Horst Weigelt

Migration and Faith

The Migrations of the Schwenkfelders from Germany to America – Risks and Opportunities

V&R

V&R Academic

ISBN Print: 9783525564356 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647564357

Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte

Edited by
Volker Henning Drecoll and Volker Leppin

Volume 110

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

ISBN Print: 9783525564356 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647564357

Horst Weigelt

Migration and Faith

The Migrations of the Schwenkfelders from Germany to America – Risks and Opportunities

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

ISBN Print: 9783525564356 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647564357

With 22 Illustrations

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data available online: http://dnb.d-nb.de.

ISSN 0532-2154
ISBN 978-3-647-56435-7

You can find alternative editions of this book and additional material on our Website:
www.v-r.de

Typesetting by textformart, Göttingen

ISBN Print: 9783525564356 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647564357

Contents

ISBN Print: 9783525564356 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647564357

ISBN Print: 9783525564356 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647564357

ISBN Print: 9783525564356 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647564357

ISBN Print: 9783525564356 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647564357

Foreword

This monograph, *Migration and Faith—The Migrations of the Schwenkfelders from Europe to America*, is the product of decades of study of the left wing of the Reformation, especially mystical Spiritualism. A leading representative of this complex movement who made significant contributions to the modern epoch was the mystical Spiritualist Caspar Schwenckfeld von Ossig (1489–1561), a Silesian nobleman. While his numerous followers came together in small "reading circles" throughout many territories of the Holy Roman Empire, they formed sizeable and permanent, although very loosely organized communities in County Glatz and principally in Silesia (in the Duchy Liegnitz and the Principalities Schweidnitz-Jauer). At the beginning of the eighteenth century, during the Counter-Reformation, some one hundred Schwenkfelders secretly left Silesia in family units or small groups and emigrated to America. Here in 1909 they formed in Pennsylvania,—after a long and complex process—The Schwenkfelder Church, a small American Church, which developed remarkable ecclesiastical, educational, charitable, social, and cultural activities. This monograph, for the very first time, presents a detailed examination of the relevance of these migrations to the faith and practice of piety of the Schwenkfelder immigrant generation. Did these migrations involve primarily risks or did they open up multiple opportunities for deepening and strengthening their faith and piety? In the most recent past, global migrations have brought an intense focus on this guiding cognitive interest, especially since such migrations continue to be frequently the result of religious principles.

This monograph was made possible by the generous support by libraries and archives, both domestic and foreign. As representatives of these libraries I would like to mention the Staatsbibliothek Bamberg, the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, and the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin—Preußischer Kulturbesitz; all of them were most helpful in securing secondary literature and accessing the rarest documents.

In regard to archives I am especially grateful to the Schwenkfelder Library & Heritage Center in Pennsburg, Pennsylvania, and to David Luz, the Executive Director. With gracious generosity he and his staff placed their rich archival collections of Schwenkfeldiana at my disposal during visits to the Heritage Center as well as providing very congenial and pleasant working conditions.

In the Netherlands I received cordial support from the Stadsarchief Amsterdam; in Poland from the Archiwum Państwowe [Księstwo Legnickie] Wrocław and from the Bibliotheka Unversytecka Wrocław; in Germany from the Geheimen Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz Berlin, from the Sächsische Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden, from the Stadtarchiv/Ratsarchiv Görlitz, and from the Unitätsarchiv Herrnhut.

I received especially valuable support and constant assistance with my research and with the composition of this monograph by Allen Viehmeyer, Ph. D., Associate

ISBN Print: 9783525564356 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647564357

Director of Research at the Schwenkfelder Library & Heritage Center in Pennsburg, Pennsylvania. He assisted me not only by constantly retrieving relevant materials as well as photos in the Heritage Center collections suitable for reproduction, but he also translated my original German text into English. He produced the digital document and helped with proofreading and compiling the indices. For that I owe him manifold thanks and I want to express my great appreciation for all he has done.

The translation of the summary into Polish was kindly prepared by Dr. Józef Zaprucki, Assistant Professor in Germanic Philology at the Karkonosze College in Jelenia Góra, Poland.

For the acceptance of this monograph into the series "Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte" I wish to thank the series editor, namely, Professor Dr. Volker Leppin, who guided this publication in word and in deed. My thanks also goes to the publishing house Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht for the thoughtful support of its Managing Director Jörg Persch and Editor Christoph Spill. Publication of the book was made possible by officials of the Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien, by the Evangelisch-Lutherische Landeskirche in Bayern, and by the Verein für bayerische Kirchengeschichte.

Munich, February 2017 Horst Weigelt

ISBN Print: 9783525564356 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647564357

Introduction

The Reformation was, as is known, accompanied by strong side flows which were of great relevance for the origin of the modern era. Of these, Anabaptism and Spiritualism acquired great significance. Several of these Anabaptist groups and communities, which arose in sixteenth century Europe, exist to this day—of course modified—as Protestant Churches such as the Mennonite Church, Brethren in Christ Church, and Beachy Amish Mennonite Church. In contrast to them, only one of the multifarious groups and communities of the Spiritualists developed later into a Church. This is The Schwenkfelder Church which was formed—after a very long and complex process—in 1909 and incorporated in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, in the same year.

The birthplace of this small American Church was ultimately the so-called "Liegnitzer Bruderschaft", a group of followers and sympathizers which had clustered around the Silesian spiritualist Caspar Schwenckfeld von Ossig at the ducal seat in Liegnitz since about 1522. Here this nobleman had been a courtier and an intimate advisor of Duke Frederick II of Liegnitz, Brieg, and Wohlau, the most powerful prince of Silesia and a staunch advocate of the Reformation. Since the second third of the sixteenth century there were many Schwenckfeld devotees and sympathizers not only in Silesia, a constituent part of the Austrian Habsburg Monarchy since 1526, but also in numerous territories of the Holy Roman Empire, especially in the southwestern territories of the German Empire. Nevertheless, these followers of Caspar Schwenckfeld formed sizeable and permanent communities just in Silesia. These were, however, only very loosely organized and hardly at all institutionalized; they persisted there for nearly three hundred years, i. e., until the 1820s.

1. Guiding Cognitive Interest

The history of the Schwenkfelders in Silesia—living almost exclusively there in the southwestern border area of the Duchy of Liegnitz and the abutting border area of the Principality of Schweidnitz-Jauer since around the middle of the sixteenth century—was characterized for the most part by suppression and persecution. Governments and ecclesiastical authorities persecuted the Schwenkfelders because of their religious deviance and massive criticism of the Church with disciplinary and punitive actions, including prohibitions of conventicles in their homes, interrogations, fines, forced labor, arrests, imprisonments, and penal servitude on galleys. These multifarious punitive actions reached their peak at the time of the Jesuit Mission which had been established by the order of Emperor Charles VI to convert the Schwenkfelders to Catholicism in 1719. When the mission's measures of force,

ISBN Print: 9783525564356 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647564357

especially fines and incarcerations, became increasingly harsh and more arbitrary, and all of the Schwenkfelders' endeavors at the Imperial Court in Vienna to gain toleration or at least approved emigration had failed at the end of July 1725, they decided to leave their homeland for the sake of their belief.

In 1726 and subsequent years several hundred of them left Silesia secretly in family units or small groups. Abandoning all of their possessions, they fled to Upper Lusatia, about a day's trek away. Upper Lusatia belonged to the Lutheran Electorate of Saxony as a garnishment since 1635. Here, under certain conditions, they received temporary asylum in the trading town of Görlitz and vicinity; moreover, especially in Berthelsdorf und Herrnhut, estates of Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf. However, they stayed for the most part only a short time in Herrnhut, which was founded 1722 by German speaking religious exiles from Moravia.

But just eight years later Elector Frederick August II of Saxony decreed the expulsion of the Schwenkfelders because they were not among the religious parties recognized in the Treaty of Westphalia. Consequently, in 1734 and during the following years, more than two hundred of them emigrated in a total of six emigrations to America. Here in colonial Pennsylvania, where William Penn started his "Holy Experiment" in 1681, they hoped—rightly so—to be able to live their faith unhindered and openly.

During their eight year sojourn in Upper Lusatia and then in their new homeland in Pennsylvania, the Schwenkfelders encountered members of other denominations, Christian communities, and loners in day-to-day life. They became acquainted with other faiths and forms of piety. Of course that was not so much the case in Upper Lusatia. However, in multireligious and multicultural as well as multiethnic colonial Pennsylvania they were confronted with other religious orientations at every turn. Here, moreover, they were challenged by other social, political, and cultural circumstances and had to come to grips with them.

The relevance of the migrations of the Schwenkfelders for their faith has already been implicitly or explicitly pointed out several times in publications about the history of the Schwenkfelders. However, in this monograph, for the very first time, the relevance which these multifaceted migrations had on the faith and practice of piety of the first Schwenkfelder immigrant generation will be investigated in detail.

Did their migrations, so to speak, implicate primarily risks and dangers, and were betrayal and abandonment, breach of fidelity and forsaking of the faith the result? Did the migrations enable alterations, i. e., modifications, changes, and transformations of their faith? Or did the migrations open up multiple opportunities for deepening and strengthening their faith? Therefore, this monograph intentionally focuses attention on the opportunities for and the risks to Schwenkfelder faith and piety, which arose from their manifold migrations. In the course of this study the overarching research issue should also reflect whether the migrations of the Schwenkfelders share certain common characteristics with other religious migrations. Reflecting this guiding cognitive interest, the monograph is divided into nine chapters.

ISBN Print: 9783525564356 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647564357

2. Outline

Before investigating the migrations of the Schwenkfelders, it is necessary to sketch their situation in Silesia before the flight from their homeland at the beginning of the eighteenth century in the first chapter. Of course, this general overview can only provide a broad outline. Just the Schwenkfelders' religious deviance and their criticism of the Church will be presented in greater detail. Their divergences from some ecclesiastical doctrines and their attacks on the Church were namely the reasons why governments and ecclesiastical authorities took actions against them with manifold punitive measures. In this connection, the Jesuit mission—established in 1719 for the catholicization of the Schwenkfelders—will be presented in detail. The harsh missionary strategies of the Jesuit priests were, namely, the immediate cause why the Schwenkfelders, at the end of 1725 or at the beginning of 1726, saw no other possibility than fleeing from their homeland for the sake of their faith.

The second chapter will describe how the Schwenkfelders—under increasing pressures from the Jesuits priests and Emperor Charles VI's final rejection of both tolerance and legal emigration—searched for a place of asylum since the end of 1725. Through delegates and written inquiries they put out feelers in sundry places in the German Empire and in the Netherlands, especially in those territories and towns where, at that time, several denominations existed side by side or where other religious refugees had already found asylum. Why and how the fleeing Schwenkfelders finally found temporary asylum in nearby Upper Lusatia and directed their footsteps toward Görlitz and vicinity and, particularly, toward the estates of Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf will be the major focus of this chapter.

In the third chapter the circumstances under which the Schwenkfelders' flight from Silesia to the Electorate of Saxony took place and how their sojourn in Upper Lusatia developed will be discussed. Their residence in Görlitz and vicinity, where they were tolerated by Elector Frederick August I until further orders, and their stay on Zinzendorf's estates where most of them received asylum, took shape very differently. Therefore their sojourn in the trade city of Görlitz with its self-assured council and predominant, orthodox Lutheran ministry will be described first. Then their stay on Zinzendorf's estates in Herrnhut und especially Berthelsdorf will be depicted. In this stretched-out ribbon village, namely, they could not only hold their own conventicles and earn their livelihoods by pursuing various activities, but also rent and build their own houses with gardens and small acreages. In this connection the major question is: How did the relationship between the Schwenkfelders and the Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine take shape? Did the Christocentric piety, intensive communal living, and simplicity of lifestyle of the Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine somehow influence the Schwenkfelders' faith and practice of piety?

On April 4, 1733, Elector Frederick August II of Saxony the only legitimate son and successor of Frederick August I, decreed unexpectedly that the Schwenkfelders residing on Zinzendorf's estates had to leave Saxony within one year's time. The few

ISBN Print: 9783525564356 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647564357

Schwenkfelders in Görlitz and its environs were at first not affected by this emigration order; they did not receive it until two years later. Fearing that the exodus of the Schwenkfelders would cause unrest among the general populace, they were ordered to leave the Electorate in small groups. The reasons for and the implementation of this migration order will be investigated in the fourth chapter.

After receiving the migration order, the Schwenkfelders—surprisingly—undertook nothing to obtain a withdrawal or delay of it. On contrary, they enquired immediately by letter and in person, about a new asylum in Europe or America. These diverse endeavors to find a country where they could live their faith freely, settle together in one area, and attain their economic livelihood, is the topic of the fifth chapter. In this connection two questions need to be asked: Why did the Schwenkfelders contact especially the Mennonites in the Netherlands for support? Why and at what time did they decide on colonial Pennsylvania as their new asylum?

The sixth chapter presents preeminently the five-month-long main emigration trek of approximately two hundred Schwenkfelders to America in the year 1734. In four stages, they travelled first from Herrnhut in Upper Lusatia in small groups to Pirna southwest of Dresden. Then they sailed from there in two boats on the Elbe to Altona and from there in a convoy of three Dutch ships to Haarlem. Finally, they crossed the Atlantic on the English sailing vessel St Andrew from Rotterdam to Philadelphia in Pennsylvania, one of the important immigrant harbors at that time. Based upon contemporary sources, the organization, route, and the events of this transatlantic passage will be described. In this case it will be necessary to investigate more closely the religious advice and financial support that some very wealthy Mennonites in Altona and in Haarlem granted to the Silesian refugees. In addition to the representation of this main emigration trek of the Schwenkfelders, a brief overview will be given of their five other, significantly smaller, emigrations to America, which took place between 1731 and 1737.

Chapter seven presents how the settlement and economic situation of the Schwenkfelder immigrants, their religious life, and their social and political engagement in multireligious and multicultural colonial Pennsylvania took shape. First the living conditions of the Schwenkfelder immigrants will be sketched, namely, their dispersed settlement and mainly agriculturally-oriented economy. Then, attention will be directed to their religious life, which, in the new homeland, passed through a very tension-filled development from predominant privacy to communality, i. e., to organizations and institutions. Of course, the reasons and the progress of this organizational and institutional development—meeting of the first General Conference (1763), foundation of the Society of Schwenkfelders (1782), and incorporation of the Schwenkfelder Church (1909)—can only be outlined within the frame of this study. Lastly, the social and political circumstances will need to be described, with which the Schwenkfelder settlers were confronted, especially in the course of the Colonial Wars, but particularly during the French and Indian War (1754–1763). How did they react to these new and huge challenges in their everyday life? What changes did their former mostly undifferentiated understanding of government undergo?

ISBN Print: 9783525564356 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647564357

Between 1731 and 1737, about 200 Schwenkfelders emigrated indeed to America, but an even greater number of them had remained in Upper Lusatia and primarily in their Silesian homeland. Here their situation had changed fundamentally when Silesia came under Prussian sovereignty in 1740. Soon after his occupation of Silesia King Frederick II guaranteed the Schwenkfelders by edicts individual freedom of religion and privileges such as the restitution of their houses, freedom to settle anywhere in Prussian territories, and tax privileges. The history of these Schwenkfelders, sketched in the eighth chapter, was characterized—in spite of favorable religio-political conditions as well as spiritual and financial support by their follow believers in America—by a nearly continuous religious, social, and numerical decline. A key issue in this context will be: Did there exist at last a causal connection between the migrations of about two hundred energetic Schwenkfelders to America and the decline of Schwenkfeldianism in Silesia and its extinction during first third of the nineteenth century?

The study on the Schwenkfelders who emigrated from Silesia via Upper Lusatia to America makes it evident, that their migrations had great relevance for their traditional faith and piety. Through the multiple encounters with other denominations and Christian communities as well as religious loners they became acquainted not only with other beliefs and forms of piety but also other lifestyles in regard to daily life. Moreover, they were confronted with completely different social and political circumstances. Of course, that happened to individual Schwenkfelders in varying ways and intensity. First and foremost, these encounters and confrontations had very different effects on their traditional faith and piety. They ranged from betrayal or abandonment of their religious convictions to alterations (modifications, changes, or even revisions) of their traditional faith, to strengthening and deepening their faith and piety. Now, in the ninth chapter, these diverse possibilities will be taken up again with another methodical approach and investigated in greater detail on the basis of some selected biographies and historical data—all treated very briefly in this monograph. The fact that migrations always involve risks but also opportunities for faith and piety will in this way be explained in more detail and illustrated paradigmatically.

In the short epilogue, that will conclude this study the theme of migration and faith will be mentioned briefly under cultural, historical, and theological points of view. This complex theme is, as generally known, at present of more enormous currency and greater relevance than ever.

ISBN Print: 9783525564356 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647564357

3. Text Style, Footnotes, List of Archival Materials, Bibliography, List of Illustrations, and Indices

3.1 Text Style

This monograph contains numerous quotations from printed books and manuscript sources. In the latter case those are mostly Schwenkfeldiana from different American and European archives and libraries.

Quotations from printed English-language literature follow the spelling and punctuation of the source. All quotations from printed books in German or Latin, for which there is until now no English translation, are translated; their punctuation is adjusted to the current American standard. Occasionally an English translation is followed by the complete or partial original German or Latin citation between parentheses.

All quotations from English-language manuscripts are strictly literal; however, the punctuation is—for the sake of readability—in line with current standards. All quotations from German and Latin manuscripts are translated into English if there is otherwise no extant English translation.

All emphases in quotations from printed books and manuscripts—for example the use of different font styles or letters in different sizes and underlines—are not distinguished. Common or unambiguous abbreviations in manuscripts are expanded tacitly in accordance with present-day orthography and grammar. However, all abbreviations in printed books are retained.

References to Bible passages or verses found in printed or manuscript sources appear in square brackets. The citations are taken principally from the King James Version of 1611 (1987 printing). Absolutely necessary explanations of words or terms as well as historical events within a quotation follow likewise in square brackets. All of these explanations are kept as short as possible and without any reference to literature. Three periods within square brackets signify omissions in the quoted printed or written text.

The spelling of names (first and last names) of Schwenkfelders from Silesia who did not emigrate to America but remained in Europe are, without exception, given in their German spelling. However, the spelling of the names of all Schwenkfelders who did emigrate to America are consistently given in their anglicized form. However, when these anglicized names are first mentioned, the German spelling of the first and—if necessary—last name will be given between parentheses.

The spelling of historical place names in Europe and America are given in their present-day form.

The spelling of the collective term for the followers and sympathizers of Caspar Schwenckfeld is—as normally spelled in English-speaking countries—Schwenkfelder, not Schwenckfelder or Schwenckfeldianer.

ISBN Print: 9783525564356 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647564357

Printed English, German, or Latin book titles mentioned in this monograph—as a rule according to the first edition—are, aside from a few reasonable exceptions, in the form of short titles. If English-language translations of these non-English-language books have also appeared in print, then the titles of these translations appear between parentheses in the short title form. All emphases in printed book titles are disregarded.

3.2 Footnotes

In order to keep the notes as succinct as possible, the bibliographical entries for printed sources (short titles) are kept very brief. The titles of manuscript sources are likewise given in shortened form; however, their provenances are in somewhat more detail.

The citation of letters is standardized as follows: first and last name of the author, first and last name of the addressee, date, provenance specification, resp., reference in printed books. Usually, there is no indication whether the letter is an original or a copy.

Explanations and bibliographical references to persons and historical events are given—as a rule—only when these are necessary for the understanding of the history of the Schwenkfelders and especially for their migrations. References had to be minimized due to space limitations; important, additional references are pointed out. These references to persons or historical events are usually listed where these persons or events are treated in the most detail; otherwise the reader will be directed to these footnotes.

3.3 List of Archival Materials, Bibliography, and List of Illustrations

In the list of archival materials all American and European archives and libraries from which manuscript sources were used and cited are listed. However, exact shelf numbers are given only for larger archival collections.

The bibliography of primary and secondary literature contains all of the cited and mentioned printed books as well as some general literature.

There are numerous illustrations, which are to elucidate important persons, buildings, documents, and historical events. As a rule, these are contemporary artworks, images, and photographic material. Moreover, these illustrations should help to visualize persons, buildings, documents, and historical events which are presented in the monograph. The list of illustrations contains information about the provenance of these items.

ISBN Print: 9783525564356 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647564357

3.4 Indices

Included in this monograph are four indices: abbreviations, biblical passages, persons, and places.

Persons with anglicized names are listed in the index under their anglicized name. However, the original German name is also in the index, which is always cross-referenced to the anglicized name.

Silesian place names in the index (as in the text) are—in accordance with common practice in historical studies—under the former German appellation. However, their current Polish place names are likewise noted in the index. These are always cross-referenced to the former German place names.

ISBN Print: 9783525564356 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647564357

I. Schwenkfeldianism in Silesia from Middle of 16th to Beginning of 18th Century

After Schwenckfeld's death in Ulm in 1561 there were many devotees and sympathizers of his teachings which were decisively determined by Spiritualism. These people were located in numerous territories of the German Empire as well as in Silesia and in Glatz County. Nevertheless, these so-called Schwenkfelders or Schwenkfeldians banded together in larger, permanent communities only in Silesia since about the middle of the sixteenth century.[1] They were, however, not tightly organized or even institutionalized. Belonging to Bohemia since the eleventh century, Silesia had come under the dominion of King Ferdinand I of Austria in 1526 after the death of King Louis II of Hungary and Bohemia, but it did not belong directly to the imperial federation. Schwenkfelder communities evolved in the southwestern border area of the Duchy of Liegnitz and the abutting border area of the Principality of Schweidnitz-Jauer. They were secluded from political, social, and cultural events. Although without a firm organizational structure, they persisted in Silesia for nearly two hundred years.

Ill. 1 Caspar Schwenckfeld von Ossig (1489–1561)

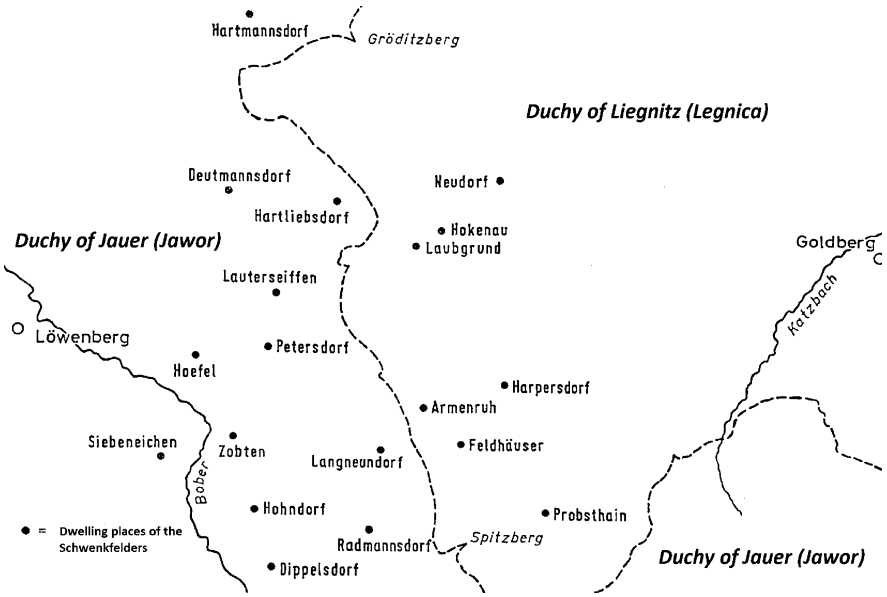
1 Schwenkfeldianism in Glatz County and especially in the southwestern territories of the German Empire was doubtlessly of great significance. Nevertheless, their conventicles in these areas were not only significantly less in number, but they were also of no duration. For more information about Schwenkfeldianism in Glatz County, see Weigelt: *Von Schlesien nach Amerika*, 106–19. Cf. Weigelt, *Schwenkfelders in Silesia*, 97–103; Weigelt, *Tradition*, 181–94. For more information about Schwenkfeldianism in the southwestern territories of the German Empire, see Gritsche, *Via Media*; McLaughlin, "Schwenckfeld and the Schwenkfelders"; Mielke, *Kirche*, vol. 1; Mielke, "Schwenkfeldertum"; Weber, *Schwenckfeld*; Weigelt, *Von Schlesien nach Amerika*, 66–105.

ISBN Print: 9783525564356 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647564357

1. Schwenkfelders until End of Thirty Years War

1.1 Residences, Living and Economic Conditions, Theology and Religious Life

In the ribbon villages situated between the cities of Goldberg, Löwenberg, and Haynau, belonging partially to the Duchy of Liegnitz and partially to the Principality of Schweidnitz-Jauer, the Schwenkfelders at that time made up possibly as much as ten percent of the population.[2] In the Duchy of Liegnitz they lived mainly in the villages of Armenruh, Laubgrund, Hockenau, and Harpersdorf; in the Principality of Schweidnitz-Jauer they resided primarily in Zobten, Langneundorf, Radmannsdorf, Siebeneichen, Höfel, Lauterseiffen, and Deutmannsdorf. The village with the highest percentage of Schwenckfeld followers was undoubtedly Harpersdorf near Goldberg. This extremely long stretched-out ribbon village, nestled in a broad valley between the Spitzberg and the Gröditzberg, consisted of Ober- and Niederharpersdorf as well as the Kammergut, i. e., the State Domain, in which a variety of ownership and legal relationships prevailed.



Ill. 2 Rural dwelling places of the Schwenkfelders in Silesia

2 An overview of the history of Schwenkfeldianism in this region of Silesia from the middle of the sixteenth century to the end of the Thirty Years War can be found in Weigelt, *Von Schlesien nach Amerika*, 120–28 (Lit.). Cf. Weigelt, *Schwenkfelders in Silesia*, 104–11; Weigelt, *Tradition*, 195–215.

ISBN Print: 9783525564356 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647564357

The Schwenkfelders living in this area were primarily cottagers (Häusler) or small farmers (Gärtner). The agriculture pursued in their home gardens or on their tiny acreage probably hardly met their own needs. These men and women earned their livelihood for the most part by spinning flax and producing linen; therefore, it was essentially a home-based family business. They sold their homemade goods either directly or through dealers at the markets in the surrounding towns, especially Goldberg. A number of these small farmers and cottagers pursued a secondary occupation as cobbler, tailor, carpenter, and mason. From time to time these cottagers and small farmers worked as day laborers in the service of their noble landlords. In addition, however, there were Schwenkfelders who were mainly artisans. The number of farmers who could live from agriculture was evidently meager; in most cases they were dependent on some additional source of income. In the second half of the seventeenth century there were several folk practitioners of medicine (Laboranten) who had acquired astonishing knowledge in the field of plants—primarily herbalism—and were gladly consulted as physicians.

Already in the sixteenth century the educational level of the Schwenkfelders was remarkably high. As a rule they could read and write. In the seventeenth century several were able to acquire Latin, Greek, and even Hebrew, more or less teaching themselves. This language acquisition served, however, exclusively for religious purposes. They wanted to read the Old and New Testament writings and the Vulgate in the original.

By the second half of the sixteenth century the Schwenkfelders, in general, had received the difficult spiritual theology of Caspar Schwenckfeld only in part. His Christology, appearing to be Eutychian, and his doctrine of the Last Supper had, at best, limited or selective acceptance.[3] However, they always upheld Schwenckfeld's teaching that eternal salvation could not be achieved through the word or sacrament as a means of grace, i. e., media salutis. Rather, it was bestowed from God to men directly by the spirit-inspired inner word. This word, no longer connected as closely to the Christological concept of the deified humanity of Christ as it was for Schwenckfeld, had to be perceived in the heart and then made real in daily life.

Theology was—the longer it prevailed, the stronger it became—focused on the origin and actualization of the New Man, i. e., on rebirth and sanctification. The evolution of the New Man, understood indeed as a process, manifests itself in a rigorous rejection of the world and in striving for moral perfection. Of course, the Schwenkfelders were careful not to lapse into Perfectionism, although they came close to that on occasion.

The Schwenkfelders practiced this worldly asceticism, avoided or loathed entertainment and social life of every sort in the villages. They led an extremely indus-

3 For Caspar Schwenckfeld's Christological concept, see especially McLaughlin, *Schwenckfeld*, 100; Weigelt, *Schwenkfelders in Silesia*, 86–91; Weigelt, *Tradition*, 159–68.

ISBN Print: 9783525564356 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647564357

trious and abstemious life. If nothing else, they were appreciated and protected by not a few of their noble landlords on account of their zeal in work and service. Without their open or secretive protection, the Schwenkfelder communities in this region would certainly not have been able to develop so robustly and last so long.

The rearing of Schwenkfelder children was strict even for that time. As often as possible they prevented their children from having contact with the village youth so that they could not romp around or scuffle on the streets.

The Schwenkfelders gathered more or less regularly in loose conventicles in their homes to study the Bible together, to sing, and to pray as well as to read certain devotional books, especially those which, in their opinion, concurred with Schwenckfeld's writings. Those were particularly the books of homilies by the theologian Johann Sigismund Werner who belonged to Schwenckfeld's narrow circle of friends in Silesia;[4] by the Zobten pastor Michael Hiller whose sermons were enthusiastically attended by Schwenkfelders in the vicinity,[5] and by the Langenbielau Pastor Erasmus Weichenhan who was regarded as an avid proponent of the Schwenkfeldian doctrine.[6] Corporate and private singing was especially practiced by them. Until the end of the seventeenth century they apparently used almost exclusively songs from the hymnals of the Bohemian Brethren.[7]

Schwenkfelders attended Lutheran church services only sporadically. Because of their spiritualistic understanding of the sacrament, they participated in the celebration of communion only on the rarest of occasions. However, compliant with the prevailing law, they permitted their children, as a rule, to be baptized by the local minister, although they were generally critical of the practice of infant baptism. From time to time they took their children outside of their villages for baptism by those Lutheran ministers who enjoyed their personal trust. So, in spite of their religious deviance and massive criticism of the Church, the Schwenkfelders were considered to be members of the Lutheran Church.

4 On Johann Sigismund Werner, see Herzig, "Werner". Werner's "Postilla" in *CS*, vol. 15, (395) 407–1031. For the different editions of this postil in the sixteenth century, see VD 16, W 2060–2063.

5 On Michael Hiller, see Grünewald, *Predigergeschichte des Kirchenkreises Goldberg*, 39. Cf. Weigelt, *Schwenkfelders in Silesia*, 104–6; Weigelt, *Tradition*, 195–99. Hiller's "Postilla und Auslegung der Evangelia durchs gantze Jahr" was not printed. Several manuscript copies are located at the SLHC.

6 On Erasmus Weichenhan, see Grünewald, *Predigergeschichte des Kirchenkreises Schönau*, 12; Schultze, *Predigergeschichte des Kirchenkreises Schweidnitz-Reichenbach*, 7. Cf. Weigelt, *Schwenkfelders in Silesia*, 110; Weigelt, *Tradition*, 212–13. Weichenhan's "Postilla" was published in 1672 by Martin John Jr under the pseudonym Matthias Israel in Sulzbach in the printing house of Abraham Lichtenthaler. For the various editions of Weichenhan's "Postil", see Weigelt, *Von Schlesien nach Amerika*, 137–38.

7 Cf. Evers, *Lied*, 25, 157.

ISBN Print: 9783525564356 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647564357

1.2 Criticism of Church and Ecclesiastical Doctrines

In accord with their spiritual theology, Schwenkfelders opposed mainly the doctrine of Lutheran orthodoxy that eternal salvation is offered and received only through the external word and the sacraments. They aimed many criticisms at the institution of the Lutheran Church. Lutheran ministers came particularly into their sights. Schwenkfelders castigated their lifestyle with sharp words and denounced their convivialities with fiddle playing and card games. They branded their homey feasts as "gorging" and "boozing".[8]

During the last two decades of the sixteenth century the Schwenkfelders' criticism of the Church took on, in part, apocalyptic forms. Moreover, they declaimed their eschatological prophecies occasionally in ecstasy. To what extent their leaders in the early 1590s sympathized and cooperated or were even identical with the so-called Peasant Preachers, who at that time were active in this area, is disputed.[9] An anonymous writer, for example, was able to report the following about a gathering of allegedly more than two thousand men and women in Hartliebsdorf near Löwenberg: they "performed strange ceremonies [symbolic actions] with gestures and with their hands; prophets among them revealed that the nobles and their ministers could be seen in Hell coupled together like dogs."[10] They prophesized that, "Although Judgment Day was supposed to have already come three weeks ago, but had been postponed for a little while, it would take place in less than a week."

At that time Martin John Sr[11] and the shepherd Antonius Oelsner[12] from Kammerswaldau were especially passionate critics of the doctrine and institution of the Lutheran Church. As the result of a revelation experience around 1580 the latter had given up his job and from that time on moved around as a bustling itinerant preacher. He preached in homes and barns, in fields and woods about the approaching apocalyptic tribulations and the imminent dawning of Judgment Day.

8 Martin John Sr to Herzog [Friedrich IV] of Liegnitz, n.d., SLHC Pennsburg, VC 5–3, 393–96, here 394.

9 For the so-called Peasant-Preachers, see Koffmane, *Wiedertäufer*, 48–55; Thebesius, *Liegnitzische Jahr-Bücher*, vol. 3, 246; Weigelt, *Von Schlesien nach Amerika*, 126.

10 Henel von Hennenfeld, *Silesiographia*, 291–92.

11 On Martin John Sr, see Weigelt, *Schwenkfelders in Silesia*, 110; Weigelt, *Tradition*, 212–13.

12 On Antonius Oelsner, see Weigelt, *Schwenkfelders in Silesia*, 106–10; Weigelt, *Tradition*, 202–6, 208–11.

ISBN Print: 9783525564356 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647564357

1.3 Disciplinary and Punitive Measures by Governmental and Ecclesiastical Authorities

Lutheran ministers felt challenged by Schwenkfelder religious deviance and criticisms of the Church. Therefore they attacked the Schwenkfelders in their sermons and polemicized against them about their occasional services, particularly those for funerals. They tried to provoke their aristocratic patrons and territorial lords into taking disciplinary and punitive actions. However, only a few of their noble landlords took action against their Schwenkfelder subjects. Among them was Sigismund von Mauschwitz, the owner of Armenruh between 1570 and 1597.[13] Most of the nobility of that region extended their hands protectively over the Schwenkfelders. Indeed, these noble landlords valued the Schwenkfelder work ethic and modesty or even sympathized secretly with their spiritual theology.

More severe for the Schwenkfelders were the measures taken against them by authorities at the state level. An anti-Schwenkfelder mandate issued by the Breslau Bishop Andreas von Jerin as the Vicegerent in Silesia on October 21, 1590, proved to be especially sharp and momentous.[14] This decree forbade Schwenkfelders from holding conventicles and required them not only to attend the Lutheran worship service but also to receive the sacraments. When the Schwenkfelders did not comply with these directives, Duke Frederick IV of Liegnitz and the Vicegerent of the Principality Schweidnitz-Jauer Matthias von Logau took action against them in both principalities by imprisoning and expelling them in addition to confiscating their assets and books. The Duke and the Vicegerent were supported in their actions by several noble landlords in these territories. Initially twenty-eight Schwenkfelders were tossed into the dungeons of the Gröditzburg—a fortress located between Goldberg and Löwenberg and in possession of the dukes of Liegnitz since 1473—and then in August 1595 transferred to Vienna where they were sentenced to serve as rowers on galleys. In the Turkish war they were deployed on the Danube as rowers and as human shields during attacks. Only three of these men survived. Among them was Antonius Oelsner, who—according to Schwenkfelder tradition—after his release is supposed to have been killed by "infamous boys" at the instigation of Catholic priests.[15]

Around 1600 the persecutions faded or even ceased. Several Schwenkfelders who had taken a tough stance had meanwhile died, and moderate proponents, such as the well-educated and multilingual Nikolaus Tatzke (Tetschke, Detschke) from Mittelwalde in County Glatz, had acquired influence.[16] Likewise, the influential noble

13 On Sigismund von Mauschwitz Sr, see Sinapius, *Des Schlesischen Adels*, 803.

14 Jerin's "Mandat" is printed as Regest in Walther, *Silesia diplomatica*, vol. 1, 94, 146.

15 John Jr, "Bericht von den Schwenkfeldern", n.d., SLHC Pennsburg, VC 5–3, 1221–35, here 1223.

16 On Nikolaus Tatzke (Tetschke, Detschke), see Weigelt, *Von Schlesien nach Amerika*, 116, 122, 127.

ISBN Print: 9783525564356 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647564357

landlord of Armenruh and Oberharpersdorf, Sigismund von Mauschwitz,—unlike his father—advocated for them with strong arguments.[17]

During the Thirty Years War Schwenkfelder communities experienced, for political reasons, a period of relative calm. In regard to action against the—in the eyes of the Habsburgs—heretical Schwenkfelders, the Silesian princes and territorial estates had to fear attracting the attention of King Ferdinand II, the Supreme Liege Lord of Silesia, giving him a pretext to attack them. Therefore they were authoritatively well advised to practice restraint.[18] The noble landlords together with their patronage priests, in whose villages deviant Schwenkfelders lived, had more than enough economic and existential worries.

After the termination of the Great War, i. e., the Thirty Years War, the Schwenkfelders were again hard pressed in the Duchy of Liegnitz soon after the ascent of Duke Christian IV, who governed from 1651 to 1663. In order to consolidate Lutheran Church matters, a general visitation was conducted between 1651 and 1657.[19] By means of this action the authorities in the nearly exclusive Lutheran Principality of Liegnitz wanted to arm themselves better against the looming Habsburg Counter-Reformation plans, because Silesia was allocated in the Peace of Westphalia to the House of Habsburg.[20] In connection with the church visitations or in their aftermath, there occurred prohibitions of conventicles, interrogations, arrests, forced labor, and imprisonments. Above all, the leading spokesmen of the Schwenkfelders were struck by punitive measures, especially Balthasar Jäckel[21] and Georg Heydrich. At that time these two men radicalized the criticism of infant baptism—always latent among the Schwenkfelders—and urged their fellow believers to have their children no longer baptized. By doing this they literally provoked a reaction by the Lutheran clergy.[22]

In the Principality of Liegnitz, at the end of 1658 or the beginning of 1659, a period of calm dawned for the Schwenkfelders and lasted for several decades. They ceased this sharp criticism of the practice of baptism. Many of them actually drew somewhat closer to the Lutheran Church and participated somewhat in the village community with its festivities and amusements.

17 On Sigismund von Mauschwitz Sr, see Sinapius, *Des Schlesischen Adels*, 803.

18 This restraint was necessary because the Silesian princes and territorial estates had supported the rebellion of the Bohemian estates.

19 For the general visitation between 1651 and 1657, see Eberlein (ed.), *General-Kirchenvisitation*, 64–65, 108–9; Velsen, *Gegenreformation*, 17.

20 Instrumentum Pacis Osnabrugense, Article V § 41. In Oschmann (ed.), *Friedensverträge*, vol. 1, part 1, 121.

21 On Balthasar Jäckel, see Weigelt, *Schwenkfelders in Silesia*, 112–15; Weigelt, *Tradition*, 217–19, 222–24, 226.

22 On Georg Heydrich, see Weigelt, *Schwenkfelders in Silesia*, 112–13; Weigelt, *Tradition*, 217–18.

ISBN Print: 9783525564356 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647564357