

The history of the Evangelical Church in early modern Gdansk, one of the most important cities in Royal Prussia, refer to the success of the Reformation that reached at that time almost the whole Europe and contributed to “liberation of thought” in order to free Christians from the monopoly of the Roman Catholic Church. While the “enslavement” of the societies by Catholicism can be still problematic, there can be no doubt that Martin Luther initiated the freedom of belief. Consequently the Reformation led to emergence of various Christian movements that attempted to develop their own theological systems based on the existing Christian doctrine as well as ancient church structures. In this way already at the end of the 16th century there were a devotional movement, known from Latin as the Pietism, which strive for a spiritual renewal and the introduction of “practical Christianity” as well as the elimination of barriers while reading of the Bible and of the mediation of the Church. The Pietistic movement was established also in Gdansk, the relevant cultural and trade centre with its multi-denominationalism and multi-ethnicity. Till today the Pietism is understood as the cultural heritage connected to the transfer of the European Reformation thought, which wasn’t still investigated properly.

The research project objectives concern a thorough analysis of the unique historical source material regarding the Pietistic/Orthodox Lutheran controversy at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries, i.e. the religious polemics carried out by Samuel Schelwig (1643–1715), an Orthodox Lutheran preacher, and the Pietistic pastor of the St. Mary’s Church in Gdansk Constantin Schütz (1646–1712). This is an undisputed innovative project which is founded on historical source material written in New High German. It includes the investigation on historical background and cultural and social context of the polemics as well as finding structures of Pietistic thought based on the analysis of chosen aspects of Orthodox Lutheran and Pietistic theology.

The scope of the research on the source material will include investigation of old prints, source criticism (hermeneutics) and (psychological, sociological, theological) interpretation, ie. the origin-and-cause investigation as well as the identification of historical figures involved in the controversy and the analysis of chosen theological aspects. The research will describe the historical and cultural context of the polemics, its connection to the European Pietistic thought, the importance and activity of local pastors in early modern European network of clergy, and also show the degree of assimilation of the European Pietistic thought in the local community in Gdansk. All research results will be placed in the raw scientific data repository and disseminated in Open Access model for all interested researchers.

The aim of the research is to provide a description of the city Gdansk in the middle of religious conflicts within one Christian doctrine – between the Pietism and the Lutheran Orthodoxy. The project makes it possible to search for the religious identity of the Gdansk citizens and to investigate on the situation of the Lutheran and Pietistic community in the local society.

It is also worth mentioning that among historians, theologians and culture theorists the controversy wasn’t of any interest yet. Much more there is a small number of archive and library queries and a small percentage of well investigated source material. It means that we don’t have currently a comprehensive summary research work written in Polish that would present this subject in details in accordance to the reliable source material. Then it is an undisputed innovative project, which perfectly fits into current trends in science referring to a regional focal point of the history research as well as to dissemination of the local history on an international scale, and has its chance to fill cognitive gaps in the investigation of the early modern Lutheran Church history in Gdansk.