrophes. A *mutatio religionis* must therefore be avoided by humans under all circumstances. In the end, it is divine wrath, but also His mercy, that is capable of turning things to the good. And the aforementioned Görlitzers assumed that, in the end, it was an improvement brought about by God. For Richter, the situation is no different with regard to the ceremonies [Richter 1614, pp. 183–187, 227]. Only those ceremonies that relate to one of the two sacraments are permitted or Christian, and even then only if they do not interfere with the sacrament. Nevertheless, the ceremonies do not belong to the essence of the sacrament. One could say that this is the internal church perspective. Yet ceremonies in the broader sense are generally an invention of sinful humanity and are part of its nature. Through them, humanity seeks to satisfy its

desires or secure its quest for power. The more decay and sin there is in a city or country, the more ceremonies there are. It should be added here that, for Richter, ceremonies have their place in domestic, political, and religious spheres of life. Just one example to illustrate a source from the Reformation era itself. When the Bishop of Meissen visited Görlitz in 1520, Johann Hass described in detail the immediately salutary interaction of secular-urban and spiritual-urban power during the Corpus Christi procession [Hass 1851, p. 566ff]. (He regards precisely this as having been lost through the Reformation).

Let us first summarize what has been said so far. By 1600, a firm image of the Reformation era had taken shape in scholarly Görlitz. This allowed the city to assert itself in the confessional disputes and within the geopolitical situation of the Six Cities League, Electoral Saxony, and Bohemia. As is well known, in 1592 the city council, the church, and the gymnasium defended themselves against the king’s accusations that Görlitz was providing refuge to Reformed Protestants. They declared that they taught nothing other than what was contained in and required by the Confessio Augustana, Luther’s Catechism, and Melancthon’s writings [Paul 2024]. They thus asserted their own legitimate form of theology and church, even in the face of attacks from Electoral Saxony—keyword: crypto-Calvinism. This tradition also includes a distinct understanding of ceremonies. Yes, the pastors in Görlitz continued to wear chasubles well into the eighteenth century (as, incidentally, in many Lutheran territories—it was only Pietism and the Enlightenment that put an end to this!), but they had quite obviously abolished the ones mentioned by Pastor Press—this is precisely what is meant by the transformation of ceremonies. It stands to reason to think back to the year 1525 here as well. In 1595, extensive renovation and restoration work, as well as expansion projects, were completed at St. Peter’s Church. This took place under the leadership of Bartholomäus Scultetus [Bürger, Winzeler 2006]. Two portraits of Luther and Melancthon—likely from the Cranach workshop in the broadest sense—along with stonemason’s marks, inscriptions, and other architectural landmarks, still bear witness to this era today. The fact that the rededication was celebrated in 1595 may at least be noted as an indication of an emerging Reformation memory [Sommferfeld 1901, p. 230; Laube 2005].⁶

The year 1525 has been identified as the decisive turning point. “*Mutatio religionis*” refers to a religious transformation; it does not imply a downplaying or relativization of the event. It is personally associated with the pastors and preachers Rotbart and Zeidler, not least in their conflict with Press. It was initially sermons that persuasively and powerfully drove the displacement of outdated superstitious rites and ceremonies. The whole process is understood as a purification of the church in accordance with the biblical word, the Gospel.

Biographical Turning Points and the Annals of Johann Hass

As is well known, Johann Hass described how, during the plague of 1521, Pastor Rotbart began to preach the Gospel as “Lutheran doctrine.” Whereas he had previously conducted himself entirely unobtrusively in his office and was scarcely heard from the pulpit, the people now gathered around him. Finally, Kaufmann considered it likely that it was Luther’s pastoral skill, as evidenced in his devotional and consolatory writings, that led to this change in Rotbart. Zobel, incidentally, had already suspected this influence. Kaufmann cites as examples “On Preparation for Death” or “On the Contemplation of the Holy Passion of Christ” [Kaufmann 2024/2025]. I would like to add here a letter from Luther to the Mansfeld vicar Martin Seligmann (d. 1548) from the year 1519. It deals with the behavior of the weak and the strong in faith during an epidemic or the plague. Thus, while the weak in faith might flee, the shepherd must not flee but must remain with the sheep [Luther WA Br 1, pp. 532ff]. Did the writings in question and/or a copy of the letter fall into Rotbart’s hands? In any case, one may assume that Rotbart underwent an inner transformation during the plague. After all, he was free to leave or to barricade himself in his parsonage outside the city walls. Yet it was not only Rotbart’s sermons that left an impact (due to their “novelty,” as Hass notes). In October and December 1523, the Luther hymn “Nun bitten wir den Heiligen Geist” was sung in the Frauenkirche on the whim of two individuals. The two were punished [Zobel 1925/1926, p. 224].⁷

Since there are no surviving writings or sermons by Rotbart and Hass left a clear verdict on him—a simple and uneducated man—one might be inclined to consider him theologically unremarkable. However, this is contradicted by the meticulousness with which Hass engaged with the content of the Leipzig Disputation (1519) and its context, yet remained distant from Rotbart’s sermons [Hass 1870, p. 10ff]. It is likely that he described “Leipzig” in such detail in the aftermath in his Annals because the points of contention of the educated Görlitzers were presented and existed there, e.g., that Luther derived the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper in both forms from the Hussites. Hass finds the sharpest attacks on the papacy in Luther’s treatise *De captivitate babilonica* (1520), which specifically attacked the seven sacraments and thus the foundations of the papacy, and which Hass briefly describes as “buchlin wieder das babistumb.” He calls its effect “most abominable” [Hass 1870, pp. 7–10]. It is known that people from Görlitz were present at the Leipzig Disputation [Zobel 1925/1926, p. 216; 1925]. Hass is also familiar with details of Reformation history that were not common knowledge, such as the fact that Frederick the Wise received the Eucharist in both forms on his deathbed [Hass 1870, p. 9]. And so, in retrospect, the year 1525—along with the Peasants’ War, the clothmakers’

revolt (which began in 1524), and Luther’s wedding—coalesces for him into a year of great catastrophes and upheavals.

When Rotbart was granted leave in 1523, he went to Breslau to the Elisabeth Church—for two years—as Hass claims. In 1524, the famous disputation under Johannes Hess took place there. When Rotbart was recalled to Görlitz by the city council in early 1525, he set conditions. Paul Kuchler, who acted as a mediator for the council, drew up a report. Archdeacon Gottlieb Christian Giese (1721–1788) claims to have had this very report in his possession around 1770.

“First ... to preach the Gospel freely, as long as he is able to do so. — But should he feel unable to do so, he would be granted an assistant, whom he would designate, to relieve him from preaching from time to time. ... 3) As for the abuses of the ceremonies—he would indeed provide instruction and, with the knowledge of Your Excellency’s Council, address them with due consideration, without causing a stir. 4) There should be no concern that he would entirely reject and abolish Mass and Vespers. Should, however, a change be found therein and in baptism and other ceremonies out of the requirements of Scripture and conscience, he would proceed and implement it with the advice and knowledge of Your Excellency’s Council, and undertake nothing with haste or ill will. 5.) Should Your Excellency’s Council approve these articles, one should convey the Council’s decision to him in writing. ... 6) In the meantime, one would consider appropriate ways to part with the preacher. - - - 7) Finally, he asks that consideration be given to how the chaplains might be supported, whom he, because their revenues have fallen, cannot provide with wages and necessities, especially since the parish has also suffered a significant loss of income.”⁸

Rotbart’s key point is that he linked the freedom of preaching to a demand regarding personnel. Incidentally, he made immediate and repeated use of this. The points relating to ceremonies appear by no means unimportant. Scripture and conscience form the standard for Rotbart! In doing so, he merely concedes that such changes should occur without violence—a matter that is virtually self-evident in light of the events surrounding the Peasants’ War. Furthermore: Rotbart demands that the current pastor—Johann Press, who also still lived in the parsonage [Hass 1870, p. 20]⁹—must leave. Finally, he calls for a restructuring of the financing of the “church staff.” The council agreed to the conditions, fulfilled the demands, or accepted them. Rotbart will take assistants from the Franciscan monastery and have them live with him. In doing so, he simultaneously accelerates its decline. Hass saw through what was happening. Yet he also had to indirectly concede that what he regarded as divine punishment—the great city fire in early summer 1525—did not become a compelling argument for reversing the reforms. Rotbart and Zeidler had circulated an interpretation that calmed the situation and, above all, ruled out a reversal of the

changes. Rotbart had the hymn “si bona suscepimus de manu domini etc.” sung during the service on “Corpus Christi Day” for nearly a year. This is based on the Bible passage Job 2:10 [Hass 1870, p. 25 v. 26]. The believer endures suffering, resists the devil’s attacks, and thus submits to God’s judgment. Indirectly, Johann Hass used this incident to signal the unbroken continuation of the changes, for a Corpus Christi procession was evidently omitted for the first time.

But other biblical passages also appear to have been the subject of the debate: Psalm 68:36, Proverbs 4:10, Jesus Sirach 19:4, Matthew 24:23, 1 John 4:1, and 2 Timothy 2:19 [Hass 1870, p. 13 v. 29–32, p. 18 v. 15–16, p. 24 v. 34–35]. Viewed in this light, Rotbart proves himself to be a theologically astute, quick-witted, and wise man. Especially when Hass assesses the clergy, including the city’s monks and nuns, in a comprehensive sense, one clearly sees how Rotbart differed from them, even if Hass could never bring himself to acknowledge it. A visible expression of the final rift was the encounter during the city fire on Nikolaistraße (Nickelgasse). Hass admitted how enraged he was when he saw Rotbart and Zeidler standing there as if at a spectacle. He had to be restrained from coming to blows. But then, addressing Rotbart and Zeidler: “Do you see the city’s misery, to which you have contributed, since you have disobeyed the council and the commoners, and you have always disregarded the council’s advice and admonitions, etc.” After these reproachful words, Rotbart and Zeidler “went silently out the door, back to their parish and den of iniquity” [Hass 1870, p. 24]. The cloth was finally torn.

While Hass clearly placed the blame on Luther and his followers or allies such as Zwingli, he was not blind to the other side of the issue. In his opinion, the fact that things had come to this was also due to the flawed educational, examination, and personnel policies of the Diocese of Meissen and the religious and moral neglect of priests, altarists, or monks, who were leaving their posts and ministries in ever-increasing numbers and presenting themselves as followers of the new doctrine. Hass made it clear: “They are generally the same coarse donkeys they were in the papist era, only now they know the common saying, ‘faith saves you,’ but their deeds contribute nothing to it, nor are they of primary importance, for Christ has placed faith before all else; the ceremonies are a mountain of nonsense, the Mass is a blasphemy against God, the hoods and robes are a farce, etc. and much more of the sort, to mock and reject the papacy as a human institution” [Hass 1870, p. 306].¹⁰ They could utter nothing but phrases and stock expressions. Their ignorance, immaturity, and depravity also explain why they were not even capable of presenting their economic hardships, their struggles, or the like to the city council. Instead, they would flee and rob the monastery; they would marry, and so on.

Rotbart had undergone a development that at least included turning points. During the plague of 1521, he finds comfort and solace in Luther’s writings. He

stays and thus becomes the pastor and preacher to the remaining population. In Breslau, beginning in 1523, he became an observer of the Reformation upheavals. It can be assumed that he was at least familiar with the topics of the Breslau Disputation of 1524 and that he delved further into the concerns of Reformation doctrine. His position was so strong that the Görlitz City Council had to recall him. He returned to Görlitz in 1525, newly equipped. What he demanded cut deeply into the self-image of the Görlitz Council. Furthermore, a biblical-theological profile is quite discernible despite the scarcity of sources.

Finally, let us turn to Hass. Christ sought to use his work to substantiate his thesis on hybrid forms of piety and conceptual worlds in Upper Lusatia. His key concept is syncretism [Christ 2021, p. 224ff]. Christ also identifies a development in Hass’s work based on interesting observations [Crist 2021, pp. 51–72]. The learned and diplomatic town clerk and mayor left his annals to the succeeding leadership elite in order to equip them for all political issues, problems, and tasks for the good of the city. For this reason, he significantly toned down confessional polemics in the 1530s—for instance, he did not label the change of denomination by council members as heresy. At the same time, he seeks to acknowledge that hatred itself underwent a religious evolution that certainly incorporated elements of Luther’s teachings. Certainly, when reading and combating opposing writings, one’s views can sometimes be influenced. And it is equally well known that the constant attack on false notions can contribute to their spread. Yet the claim that hatred abandoned the veneration of the saints in the course of the conflict and instead developed a certain Christ-centeredness is not really convincing.¹¹ Christ-centeredness is not an invention of Luther’s. One need only visit the Trinity Church in Görlitz. The idea that he even adopted elements of church criticism from Luther’s *De captivitate Babylonica* is a misunderstanding. Church criticism is, after all, something other than merely identifying the existing church, the pope, and the papacy with the Antichrist, but rather fundamentally questioning jurisdiction and hierarchy—in short, the entire essence—as fundamentally flawed. This is what happens in the aforementioned treatise, where five of the seven sacraments are dismissed as human inventions and two or three are reinterpreted (keyword: ceremonies!). According to Hass, the effect of the treatise was “most abhorrent.” Hass discusses all seven sacraments and continues to regard them as necessary.

Did his understanding of God and His providence/care change, as Christ seeks to prove? Certainly, this changes over the course of a lifetime, especially in challenging times. That makes sense. But the idea that Hass, at some point in his development, believed God merely watched from afar is simply false. Hass was educated; he had studied (apparently in the scholastic tradition). An example used by Christ may illustrate how wise and level-headed he was. I quote the relevant pas-

sage in full: “Taxes were imposed through the Behmen and all incorporated lands, as mentioned above, and rebellion was instigated by the entire German nation, by the Lutheran clergy, and other evil sects—Zwinglians, Anabaptists, etc.—who arose from this, as has also happened here. And even if the punishment and judgment are God’s, which I certainly believe, it is still a sorrow to the council that the people are so heedless despite so many admonitions. For God, out of grace and mercy, will not rebuke and warn us any further than we ourselves are willing. Just as if someone were to set fire to his own house, God would hardly put it out for him. Another might say that ever since the old religion was abandoned and the Lutheran faith was introduced and accepted, the German nation has been beset by many calamities. But this talk belongs in the dark corners, for it is written: “No one is tempted unless he is tempted by God, etc.” [Hass 1870, p. 333 v. 35 – p. 334, v. 7].

The last sentence is important. It is a biblical reference from Matthew 4:7 and James 1:12–16. In this context, it warns against temptation (“God does not tempt anyone”), calls for endurance and repentance—all included. The addition in the margin refers to an apologetic letter by the Church Father Tertullian to the proconsul of Carthage, Scapulas, during the persecutions of Christians around 212. This adds an element: the persecuted Christian prays not for himself, but for his enemies. For he knows the commandment that he must love his enemies! That is why the topic under discussion regarding hatred belongs in the “Lenten season” (during Lent or Holy Week). Only through repentance can the dire situation change, and it is the Christian’s duty. Hatred is directed at traditional believers who might think that the divisions and catastrophes described are justly befalling those who side with Luther, etc. It is, after all, no wonder that things have turned out this way. But a Christian should not think this way. He should seek the best (with the city elite in his sights) and must therefore begin with himself. These are, after all, punishments from God that have befallen the German land—and for Hass, undoubtedly

because of Lutheran doctrine. Yet the wise statesman and Christian will see the city’s distress and understand it as his own task. Here, duty imposes upon every council the obligation to examine itself in the presence of God. The reaction must not be to sit idly by and say: “Look, you wanted it this way.” It is, however, good Christian conduct to at least acknowledge the neighbor’s (the enemy’s) misguided path in the form of a call for self-reflection. For even Christ was tempted.

Here, in fact, a “pragmatic” consciousness that transcends the parties is expressed. But there is no doubt about God’s rule in the world. Quite the contrary. God is currently punishing all people in a most visible way, whether of the old or new faith. But even as enemies, the punished are to be shown love, as befits Christians. The aforementioned marginal note: “Our labor and deeds must be in accordance with God’s providence.” The examples strung together like a chain, beginning with the fire in the “Hottergasse” (today Hotherstraße),¹² through to the explosion triggered by a lightning strike at Heidelberg Castle (1537) or a barn that burned down at the Magdalene Convent in Naumburg am Queis (in the summer of 1537), do not represent a conception of God in which God merely observes or permits events (without any particular intent). Hass was not only a learned and wise man; he was a devout man who knew what he owed to his God and his city.

It is interesting that Hass perceives an accumulation and intensification of such “coincidences” over a period of twelve years. Twelve years in 1537 means: since 1525 [Hass 1870, v. 10–11]. Nothing like this had ever occurred in the city’s history.

A summary by Hass from the year 1536: “And I will finally speak and write of this, that the old religion and piety, fear of God, love for one’s neighbor, honor, discipline, obedience, mercy, and all righteousness, have been greater and more profound, through the glory of God—which, through the love and fear of God, must prevail over all things—than in the present Lutheran era, which is called by the noble name of the time of the Gospel, as is publicly attested” [Hass 1870, v. 10–17].

Footnotes

¹ Here, reference is made to a letter from A. Scultetus to the Görlitz rector Kückler dated July 19/29, 1620.

² In the section on Scultetus, whom he regards as an ideal-typical case, he does not even cite them, but refers to Speer [2011].

³ Cf. Scultetus: Goerlitzische Jahrbücher 1500–1592 (Wrocław Library: Akc. 1948/401, formerly OLB L I 148). Jecht noted the following comment on fol. I: “This chronicle is a copy of Scultetus’ Annales Gorlic. II. The original is located in the Milich Library, mspt. 4°, no. 75 ... The accuracy of the copy still needs to be verified.”

⁴ Behrisch and Christ are not familiar with it or do not use it. Speer is familiar with it and uses it to support his main thesis. He presents the content itself only very briefly. One wonders why. One would have expected this based on the title of the section on the Reformation alone. It seems he, too, did not have the original in his possession.

⁵ They were published in three volumes between 1598, 1600, and 1602 in Görlitz, and later reprinted several times.

⁶ I therefore cannot share his impression that the urban Reformation memoria was subject to a “permanent pull toward relativization” and “hybrid forms of confessional piety.”

- ⁷ Compare this with the famous conversion account by the preacher Nicolaus Zeidler, which dates to the year 1523 [Hass 1870, p. 14].
- ⁸ See Second Contribution to the History of the Church and Preachers of the Electoral Saxon Six-City of Görlitz from the Sixteenth Century to the Present Day at the End of the Year 1770, drafted by Christian Daniel Brücknern, published by St. Peter and Paul. Görlitz, printed by Johann Friedrich Fickelscherer, pp. 10–11. Hass [1870, p. 20] was aware of the negotiations concerning Paul Küchler, but saw mutual conditions emerging from them that Rotbart had not adhered to.
- ⁹ Rotbart initially lived with his sister “Weiderin on the New Market.”
- ¹⁰ Hass describes cases from the period before 1520 on p. 305.
- ¹¹ Hass dates events after 1519 and after 1534ff. using the names of the saints. As seen, he opposes Luther’s attack on the veneration of saints. Regarding St. Anne’s Chapel, the question is what place it occupied in the city’s sacred landscape, what personnel dependencies it entailed, and

what financial obligations it imposed on the city council. This, along with the construction itself, is the reason why he mentions Frenzel’s connection to St. Anne at all. It is not clear from this whether Hass himself was a devotee of St. Anne. See Hass, Neumann, *Annalen*, p. 573f. The second example—in which Hass is personally involved—again concerns a major construction site. It deals with a divine intervention that miraculously mitigated the consequences of an otherwise horrific accident that resulted in at least two deaths. Hass and Rosenberg escaped the catastrophe “undoubtedly through divine providence.” At the end of the section “Of St. Nicholas’ Church, and how the bricks fell from the wall,” it states: “And so the damage occurred through carelessness, and the two gentlemen were certainly spared harm to their lives through special divine grace and the intercession of St. Nicholas, the patron saint” [Hass 1851, pp. 574 and 576].

- ¹² Preacher Benedikt Fischer (successor to Wolfgang Schystel or Sustelius since 1535) is said to have preached “on these events” shortly after the fire [Hass 1870, p. 333 v. 6–8].

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Abstract

The author attempts to understand the sixteenth-century Reformation in Görlitz. He believes that the complexity of this process can only be understood by employing a variety of methods and an interdisciplinary approach. He therefore urges caution in this regard. He is sympathetic to the view that speaks of a syncretic Reformation in Upper Lusatia, which was not an exception—for example, in terms of religious tolerance—but was one of those territories where confessional boundaries remained flexible for a long time. The thesis of a syncretic Reformation explains diversity and continuity, but, in the author's view, it does not explain the division into confessional cultures that lay at its origins.

Streszczenie

Autor koncentruje się na próbie zrozumienia reformacji XVI wieku w Görlitz. Uważa, że złożoność tego procesu można zrozumieć jedynie przy zastosowaniu różnych metod badawczych oraz podejścia interdyscyplinarnego. Z tego względu zaleca ostrożność w formułowaniu jednoznacznych ocen. Bliski jest mu pogląd o synkretycznym charakterze reformacji na Górnych Łużycach, które nie stanowiły wyjątku – na przykład pod względem tolerancji religijnej – lecz były jednym z tych terytoriów, na których granice konfesyjne przez długi czas pozostawały płynne. Teza o synkretycznym charakterze reformacji wyjaśnia jej różnorodność i ciągłość, jednak zdaniem autora nie tłumaczy podziału na kultury konfesyjne, który ukształtował się u jej początków.