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6-2024

### Heroes Have Flaws

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# Heroes Have Flaws

At times, we have the tendency to regard people as “good guys” or “bad guys,” as if there is no in-between.



▲ DENIS KAISER

“WHILE WE MIGHT LAMENT THE ERRORS AND FRAILTIES OF FELLOW BELIEVERS AND CHURCH OFFICIALS, WE MAY ALSO RECOGNIZE AND CHERISH THE UNFORESEEN GOOD ARISING FROM THEIR ENDEAVORS, HOWEVER FLAWED.”

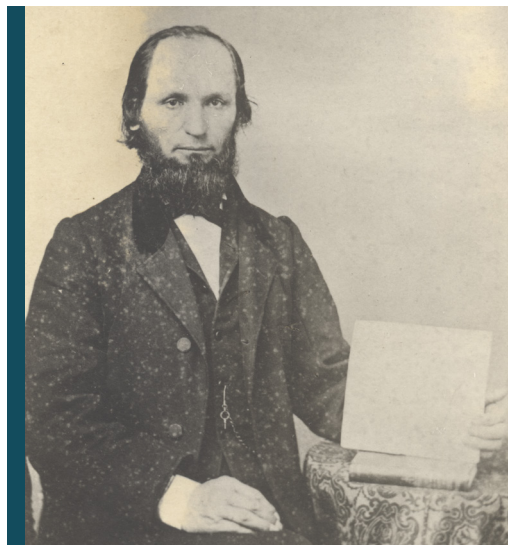
At a recent meeting of historians, one scholar captured the complexity of reality and personality by saying, “The villain has a heart, and the hero has flaws.” Striking a fair balance between the two is an art.<sup>1</sup> Many examples could be given from the history of our church to illustrate that reality. Today, I would like to focus a little bit on Michał Mathias Belina Czechowski (1818–1876), the apparent renegade Seventh-day Adventist minister who sailed under the banner of the Advent Christian Church to Europe, but, unbeknownst to either group, he shared the truth of the Seventh-day Sabbath there and established little companies of Sabbathkeepers in Switzerland and Romania.

In January 1864, Czechowski expressed his desire to preach the third angel’s message to the pope in Rome, yet Loughborough replied that the church would not be able to send him, a remark that seemed to contradict James White’s suggestion eight months earlier to send B.F. Snook as a missionary to Europe by the end of 1863.<sup>2</sup> There was certainly a contrast between the insular, frontier-minded early Adventists and this polyglot

cosmopolitan. Czechowski had a burning desire to share the gospel to as many people as possible, with a focus on recent immigrants. He claimed to speak seven languages, and in 1860, he chose to establish a city mission in New York City, a melting pot of cultures and languages. Despite his zeal, Czechowski’s impulsive decisions and poor financial management often undermined his efforts. Most endeavors resulted in significant debt for him and his family, and the church that tried to lift his burden each time.<sup>3</sup>

A move to Europe would place him where the church would no longer be able to counsel him, yet they would feel obliged to support him financially. The later story of his sojourns in Europe would prove them right in this regard. But despite noting his weaknesses and failures, Seventh-day Adventist leaders were impressed to admit that God had blessed Czechowski’s efforts in Europe, thus establishing the nucleus of our church on that continent.<sup>4</sup>

Life’s complexity is mirrored in its people. While we might lament the errors and frailties of fellow believers and church officials, we may also recognize and cherish the unforeseen good arising from their endeavors, however flawed. ■



- 1 Anne Blue Wills at the “Roundtable: Writing Religious Biography,” panel discussion of the “Conference on Faith and History Session 2,” annual meeting of the American Historical Association, San Francisco, CA, Jan. 6, 2024
- 2 [J. White], “God’s Free-men,” *Review and Herald*, June 2, 1863, 8.
- 3 “Czechowski, Michael Belina (1818–1876) ...,” in *The Ellen G. White Letters and Manuscripts with Annotations*, vol. 1, 1845–1859, ed. Timothy L. Poirier, Kenneth H. Wood, and William A. Fagal (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2014), 819–820.
- 4 George I. Butler to Ellen G. White, April 1, 1884.

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