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Who was Rev. Vladislav Santarius and why does he remain a precious model of enthusiasm about and for Jesus Christ?

FAITH, ETHNICITY AND SOCIAL ISSUES IN THE THOUGHTS AND WORK OF PASTOR VLADISLAV SANTARIUS

by Martin Piętak

Editor's note: This essay was written by a theologian in the Silesian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (SECAC).¹ The origins of this church date to the 16th century, when Luther's ideas came back to Silesia by students who were studying in and near Wittenberg. The church suffered persecution under the Counter Reformation and during Communist times in the 20th century. The church has strong pietistic tendencies but considers itself Lutheran and seeks a stronger Lutheran identity. The SECAC has a partnership with the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELK) of Germany, a partner church of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, in diaconal matters. The SECAC and the Missouri Synod also signed a working agreement in Fall 2010, which entails cooperation in the following areas: regular contact between the church leadership, collective theological work to strengthen the work of pastoral ministry (e.g., in the form of pastoral lectures and pastoral convention) and reciprocal invitations to theological presentations. The SECAC and the Missouri Synod are not in altar and pulpit fellowship. This essay was presented at a conference on the development of diaconal work in the SECAC in Cesky Těšín on Oct. 10, 2015. The purpose of presenting this paper is to familiarize International Lutheran Council members with the work of some Lutherans during the Communist era and among church bodies they are less familiar with.

In the 20th century, the region of Těšín Silesia was very diverse in terms of ethnicity and social structure. Religion, faith and service in the Church, therefore, easily became a part of the problem rather than their solution. Vladislav Santarius² was a true son of the region, and he was very well aware of this danger. He was born and grew up in a period of escalating ethnic tensions. As for social background, his family was rather poor, quite large (he had six siblings) and mostly working in the mines, which was typical for the region at those times. In terms of ethnicity, he was Polish. At home, his family spoke a Polish dialect, but after finishing the first cycle of primary education at a Polish school in Stonava, he started the second cycle at a Czech school in Horní Suchá. Afterward, his

secondary studies took place at the Czech grammar school in Český Těšín and after school-leaving exams, he continued at Evangelical Theological Faculty in Bratislava in Slovakia.³ As far as religion is concerned, he grew up in an evangelical family and he was strongly influenced by the “awakening” movement led above all by parson Kulisz. In the regional context, both the language and the religion were generating considerable tensions in 20th century. Our aim will be to analyze in what manner it was possible to re-conciliate and relatively peacefully develop these aspects of human life that are the most frequent causes of conflicts and wars. We will treat them in an order reflecting life priorities: faith, social issues and ethnicity.

On the basis of his studies of Scripture and Reformation documents, [Santarius] sought an integral, Christocentric and active Christianity as an opposite to a spiritless religion.

¹ For information on the Lutheran churches in the Czech Republic, see David Jurech, “Global Lutheranism Finding the Lutherans in the Czech Republic,” *Lutheran Forum* 45, no. 2 (2011), 26–29.

² Editor's note: Vladislav Santarius is known for being one of the leading Christians in Czechoslovakia during the Communist times. He was persecuted for his Christian faith but not imprisoned.

³ Allegedly, he started to attend the Czech grammar school because it was a state institution and therefore free of charge. The Polish grammar school was a private institution and a fee had to be paid, which his family could not afford. This situation was nevertheless undoubtedly the result of a strong Czechoslovak nationalist policy in the Těšín region and local Polish population must have perceived it as harm.

Faith and religion

As far as faith is concerned, the situation was explosive in three aspects. On one hand, there was the traditional Church that was — among others — willing to collaborate with the Communist authorities. On the other hand, there were revival movements with partially separatist tendencies aimed at leaving the Church. Finally, there was also the official Communist atheism of the Czechoslovak state that considered the faith an anachronism, planned to abolish the Church and liked to use internal conflicts within the Church to achieve its own goals.

The faith in the triune God revealed in Jesus Christ was the absolute essence of the thoughts and life of Pastor Santarius. On the basis of his studies of Scripture and Reformation documents, he sought an integral, Christocentric and active Christianity as an opposite to a spiritless religion. His programmatic documents and also his implementation of basic theological points in his pastoral work prove how much he wished to return to a simple biblical Christianity — the one with apostles and reformers, based on personal relation with God and manifested in an active and practical love and inclusion of all believers in the service of the Church. He refused spiritless traditionalism and routine bigotry where nothing echoed in the real life. His thoughts were thus a continuation of the traditional Silesian Lutheranism that was influenced by Pietism and the awakening movement.⁴ His home in Stonava is a good example. There were three neighboring houses, and in each of them, Bible classes of a different awakening movement were organized, namely Christian Fellowship, Salvation Army and the Blue Cross. This led him among others firmly to refuse the servile attitude of the Church and its passive reconciliation with the aggressive boom of atheism. He, therefore, got into conflict with both the official leadership of the Church and the state authorities. For this reason, his activities

He considered the service of mercy as the essential practical manifestation of living the Gospel. It was not just a facultative matter or an option to him; it was the vital need of a living Church.

could certainly not be considered as non-conflicting. You can say that this was the main battle line. Vladislav Santarius was convinced not only about the fact that the Church needed an internal renewal but also about the fact that such renewal would really be possible (many people had already ceased to believe in it). Although his own church disappointed him many times, he decided never to leave it and instead freely to implement his own visions formulated in a visionary and a slightly idealistic way in his extensive project “Free Church of Unification,”⁵ written during his theological studies.

He actively worked for the unification of various renewal initiatives within the Church. When the tensions between Association of Resolute Christians, Christian Fellowship and the Church escalated, he — as the chairman of Christian Fellowship and on behalf of both movements — elaborated a conciliatory “Project for Solution of Internal Problems of Mission Movement in Těšín Silesia” (May 1947).⁶ However, the superintendent of the church, J. Berger, rejected the project without any discussions.⁷ The unification of the Church and renewal movements failed and the members of Association of Resolute Christians seceded from the Church. This was a considerable disappointment for many people, including Vladislav Santarius.⁸ Nonetheless, he never gave up the struggle for the renewal. He found encouragement in various examples from Church history, but he also carefully watched the evolution in the new secession churches and maintained occasional contacts with their representatives.

Vladislav Santarius, thus, remained faithful to his denomination. He considered himself Lutheran, and you

⁴ For more information (in Czech) about the theology of V. Santarius: PIĘTAK, Stanislav, *Teologie pastora Vladislava Santariuse*. In VV. AA., Vladislav Santarius, *Svobodný v nesvobodě. Konference ke 100. výročí narození*. Sborník. (not published yet) and articles in ŘÍMAN, Karel, ed. *Pane, Ty jsi povolal... Vladislav Santarius - Boží dílo skrze jeho život a službu. Český Těšín: Slezská církev evangelická a. v.*, 2001. ISBN 80-238-7873-5, especially the articles *Zakotvení ve své církvi* (V. Volný, s. 111–118) and *Teologické důrazy* (S. Piętak, s. 119–126).

⁵ W. Wolny *Kościół Zjednoczenia Santarius. Ruch zjednoczenia chrześcijańskiego. Chrześcijaństwo miłości. Charakterystyka i organizacja*. Manuscript; no further data (1940?), 34.

⁶ In Karel Říman, ed. *Pane, Ty jsi povolal*, 44–50.

⁷ *Pane, Ty jsi povolal*, pp. 39–43. Such acting was perceived as a mistake also by his secretary, parson Jiří Wařach (as he mentioned in a personal interview at the end of 1990's — Martin Piętak).

⁸ For more information about the relations between Christian Fellowship, Association of Resolute Christians and Evangelical Church: e.g. SPRATEK, Daniel. *Vznik Křesťanského společenství - impulsy, důvody, události, význam*. In: *Mezinárodní vědecká konference „Evropa Ducha — pietistická hnutí v církvi a ve společnosti ve XX. a XXI. století“* [online]. 2005. Available at: http://www.academia.edu/2362250/Vznik_Křesťanského_společenství_-_impulsy_důvody_události_význam.

can say without hesitation that he was a rigorous one, especially in comparison to the Czech Brethren and other Christian groups around him.⁹ From the perspective of a confessional Lutheran, some of Vladislav Santarius' points of view were unorthodox (perhaps having been influenced by the Czech Brethren).¹⁰ Overtime, Santarius rejected his former views as his practice became more Lutheran. In any case, he was acquainted with Luther's thoughts better than many of his colleagues. Although the leadership of the church did not give him much space in printed matters published by the church (*Friend of People* magazine, *Evangelical Calendar*),¹¹ they used to contact him when more expert (Lutheran) dogmatic issues were to be treated.

He was very proud of the Lutheran Reformation heritage. It must be said that this pride was sometimes quite close to stubbornness, for example, during conflicts with the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren concerning the existence of a congregation of the Augsburg Confession in Ostrava. Pastor Santarius demonstrated quite ostentatiously that it was a Lutheran congregation of the Augsburg Confession, for example, by putting the portraits of Luther virtually in every room in the congregation premises or by having the inscription "Dedicated by Jan Michalik, Evangelical Parson of Augsburg Confession" carved on the Baptism font. This certainly was not the best strategy to achieve heartfelt relations with the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren. Sometimes his human features simply couldn't keep pace with his spiritual principles.

Despite this, his work is an example of the best tradition of Lutheran evangelism constructively combined with dynamic missionary activities set into new conditions. Thanks to the emphasis he put on missionary work,

⁹ Editor's note: Vladislav Santarius considered himself a Lutheran, especially in contrast to the Czech Brethren. The Czech Brethren is a union church that accepts both the Augsburg Confession and the Helvetic Confession. Santarius saw himself in contrast to the Union Church background.

¹⁰ For example, the Czech Brethren replaced the altar with a simple table. Santarius seems initially to have agreed with this position and others on Baptism and confirmation from the Czech Brethren.

¹¹ He had a folder in which he filed all his articles that the redaction refused to publish.

he was able to gain respect of many preachers from other churches, and he was also invited to preach in a large-scale evangelization meeting organized by Snaha movement in Zlín. Even today, people far beyond the denominational boundaries of his own church body remember his service with respect.

Social issues

His fervent faith was nevertheless not floating in some kind of spiritual vacuum, far from real social and material needs of particular human beings. He was born into a family of miners and experienced forced labor both during World War II and during Communist rule,¹² so he had a special gift for establishing close relations with ordinary people and gaining their sympathies. He had a natural sense of fair play¹³ and a

deep compassion for human misery. During War II, he participated in aiding Russian captives, and he acted in a similar way in 1964 when he organized material support for families of imprisoned representatives of Association of Resolute Christians after their unsuccessful demand for being recognized as an independent church.

He fully expressed and developed his social feelings when he was appointed manager of Betezda and Sarepta charitable institutions in the village of Komorní Lhotka. He did this job from 1948–1957, and he ensured the best care possible — both in terms of physical health and spiritual needs. He had large-scale renovation works done and practical equipment delivered. He also acted as pastor along with running the above mentioned institutions — first in Komorní Lhotka (from the very beginning of his service), since 1950 in Třanovice and since 1953 in Ostrava and Bohumín. This was extremely demanding as far as office work and time management were concerned. One hardly believes how much he was able to manage under the given circumstances; he was tough as a bulldog.¹⁴

¹² Because of political reasons, he had to work manually in a demolition and re-cultivation company from 1963–1965.

¹³ At a young age, he organized a petition in his home in Stonava in order to make sure that both the Catholic and the evangelic parson were present during the sanctification of the fire engine; this objective was accomplished.

¹⁴ For a more detailed description of his social activities, see the article written by his son Česlav Santarius: Sociální citění a přístup k teologii

If the question of God's Kingdom is supposed to be the priority, the issue of nationality and language must be handled in such a way to make sure that Gospel is spread and Christians remain united.

He continued to serve elderly and ill people even after the Betezda and Sarepta institutions had been nationalized. He selflessly used to see ill people, often in their homes, and he organized Bible classes and involved many of his co-workers in these activities. He taught them that it's necessary to satisfy physical needs as first, in order to make sure that the Word of God is afterward preached in a trustworthy way. He was renowned for his lightning fast few-minute visits of patients. Though very brief, these visits used to bring much consolation and encouragement, and they also showed a proof of faith to atheist patients.¹⁵

If we tried to make a summary of his attitude to social issues, there would be two main theses: (1) He considered service to needy people as the essential task of all believers. However, he neither drowned in social activism, nor did he sacrifice his faith for social welfare. (2) He had a vision of a largely stratified institutional diakonie that he, unfortunately, could not bring to life under the given circumstances, but he knew that the crucial aspect would consist in enthusiastic volunteers able to implement basic Christian services even without a suitable institutional background.

Service to fellow neighbors as essential manifestation of living faith

He considered the service of mercy as the essential practical manifestation of living the Gospel. It was not just a facultative matter or an option to him; it was the vital need of a living Church. The urgency of this mission along with a self-critical point directed against contemporary work of the Church are expressed in quite a resolute way in his vision "Characteristics of Christianity in Years to Come," especially in articles 17–19. It is worth it to quote this text in its full extent as a demonstration of how wide the range of his thoughts was (see the emphasis put on cooperatives) and how detailed they were:

Ethnicity was very important to him, but he also wanted to make sure that it would not hamper spreading the Gospel.

17. The Eternity starts already here on Earth. That's why Christians have to live their lives fully already on Earth, without postponing things for afterlife. Such a man is called by an act of love to spread God's kingdom on Earth.

18. Christianity has to implement the programme of social renewal. It must not keep tolerating preachers' 'chitchat' about welfare in Heaven that will come after death. The issue of daily bread exists only on Earth and we have to solve it here. Alms are the shame of man; we need to establish suitable social conditions including all relevant institutions in order to allow people to keep their human dignity. Christianity can't be based on individuals - it must be based on general public. Christianity must not take off and fly to heaven, forgetting about the misery of workers; it must work on the unification of humanity. The supreme type and form of democracy are concerned.

19. Christianity is a thoroughly social matter and in its original form it enables socialization and cooperative approach not only in material and economical matters, but also in the world of spirituality and ideas. The idea of cooperativeness should reflect in the whole spiritual organization, including the preaching pulpit. Christianity is the leader of humanity; it exists for people, not for gods or saints. Its task is to unveil spiritual hypocrisy, 'bigotry and casuistic moralizing everywhere they exist; it should openly look in the eyes of human life and penetrate into its deepest secrets. It has to reach the deepest depths of human life; it must not formally decide about human beings and their value. Christianity doesn't know any templates; it uses the latest outcomes of research.¹⁶

Today we consider emphasising merciful service as a natural mission of the whole Church. However, in real life we can observe a tendency toward a more comfortable transfer of some services to professionals. For this reason, one thing is up-to-date even today, namely the emphasis that Vladislav Santarius put on the need of the Church (or actually its congregations and their individual

diakonie (křesťanské službě lásky) v teoretických úvahách i v praxi. In Pane, *Ty jsi povolal*, 98–110.

¹⁵ His nephew remembers that Pastor once visited him at hospital where he was sharing room with several miners who used particularly rough language. Pastor spent about five minutes at the room, handed out sweets to everybody, uttered a few words and, in the end, prayed aloud. His departure was followed by approximately 30 minutes of silence; nobody dared to ask who that man had been. And no rough word was pronounced till the evening, not even whispered.

¹⁶ Charakteristika křesťanství v příštích letech, In Pane, *ty jsi povolal*, 38.

members) to be actively taught and led toward accepting merciful services as their mission in this world, regardless of possibilities or limitations of institutional diacony. In real life, this means, on one hand, the development of individual and congregational diakonie (in the context of church congregations), and on the other hand, the need to develop volunteerism ensured not only by foreign trainees but also by local members of the Church (in the context of diacony). Last but not least, it also means to encourage young believers to study related professions and to work in social, charitable and humanitarian services. Congregations have to learn how to consider the service in institutional diakonie as their proper feature. Both the congregations and the diakonie must therefore cultivate the elements of diaconal movement, which is based on enthusiastic volunteers “full of faith, Holy Ghost and wisdom.”¹⁷

Spiritual dimension of diacony

Despite a strong emphasis put on satisfying the social needs of people, Vladislav Santarius never slipped into superficial social activism or, even worse, into giving up the service to Church and replacing it by Socialism in which the faith would dissolve. To be quite exact, not all his fellow pastors were able to do the same.¹⁸ It is true he recognized the equation “Christianity = (automatically) social activity,” but the contrary — “social activity = (automatically) Christianity” — did not apply to him, of course. He considered Jesus Christ too precious and 100 percent needed and sufficient in this field; Christian services simply could not do without him.¹⁹ Merciful service is expression of the essence of Christianity, but not its essence itself. Jesus

He was far from being flawless in his acting and judging, but he remains a precious model of enthusiasm about and for Jesus Christ.

Christ and His Gospel are the essence. That’s why the evangelical basis of the faith is so important.

When the secretary of the Communist party responsible for ideology tried to convince him that in the perfect welfare of the Communist society, people will no more need to believe in God, Pastor Santarius argued that the contrary would be true: “The better off people are here on Earth, the more reluctant they will be to depart from this world. The death will remain a great mystery and it will perturb them, making them think about supernatural things. They will be searching for answers and this will lead them to the Church.”²⁰

Today we can’t but confirm the truthfulness of this argument. Communism collapsed along with its specific concept of welfare and its generalized social guarantees. In spite of this, we are living in a great welfare, a rich society, where the exceptions prove the rule. And we can’t but confirm that the need of supernaturality did not disappear. The question is whether we, as the Church of Christ, are ready to provide trustworthy answers and authentic spiritual background; we must indeed compete with many new spiritual movements.

Service to fellow neighbours and diakonie today

The collapse of Communism brought new unexpected possibilities for the development of diaconal work. Thanks to the efforts of Pastor Santarius, there were projects to be continued and people to implement them. Visions of Pastor Santarius came true to a considerable extent, including far-reaching international influence. Today, Slezská Diakonie employs hundreds of people and runs dozens of centres. But we’re also facing completely new challenges. The biggest ones are not related to the question of how to extend the range of diaconal services. The question is rather how to preserve the truly diaconal, service-oriented, Christocentric and free nature of diakonie and how to maintain the spirit of selfless serving and cooperation in the Church, both within and beyond the framework of institutional diacony.

In this context, the emphasis put on the spiritual dimension of diaconal service, on its evangelization and missionary tasks, and on the participation in the spiritual

¹⁷ See characteristics of people performing “diaconal tasks” mentioned in Acts 6:3, 5, 8.

¹⁸ The unbelievably sad words of Parson K. Kyjánek (included in 1951 Annual Report of SECAC Congregation in Ostrava and recorded in the SECAC archives) do not refer directly to the social services of the Church, but they do give us an idea of to what extent some people in the Church gave up their spiritual service. The local choir fell apart because choir conductors altered frequently and choir members lacked time: “This was not caused by an aversion to Church singing; just the contrary — all our members were sorry for not being able to meet. We can frankly state that our congregation made this sacrifice on behalf of the socialist development of Ostrava Region and we are glad to have made this sacrifice. According to us, the development of Ostrava region is the priority to which everything else must be subordinate.”

¹⁹ Cf. W. Parę Santarius, skromnych uwag do problematyki Kościoła Chrystusowego w Nowym Testamencie. Samizdat; no further data.

²⁰ Pane, Tys povolal, 53–54.

renewal of individuals and the whole nation should be considered as the family treasure of Slezská Diakonie. Indeed, sacrificing the faith in the name of social services would mean to give up the truly holistic service provided to man as a whole. In real life, this could mean a struggle for a meaningful legislation and the courage to face post-Christian social and ethical experiments.²¹ It's quite possible that one day diakonie will have to stop the provision of some services because national or European regulations would force it to act in contradiction with Christian faith and Bible-based ethics. However, this must never mean to lose the identity of our own faith or to deny the wish to express love by means of true acts.

Ethnicity

Just as in each border region with a complex history, ethnicity was playing — and has been playing — an important role in Těšín region. Pastor Santarius grew up in a period of fervent ethnic conflicts that caused much disunity among evangelic believers living in the region. The establishment of as many as three various national congregations — German, Czech and Polish — is indeed a very eloquent proof. Escalated ethnic conflicts caused the separation of whole parts of particular congregations and their unification with other parts of church structure.

Let's mention examples from Komorní Lhotka, the first congregation where Pastor Santarius worked. The congregation in Staré Hamry was united with the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren and a new Adventist congregation was established in Dobruška. This event is often associated not only with a different theology but also — at least partially — with linguistic differences; Czech-speaking members of the congregation thought that their rights were not respected. Some people still remember a fist fight between the Czech parson Janeček and the Polish parson Krzywoń that took place in Komorní Lhotka during the first disturbed years after World War II, when there were efforts to unify the congregation with the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren. Similar incidents were a great scandal for the members of the Church.²²

²¹ As negative examples of legislation that may be smartly abused, we might light absurd hygienic regulations, for example, published by Communist authorities concerning the Betezda and Sarepta centers or the ban on pastoral visits beyond the territory of the congregation. The only objective was to stop the Bible classes from being organized.

²² For more detailed information about the ethnic composition of evangelic believers in Těšín Region, see works by J. Szymeczek, e.g. Józef Szymeczek. Rola Kościołów w życiu narodowym Polaków na Zaolziu. In Józef Szymeczek, ed. Polacy na Zaolziu — Poláci na Těšínku. 1920–2000. Proceedings from academic conference held on

However, let's get back to the life story of Pastor Santarius. It has already been mentioned that due to the pressure generated by given circumstances, the second cycle of his primary education and his secondary education took place at Czech schools. However, once he started to study in Slovakia (1937), his national feelings woke up. It is quite interesting that in his biography, he mentions Bratislava as “the place of full national awareness.” While making this note, he also added and underscored the following remark (addressed to Czech politicians in the region of Těšín): “Depriving someone of his nationality is a sin.”²³

His experience convinced him deeply that the majority society should take minorities in consideration. When World War II started, his family refused the so-called “Volkliste.” In real life, this meant relegation among the most disadvantaged and most persecuted ethnic groups. Pastor Santarius had a very personal experience with this fact, as he was practically immediately sent to forced labor. He was proud of his origin as well as of the region he came from. In his works, he mentions local people with a great respect: “our nation,” “our man.”²⁴ On the wall of his study, he used to have a large map of the Těšín region with statistics about ethnic composition in particular villages in 19th century. They proved that the original local population used to be mostly Polish. He considered himself Polish during his whole life and was also perceived as Polish both in Czechoslovakia and abroad. He also died as a “genuine Polish,” in the words of Pala, a lawyer, expressed at the funeral of Pastor Santarius.

Nonetheless, it seems that contrary to some other priests, he was able to keep his heart open not only to Polish people but to Czech and Slovak people as well. Nationality didn't become his hidden religion or, rather, he was able to distinguish his nationality from his faith. No matter how much he treasured his Polish origin, he never actively participated in enforcing Polish national interests on the educational or even political level.

As a sharp observer, he was certainly able to see that too intense national feelings excluded some of his colleagues and predecessors from a free service in the Church. In this context, let's mention Dr. J. Berger and his involvement in ethnic-based organizations, including his

Oct. 13–14, 2000, in Český Těšín. Český Těšín: Kongres Polaków, 2000, s. 141–150. ISBN 80-238-8050-0.

²³ Biographical album, 16, family archive.

²⁴ Charakteristika křesťanství v příštích letech, art. 10 and 11. In Pane, Ty jsi povolal, 37.

work as deputy in the Silesian Sejm (parliament) during the Polish occupation of Těšín region; he paid a price for this by being sent into a forced exile in Slovakia. We can also mention J. Kulisz, the principal spiritual model for Vladislav Santarius, and his controversial solemn sermon “When the Corn Ears Get Ripe” on the occasion of Polish occupational forces entering the Czech part of Těšín Silesia.

As far as Czech parsons are concerned, we can mention the controversial work of Jan Geryk or Pavel Janeček. It would be even more flagrant to compare them with Paul Zahradnik, the parson of the German Church congregation Na Rozvoji, who enthusiastically welcomed German troops, or with Jan Geryk and Pavel Janeček and their efforts of enforcing Czech language and culture. Pastor Santarius had esteem for K. Kulisz and J. Berger for their faith, personal courage and the suffering they had to endure because of their ethnic origin during the war. He also certainly understood the reasons for their actions, considering the regional history and the complex situation into which the majority of the Polish population got after the region was unified with Czechoslovakia.

However, he understood that national feelings and faith had to be grasped differently. Ethnicity was very important to him, but he also wanted to make sure that it would not hamper spreading the Gospel. He intentionally sought to prevent the missionary movement from being limited to a single nation and thus to just a specific part of society. Already at young age, he promoted what is today considered as a reasonable model of co-existence of various nations: integration of Western type instead of a wild Balkan way.²⁵ Where was this attitude anchored? In his strictly Christocentric concept of Christianity.

He clearly formulated his points of view at the beginning of World War II in the already mentioned project Free Church of Unification. Starting with Article 2.b — “Jesus Christ is the central point of life” [sic, i.e. not the central point of faith] — he arrives at the following thesis in Article 2.f: “The unification of everything in Christ is the goal and the consequence of Christianity. Everything must concentrate on it and all differences have to withdraw,” including nationalistic issues.

All this is emphasised in Article 3.ch where the full freedom of the planned movement is accentuated: “Free, independent, united Christianity working like an

organization aimed at the welfare of the nation, state and humanity; never serving material, earthly, perishing, unilateral or individual interests of individuals, groups or whole nations or states ... if they are contradictory to the nature of Christianity.”

According to him, the real renewal of a nation could not be ensured just by preserving the language and the culture. He was convinced that a nation needs more profound values. From this point of view, it's interesting to read Article 11 from his study “Characteristics of Christianity in Years to Come,” written when he was just 24 years old. “*Our man or nation doesn't need to go through Rome, Wittenberg or Geneva to reach God ... Our man, our nation is able and has the right to reach God through Christ.* That's why Christianity has to promote individual thinking and individual rebirth of a nation; it must supply the nation with the greatest values, absorbing the positive features of the nation and destroying the negative ones”²⁶ (emphasis mine). This was written in October 1939 during the first months of German occupation.

When you see these spiritual points of view, there is no wonder that he was able to quickly temper ethnic tensions wherever he worked and served.²⁷ The usual proceedings (at some places up to 1990s) consisted in dividing the congregation into a Czech and a Polish part, which was sometimes partially motivated also by the mutual animosity between the Czech and the Polish parson. Quite often, when somebody arrived by mistake to a church service in the other language, he or she simply turned around and went back home. However, Pastor Santarius was not willing to tolerate such things. If the question of God's Kingdom is supposed to be the priority, the issue of nationality and language must be handled in such a way to make sure that Gospel is spread and Christians remain united. That's why he united the existing choirs — Czech and Polish — very shortly after he had started to work in Třanovice; the united choir afterward sang in both languages. Pastor Santarius argued in the following manner: “They will all speak the same language in heaven; so why should two languages from the same kinship be divided, when everybody understands both of them?”²⁸ He was very serious about the affirmation in the Bible that we are just guests on this earth. Believers are above all citizens of

²⁵ Szymeczek, op. cit, 150. Szymeczek makes reference above all to E. Gellnera: Ernst Gellner, *Národy a nacionalismus*, Prague: Hřibál, 1993. ISBN 80-901381-1-X, 158.

²⁶ Charakteristika křesťanství v příštích letech, in Pane, *Ty jsi povolal*, 37.

²⁷ Pane, *Ty jsi povolal*, 14.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

heaven (Phil. 3:20) and they should settle their citizenship on earth accordingly.

Pastor's vigor, enthusiasm and organizational talent played their role too. He was able to make people focus on spiritual work and to keep them busy in such a way that according to many people, "There was no time for silly things,"²⁹ among them no time for eternal conflicts about language or nationality. For him, these issues had actually no place in the congregation because there were more important issues and tasks. He put everybody on the same level and made sure that everybody's (national) rights were respected. He found it absolutely natural to serve people in the language that was close to them. While having sermons or speeches, he was able to switch flexibly between Polish and Czech or even Slovak if some Slovak people were present. He also led his co-workers to do the same.³⁰

Regardless of their nationality, he actually expected pastors to be able to serve both in Czech and in Polish. And he also expected the listeners to be so fond of the Word of God that they would appreciate hearing it in a different language. The emphasis put on bilingualism was reflected also by the number of new three-language hymnals comprising songs in Polish, Czech and Slovak. Following the apostle Paul's example, he tried to be "Polish for the Polish and Czech for the Czech." People with more pronounced national feelings could not have been satisfied with this approach (some thought he was trying to enforce Czech language, while others blamed him for enforcing Polish language), but it was a precious example of Christ's love implemented in practice.

The paradox of the ethnically neutral (or rather integrationist) approach of Vladislav Santarius is the fact that it would be hard to find other personalities in social life who would be naturally able to make so many local and foreign (Czech and Slovak) co-workers learn Polish (and gain at least a passive knowledge). Even today, many people who have been working in the Church and who came from other regions of the Czech Republic are quite capable of preaching in Polish. This was far from being the main objective of his efforts, but it somehow came by as a professional necessity. In a natural and quite an

essential way, he thus managed to preserve the Polish element in the Church.

Let's not just praise though. In spite of his efforts to find balance in ethnic issues, you can also see a certain fluctuation and progress in the life of Pastor Santarius. For instance, he was quite reticent toward many German people (certainly not toward all of them). In specific contexts, he didn't hesitate to recall the negative role of Germany in the history of 20th century. No wonder; he was indeed a victim of German fascism himself.

But there were also other moments when his local patriotism manifested itself in an instinctive and not quite sensitive way. His work in Ostrava was perhaps the most obvious example. For illustration, let's remember that when the evangelical church in Ostrava was founded at early 20th century, the main part of local evangelical believers were either German or Polish; Czech people constituted just a minority. Taking into consideration the Polish history of the congregation, as well as the fact that many people of Polish origin kept leaving the Těšín region in order to find jobs in Ostrava (or they at least commuted to attend the church services of Pastor Santarius), he did not hesitate to hold regular church services in Polish, despite the fact that Ostrava gradually became almost entirely a Czech town. Not everybody appreciated this. Sometimes he also astounded visitors from Bohemia, Moravia or even from abroad, advising them — with a certain exaggeration and seemingly not quite seriously though with quite an emphasis (as was usually the case with him) — that brothers should learn Polish because they would need this language to serve local people better.

In what way is this approach inspirational, if we consider the present and the future of the Church in this region?

The issue of nationality, or at least the issue of language used during church services, remains a hot topic in some congregations, although the voices are much calmer than they used to be just after World War II. Now and then, it's precisely the language that plays a role in joining or leaving a church. The need for tolerance and respect has not vanished at all. Just the contrary. Nowadays, the situation is considerably different because after World War II, local people generally kept speaking the regional dialect, no matter if they declared Czech or Polish nationality. This is not the case anymore. Nowadays, the question is not who you feel to be but what you understand or not.

Many Czech-speaking people simply don't understand

²⁹ Cf. Pane, *Ty jsi povolal ...*, 84–J. Kunz declares that young people had no time for "bad" activities (dancing parties, bad company, alcohol, etc.). However, other people indeed also mentioned "nationalist passions" in this context.

³⁰ I remember that in our teens, we used to make fun of orators who fluently switched between languages, calling them "switch-men."

Polish anymore. It's perhaps a pity, but it's like that. When you look back in the past, you may sometimes — very carefully and just under certain circumstances — reproach the Polish majority for a lack of sensibility toward the Czech minority.³¹ Today, it's vice versa. It's necessary to make sure that the Czech majority in the church has a sensitive approach towards the Polish minority. It's not easy, but it's necessary. When you see the growing globalization and the new migration period that has been taking place recently, you may perhaps perceive the situation in our region as a kind of training of tolerance and co-existence of various ethnic groups. It seems that focusing clearly on Jesus Christ, promoting a helpful approach and working together on “superior objectives” is the only passable path to take.

Another lesson we can take from Vladislav Santarius may be considered as his major contribution in this field: namely the way he managed to perceive the ethnic diversity of Czech-Polish-Slovak borderland as something positive, as a strategic advantage and a great occasion to preach the Gospel regardless of borders between states or nations. He had a vision: a Church that would be active not only in the Těšín region but among neighboring nations as well. He urged his co-workers to accept responsibility not only for the spiritual life of their own congregations and their own church but for those of other evangelical churches as well. He initiated several meetings and trainings for employees from Poland and Slovakia.³² He thus implemented his far-reaching vision from the already mentioned project “Free Church of Unification,” where he defined in details the “sequence of regions to be gained:” (1) Těšín region, (2) the whole Polish nation (in accordance with the slogan “Silesia to the Polish nation”), (3) West Slavic nations (Czech, Slovak and the rest of the others), (4) East Slavic nations, (5) South Slavic nations, (6) neighbors of Slavic nations and (7) through Slavic nations, the whole humanity.

You may hear a pathetic echo of the Polish messianic

complex.³³ You may feel uneasy in front of the megalomania of these youthful plans and the later activism. You may question some proceedings. You may point out certain blunders. But you can't deny that his vision was far ahead of his time. The conditions in the Communist Czechoslovakia allowed his work to reach only to the neighbouring Poland. The furthest he got — just on paper, though — was Romania. Indeed, the Dutch-American missionary Hank Paulson secretly visited Pastor Santarius several times with a supply of Western literature, and he described him in his book about Christians in Eastern Europe as a Romanian pastor called Alex³⁴

Thanks to his (often secret) international contacts, he raised awareness about Silesian evangelicals and their missionary work far beyond the national borders. But even more important was the fact that he filled his co-workers with enthusiasm for missionary service worldwide. It was no coincidence that the first large-scale conference on evangelization organized in Eastern Europe after the collapse of Communism took place right here. It was no coincidence that Pastor's co-workers or their descendants stood and have been standing behind the development of missionary and diaconal activities all over the world.

Summary

Vladislav Santarius was able to take an explosive bundle of relations, interests and needs and to use it in a constructive way and to a general benefit. Inspired by the teaching of Jesus, he tried to re-conciliate oppositions and to find a balanced approach to everybody. His comprehensive concept of the Church and Christianity created conditions where the minimum resources provided by the Communist regime brought a maximum profit. He had great vision, but he also worked hard, starting out with small resources. His thoughts were focused on whole nations, but he never hesitated to devote his time and energy to a weak individual. Not discouraged when he was not enabled to do something, he never lost his faith and used every chance. He thought on a global level and acted on a local level.

He was far from being flawless in his acting and

³¹ Cf. e.g. Józef Szymeczek. Rola Kościołów w życiu narodowym Polaków na Zaolziu. In Józef Szymeczek, ed. *Polacy na Zaolziu — Poláci na Těšínsku. 1920–2000. Polacy na Zaolziu – Poláci na Těšínsku. 1920–2000*. Proceedings from academic conference held on Oct. 13–14, 2000, in Český Těšín. Český Těšín: Kongres Polaków, 2000, s. 141–150. ISBN 80-238-8050-0. 146. “Believers with Czech nationality were considered to be Poles who had been forcibly assimilated into Czech culture and were able to understand Polish language. For this reason, the Church of Augsburg confession did not pay much attention to ensuring some specific care for Czech people.”

³² Pane, Ty jsi povolal..., 56.

³³ Cf. Polish poet A. Mickiewicz (especially his *Księgi narodu polskiego i pielgrzymstwa polskiego*) and other Polish revivalists and their idea of Poland being the “Messiah of nations.”

³⁴ Hank Paulson. *Beyond the Wall: The People Communism Can't Conquer* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1982). Pastor's story is treated on pages 150–153. For more information about international contacts during Communist rule, cf. article by S. Piętań. *Mezinárodní rozměr jeho práce* In Pane, Ty jsi povolal..., 127–135.

judging, but he remains a precious model of enthusiasm about and for Jesus Christ. When remembering Vladislav Santarius, J. B. Hrboň appreciated the missionary activities with the following words, “Real faith has both enough imagination and enough love” to prove that “where they want to work, they are able to work despite unfavourable political system, despite any danger.”³⁵ We can’t but wish today’s Silesian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession and Slezská Diakonie enough “real faith” and enough “imagination and love” for their future activities.

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Pane, Ty jsi povolal, 144.