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DUKE ALBRECHT'S APOLOGIES

Abstract

The article examines the consequences of the Treaty of Cracow in 1525. It shows how the resulting conflict between the Teutonic Order and Duke Albrecht of Prussia is reflected in his justification writings for the Imperial Diets, where political and confessional disputes were fought. The four apologies of 1526, 1530, 1531, and 1532 (in German and Latin transcripts) demonstrate Duke Albrecht's argumentation structure in his defence against the accusations of the German Land Master of the Teutonic Order, whereby the religious arguments diminished over time. The article illustrates how Duke Albrecht attempted to act tactically and adapt to the prevailing mood in the Holy Roman Empire, while also engaging with the Polish royal court. The 2009 edition of the apologies is taken as the starting point of the investigation.

Keywords: Albrecht of Hohenzollern, Teutonic Order, Reformation, Sigismund I of Poland, Prussian Homage, Duchy of Prussia, apologies

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One of the ways the ideas of the Reformation found their way into Prussia was via Albrecht of Hohenzollern (1490–1568), especially under the influence of the talks he held with Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon in Wittenberg in autumn 1523 and spring 1524. They would later form the basis of his arguments¹. As early as 1522, Albrecht and his brother-in-law, Duke Frederick of Liegnitz, had discussed both the possibility of a church reform and its potential benefits for princely power. This meeting, an inspiration for Albrecht's further actions, was described by Gabriela Wąs as just as important as his encounter with Luther². Before 1548, Lutherans did not refer to a theological network; the reform movement was personalised³.

Albrecht, who had become Grand Master of the Teutonic Order in 1511, converted the theocratic state of the Teutonic Knights in Prussia into a Lutheran and hereditary realm, the Duchy of Prussia, for which he – as dynastic prince – paid homage to his uncle, Sigismund, King of Poland, in 1525⁴.

¹ See Martin LUTHER, *An die Herren des Deutschen Ordens, daß sie falsche Keuschheit meiden und zur rechten ehelichen Keuschheit greifen*, 1523, [in:] *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Bd. 12, Weimar 1891, pp. 228–244. In general, see Almut BUES, *Herzog Albrecht von Preußen (1490–1568). Ein Reformationsfürst der ersten Generation*, [in:] *Die Reformation. Fürsten – Höfe – Räume*, hrsg. v. Arnim KOHNLE, Manfred RUDERSDORF (Quellen und Forschungen zur sächsischen Geschichte, Bd. 42), Leipzig 2017, pp. 56–72; Udo ARNOLD, *Vom Ordensland zum Herzogtum. Religiöse Überzeugung oder politisches Kalkül des Hochmeisters Albrecht von Brandenburg-Ansbach*, *Zapiski Historyczne*, t. 82: 2017, z. 2, pp. 21–40, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15762/ZH.2017.17>; Walther HUBATSCH, *Albrecht von Brandenburg-Ansbach. Deutschordens-Hochmeister und Herzog in Preußen 1490–1568* (Studien zur Geschichte Preußens, Bd. 8), Köln–Berlin 1960.

² Gabriela WĄS, *Rozmowy chrześcijańskie w nurcie reformacji. Legnicy i pruscy ewangelicy wobec wczesnoreformacyjnych problemów* (Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis. Historia, nr 181), Wrocław 2011, pp. 48–49. Along with Margrave George of Brandenburg-Ansbach, Frederick of Liegnitz played a leading role in the diplomatic negotiations on Albrecht's behalf, see Christel KRÄMER, *Beziehungen zwischen Albrecht von Brandenburg-Ansbach und Friedrich II. von Liegnitz. Ein Fürstenbriefwechsel 1514–1547. Darstellung und Quellen* (Veröffentlichungen aus den Archiven Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Bd. 8), Köln 1977, no. 21, pp. 216–218, no. 44, pp. 245–246.

³ Irene DINGEL, *Wie lutherisch war die Wittenberger Reformation? Von vorkonfessioneller Vielfalt zu theologischer Profilierung*, [in:] *Initia Reformationis. Wittenberg und die frühe Reformation*, hrsg. v. eadem, Armin KOHNLE, Stefan RHEIN, Ernst-Joachim WASCHKE (Leucorea-Studien zur Geschichte der Reformation und der Lutherischen Orthodoxie, Bd. 33), Leipzig 2017, pp. 409–428.

⁴ Among the extensive literature only a few publications can be mentioned here: Igor KĄKOŁEWSKI, *Hołd pruski (1525). Historia, pamięć i narracje o scenariuszach alternatywnych*, Warszawa 2025; Jacek WIJACZKA, *Traktat krakowski i hołd pruski z 1525 roku*, Olsztyn 2025; idem, *Albrecht von Brandenburg-Ansbach (1490–1568). Der letzte Hochmeister des Deutschen Ordens und der erste Herzog in Preußen. Die Biographie* (Schriftenreihe des Brandenburg-Preußen Museum, Bd. 2), Buskow 2019; Stephan DOLEZEL, Heidrun DOLEZEL, *Die Staatsverträge des Herzogtums Preussen, Tl. 1: Polen und Litauen. Verträge und Belehnungsurkunden 1525–1657/58* (Veröffentlichungen aus den Archiven Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Bd. 4), Köln–Berlin 1971, pp. 12–56.

Under political pressure, this seemed to Albrecht the most elegant solution⁵. 'A political process was taking place that required a fundamental religious decision'⁶. This transition did not come out of nowhere, nor did it occur without protest, both from inside and outside Prussia⁷. Albrecht endeavoured to justify his actions in several documents⁸. 'Albrecht's apologies of 1526 and later on [...] are entirely in the present and defend a revolutionary act, the abolition of the centuries-old rule of the Teutonic Order in Prussia, with reasons that stem from perception of time, religious conviction and political necessity'⁹.

Both the German Land Master of the Teutonic Order and Duke Albrecht utilised the forum of the Imperial Diets (Ger. *Reichstag*) – which especially in the 1520s and 1530s were used to settle confessional disputes – as a venue for their vindications¹⁰. For the Imperial Diet of 1526 in Speyer, German Land Master Dietrich von Cleen had printed 600 copies of his *Entschuldigung unsers Dietterichs von Kleen Meister Teutsches Ordens in Teutschen und Welschen Landen betreffend die Handlung und Uebergebung der Land Preussen*, in which he distanced himself from Albrecht, who was not present at the Diet, defended

⁵ For details on the confessional-state transformation, see Jürgen SARNOWSKY, *Die Apologien Herzog Albrechts von Preussen. Vom katholischen Ritterorden zur ersten protestantischen Landesherrschaft*, [in:] *Geistliche Intermedialität und Interkonfessionalität in Danzig. Königlich Preußen und Herzoglich Preußen (16. bis 18. Jahrhundert). Zehn Fallstudien*, hrsg. v. Johann A. STEIGER, Ricarda HÖFFLER (Geistliche Intermedialität in der Frühen Neuzeit, Bd. 11), Regensburg 2024, pp. 10–13.

⁶ 'Hier vollzog sich ein politischer Prozess, der eine religiöse Grundsatzentscheidung bedingte'; Andreas LINDNER, *Konversion im Spannungsfeld von Politik und Religion. Albrecht von Brandenburg-Ansbach (1490–1568) und die Begründung des Herzogtums Preußen*, *Preußenland N.F.*, Jg. 9: 2018, pp. 49–50.

⁷ For example, 'dadurch wir alher in Preussen verdacht werden, schult daran haben sollen, darumb werden wir durch alle Teutsche lande vor boszwicht und an unser ehre gescholthen'; Philipp von CREUTZ, *Relation, wie der abfall in Preussen geschehen, beschrieben von herrn Philipp von Creutz, gewesten Teutschen ordensrittern*, hrsg. v. Max TÖPPEN, [in:] *Scriptores rerum Prussicarum*, Bd. 5, hrsg. v. Theodor HIRSCH, Max TÖPPEN, Ernst STREHLKE, Leipzig 1874, p. 364.

⁸ Almut BUES, *Die Apologien Herzog Albrechts* (Deutsches Historisches Institut Warschau. Quellen und Studien, Bd. 20), Wiesbaden 2009; Marie-Luise HECKMANN, *Herzog Albrecht und die Reformation in Preußen im Spiegel seiner Selbstzeugnisse*, *Preußenland N.F.*, Jg. 9: 2018, pp. 59–88.

⁹ 'Die Apologien Albrechts von 1526 und später [...] stehen ganz in der Gegenwart und verteidigen einen revolutionären Akt, die Beseitigung der Jahrhunderte alten Ordensherrschaft in Preußen, mit Gründen, die aus dem Zeitempfinden stammen, mit religiöser Überzeugung und politischer Notwendigkeit'; Kurt FORSTREUTER, *Vom Ordensstaat zum Fürstentum. Geistige und politische Wandlungen im Deutschenordensstaate Preußen unter den Hochmeistern Friedrich und Albrecht (1498–1525)*, Kitzingen/Main 1951, p. 113.

¹⁰ On religious issues at the Imperial Diets, see Eike WOLGAST, *Die Religionsfrage auf den Reichstagen 1521 bis 1550/51*, [in:] idem, *Aufsätze zur Reformations- und Reichsgeschichte* (Jus Ecclesiasticum, Bd. 113), Tübingen 2016, pp. 49–72.

his own position and called on the emperor and the estates to act 'so that they would not be deprived of their hospital in the lands of Prussia'¹¹.

THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY OF 1526

Albrecht protested against the document submitted by the German Land Master with his *Christian Responsibility* (Lat. *Christiana responsio*) of 29 October 1526¹². His explanations began with the notion of Albrecht's leaving the Teutonic Order; here he argued from a purely theological point of view that 1) one should return *ad solas scriptas*, 2) the laws of the Order contradicted the Gospel, 3) and a ban on marriage was not to be found in the Bible, which he proved by reference to decisions of the First Council of Nicaea in 325 and the Synod of Gangra in 430. He was not a violator of divine commandments, he argued; his actions were justified by his interpretation of the Bible. There were many things 'in this Order's rules that were contrary to the Divine Word and were handled violently'¹³. The Reformation in Prussia was thus the consequence of Luther's criticism of the institution of religious orders as a mixture of spiritual and secular government that was contrary to the Scriptures¹⁴. Volker F. Hentrich called the first part of the *Christiana responsio* 'a masterpiece of diplomatic language [...] in its formulation and style, which works with adjectives, references and subliminal, precisely calculated formulations in a virtuoso manner'¹⁵.

¹¹ 'Damit sie ihres Spittals bey den Landen Preussen nicht also entsetzt bleiben'; A. BUES, *Die Apologien*, p. 58. Printed as *Entschuldigung des hochwirdigen Fürsten vnnd herren herren Dietterichs vonn Cleen Meyster teüttsch Ordens jnn Teüttschenn vnnd Wellischen lannden gegen allen vom Adell Teüttscher nation betreffend die hanndlung vnnd vbergebung der lanndt Preüwssen*, Speyer 1526 (Verzeichnis der im deutschen Sprachbereich erschienenen Drucke des 16. Jahrhunderts [further cit. VD16], D 680).

¹² *Christliche Verantwortung des Durchleuchtigen und Hochgebornen Fürsten und Herrn Herrn Albrechten Marggraffen zu Brandenburg Hertzogen in Preussen etc. auff Herr Dietrichs von Cleen Meisters Teutschen Ordens außgebreiten Truck und angemaste Verunglimpfung*, Königsberg 1526, Deutschordens-Zentralarchiv, Wien (further cit. DOZA), archival ref. no. Hs 440 (copy); printed: Nürnberg 1526, see VD16, P 4782. In detail, see Volker F. HENTRICH, *Die Umwandlung des Ordensstaates in ein weltliches Fürstentum Preußen (1525) in der Darstellung der Apologie (Christiana responsio) Herzog Albrechts von Brandenburg-Ansbach von 1526* (doctoral diss., Universität Hamburg), Hamburg 2019.

¹³ '[...] in dieser ordens regel viel ding wider das lauter göttlich wort gesatzet und thetlich gehandhabt'; A. BUES, *Die Apologien*, p. 61.

¹⁴ Martin LUTHER, *Wider den falsch genannten geistlichen Stand des Papsts und der Bischöfe*, 1522, [in:] *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Bd. 10, Abt. 2, Weimar 1907, pp. 93–158. Cf. Mt 24.

¹⁵ '[...] in Formulierung und Duktus ein Meisterwerk der diplomatischen Sprache [...], das virtuos mit Adjektiven, Bezügen und unterschwelligem genau kalkulierten Formulierungen arbeitet'; V. F. HENTRICH, op.cit., p. 75.

A second, political part – far less coherent – dealt with the transformation of Prussia. As a prince, Albrecht saw transformation not only as a personal necessity, but also emphasised – not very truthfully – the participation of the local friars and the population's longing for peace, which he immediately involved in his strategy of defence¹⁶. Prussia had already been committed to the Crown of Poland by the treaties of 1454 and 1466; yet despite intensive efforts, Albrecht had been unable to find support for a military campaign against the Polish king in the Empire, which is why he began mediation efforts, and in 1525 concluded a peace treaty with King Sigismund (in which religion was not mentioned at all)¹⁷. The emperor and the Empire had never 'had any service or use from this land [i.e. the territory of the Teutonic Order in Prussia – A.B.], but only various requests for advice and assistance'¹⁸.

In addition to theological reasons, the duke brought political necessity into play. Albrecht's most important councillors, such as the humanist Crotus Rubianus, the chancellor Friedrich Fischer, and Vipert Schwab, later professor in Frankfurt, supervised the drafting of the apology. The political aspect was also emphasised by the royal chancellery in Cracow, i.e. by Andreas Cricius (Andrzej Krzycki)¹⁹. The arguments formulated at that time were repeatedly presented at the Imperial Diets for the following two decades. 'Albrecht's apology was a Reformation political treatise, deeply rooted in emerging Lutheran theology'²⁰. This first apology shows Albrecht as a statesman who wanted to actively steer the discourse and thus gain time for further preventive measures.

THE SUPPLICATION OF 1530

Duke Albrecht was able to stabilise his territory by marrying the daughter of the Danish king as well as enacting a church ordinance (Ger. *Kirchenordnung*) and a land ordinance (Ger. *Landesordnung*)²¹, thereby creating a constitutional

¹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 139–144.

¹⁷ Cf. Maciej PTASZYŃSKI, *Herzog Albrecht von Preussen, die polnischen Eliten und die Reformation. Vom Umgang mit konfessioneller Differenz*, Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung, Bd. 46: 2019, H. 2, pp. 219–254, DOI: 10.3790/zhf.46.2.219.

¹⁸ '[...] von diesem Land nie keinen Dienst oder Nutzung, sondern allein vielfältig ansuchen umb Rath und Hülff gehabt'; A. BUES, *Die Apologien*, p. 79.

¹⁹ *Andreae Cricii Episcopi Premisliensis ad Ioannem Antonium Pulleonem Baronem Brugij nuntium Apostolicum in Vngaria, de negotio Prutenico Epistola* [Cracoviae, 1 May 1525], [in:] *Acta Nuntiaturae Polonae*, t. 2: Zacharias Ferreri (1519–1521) et nuntii minores (1522–1553), ed. Henryk D. WOJTYSKA, Romae 1992, no. 19, pp. 185–193; Maciej PTASZYŃSKI, *Reformacja w Polsce a dziedzictwo Erazma z Rotterdamu*, Warszawa 2018, pp. 210–213.

²⁰ 'Apologia Albrechta była reformacyjnym traktatem politycznym, głęboko zakorzenionym w rodzącej się luteranśkiej teologii'; M. PTASZYŃSKI, *Reformacja w Polsce*, p. 219.

²¹ Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin-Dahlem (further cit. GStA PK), XX. Abt. Hausarchiv (further cit. XX. HA), Staatsarchiv (further cit. StA), Königsberg Urkunden

basis for the duchy. However, the Teutonic Order did not remain inactive in the period that followed 1525. The newly elected German Land Master Walter von Cronberg was appointed by the emperor in 1527 to administer the office of Grand Master, which was finally conferred on him on 26 July 1530. As administrator of the office of Grand Master and Master of the German and Italian branch of the Order, he transferred the Grand Master's seat from Königsberg to Mergentheim; this allowed the Teutonic Order, which was not bound to any territory, to continue to exist. In June 1530, von Cronberg presented the emperor with his supplication, in which he asked for support, as the Order was bound to the Empire and its nobility. With the secularisation of Prussia, Albrecht had stolen territories not only from the Teutonic Order, but also from the Holy Roman Empire, and their reclamation was therefore a matter for the whole Empire²².

For the Imperial Diet in Augsburg in 1530, Duke Albrecht's chancellery drafted a new statement of defence²³. Given the tense situation in the Empire, Albrecht attempted to act tactically and adapt to the mood therein. As a margrave, he belonged to the Holy Roman Empire; at the same time, he was a vassal of the king of Poland²⁴. Therefore, this new text was concerned more with striking a balance between his political standings, while the religious arguments became almost insignificant. This was also the line of the Polish royal court headed by Chancellor Krzysztof Szydłowiecki and Vice-Chancellor Piotr Tomicki, with whom Duke Albrecht cultivated close contacts²⁵. Finally, Albrecht argued that despite intense efforts, he had not found any support in the Empire, so in the end he only had the choice between war and peace and decided in favour of the latter²⁶. The ducal envoy to the Diet, Georg von Klingenbeck, went on to say that 'my gracious lord, the Duke of Prussia, has not

Schieblade LXX, no. 4. Here Albrecht could use the well-developed administrative structures of the Teutonic Order.

²² Walter von Cronberg to Emperor Charles V, [s.l.], 6 June 1530, DOZA, Preu 396/2, fol. 232–235v.

²³ Supplication der Verenderung fürstlicher durchlaucht zu Preußen halben an kays. Mat., Churfürsten und Stende des Heiligen Reichs durch Georgen Clingenbecken übergeben, October 1530, GStA PK, XX. HA, StA, Königsberg HBA H Kasten 757, fol. 1–25v.

²⁴ Incidentally, this dual loyalty had previously been one of the reasons why the Grand Masters did not want to swear allegiance to the Polish king.

²⁵ M. PTASZYŃSKI, *Herzog Albrecht von Preussen*, p. 230. Cf. *Elementa ad Fontium Editiones*, vol. 34: *Documenta ex Archivio Regiomontano ad Poloniam spectantia*, IV pars, HBA B2, 1525–30, ed. Karolina LANCKOROŃSKA, Romae 1975, ad indicem.

²⁶ 'Haben sich ir fuerstlich gnad von den zweien zum bestendigsten und besten, nach vilen menschlichen bewegungen in dem namen des almechtigen begeben, und also got mer dann den menschen trauen müssen, sonderlich dieweil sein fuerstlich gnad, wie vor und hernach gemelt, bey allen menschen wenig oder gar kain rath, hilff, noch trost hat finden können und also die ewige fursehung nit veracht [...]'; A. BUES, *Die Apologien*, p. 92.

made any new fiefdom for this Crown, nor has he been able to take anything away from the Roman Empire, which previous rulers of the land of Prussia had received as a fief and which was orientated towards the Crown of Poland'²⁷.

Despite the intervention of the Polish envoy Johannes Dantiscus (Jan Dantyszek) in Augsburg²⁸, the ducal envoy Georg von Klingenberg was unable to hand over the supplication, which was lengthy, less structured, and contained nothing new compared to the first apology. However, Dantiscus presented the emperor with the Polish king's view that Albrecht had renounced the Teutonic Order before concluding the Treaty of Cracow in 1525, that King Sigismund had acted with him for the sake of peace, and that the emperor was doing the same within the Empire with the Protestant princes²⁹. The mission was not a diplomatic success; in the meantime, the emperor and the Catholic princes of the Empire had openly sided with von Cronberg, on whom, as already mentioned, the emperor conferred the administration of the Teutonic Grand Master's office.

THE LIBEL OF 1531

Work on a new document began immediately at the ducal court. Here, too, we can see a closing of ranks with the Polish king, who, 'causa pacis et boni publici', supported the duke, but at the same time reproached him for his conversion, which made him an easy target for his enemies³⁰. Duke Albrecht's summons to appear before the Imperial Chamber Court (Ger. *Reichskammergericht*), which arrived in Königsberg in March 1531, changed the situation once again. Now the duke no longer needed to take the emperor and the Catholic imperial estates into consideration; his break with the Empire was complete. A comprehensive statement of defence³¹, of around eighty pages

²⁷ '[...] das mein gnediger herr, der herzog in Preussen, derselben cron kain neu lehen gemacht, noch dem Romischen Reich etwas hat entwenden können, so von merern der regirer der land Preussen vorhin zu lehen empfangen und der cron Poln zugewendt ist'; A. BUES, *Die Apologien*, p. 94.

²⁸ Josef KOLBERG, *Die Tätigkeit des Johannes Dantiscus für das Herzogtum Preußen auf dem Reichstage zu Augsburg 1530*, *Historisches Jahrbuch*, Jg. 33: 1912, pp. 550–567; M. PTASZYŃSKI, *Herzog Albrecht von Preussen*, pp. 225–226; idem, *Reformacja w Polsce*, pp. 239–242.

²⁹ Johannes Dantiscus to King Sigismund, Augsburg, 30 July 1530, [in:] CIDT&C: Corpus of Ioannes Dantiscus' Texts & Correspondence, Letter #518, <http://dantiscus.ibi.uw.edu.pl/?f=letterSummary&letter=518> [accessed online 30 June 2025].

³⁰ King Sigismund to Duke Albrecht, Piotrków, 8 January 1531, GStA PK, XX. HA, StA, Königsberg HBA B1 Kasten 295, no. 64. Cf. the royal promise of protection, Piotrków, 29 December 1530, [in:] A. BUES, *Die Apologien*, pp. 295–296.

³¹ Auff erneuerte ungegründete clag romischer kayserlicher mayestat, meinem allergnädigsten herrn, durch hern Walthern von Cronburg, vormeinten administrator und meister teutsch ordens, furgepracht und durch hochgedachter kayserlicher mayestat mandat und angehangener citation dem durchleuchtigen hochgebornen fursten und hern, hern Albrechten, marggrafen

in length, was written, in which Albrecht – as demonstrated by the 16 pages of his handwritten notes – played a particularly active role. The authors of the first apology no longer remained at the ducal court; now there was nobody who could curb the duke's 'overly prolific flow of speech' and polish his style³².

The libel began with a description of the previous situation (Art. 1–23). Albrecht complained about the proceedings against Georg von Klingenberg, who had been refused a hearing at the Imperial Diet in Augsburg, despite being an envoy of an imperial prince, and contrary to diplomatic custom, he was threatened with capture. The administrator of the Grand Master's office von Cronberg had brought matters to a point where Albrecht was summoned to appear before the Imperial Chamber Court (insert of the imperial mandate, Art. 15). As margrave of Brandenburg, he still considered himself to be an imperial prince, but it was also a matter of the Polish Crown and the Polish king had forbidden him to comply.

In the first part (Art. 24–142), Albrecht's active role in making policy since his assumption of the office of Grand Master in 1511 was explained and justified. The lack of assistance from the Empire to the Teutonic Order and the heavy losses it suffered during the Polish-Teutonic War (referred to as *Reiterkrieg* in German) of 1519–1521 (Art. 35–43)³³ as well as the subsequent armistice of 1521 (Art. 44–55) were considered in detail. A meeting scheduled for further negotiations at Preßburg (Bratislava) at the beginning of January 1525 had been cancelled through no fault of Albrecht's (Art. 56–83). Thus, he had to rely on the mediation of Margrave George of Brandenburg-Ansbach and Duke Frederick of Liegnitz to have proposals for peace with Poland discussed (Art. 84–128), whereby a letter from the Hungarian diplomat Johannes Statilius (János Statileo/Ivan Statilić) dated 22 March 1525 was inserted (Art. 121). The negotiated *pax perpetua* of 8 April 1525 had also been welcomed and approved by the Prussian estates (Art. 129–141).

A summary (Art. 142) rounds off this first part. Article 143 concludes by emphasising Albrecht's role, 'the renunciation of the office of German Land Master and Grand Master, as well as the receipt of the fiefdom of the land of Prussia and whatever else might belong to it or be attributed to us in this

zu Brandenburg, in Preussen etc. hertzogen etc., meinem gnädigsten hern, zugeschickt, thun sein fürstliche gnad, neben weitterer vorgehender extension derselben seiner gnaden voriger christlichen verantwortung, auf des vorigen deutschen meisters verunglimpfung im druck ausgangen, zur selben zeit aus beweglichen ursachen vorplieben, nachvolgende neue erinnerung und erclerung, 1531, GStA PK, XX. HA, StA, Königsberg HBA H Kasten 758, fol. 1–77.

³² 'den allzu fruchtbaren Redefluß seines Herrn'; K. FORSTREUTER, op.cit., p. 147.

³³ Cf. Stephan FLEMMIG, *Zwischen dem Reich und Ostmitteleuropa. Die Beziehungen von Jagiellonen, Wettinern und Deutschem Orden (1386–1526)* (Quellen und Forschungen zur sächsischen und mitteldeutschen Geschichte, Bd. 44), Leipzig–Stuttgart 2019, pp. 537–552.

regard, we did not do out of any wilfulness for our own or any other assumed temporal benefit, carelessness or wickedness, but out of God's will for the salvation of souls, in view of the justice of the Polish Crown and the power it had to secularise such a country, and especially after all and any abandonment, out of the highest urgency, to prevent further Christian bloodshed and further spoilage of land and people, furthermore from the petitions, demands, longings and appeals of the Prussian priests and dignitaries, as well as the will of the royal majesty, as previously reported³⁴.

As a dialectical antithesis, the second unstructured part (Art. 144–212) examined the role of the Teutonic Order; here, too, an epilogue summarised the most important ideas. Christianity was not to be brought to the people with weapons, but through the Gospel (Art. 145). Although the Teutonic Order had conquered Prussia 300 years prior, when it was subordinate only to the pope (Art. 148), it had also lost a large territory due to a war, namely the Thirteen Years' War concluded in 1466. Its role as a defender of Christendom had long ceased to exist, as it was surrounded by Christian lands, that is, the Duchy of Mazovia, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland (Art. 150). The Teutonic Order was not 'a useful Christian hospital of the German nobility', but should rather be called 'a wretched, miserable dungeon of dazed seduction' (Art. 161). As Grand Master, Albrecht had always acted for the good of the Order; indeed, he was in favour of joining with the Order of St John to jointly fight against the infidels. In doing so, he had sought contact not only with the imperial court but also with the kings of France, England, and Scotland (Art. 166–174).

Duke Albrecht criticised the Teutonic Order and the behaviour of his brethren quite clearly and in harsh words. In doing so, he employed theologically sound counterarguments by referring to the universally recognised Christian authorities, i.e. to passages from the Bible and the early Christian councils. The rules of the Order, such as chastity and poverty, as well as the vows taken by the Teutonic brethren, were man-made and contrary to the divine law (Art. 175–196); the Apostles had already opposed segregation in the congregation (Art. 189). The Order was to be called neither secular nor spiritual, 'since

³⁴ 'das ablegung des ordens- und hochmeisterampts, auch die lehensentpfahung des landes Preussen und was demselben mehr anhengig oder uns hierin zugemessen werden mochte, aus keinem furwitz fur uns selbs oder eygenen angenommenen zeitlichen nutz, leichtfertigkeit oder muthwillen, sonder aus gotlichem geheyß zu errettung der seelen seligkeit, angesehen der cron Polan gerechtigkeit und das dieselben macht gehabt, solch landt, sowol als das vorig, in weltligkeit zu ziehen, und sonderlich nach aller und yder verlassenheit, aus hochstem bedrang, zu verhuttung weitters cristlichen plutvergiessens und verner verderbung landt und leuth, darzu aus bith, erfordern, heischen und vociren prelaten und underthan in Preussen, auch wollen koniglicher mayestat, wie hievor berurt, dargeflossen [...]'; A. BUES, *Die Apologien*, pp. 200–201.

the Order, according to its advantage, today appeals to the spiritual, but tomorrow to the secular' (Art. 196).

The remaining articles addressed some political accusations close to the duke's heart, such as the reproach that he had alienated Prussia from the Holy Roman Empire (Art. 197–212). Albrecht had been abandoned by the Order, Prussia had brought no benefit to the Empire anyway, it did not legally belong to it, the peace concluded in 1525 was not an innovation in this respect, and the treaty was the lesser of two evils. After all, the Polish king was also free to enfeoff another person with Prussia. Albrecht hoped that the emperor and the imperial estates would not be influenced by the slander of the Grand Master's office holder and the Livonian Land Master. An epilogue summarised the most important arguments in key points.

This voluminous work, a mixture of religious confessions, complaints and accusations, was not suitable for diplomatic negotiations. It was more of 'a form of a final coming to terms with the past'³⁵. In May 1531, the libel was sent to friendly courts in Cracow³⁶, Marburg³⁷, Torgau³⁸, and Wittenberg with a request for review. Martin Luther replied in August 1531, stating 'that it should not be necessary to publish such a precise and expanding thing, because it is the nature and kind of all adversaries, where they cannot harm the main reasons, they doubt in the word and ponder over it, so that things get off track and the main reasons drop out of sight and lose their appearance'³⁹.

THE APOLOGY OF 1532

In the meantime, on 19 January 1532, Albrecht had been placed under the ban of the Empire (Ger. *Reichsacht*)⁴⁰. The duke was now protected by his close personal connections to the Polish court, as the emperor and the Empire

³⁵ 'eine Form abschließender Vergangenheitsbewältigung'; V. F. HENTRICH, op.cit., p. 124.

³⁶ Legatio ab Alberto ad Sigismundum de banno Caesareo [April 1531], [in:] Acta Tomiciana, t. 13, Biblioteka Jagiellońska, Kraków, BJ Rkp. 6557 III, no. 121, pp. 116–121; King Sigismund to Duke Albrecht, Cracow, 29 April 1531, GStA PK, XX. HA, StA, Königsberg HBA B1 Kasten 295, no. 71.

³⁷ Duke Albrecht to Landgrave Philip of Hesse, Königsberg, 31 May 1531, Hessisches Staatsarchiv Marburg, Politisches Archiv Landgraf Philipps des Großmütigen 3, archival ref. no. 2476, fol. 25–26v.

³⁸ Duke Albrecht to Duke John Frederick of Saxony, Königsberg, 28 May 1531, Landesarchiv Thüringen, Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar, Ernestinisches Gesamtarchiv Reg. C (Auswärtige Angelegenheiten) 940, fol. 1.

³⁹ '[...] das nicht not sein solle, ynn angezeigten stucken so gnaw und weitleufftig sach heraus geben, weil aller widersacher art und natur ist, wo sie den rechten heubtgrunden nichts anhaben mugen, zweifeln sie etwa im wort und klügeln druber, damit die sache aus der ban und die heubtgrunde aus den augen komen und den schein verlieren'; Martin Luther to Duke Albrecht, [Wittenberg], 24 August 1531, GStA PK, XX. HA, StA, Königsberg, HBA A4 Kasten 188.

⁴⁰ Emperor Charles V, Speyer, 19 January 1532, DOZA, Hs 463.

needed the help of the Jagiellons in the fight against the Ottomans, who had advanced as far as Vienna in 1529. The Habsburgs counted on Albrecht's help in fending off the Ottomans and suspended the imperial ban several times for a year at a time.

Another apology was written for the Imperial Diet of Regensburg in 1532⁴¹, in which many of the ideas from the 1531 libel were adopted in an attenuated form. This version was submitted to the Imperial Diet by the Polish envoy Johannes Dantiscus, who in his speech in May 1532 asked for Albrecht's imperial ban to be lifted⁴². In June, Walter von Cronberg was given the opportunity to submit a refutation, in which the Grand Master's office holder used historical arguments to reject Poland's claims to Prussia⁴³. In their expert advice to the emperor, the imperial estates proposed a two-year suspension of the imperial ban⁴⁴.

The apology of 1532 was, like the one of 1530, stripped of religious arguments and limited to political matters. King Sigismund, as feudal lord, had forbidden Duke Albrecht to obey the summons to the Imperial Chamber Court; the letter of the Polish king to Duke Albrecht (Cracow, 29 April 1531) was reproduced verbatim. Albrecht was ready for peace and tranquillity, but von Cronberg would not stop publicly denigrating him to the ecclesiastical authorities, the princes and the common man.

As a born prince of the House of Hohenzollern, he had always served the Holy Roman Empire. In order to avoid Christian bloodshed (and without the support of the German imperial estates), Albrecht had then made peace with the Polish king, stating 'that out of His divine grace we had to seek not our own, but the common good, and have set a large part of Europe to eternal peace and made the German nation a long protective wall against the infidel enemy'⁴⁵. And switching to attack, Albrecht visualised the Teutonic Knights'

⁴¹ *Apologia Alberti ducis Prussiae Ratisbonam ad comitia imperialia missa, in qua adducuntur causae, ob quas ille ab ordine desciverit, ducatum Prussiae in feudum acceperit, et uxorem duxerit Anno 1532*, GStA PK, XX. HA, StA, Königsberg HBA H Kasten 760, fol. 1–13.

⁴² See the speech of Johannes Dantiscus, Regensburg, 7 May 1532, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv (further cit. HHStA), Mainzer Erzkkanzlerarchiv (further cit. MEK), Reichstagsakten 6b, fol. 192–194v (final copy); DOZA, Preu 410/2, fol. 86–91.

⁴³ *Teutscher Gegenbericht unsers Vorfahrns Herrn Walters von Cronberg seligen gedächtnus widder deß Polnischen Orators Supplication in der preußischen Sach uff dem Reichstag zu Regensburg ubergeben im Jahr Christi 1532*, Regensburg, 3 June 1532, DOZA, Preu 410/2, fol. 14–17, 24v–29; GStA PK, XX. HA, StA, Königsberg HBA H Kasten 760.

⁴⁴ *Deutsche Reichstagsakten. Jüngere Reihe*, Bd. 10, Teilbd. 1–3, bearb. v. Rosemarie AULINGER, Göttingen 1992, no. 169, pp. 774–777.

⁴⁵ 'das wir aus seiner gotlichen gnaden nicht das unsere, sonder des armen gemeinen nutz also haben suchen müssen und hiermitte einen grossen theil Europa zu ewigem fride gesetzt und der Deutzschen nation ein schirmmaure eines langen orts gegen den ungleubigen veinden gemacht'; A. BUES, *Die Apologien*, p. 263.

chances of reconquering lost territories in south-eastern Europe and southern Italy⁴⁶; moreover, he doubted their chastity.

Was it all just a game of muscle-flexing? The Imperial Diet at Regensburg in 1532 did not bring any clarity either; both parties once again tried to win over the imperial estates in favour of their own view of things. The Protestant imperial estates mostly supported their brother in faith, and the Catholic estates – the newly appointed administrator of the Teutonic Grand Master office⁴⁷.

CONCLUSION

Even though the conflict between the Teutonic Order and Duke Albrecht smouldered on, there were no further major accusations at the Imperial Diets and therefore no more apologies. Walter von Cronberg, as the administrator of the office of Grand Master and Master of the German and Italian branch of the Teutonic Order, had been able to achieve his goals, that is, to preserve and consolidate the Order as a noble institution in the age of confessions. The granting of regalia (1530), the general confirmation of all the Order's privileges (1530) and the recognition of the Frankfurt Constitution of 1529 by the emperor and pope formed the basis for its consolidation and continuation, even if winning back Prussia was no longer feasible.

Duke Albrecht of Prussia could also be satisfied with his political situation: the Duchy of Prussia became and remained the first Lutheran territorial governance, the Polish king, as Prussia's suzerain, interfered little in its internal affairs for the time being, and while the imperial ban was personally painful to Albrecht, it did not have any tangible consequences. The legal proceeding before the Imperial Chamber Court, like so many others, fizzled out over time, as neither party was prepared to risk a war for their clientele.

The pamphlet of 1532 was the last of the great apologies; further politics no longer required this form of debate. Nevertheless, it remains a literary monument and a portrait of the times. The line of thought in the apologies is clear: Albrecht had acted for the common good, and that is why he was right, because – according to Thomas Aquinas – rule becomes unjust when the personal advantage of the ruler is sought instead of the neglected common good⁴⁸. Albrecht was not a traitor, as in the German language, the word *Verräter* originally meant to make a decision for someone's ruin. It was only in modern

⁴⁶ In general, see Kristjan TOOMASPOEG, *The Teutonic Order in Italy, 1190–1525: Building Bridges in the Medieval World*, Abingdon–New York 2024.

⁴⁷ The secularisations gave rise to litigation in the Imperial Diets and the Imperial Chamber Court for many years.

⁴⁸ 'Amplius: per hoc regimen sit iniustum quod spreto bono communi multitudinis, quaeritur bonum privatum regentis'; Tommaso D'AQUINO, *Libri IV de regimine principum*, Parisii 1509, book 1, chap. 3, p. EO.VIII.

German that it became restricted to cases in which this was done by revealing secrets. To a certain extent, the apologies conceal the fact that Albrecht was not only an actor in the play; he was also a driven person.

As Duke of Prussia, Albrecht had brought peace both to his own territories and to a large part of Europe. He could argue, as Bodin did later, that a wise prince would not wait until the enemy had invaded his country if he could prevent such an invasion in advance, or else he would withdraw his army safely to fortified positions⁴⁹. Furthermore, Duke Albrecht utilised the topos of a protective wall against the infidels, i.e. the Ottomans, which was widely used in Central Europe, and thus joined the group of Christian European rulers, meaning that he was not a renegade revolutionary.

In the late Middle Ages, the 'reformation' was the only possibility for social change⁵⁰. Albrecht had enough self-confidence and energy to immediately translate the new Lutheran doctrine into political action. His efforts towards emancipation came at the right time and in the right place. As the first ruler to introduce the Lutheran faith as the 'state religion', he was able to count on a certain surprise effect, as in 1525, confessional pathways had not yet been established anywhere, and European politics was overtaken by other priorities. Prussia as well as Livonia, where the Livonian Land Master of the Teutonic Order Gotthard Kettler became Duke of Courland in 1561⁵¹, were situated so far away on the periphery of the Empire that, firstly, the imperial 'core' and 'centre' had little interest in their fates and, secondly, surrounding foreign powers could be included in their political calculations. In the following centuries, the Teutonic Order tried – unsuccessfully – to reclaim Prussia; however, over time, the Cracow Treaty of 1525 became law.

The kings of Poland and grand dukes of Lithuania had ruled over various denominations for centuries, as Dantiscus repeatedly declared at the Imperial Diets of 1530 and 1532⁵²; however, a close alliance with the Lutherans in Poland-Lithuania did not take place during the first half of the sixteenth century. There, the Reformation movement remained secret, decentralised and

⁴⁹ 'Car iamais sage Prince n'attend que l'ennemy soit entré en son pays, s'il peut le romper, ou l'empescher, au parauant qu'il y soit entré, ou du moins qu'il ait vne autre armee, ou la re-traicte seure aux places fortes, autrement c'est iouer son estat au hazard'; Jean BODIN, *Les six livres de la repvblque*, Paris 1576, book 5, chap. 5, p. 594.

⁵⁰ Richard VAN DÜLMEN, *Reformation als Revolution. Soziale Bewegung und religiöser Radikalismus in der deutschen Reformation*, München 1977, p. 17.

⁵¹ In this case, the feudal lord King Sigismund Augustus guaranteed the freedom of worship according to the Augsburg Confession, see Almut BUES, *Das Herzogtum Kurland und der Norden der polnisch-litauischen Adelsrepublik im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert. Möglichkeiten von Integration und Autonomie*, Gießen 2001, pp. 149–155.

⁵² M. PTASZYŃSKI, *Reformacja w Polsce*, p. 213.

non-institutionalised, and was of no political significance⁵³. After 1525, King Sigismund issued numerous edicts against Lutherans in Royal Prussia in order to prevent the destabilising influence of the Reformation movement from spilling over into Poland. On the other hand, these decrees were also intended to have an external impact, especially for the Habsburgs. "The ambiguities, riddles, and paradoxes of Polish policy towards the early Reformation seen in so many spheres were, in Sigismund I's international relations, played out on a bigger and more conspicuous canvas"⁵⁴. Duke Albrecht's attempts to mediate the conflict between the trading city of Danzig (Pol. Gdańsk) and King Sigismund in the summer of 1526 had no effect⁵⁵; later, Albrecht no longer interfered in the religious affairs of Poland-Lithuania, but the Duchy of Prussia remained a refuge for Lutherans⁵⁶.

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⁵³ Maciej PTASZYŃSKI, *Wie politisch war die Reformation in Polen?*, Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte, Jg. 112: 2021, Nr. 1, p. 72.

⁵⁴ Natalia NOWAKOWSKA, *King Sigismund of Poland and Martin Luther: The Reformation before Confessionalization*, Oxford 2018, p. 133.

⁵⁵ M. PTASZYŃSKI, *Reformacja w Polsce*, pp. 134–135; N. NOWAKOWSKA, op.cit., pp. 79–82.

⁵⁶ M. PTASZYŃSKI, *Reformacja w Polsce*, pp. 152–156.

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