

PAULINA BUCHWALD-PELC

## CALVINIST CENSORSHIP IN THE LIGHT OF THE ACTS OF THE LESSER POLAND SYNODS

Discussions relating to control over the publication, distribution and reading of books, whether preventing them from being printed, destroying undesired ones or punishing authors, printers, booksellers or (in rare cases) readers – that is to say preventive and repressive censorship in the early Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth – have tended to be limited to outlines of royal and Catholic Church censorship. Jan Daniel Hoffmann was probably the first to take note of the existence of not only Catholic censorship, but also that practised by dissenters. In his outline of the history of printing in the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania released in 1740, he listed in the final chapter (and sometimes quoted) certain rulings of synods, both Catholic (such as the provincial synod of 1643) and Protestant, as of 1560. Extensively quoting Jan Łasicki, the author summarised the approach adopted by the Unity of Brethren in this respect, particularly the special attention they paid to books published in the vernacular language, since *multi enim vident prius, quod plures post lecturi sunt* (similar views were later expressed by Salomon Rysiński). Hoffmann also quoted a passage from a resolution of the general synod of Włodzisław in 1583 on subjecting any books featuring the exposition of doctrine to the censorship of superintendents, as well as mentioned such provisions included in the acts of Lutheran synods.<sup>1</sup>

For Protestant Churches within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, control over their publishing houses and print shops concerned specifically books directly intended to serve for divine service or exposition of doctrine.<sup>2</sup> The as-

---

1 J.D. Hoffmann, *De typograftis, earumque initiis et incrementis in Regno Poloniae et Magno Ducatu Lithuaniae*, Dantisci 1740, p. 69-71.

2 Censorship as practised by the authorities of Gdańsk and Toruń, dominated by members of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, was far more extensive. In 1601 in Toruń, not only

assessment – called inspection or censorship (most commonly among the Lithuanian Brethren), along with acceptance and approval of books for the purposes of printing, often preceded by their rectification – was performed at synods. Such assessment tended to be lengthy and did not always bring favourable results, as the inspectors or censors changed. Complaints were even raised in this respect, for example by Wojciech Salinarius at the provincial synod of Vilnius in 1611 who “also reported that multitudo correctorum mala.”<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, especially in the early period, publishing and even writing itself was largely discouraged. In 1560, a synod in Książ resolved that the “Seniors” shall oversee that no minister “entertains himself with needless writing, making him waste the time he shall spend on studying for himself, so that he can guide his sheep more learnedly. And should anyone amongst them write something of value, then not only shall they refrain from printing it, but also from divulging it to anybody, until the synod comes where people will be designated to examine it.”<sup>4</sup>

As a matter of fact, this was not the first resolution made by the synod, which constituted the highest Church authority, with regards to the printing and distribution of books as well as their control or censorship. As early as in the acts of the synod of Pińczów held in 1556 (in which delegates of the Unity of Brethren participated), it was recorded that the Church represented by its elders shall decide whether or not printing should be permitted: “No treaties may be published privately, against their will, without their inspection and rectification” (Akta I, p. 76). Otherwise, one was risking reproofs such as those addressed to Andrzej Trzeciński who was “writing what he wished to, with no judgment or advice” (Akta I, p. 91). Likewise, at the Włodzisław synod in 1557 it was resolved that none of the brethren was allowed to publish books or postils without the prior judgment and assessment of the seniors (Akta I, p. 179). This was expressed even more explicitly when Daniel of Łęczycza launched his printing house in Pińczów. His activity was welcomed at the synod of Książ in 1558, however, upon one condition: he could release no books on matters of faith without the synod’s prior approval. It was also undertaken to appoint book inspectors at the next general synod, so that they might exercise control over works prior to their publication and supervise the printed matter (Akta I, p. 264). Indeed, more and more records of inspections or requests for such an inspection started to appear in the synod acts, as for example one that was submitted that very year with respect to a book by Wawrzyniec of Przasnysz, released the following year in 1559.

---

Arian books, but also “papist” ones were forbidden; this, however, was of little practical impact, although orders to stop the printing of a Catholic book were occasionally issued. I discussed the censorship practised by various churches, including reformed ones, in my book *Cenzura w dawnej Polsce: między prasą drukarską a stosem*, SBP, Warszawa 1997.

3 Akta synodów prowincjonalnych Jednoty Litewskiej 1611-1625, Wilno 1915, p. 4.

4 M. Sipayłło (ed.), *Akta synodów różnowierczych w Polsce*, Warszawa 1972, v. 2, p. 46-47. Further references to this work will be hereinafter given in parentheses in the main text as the first word of the title (Akta) followed by the number of the volume and page (v.1-1966, v.3 0 1983).

Nonetheless, Daniel of Łęczyca, the printer, broke his engagement and printed without having notified the Church. Consequently, at the synod of Włodzisław (29 June 1559) he was accused of having “printed many vile works with no approbation or censorship of the Church” – we remain, however, unaware of which books this reproach referred to.<sup>5</sup> Daniel was equally blamed for printing the work by Francesco Stancaro, *Collatio doctrinae Arii et Ph. Melanctonis et sequacium*. According to a letter of September 1, 1559, from Francesco Lismanini to the Zurich ministers, the impression was burnt in its entirety. Daniel justified himself by claiming that he had been forced to release the publication by Grzegorz Orszak because he was obligated by “lord’s threats,” referring to Mikołaj Oleśnicki (*Akta* I, p. 309).

Before this, the Polish version of *Canones Reformationis Ecclesiarum Polonicarum* by Francesco Stancaro – probably published in Cracow in 1553 with financing by Hieronim Filipowski as *Porządek naprawienia w kościołach naszych* [A System of Melioration for our Churches] – was supposed to be burnt. A fragment of this print was found by Kazimierz Piekarski<sup>6</sup> among waste papers. As per the acts taken down by Jakub Sylvius, a synod held in Słomniki on November 25, 1554, rejected and condemned this regulation of the Church “system”. As Stanisław Górski informed Stanisław Hozjusz in his letter of January 6, 1555, “The entire impression is believed to have been burnt in Krzęcice pursuant to Stanisław Stadnicki’s advice” (*Akta* I, p. 3).

The censorship even went as far as to put pressure on the Catholic Church authorities, in a way, so that they would destroy books that the Protestant Church censors believed to be harmful and punish their authors, as the case of Piotr of Goniądz illustrates. At the synod of Pińczów in 1556 where he was “refell’d for the Arian error”, it was decided to “send two gentlemen” to the Bishop of Cracow “to let him know that this misbeliever was not and hath never been one of their people” (*Akta* I, p. 72). It was probably due to the machinations of Bishop Andrzej Zebrzydowski that the king issued an edict against Piotr. The book, unknown today, was reportedly bought out and destroyed by Mikołaj “the Black” Radziwiłł, the great protector of Polish dissenters including Piotr of Goniądz.<sup>7</sup>

Some kinds of publications were treated with particular diligence. The 1566 synodal assembly of Calvinist ministers in Włodzisław emphasised the necessity of having the psalms and catechisms in particular as well as the Brest Bible – works that were used widely and frequently, especially in religious services – checked and inspected by ministers (*Akta* II, p. 203). However, constant reminders that one should subject oneself to the Church’s censorship every time were not neglected. At the 1575 general synod of Cracow, it was ascertained again that

5 A. Kawecka-Gryczowa, K. Korotajowa and W. Krajewski (ed.), *Drukarze dawnej Polski od XV do XVIII wieku*, fasc. 5: *Wielkie Księstwo Litewskie*, Wrocław 1959, p. 73; *Akta* I, p. 308-309.

6 K. Piekarski, “Nieznane druki reformacyjne z XVI w.”, *Reformacja w Polsce* 3, 1924, p. 144-145.

7 L. Szczucki, “Piotr z Goniądza”, *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, v. 26, 1981, p. 398.

“No minister shall be free to issue books *in publicum*, either newly created rewritten or printed, until the synod approbates them” (*Akta* III, p. 9). Jan Pirożyński<sup>8</sup> believes that one consequence of the synod resolution that superintendents representing three Churches – the Calvinists, the Lutherans and the Unity of Brethren – should censor works that contained basic exposition of religious doctrine, was the fact that Maciej Wirzbięta’s 1574 edition of the *Sandomierz Confession*, a text criticised by both the Unity of Brethren and the Lutherans, was clandestinely reprinted (so-called *sub-printing*) at Jan Karcan’s around 1595.

Strict adherence to the order to inspect written works was solicited not only by the Church “Elders,” but also by the protector of the Calvinists of Lesser Poland and voivode of Brest, Andrzej Leszczyński. He sent a letter to the provincial synod of Ożarów in 1600 where he cautioned that “no one shall dare to issue any books without consent of the brethren’s careful rectification” (*Akta* III, p. 217, emphasis added – P.B.-P.).

While the main reason for the censorship or “inspection” of books was concern for the purity of doctrine, attention was also paid to the uniformity of worship as well as the unification of prayers and chants. In 1601, discussions at the provincial synod of Włodzisław focused on the fact that there were “many different catechisms in some of our churches, therefore the chants varied” (*Akta* III, p. 229).

Subsequent editions of books very important for religious instruction were carefully prepared. As soon as copies of the *Catechism* by Krzysztof Kraiński became scarce, a decision was made to publish it “properly.” Consequently, it was ordered that written comments be brought to the following synod concerning any necessary rectifications to the Catechism. This resolution was adopted in Bełżyce in 1620, while the revised book was not released until 1624 in Raków, as discussions on the issue continued at numerous synods and assemblies (*Akta* III, pp. 421, 447 and 455). Any “Arian errors” were tracked with particular diligence, especially in Bible translations (*Akta* III, p. 460). The entire task of a new Holy Bible edition, reviewing its text, and in particular work on correct “annotations” took years and years before the Bible was finally printed in Gdańsk in 1632 (the printing process did not actually finish until 1633), provoking an immediate reaction from the Catholics as Primate Jakub Wężyk announced a ban on its distribution in 1634. The Bible edition was equally criticized in certain Protestant communities, for example causing outrage for the way the foreword was signed, and provoking other objections against it.

The censorship or “inspection” of books also aimed to prevent religious disputes being unnecessarily stirred up by provocative words. Showing moderation in discussions with ideological opponents was recommended, although in this respect authors were simply called upon to do so – like Bartłomiej Bythner and Daniel Clementius in Bełżyce in 1628 (*Akta* III, p. 510) – rather than being offi-

8 J. Pirożyński, “Nieznane wydanie Konfesji Sandomierskiej”, *Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce* 12, 1967, p. 194-196.

cially reprimanded. Accordingly, no evidence has been found of such provocative discourse being the reason for refusal to print a work. Nevertheless, intervention regarding books already printed was still possible. Francesco Stancaro – the son of a prominent heresiarch who was called a “renegade” by Krzysztof Kraiński in his *Postilla* of 1611 – managed to obtain a resolution of the provincial synod of Ożarów in 1618 ordering the ministers to erase (or rather to blur or scratch out) “at their parishioners” his father’s name (*Akta* III, p. 403).

A censor’s intervention regarding an already printed book did not necessarily mean its complete destruction. Besides, the “cleansing” of Kraiński’s *Postilla* was performed exclusively on the son’s initiative and was easy to put in place. Nonetheless, even in the case of more general objections regarding doctrine not simply limited to one word, and resulting from obvious faults such as failure to submit the work to “inspection” and printing it with doctrinal errors, the printed book could still be saved as long as certain passages were removed or rectified.

This happened in 1627 when “our dear brother, the Rev. Paweł Żarnowita, gravely alarmed the Holy Church by exposing publicly and *privatim* his doubts as to the Holy Trinity of God,” and submitted the book for printing without prior inspection. Because of that, he was expelled from the Church; however, since he humbled himself and promised to improve, his fault was pardoned under certain conditions. It was acknowledged that he had incurred costs connected with the publication of his book, so it was approved after release provided that “it was used in private by the pious, nonetheless, all copies which still remained unbound should have their prefaces removed, so that only the prayers and chants were preserved. As to the bound copies, should someone bring them to the Church, any *locos erroneos* ought to be erased by the minister loci” (*Akta* III, p. 495–496). Since no copy of this edition has been preserved, we cannot verify the results of these efforts. When the book was republished a couple of decades later, its new edition reprinted only the prayers and chants, which indirectly confirms the successful “cleansing” of the original edition.

Evident signs of books being approved by the Church – or “the Elders” as they were referred to in suitable formulas – are rarely to be found. While even the authority of the Holy Spirit might be invoked during the process of approval for printing – “It seemed to the Holy Spirit and to all the brethren, both of the clergy and laymen, that an answer to the book by Sir [Andrzej] Chrzastowski as regards its printing should be promptly announced” (resolution of a synod held in Bełżyce, December 7, 1618, *Akta* III, p. 404) – nevertheless, the books mentioned only the approval of the “Elders” or the “supervisors.” Abridged approbation formulas placed in the prints were similar, nearly identical to the ones applied by the Catholic Church, and mainly put on title pages. Four works by Jakub Zaborowski provide a good example in this respect as they feature nearly the entire range of these formulas even though they were published almost simultaneously, and most importantly – apart from one – at the same famous print shop in Raków run by Sebastian Sternacki, a fact which remained, however, undisclosed. Zaborowski’s

prints from Raków feature labels such as: *Cum licentia Superiorum, Cum permissu superiorum, Ex mandato Superiorum*, whereas a work published in 1619 at Augustyn Ferber's in Toruń entitled *Ogień z wodą, to jest o uniej traktacik [...]*, aimed against the Arians, bore the following remark: "upon command of the Provincial Synod duly gathered in the name of the Holy Spirit and celebrated in Bełżyce [...] in 1617."

Since Arian books were considered to be a menace, warnings concerned not only reading them, but even keeping them. It was written in the canons of the synod of Toruń of 1595, the intention of which was to bring the Calvinists, the Unity of Brethren and the Lutherans closer, that "[n]one of our brethren shall, contrarily to the ministers' advice, bring Arian books home nor shall they read them" (*Akta* III, p. 603).

Any prohibitions or even recommendations to refrain from reading or keeping particular books, works of a specific kind or even a particular title did not, however, play an important role as far as the Calvinists' approach to books is concerned. Their system of supervision over books, which worked successfully, mainly consisted in preventive censorship, "inspection," evaluation, rectification and approval for printing, as well as vigilance over the printers serving the Church to ensure that they not print anything deemed improper and harmful. Daniel of Łęczycza had to abide by this condition from the start of his activity in 1558. Following the bitter experience faced in the printing of *Gratis* by Jan Brożek in 1625 in a Church print shop in Wielkanoc, near Cracow – a print shop which at that time had not even been properly launched, and was moved to Baranów afterwards – the provincial synod of Oksza in 1629 undertook to further limit the possibilities of printing without due supervision: "The printer ought to be equally warned *auctoritate synodi* not to dare to print anything *privata voluntate*, not even the smallest page" (*Akta* III, p. 534). Printers were further reminded of this prohibition at the provincial synod of Chmielnik (September 26, 1640) where it was stated that they were forbidden to print anything without the knowledge and approval of the superintendent. At the same time, to prevent the possible intervention of the Catholic Church or of secular authorities and their repressive censorship, it was recommended that the printers avoid disclosing the name of the publishing house in works which might cause objections: "whatever he prints [...] he may neither put his name nor the name of the print shop, save where the Rev. Superintendent discovers a need to do so."<sup>9</sup> This matter was further discussed at the subsequent synod of Chmielnik in 1642. A resolution was adopted to appoint censors to supervise the print shops and make sure that "nothing is presented for printing, approbated or printed" without their permission, "not even a funeral sermon, *idque gravibus de causis*." As a matter of fact, synod acts mention approvals of books with no religious contents whatsoever, such as reading primers ac-

9 M. Sipayłło, "Dzieje drukarni baranowskiej w świetle akt synodalnych", *Roczniki Biblioteczne* 6, 1962, p. 90.

cepted at the provincial synod of Bełżyce in 1646 or a funeral sermon at the synod of Sielec in 1635.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, the rectification of devotional publications attracted the greatest attention. The book of the general synods of the Lesser Poland province held from 1633 to 1678 preserves an extensive *Rectification of psalms [...] that are to be inserted amongst those of the Rev. [Maciej] Rybinski, Rectification of pious anthems or chants* as well as of the agenda by Krzysztof Kraiński. These rectifications were adopted at the general convocations in Orle and Włodawa in 1633 and 1634.<sup>11</sup>

More resolutions and opinions regarding books as well as names of authors and censors may be listed, this would not, however, change the general picture. We ought to mention that censorship was practised in an essentially similar manner by the Lithuanian Brethren, even though general issues might have been discussed less frequently there. In Lithuania, requests or even demands for inspection or assessment were predominant, while in Lesser Poland it was chiefly the “Elders” rather than the authors that initiated such actions. We may get the impression that faults allegedly committed by authors were punished less severely in Lesser Poland than in Lithuania, though in the early period the destruction and burning of books considered to be harmful was not unheard of, not to mention that approvals for printing were sometimes issued upon lengthy considerations and assessments, and specifically involved forcing the author to rectify objectionable passages in the book. Censorship as practised by the Lesser Poland synods, like in any other church, focused predominantly on vigilance over doctrinal purity of the works published by members of the Church community and destined for its other members, as well as on unifying the rite. The Church censorship was, however, less interested in the books believers had in their possession or read, and if it did, it was mostly libraries of ministers that were checked to make sure they did not contain improper publications (which has been confirmed in Lithuania), while houses of other members of the Church were not searched for this purpose, although – as mentioned previously in the present paper – believers were warned against Arian books.

#### SUMMARY

On the basis of remaining published and manuscript records of the Protestant synods and statements by members of the congregations, the present paper shows how the synods passed resolutions and opinions on the control of printed works before printing operations took place. Examples of such censorship, and of proceedings in cases where it was not used, especially in the case of Arian books, are presented.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 91, 92 and 89.

<sup>11</sup> Manuscript of the Library of the University of Warsaw no. 590.