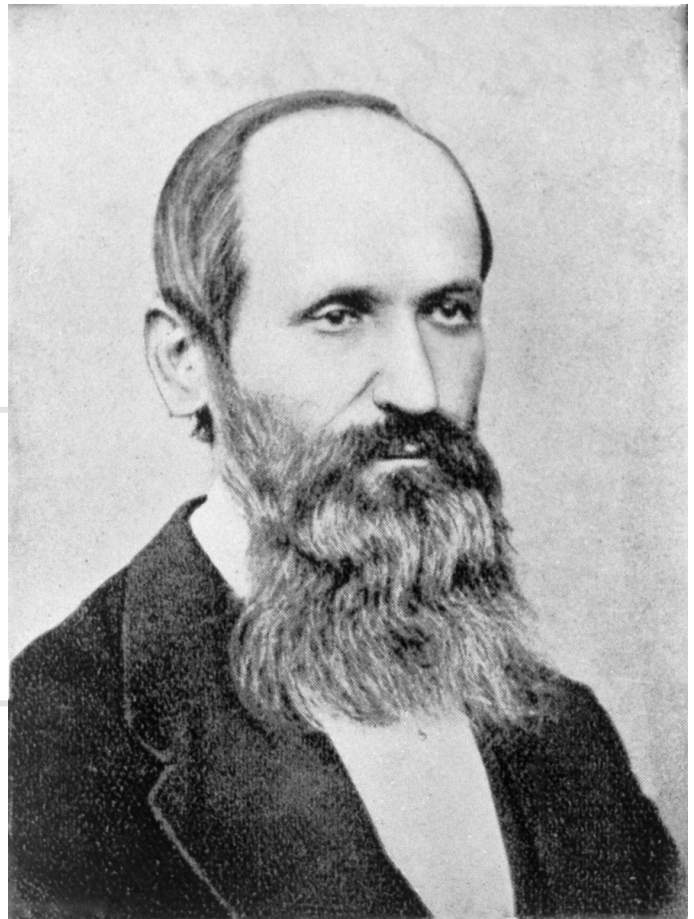


Czechowski, Michael Belina (1818–1876)

GALINA STELE

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Michael Belina Czechowski was the first unofficial Adventist missionary to Europe. He founded the continent's first Adventist congregation in Tramelan, Switzerland, along with Sabbath-keeping groups in Italy and Romania, and published its first Adventist newspaper, tracts, and prophetic charts.



Michael Belina Czechowski

Credit: Ellen G. White Estate.

Early Life (1818–1835)

Michael (Michał) Belina Czechowski¹ was born on September 21, 1818, to Polish Catholic parents, Andrzej and Franciszka, in the Sieciechowice village of Olkusz County, near Krakow, Poland, then located in the Russian Empire. Michael had a sister, Juliana Antoinette, and two younger brothers, Franciszek and Ludwik. His father, an organist, worked hard to pay for Michael's education in the independent city of Krakow, where Michael studied until 1835.²

A Catholic Monk, Priest, and Polish Patriot (1835–1850)

In 1835, inspired by the appealing sermon of a Franciscan priest, he went to Stopnica monastery and, on September 14, became a Franciscan monk named Brother Cyprian. Prior to that, he gave all his possessions to the poor students at his previous school, literally fulfilling Jesus' commandment to the young ruler (Luke 18:22). At the monastery, he diligently observed all rules, including regular flagellations, church singing in Latin at 4:00 AM, gardening, and so on. There, he experienced a complete surrender to God and was willing to die for Him if

required.³ And his dedication to Christ and impractical approach to earthly things accompanied him throughout his life.

In September 1836, Czechowski continued his education in the Pińczów monastery. Disappointed with unjust treatment and the moral decay of priests and monks, he decided to go to Turkey as a missionary to the Slavonian people. The plan failed, and in February 1838, escaping punishment, he ran away to the less-strict monastery at Przysów, where he was named Brother Matthias. In September 1839, he entered Piotrków University. After the completion of his studies, he was ordained in the Holy Cross Church in Warsaw as a Franciscan priest on June 25, 1843.⁴

While teaching at Przysów monastery, Czechowski's frustration with the inappropriate behavior of the clergy and the political situation led him to get involved in the movement for Poland's liberation. After a narrow escape from arrest, he headed to Rome in October 1843 to present the a plan for church reformation to Pope Gregory XVI. Forced to turn back due to the revolutionary unrest, he ended up in Lissa, Prussia (Leżno, Poland) before finally completing his journey to Rome in mid-October 1844. However, his audience with the Pope did not lead to the reforms he sought. Instead, Czechowski received a promotion to a very prominent position in Jerusalem, which he refused to accept.⁵

During the next five years Czechowski served in various places: at the magnificent Saint-Vincent-de-Paul church in Paris (until June 20, 1845); in Reichthal, Poland, where he organized a temperance reform, regular Bible studies in private homes, and reformed three schools; in Alona (until the end of 1847); and at the Saint-Séverin church, Paris (1848-July 1849). At the latter place, he was heavily involved in work on behalf of Polish émigrés and even joined forces organized to fight for Poland's liberation, serving as chaplain. After their defeat he returned to Saint-Séverin church, but not long afterwards, in July 1849, he was expelled from Paris, due to the influence of Polish Jesuits.

He obtained a position as a chaplain in Lancy, Switzerland, where he became acquainted with Jean Jacques Caton Cheneviere, a pastor of the Reformed National Church and theology professor at Geneva, who introduced him to Protestantism. He decided to leave the priesthood and in preparation learned the art of bookbinding as an alternative occupation. He resigned from his priestly ministry on September 30, 1850.⁶ Everywhere he served, Czechowski had received high commendation from superiors for "irreproachable conduct" and dedication "to saving people for Christ."⁷ On October 5, 1850, Czechowski wed Marie Virginie Delavouet in Solothurn, Switzerland. First, the young couple went to Brussels, Belgium, where Michael worked as a bookbinder. But his Jesuit opponents found him and reported him to the government. They plotted to force him to divorce his wife and return to the priesthood. The couple left for London, where Marie became seriously ill. The Jesuits followed them, trying to prevent Czechowski from finding a job. However, with the help of a Baptist pastor of the Zion Church who was president of the Polish Literary Society, they immigrated to America.⁸

Conversion to Adventism and Ministry in North America (1851–1864)

The Czechowskis arrived in New York on September 3, 1851, having just four dollars.⁹ First, they went to Haverstraw, New York, where Michael worked at a brickmaking factory. Unused to hard physical labor, Czechowski soon fell ill and quit the job. Following the advice of his coworkers, he went to Montreal, Canada, arriving there on October 1, 1851. He began working as a bookbinder and eventually opened his own business. But only months later, in June 1852, it was destroyed in a fire that devastated a large section of the city, leaving the Czechowskis in extreme poverty. Michael then began Protestant mission work among French-speaking people, connecting first with the Grand Linge Mission, and in December 1852, with the American Baptist Home Mission Society. The Czechowskis moved to the town of Mooers in northern New York state where Michael was assigned to work among recent émigrés from Canada. During this ministry, he formed a congregation of twenty-seven former Catholics in the town of Sciota, built a French Baptist church with a school, and, after training, was ordained as a Baptist minister at Jay, New York, in late 1854.¹⁰

In 1856, Czechowski heard James White and other speakers from Battle Creek, Michigan, in a camp meeting in Perry's Mills, New York. He was much impressed with their message on the imminent second coming of Jesus. What he "had looked upon as so distant was near at hand."¹¹ He left his ministry in the Baptist church, moved to Findley, Ohio, worked as a bookbinder, and shared this message with great zeal. In the summer of 1857, he accepted the Sabbath doctrine at an Adventist tent meeting and was baptized by [Merrit E. Cornell](#).¹² Soon he moved to Battle Creek. His bookbinding business was advertised in the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*.¹³

Ellen and James White were very impressed when they met Czechowski. Tall, eloquent, well-educated, with the knowledge of seven languages and ministerial experience in the Catholic and Baptist churches, he made an unforgettable impression. James White said, "Providence has placed him with us."¹⁴ They saw his great potential in reaching French-speaking people with the Adventist message and proposed that he move back to Mooers, where he still had a farm. However, Czechowski, who had three children by this time, was under great financial stress. Thus, the Adventists raised funds to pay Czechowski's debt and for house repairs, making it possible for the family to return to Mooers in the summer of 1858,¹⁵

That year, on August 29, Czechowski wrote a letter to the Whites, expressing his desire to visit his "own native country across the big waters, and tell them all about Jesus' coming, and the glorious restitution, and how they must keep the Commandments of God and the Faith of Jesus."¹⁶ However, the Adventist Church was not yet officially organized and was not ready to send someone abroad as a missionary.

At Mooers, Czechowski worked with another Adventist minister, [Daniel T. Bourdeau](#), in reaching out to French-speaking people in Canada, northern New York, and Vermont. In September, 1859, they conducted a conference in Chazy village for Sabbath keepers with "quite a number of French Protestants and Americans" present. Czechowski spoke on systematic benevolence and the harm of tobacco, and Bourdeau said that "most all of our French brethren have laid this idol aside."¹⁷

In 1860, Czechowski, constantly in financial need and his wife now expecting their fourth child, realized that he was not able to provide for his growing family by running a farm. Unsuccessful in trying to find additional employment, he decided to move to New York City, planning to evangelize there among different ethnic groups. He did not consult with Bourdeau, who did not find out until Czechowski already “had laid his plans so deep that his mind could not be changed.”¹⁸ The farm was sold, and on March 7, he went to New York, bought a lot in Newtown, Long Island, and started building a house.

In New York City, Czechowski worked among the French, Poles, Italians, Swedes, and Germans, conducting meetings in three languages. He organized a group of Adventists in Brooklyn. His first converts were an ethnic Pole, Julius Stawicki, and a woman from the Baptist Church.¹⁹

However, this project did not prove successful, and the house was not finished due to a lack of means. The Whites tried to support him as much as they could. But in 1861, Ellen White wrote that God showed her that his decision to move there was wrong.²⁰ To redeem the situation, James White suggested moving him to Enosburg Falls in northern Vermont. Bourdeau and his church accepted the idea and covered Czechowski’s moving expenses. It proved to be a good decision, and Czechowski later thanked Bourdeau and others for the kindness and care they provided for his family.²¹

In 1862, Czechowski published a book about his priesthood experience in the Catholic Church, *Thrilling and Instructive Developments: An Experience of Fifteen Years as Roman Catholic Clergyman and Priest*, which was advertised in the *Review*. The following year, he published another book on the history of Poland.²² He hoped these publications would help him financially.

Czechowski worked in northern Vermont for some time and raised a church near Lake Champion, but due to some difficulties, he decided to leave the ministry and go back to New York City.²³ He settled in Williamsburg, Long Island, New York. The Adventist church ceased to finance him, and his publications did not bring him the expected help. Having made friends with some influential Italians in New York, he decided to go to northern Italy and work among French-speaking people in the Waldensian valleys. By that time his parents had died, and he hoped that his brothers could join him in Italy.²⁴

Adventist leaders, “while never doubting Czechowski’s zeal and ardor,” were not ready to send him as an official missionary because they “began to question his financial management capabilities and general trustworthiness.”

²⁵ In 1863, they began to think of sending a missionary to Europe but had [B. F. Snook](#) in mind. Ellen White wrote a letter to Czechowski counseling him not to go to Europe on his own and warning him about the negative consequences of his decision.²⁶ However, he decided to move on when he secured financial support in Boston from the Advent Christians (whom Seventh-day Adventists typically called “first-day Adventists” because they retained Sunday as their day of worship). They published his books and until 1869, their publications, mainly *The World Crisis and Second Advent Messenger*, became his platform for publishing progress reports, requests for

financial support, and notifications of donations received.

Ministry in Italy (1864–1865)

On May 14, 1864, Czechowski sailed for Europe with his wife, four children, and his secretary, Annie Eliza Butler, who was a sister of the future SDA General Conference president [G. I. Butler](#). Czechowski was eager to share the Advent message with people in the Waldensian valleys and reach out to all the European nations “by publications and preaching as the way may be opened.”²⁷

On June 6, 1864, the group arrived at London. Having received some funds from English and Scottish Advent Christians they left for Torre Pellice, Italy, on June 30, with a short stop in Paris.

Torre Pellice, a center of the [Waldensian](#) church, was a well-developed town with a Catholic church and two Presbyterian churches, a college, a girls’ boarding school, a hospital, and several factories.²⁸ In the Waldensian valleys, Czechowski counted fifteen French-speaking Protestant churches. Starting with meetings at his home, he gave studies on Bible prophecies and the second coming of Jesus, followed later by the Sabbath and other Adventist doctrines. On July 31, he was invited to speak in the oldest Waldensian church called Temple. The church pastor summarized the overall impression: “May we imitate his zeal, and do all in our power for our own countrymen” as seen in “the feelings of this brother for his English and Slavonian [brethren], for whose spiritual good he is willing to die if necessary.”²⁹

As the number of visitors to his home meetings grew, the landlord asked Czechowski’s family to move out. Friends helped them to find a place across the river in the town of St. Jean.

Czechowski worked tirelessly. In his reports published in the *World’s Crisis*, he said that he preached thirty-six sermons in August of 1864. In January of 1865, he delivered twenty-five lectures and in February another twenty-seven in six different places. Overall, during seven months of preaching in Torre Pellice, St. Jean, and the surrounding region, he presented 180 lectures in addition to private conversations with interested people. His labor stirred controversy in that region and, as one Waldensian lady said, “in nearly every house there was a division” over what he preached.³⁰

Czechowski formed a company of believers in St. Jean, which he called a “little church.” Among his first converts, the most well-known are Jean-David Geymet, Joseph Jones, and Catherine Revel.³¹ Their stories shed light on the work of Czechowski in Italy.

Geymet was won by the message at once. Going home from work, he saw a group of people in front of a store with “a man with a long beard and a little stick explaining the prophecy of Daniel 2” on the prophetic chart.³² He became Czechowski’s assistant in Italy and Switzerland, a translator, publisher, and literature evangelist.³³

Joseph Jones attended Czechowski’s lectures during a visit to Torre Pellice, studied the Bible with him, and was baptized on July 1, 1865. As the first missionary on Czechowski’s team, he was sent to Turin and Tuscany.

Czechowski hoped that one day he would become an Adventist minister.³⁴

Catherine Revel, a thirty-four-year-old woman from a remote farm on the top of the mountain of St. Jean's town, accepted the Adventist message with her husband. He soon turned antagonistic but Catherine continued to keep the Sabbath and to come down with her small daughter to the meetings of the little church even after her husband dropped his conviction and persecuted her. Later, while in Switzerland, Czechowski continued to support Catherine through his letters. In 1924, L. R. Conradi called ninety-three-year-old Catherine the fruit of Czechowski's labor and "the oldest living Sabbath keeper in Europe."³⁵ Her daughter Mery was baptized by D. T. Bourdeau in the winter of 1884–1885. Mery's son, [Alfred Vaucher](#), became an Adventist theologian, teacher, and administrator. Ellen White visited Catherine with the Bourdeaus and Geyment during her trip to Italy in November of 1885.³⁶

By April 1865, Czechowski's team began translating some Adventist tracts. Czechowski needed handouts to distribute after his lectures to send to "the King, to princes, lords, cardinals, bishops, and priests, etc."³⁷ He considered printed material "of even more importance to the spread of the truth than preaching."³⁸

That March, he also preached in Turin to a group of his Polish friends, who were "found firm in the faith of the Lord's soon coming" and met with 160 Polish immigrants.³⁹ In July, Czechowski went to Germany, having been invited by his friends from Württemberg. On this trip, he also visited Bavaria, Saxony, Poland, and Prussia. He was surprised that "many became interested, and desired more light."⁴⁰ This made him think of moving to Switzerland. The economic situation in Italy was not the best, people were poor and could not support his mission. Donations from America were not regular or enough. Also, the opposition to his ministry from both Protestants and Catholics was growing. He was afraid to establish a mission office for fear that people could destroy it and harm his family. Switzerland also had a more central geographical position than other countries.⁴¹

Czechowski was never in favor of creating large congregations that could foster nominal religion. He wanted to organize small churches that were faithful to God and are light and salt locally and abroad.⁴² He devoted his last two weeks in Italy to sequential meetings in St. Jean to strengthen his followers in the Vaudois vicinity to remain faithful to the truth they accepted. He left his new coworker, François Besson, to care for the people in Torre Pellice and the surrounding vicinity and Jones to labor in Tuscany.⁴³

Ministry in Switzerland (1865–1868)

On September 5, 1865, Czechowski left Italy with his family, his brother, [Annie Butler](#), and Geymet. They arrived in Yverdon and then rented an apartment in Grandson at Lake Neuchâtel.⁴⁴

Czechowski started meetings at his home for those interested in his message. In November, he visited villages along the lake and in the Jura Mountains. He also visited Geymet in Missy; held lectures in St. Croix church, at the school and hotel in Vuiteboeuf; and had a large gathering in Vuggelles. Czechowski was very impressed with

the people's openness and, above all, the better living conditions compared to those of Italy.

In 1866, the number of places he visited grew tremendously. He preached in the college in Bullet; in the large National Temples in Buttes, Auvernier, and Faoug; in the National Church in Fleurier; and in a large college hall in Le Locle. In addition, he visited Basel, Berne, and Lausanne. He also preached in a college and city hall in Chaux-de-Fonds; then in Calames, Geneva, Neuveville, Tramelan, Sonvilier, and Courtelary. In the latter, a local pastor organized a prayer meeting in a church member's house and in the college chapel. He also had good results near Lake Morat.⁴⁵

The first person baptized by Czechowski in Switzerland was an influential lady, Louise Pigueron, from Auvernier. She was invited to Czechowski's lecture by her daughter Anna's teacher while she was visiting her at school in Fleurier. Responding to her interest, Czechowski came back to the town the following week, studied the Bible with her, and remained to conduct for Louise and Anna their first Sabbath worship. Louise was baptized at night in the Lake Neuchâtel on February 7, 1866.⁴⁶

The first circle of Czechowski's followers was formed in Fleurier. It included a Pastor Coulon of the National Church, his wife, and two well-respected men—a former milliner, Sigismond David Hanhardt, and his son Jean David. They began assisting Czechowski in his labor immediately and were baptized with another person from Fleurier on August 19, 1866.⁴⁷

By May 1866, Czechowski finally published prophetic charts and several hundred tracts on the second coming of Jesus. That same month he preached in Le Locle, and David Hanhardt distributed the prophetic charts and tracts, going from house to house. Soon they were joined by a former theology student, Emille Frey, who accepted the message and helped distribute the literature. Father and son Hanhardt also assisted Czechowski in communication with German-speaking people.

Czechowski found that German-speaking Baptists seemed open to the Adventist message and hungry for truth. Some of them walked on foot for several hours to meet with him. In June 1866, Czechowski was invited to preach at the German Baptist Conference held near Le Locle.⁴⁸ Seeing a need for German Bibles, Czechowski asked [Miles Grant](#), editor of the *World's Crisis*, to order 500 copies from the American Bible Society.⁴⁹

In June 1866, Czechowski published the first issue of his weekly paper *L'Évangile Eternel (The Everlasting Gospel)* in Grandson.⁵⁰ His editorial team included his son Ludomir, Geymet, and Anna Pigueron. The paper was published until the funds ceased at the end of 1868. It was widely circulated in Switzerland and sent out to Italy, France, England, Holland, Germany, Poland, and Hungary.⁵¹

Like Seventh-day Adventists in America, Czechowski held annual General Conference (GC) meetings for his followers. In August 1866, he conducted the GC meeting at Calames, near Le Locle. John Hanhardt led the discussion on Biblical topics. Many guests from different denominations, including Baptist ministers, attended; some walked on foot for several hours to join the conference.⁵²

The interest in the Adventist message was growing but so was opposition from both Catholic priests and Protestant pastors, making it difficult to find a place for public meetings. This led Czechowski to the idea of buying a large tent with portable chairs for 1,000 people and putting up a sign: "American Mission of the Second coming of Our Savior, Jesus Christ."⁵³ He hoped to secure funds from the sales of the second edition of *Thrilling Narrative*, but it never happened.

Another important development took place at the end of August 1866. Czechowski began preaching in Tramelan and the congregation that formed in response donated funds enabling him to buy a small printing press. During a return trip at the end of December, Czechowski, accompanied by Geymet, barely survived a fall going through mountains in deep snow. Geymet spent several hours descending the slope and looking for scattered tracts from Czechowski's broken trunk.⁵⁴

On October 1, 1866, Czechowski's family moved to a farmhouse in the village of Cornaux, Saint-Blaise, centrally-located as a base for his missionary travels. There Czechowski founded a mission called: "European and Worldwide Mission of the Savior's Second Coming."⁵⁵ He also started publishing pamphlets in the French and German languages.⁵⁶

The family was forced to move again after a fire broke out during the night of March 31, 1867, in a barn that connected two parts of the house. It destroyed Czechowski's library, prophetic charts, and most of the publications, which were stored in a room adjoining the barn.⁵⁷ Fortunately, their lives and the press were spared. Czechowski soon began building a new house in Hauterive and the family moved in even before it was completed. It promised to have enough space not only for his family but also an office, the press, and even a small chapel. But its mortgage eventually led Czechowski into bankruptcy.

More good fruit resulted from Czechowski's labor in 1867. On April 27, he baptized Anna Pigueron, his son Ludomir, and Wilhelmina Schirmer, who became his secretary and, later, his second wife.⁵⁸ During the spring and summer, Czechowski's team worked in different places: Geymet worked in villages in the Val de Buz in the Jura mountains; Jean Hanhardt worked in July in the Canton of Vaud near Lausanne while his father canvassed in the Jura mountains.⁵⁹

The church in Tramelan was growing, too. Eleven people were baptized in the summer and eight more at the conclusion of the GC meeting held on August 3, 1867. People "seemed greatly astonished to see so many persons of superior class submit to this ordinance, administered to them by a minister of another nation."⁶⁰ This motivated Czechowski to prepare a tract on baptism.

On September 15, 1867, the first Adventist church in Europe was organized in Tramelan. After the baptism of another four people, the believers elected an elder, [Albert Vuilleumier](#), and two deacons, [Jules E. Dietschy](#) and [Jules-Henri Guenin](#).⁶¹ Czechowski called this group "the little church in Tramelan," where members "are strong in the Lord, giving an excellent example to all around them."⁶²

Czechowski continued to work among Polish refugees, sharing with them the Adventist message. Many were of higher ranks and knew Czechowski's family; some remembered him as a Catholic priest.⁶³ In Geneva, he met Polish people who once were his parishioners. Some of them subscribed to *L'Évangile Eternel*.

Visit to Italy

The members of the little church in Italy kept correspondence with Czechowski, telling him they were growing in faith. Count Pierro Guicciardini, described as an influential man "who has suffered much persecution for the truth," reported that seven evangelists were working with him to spread the truth in Italy and that Catherine Revel was "firm . . . as a rock."⁶⁴

In March 1866, Jean-David Geymet returned to Italy and reported successful lectures in the valley of Rorà as well as Joseph Jones's good work in Leghorn (Livorno) and Pisa. Besson, now retired from his government position, was fully occupied with supervising believers at Torre Pellice.⁶⁵

Czechowski returned to Italy in November 1867 to strengthen his followers.⁶⁶ He crossed Mont Cenis by foot in deep snow. During the next three months he visited Torre Pellice, the Piedmont valleys, Turin, Milan, Biella, Vercelli, Mortara, Novara, Bergamo, Brescia, Padua, Verona, Venice, and Rome. In Rome, Czechowski spent three weeks working from house to house and holding small meetings. In Brescia, wrote Czechowski, God prepared the way for the message as He did for Cornelius in Acts 10. In other places, Czechowski received threats in the form of "screams, yells, and also . . . the discharge of a pistol in the hall of assembly."⁶⁷ On this trip, he described himself as "a soldier of Christ, fifty years of age, carrying fifty lbs weight of books, tracts and papers from place to place, who often knows not where to lay his head at night, crowded with correspondence; and who, while resting, writes articles for the *Évangile Eternel*, to send each week to St. Blaise."⁶⁸ Geymet and Beason assisted him though they could not accompany him in every place. Among new contacts were Mr. Ferrari, an evangelist, and Louis Kossuth, the former leader of Hungary's revolutionary government (1848-1849), who received a prophetic chart and the weekly paper.

Inspired by Czechowski's reports, the *World's Crisis* published an appeal in February 1868 for funds to support the Italian mission where Czechowski was "doing a good work," "scattering the light."⁶⁹

Further Developments

Meanwhile, some important developments took place in Tramelan. Albert Vuilleumier found a copy of the *Review and Herald* in the room joined to the chapel, where Czechowski usually stayed. From this he learned that there was an Adventist church in America, something Czechowski had never revealed. To establish contact, Vuilleumier sent a letter to *Review* editor Uriah Smith. Church leaders in Battle Creek rejoiced to hear about a Sabbath-keeping congregation in Tramelan and other groups of believers in Switzerland and Italy.⁷⁰ Their

correspondence continued, and Albert asked the leaders to send them a missionary.

This set in motion the downfall of Czechowski's ministry. While in Basel, he heard about Albert's correspondence with Battle Creek and also learned that his Advent Christian sponsors' had discovered, to their disappointment, that he taught the Sabbath doctrine to his converts. They had supposed that he had broken with the Seventh-day Adventists and was working solely for them.⁷¹

Foreseeing damage to the relationship with his sponsors, Czechowski wrote a straightforward letter on July 5 instructing Vuilleumier that he had to consult with him first and warning him that his action would harm the cause for which he had been working. Albert disagreed. Also, because he was experiencing financial difficulties, Albert asked Czechowski to pay back his loans to him. Czechowski replied that he was working on that and, if not successful, would sell his house to pay Albert. He also recommended asking the General Conference to send a more worthy and sponsored missionary.⁷²

The situation became quite complicated for Czechowski. The new house was under a large mortgage and was not yet finished. Since August 1867, the Czechowskis had been living on credit. Some donations came from the *World's Crisis* as late as August 1868, but they were not enough to pay all of the debts. His relationship with his wife, who was often depressed and sick, was also in crisis.

In the summer, he went to France and Germany and visited Mulhouse, Bâle, Fribourg, Baden-Baden, Karlsruhe, Stuttgart, Zürich, and the Kingdom of Württemberg. In Rapperswil, near Zürich, he attended a large meeting of Polish delegates, who dedicated a monument in memory of the Polish revolt.⁷³ This trip was interrupted by Annie Butler's death. The Vuilleumiers had taken her to Tramelan to care for her when she got sick. Czechowski quickly returned to Tramelan to perform her funeral on August 25th.⁷⁴ He valued Annie's contribution very much. In addition to her work as his secretary, she taught and took care of his children. He was sorry that he could not provide effective treatment during her illness.

The Tramelan church continued to grow. Czechowski conducted the annual General Conference there at the end of October and made his final visit in late December.⁷⁵

Favorable results continued to attend his labors, particularly in Basel and in the Alsace region where several people gave their hearts to the Lord, he reported to the *World's Crisis* in December. To reach the Alsace, he had to cross the Jura mountains on foot, in deep snow, and was caught by a storm. That evening, he went twenty-four miles on foot and in the morning had to continue nine miles more until he found shelter and a cup of milk for his last pennies.⁷⁶

At that time, he had a team of five workers: Geymet worked in Italy, [Jakob H. Erzberger](#), a member of the Tramelan church, worked among Germans; Czechowski, his son Ludomir, and Wilhelmina Schirmer worked among French people.⁷⁷

In an attempt to improve his financial situation, Czechowski decided to move to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He also hoped to realize his long-term desire to reach out to Slavonian people.

Ministry in Hungary and Romania (1869–1876)

Czechowski arrived in Budapest on January 20, 1869. Unable to rent a public hall, he started a door-to-door ministry. He met with influential people and distributed the Bible to families who had never read it. During the year, he formed seven small missionary stations around and inside the city, naming them Pest, Buda, Dunakeszi, Vac, Adelhaza, Ujpest, and Rakos.⁷⁸ At the end of June in 1869, he reported that in Hungary, “many honest and noble hearts received the glad tidings with joy.”⁷⁹

To earn money, Czechowski founded a brick-making factory near the Danube River on a lot given to him by friends. The bricks were made for a railway company in Budapest. He produced over 200,000 bricks but got sick and could not sell them in time, and all the bricks and the factory were destroyed by flooding.⁸⁰

In October 1869, he went to Transylvania, invited by friends. He visited Siebenbürgen, Turda, Pata, Kolozs, Klausenburg, Volosxyt, Szamosújvár, Dés, Bethlehem, Gerend, and Bistritz. In his report in the *World's Crisis*, Czechowski wrote that he “left a very good impression of the second coming of the Lord” in every place.⁸¹

Visiting Vienna, Czechowski met a rich Romanian merchant, Tache Fotescu, and went with him to Pitești. Czechowski knew “the technique of manufacturing the tiles for glazed stoves,”⁸² and they planned a tile business together. On their way to Pitești, they went through Cernauti (Chernivtsi, Ukraine).⁸³ According to later Russian and Ukrainian sources, Czechowski visited Chernivtsi again during his stay in Romania. It is believed that he was the first Adventist minister who preached the three angels’ messages in Chernivtsi—in a tile factory in a suburb called Rosha—and that the first Adventist group was organized in that city because of his preaching. However, primary source documentation for these claims has not been discovered.⁸⁴

Fotescu’s family did not support the tile manufacturing plan, and Czechowski was left alone in Pitești. After offering a prayer, he was impressed to go to the shop street. There he became acquainted with [Toma Aslan](#), an Armenian engineer and a store manager. Czechowski agreed to give French lessons to Toma and his brother, accompanied by Bible studies on the book of Daniel. Soon, Czechowski moved into their house and conducted lectures in a large room transformed into a lecture hall. Toma Aslan was his translator. In 1870, Czechowski baptized Toma with his wife, Margaretta, and his brother Mitică with his wife, Zoe. In 1872, he baptized their brother Tache and his wife. Later, he also baptized Toma’s parents and some other people.⁸⁵ By the end of the year, there were about 10–15 followers of the Adventist message in Pitești.

After Czechowski’s death in 1876, Toma Aslan led believers in Pitești. In 1879, Adventist missionaries [R. Bertola](#) and [H. P. Ribton](#) visited the Romanian group.⁸⁶ An Adventist church was officially organized there when [A. C. Bourdeau](#) and Bertola visited Pitești in 1885. Toma Aslan was ordained and became the first Adventist minister

in Romania.⁸⁷

New Developments

In response to Albert Vuilleumier's request for a minister, the church leaders invited him to Battle Creek for the GC session in May 1869 to receive instruction and preparation to carry the work forward in Switzerland. Because Albert's wife was expecting, Jakob Erzenberger was sent instead. He arrived in June, missing the session. Nevertheless, the church leaders reported at the session about a group of Sabbath keepers in Switzerland converted by Czechowski. It was resolved "to receive them under the care of this General Conference, and to consider that field as missionary ground."⁸⁸

In the summer, the Tramelan church also sent Ademar Vuilleumier to America. In November, the *Review* published an article about Sabbath keepers in Switzerland resulting from Czechowski's work. The article acknowledged that the church could have done better in handling the issues involved with Czechowski and his desire to take the Adventist message to Europe. A request was presented for funds to meet the financial obligations on Czechowski's heavily mortgaged home (encompassing printing office, chapel, and family dwelling).⁸⁹ The pledges were collected in December of 1869, and a letter was sent to Czechowski via Albert Vuilleumier. The conditions included the expectation that the Adventist Church would own the house and press. Czechowski did not accept these conditions because it was also his family's home.⁹⁰ Vuilleumier was sorry for Czechowski despite their disagreement. He wrote to the GC leaders that the members of the Tramelan church all knew how much Czechowski sacrificed for God's cause and that in this time he especially needed support and compassion.⁹¹ In March 1870, the bank took Czechowski's property.

Jakob Erzberger returned to Switzerland in 1870 as the first Swiss ordained minister. This laid the foundation of the Seventh-day Adventist mission outside America. In October of 1874, Ademar Vuilleumier returned with [John N. Andrews](#), the first official American missionary.

Family

Czechowski was married twice: to Marie Virginie Delavouet (1821–1870), the daughter of a landowner in Bogeve, Savoy (modern France), and then to Wilhelmina Schirmer. He re-registered his first marriage in Zion Church in Montreal on August 2, 1852 because they did not secure a marriage certificate from Europe. But the date of the first registration was added there.⁹²

His children from the first marriage were: Ludomir (1852–1875); Anna Sophia (born 1854); Michael Andre (born 1856); Victor Emmanuel (born 1860); and Leon Oxa (1863–1864), who died from diphtheria as an infant five months old in Williamsburg, New York.⁹³ [J. N. Loughborough](#) conducted and preached at Leon's funeral on January 17, 1864, in Brooklyn, as Czechowski was sick and could not attend. Czechowski's daughter Claudia was

born in 1865 in Italy.

Stressful circumstances strained Michael and Marie's marriage. They moved often and lived in poverty in almost every place. Czechowski was a visionary leader but not practical in earthly matters. Marie was not prepared for all the hardships they met. She was not educated and could not be his partner in ministry. In addition, she suffered from depression and Czechowski's constant absence. Annie Butler helped them with children and chores. After the Vuilleumiers took Annie to Tramelan, Czechowski's family fell apart. He blamed Marie for ruining his ministry and their marriage.⁹⁴ His departure for Germany in 1868 marked a permanent separation, an end to their marital relationship, though he continued to care for his children.⁹⁵ His biggest crisis was not financial but relational—his marriage was falling apart.

Ludomir became one of the best printers in Neuchâtel.⁹⁶ He continued to help his father for some time after his departure. Marie died in 1870, four months after the bank took their house. Two Adventist families took the younger boys. Czechowski placed Claudia in a school in Stuttgart, and later Anna Sophie and Michael Andre were sent to a boarding school.⁹⁷

According to Ana Puegeron, Ludomir and Anna continued in the faith for a time but there was no Adventist group in Neuchâtel, and soon Ludomir lost connection with the Adventist Church.⁹⁸ He married a Catholic girl, Emilie-Josephine, but soon died at age 23, leaving his one-year-old son Auguste-Paul. His funeral was very humble, performed in the Catholic hospital in Neuchâtel by the pastor of the independent church with no service at the grave.⁹⁹ Anna Sophia married in Neuchâtel and died there of tuberculosis. Later, Michael went to the West Indies. Claudia, the youngest, moved to the United States and married in Chicago.¹⁰⁰

Czechowski's second wife, Wilhelmina ("Mima," "Emma," "Eliza") Schirmer, was converted from the Roman Catholic Church. Czechowski described her as "a young lady, a teacher from the city of Cassel, in northern Germany, of noble character and excellent abilities, well educated in the German and French languages."¹⁰¹ She became his secretary and translator, working in his office in Switzerland, and accompanying him on some trips.

Wilhelmina came to Pitești, Romania, in the fall of 1870 with their two children and stayed with Czechowski as his wife. They had married after Czechowski's separation from his family, but the date is unknown. They had a son Elie, (born April 26, 1869),¹⁰² and a daughter Freida Setha (born October 27, 1870).¹⁰³ After Czechowski's death, the Aslan family cared for Wilhelmina and the children until she found a job in Bucharest at an Anglican school. She worked there as a teacher and died in that city.¹⁰⁴

End of Life

In his last years, Czechowski developed some health issues. In 1869, he became seriously ill for five weeks and "was not able to speak, neither to give answer to any question." But with God's help he recovered and was able again "to work with his hands . . . and preach the gospel."¹⁰⁵ In 1875, Andrews wrote that Czechowski "lost the

sight of one eye, and his hearing in part.”¹⁰⁶

In February of 1876, Czechowski came to Vienna, possibly as a part of his overall trip to visit followers of his message or to look for a treatment.¹⁰⁷ On February 3, he collapsed on the street and was taken to the nearby Vienna General (Royal) Hospital. Theodor Meynert, later a teacher of Sigmund Freud, examined him and sent him to the psychiatric department of the hospital called the Vienna Mental Hospital of Lower Austria.

Czechowski was admitted there at 3:00 PM and stayed there for three weeks, but medical efforts did not help restore his health. In the hospital archives, his occupation was registered as a former train conductor, possibly because, as a result of his acquaintance with Luciano de Prato, he worked as a conductor for some time. He died on February 25, 1876, at 8:00 AM, at the age of 57.¹⁰⁸

In March, D. T. Bourdeau informed Ellen and James White about Czechowski’s death, confirmed to him by Jean-David Geymet. Bourdeau stated that the cause of death was “cancer in his mouth.”¹⁰⁹ In 1975, before the GC session in Vienna, the Adventist Church obtained his death certificate from the city archives with the cause of death noted as “exhaustion.”¹¹⁰ At that time the term “exhaustion” had a broader meaning in medical circles than a mere fatigue. Czechowski was buried in Vienna Central Friedhof (cemetery) on February 27, 1876,¹¹¹ possibly in a general grave, his grave was not registered or identified.¹¹²

Contribution

M. B. Czechowski laid the foundation for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Europe. He was the founder of Sabbath-keeping Adventist communities in Italy, Switzerland, and Romania. His main role was in sowing seeds through preaching and publications. His prophetic charts, tracts, weekly newspaper, and pamphlets became the first Adventist publications in Europe. He was a founder of the first Adventist missionary society in Europe and the first Adventist congregation in Switzerland officially recognized by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Adventist leaders acknowledged God’s providence in his labor. In 1869 the *Review and Herald* stated:

Eld. M. B. C. felt deeply for Europe. We do not doubt that the Spirit of God was impressing his mind. But as he found that we were not ready to send him to the Old World so soon as he thought it duty to go (for we thought the time had not come for him to do this), he sought aid from the first-day Adventists.¹¹³

The eighth GC session in 1870 voted the following: “RESOLVED, 1. That we recognize the hand of God in the establishment of a body of Seventh-day Adventists in Central Europe.”¹¹⁴ The same thought was repeated at the GC session of 1871 with an addition that the church “will, so far as the providence of God shall open our way, do what lies in our power to assist in the spread of the truth in that country and in other countries of Europe.”¹¹⁵

On November 1, 1874, when John Andrews conducted the first meeting of believers at Neuchâtel, representatives came from seven places where Czechowski labored—Tramelan, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Le Locle, Fleurier, Neuchâtel, Bienne, and Buckten.¹¹⁶ Czechowski's efforts were not in vain. As a result of his labor, the church gained many leaders, including Albert and Ademar Vuilleumier, Jakob Erzberger, John Geymet, Toma Aslan, Alfred-Felix Vaucher, and others. Ellen White met Czechowski's converts while visiting Switzerland and Italy. More followers might have remained in the faith if there had not been a gap of six years between Czechowski's departure and Andrews's arrival.¹¹⁷

Doubtless, Czechowski's labor could have been more successful if he had followed Ellen White's advice and waited until the church could officially send him. His contribution would have been more powerful if he had not been a lonely pioneer moving forward on his own. However, he believed that the time was short, and God used his zeal for His purpose. Czechowski said: "I feel very grateful to him that he has given me the privilege of forming several small churches, members of which are true pillars, showing to those around them the way to the kingdom of God."¹¹⁸ He stands as a representative of the supportive independent ministries that take initiative and go forward where the church has not been yet. He was not perfect, he made mistakes, but God used him to bring the Adventist message to Europe. His example and results in Europe opened a new era of the worldwide Adventist mission.

In commemoration of the 100th and 150th anniversaries of Czechowski's death and in memory of his mission to Europe, two conferences were held in Poland: a symposium in Warsaw, May 17–23, 1976; and a conference in Podkowa Leśna, May 14–20, 2014. A book, *Michael Belina Czechowski 1818–1876*, edited by R. L. Dabrowski and B. B. Beach, was published as a result of the first conference. In September 2021, in Kraków, a city square was named after the Adventist missionary Michał Belina-Czechowski.¹¹⁹

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64. Czechowski, "Mission Letters from Switzerland. Number Two," *WC*, December 27, 1865, 59; "Mission in Switzerland," *WC*, January 31, 1866, 78, 79; "Mission Letters from Switzerland. Number Six," *WC*, June 27, 1866, 58.
65. Czechowski, "Mission Letters From Switzerland. Number Six;" "Mission Letters From Switzerland. Number Eight;" "Mission Letters From Switzerland. Number Twelve;" "Mission Letters From Switzerland. Number Thirteen;" "Mission Letters from Switzerland. Number Seventeen."
66. Czechowski, "Mission Letters from Switzerland. Number Twenty," *WC*, January 22, 1868, 74.

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70. Vaucher, *M.-B. Czechowski*, 35.
71. Dabrowski and Beach, 260–262.
72. *Ibid.*
73. Czechowski, "Mission Letters from Switzerland. Number Twenty-Three," *WC*, October 7, 1868, 16.
74. *Ibid.*
75. Czechowski, "Mission Letters from Switzerland. Number Twenty-Four," *WC*, January 6, 1869, 68; Dabrowski and Beach, 270.
76. Czechowski, "Mission Letters from Switzerland. Number Twenty-Four."
77. *Ibid.*
78. Czechowski, "Mission Letter from Hungary," *WC*, January 12, 1870, 68.
79. Czechowski, "Mission Letter from Hungary," *WC*, July 28, 1869, 80.
80. Dabrowski and Beach, 334.
81. Czechowski, "Mission Letter from Hungary," *WC*, January 12, 1870, 68.
82. Dabrowski and Beach, 334.
83. "Istoricul Bisericii Adventiste," ["History of the Adventist Church" (Romanian)] Adventist Wiki, accessed February 9, 2025, https://seventhdayadventist.fandom.com/ro/wiki/Istoricul_Bisericii_Adventiste.
84. Mikola Zhukalyuk, *Kriz' Buri, Shtormi, Likholittya: Do 120-litn'ogo Ubileu Adventizmu v Zakhidnij Ukraini* [Through Tempest, Storms, Hard Times: Towards the 120th Anniversary of the SDA Church in Western Ukraine (Ukrainian)], Kiev, Dzherelo Zhitya, 2009, 36, 37. In correspondence with the author, Mikola Zhukalyuk, stated that he saw an article regarding formation of an Adventist group in Chernivtsi by Czechowski in *Zions-Wächter*, a German Adventist magazine, shown to him by another Ukrainian pastor, Leon Belinskii (since deceased). Pastor Zhukalyuk did not write down the number of the issue, and the article he describes does not exist in any extant issue of *Zions-Wächter* in the archives at

Friedensau Adventist University. It should be noted that not all issues have been preserved. Also, Zhukalyuk pointed out that he never previously heard of *Zion's-Wächter* and could not have come up with such a magazine title without seeing the publication.

85. Dabrowski and Beach, 336–340.
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87. Dabrowski and Beach, 346.
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90. Andrews, "The Case of Eld. M. B. Czechowski."
91. Dabrowski and Beach, 264.
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95. Ibid.
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98. de Prato.
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104. Daniel-Adrian Neagu, "The Family of Thoma Aslan and the Heritage of Mihail Belina Czechowski in Romania," paper, presented at the Conference in memory of Czechowski in Podkowa Leśna, Poland, 2014; Dan-Adrian Petre, "Crafting the History of Adventism in Romania: The Challenge of Michael Belina Czechowski's Mission to Romania," *Journal of Adventist Archives* 5 (2025): 39.
105. Czechowski, "Mission Letters from Hungary," *WC*, January 12, 1870, 68.
106. Andrews, "Switzerland."
107. Dabrowski and Beach, 342, 344.
108. Dabrowski and Beach, 352–356.
109. D. T. Bourdeau, letter to James and Ellen White, March 23, 1876, in possession of the Ellen G. White Estate, the General Conference.
110. Uebersax.
111. Vaucher, 42; the Ellen G. White Estate at the General Conference has a copy of his death certificate.
112. Uebersax, 354.
113. No author, "The Seventh-day Adventists of Europe," *ARH*, November 30, 1869, 181.
114. General Conference Session, 1870, "Switzerland," March 15, 47, Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, accessed September 4, 2025,
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116. John Vuilleumier, "Early Days of the Message in Europe," *ARH*, March 28, 1929, 11, 12.
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