Piotr Wilczek

Polonia Reformata: Essays on the Polish Reformation(s). Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Academic, 2016. Pp. 145. Hb, \$100.

Until October 2016, Piotr Wilczek was an active scholar and researcher in Poland, directing the Center for the Study of the Reformation and Intellectual Culture in Early Modern Europe and teaching the humanities at the University of Warsaw. His specialty is early modern Polish religious history. However, on October 21, 2016, the president of Poland appointed Wilczek as ambassador to the United States and the Bahamas. One presumes that he will have less time in the next few years to devote to scholarly research: all the more reason to highlight his recent collection of essays on the Polish Reformation(s).

The history of the Polish Reformation, like that of the Reformation in Hungary, Bohemia, or Transylvania has struggled to gain attention in the broader field of Reformation studies for a number of reasons, many of which are outlined in Wilczek's work. One major hurdle has been the language. Although there are numerous careful studies of the Reformation in Poland, many of these are only available in Polish, and the lack of knowledge of eastern European languages among western Europeans and North Americans has proved to be a persistent barrier. A second challenge, at least up until the 1990s, was the lack of accessibility of eastern European archives to those coming from elsewhere. Furthermore, the impact of Communism on Reformation studies meant that certain interpretations were clearly favored over others, thus shaping the field over many decades in specific directions.

Those hoping to turn to Wilczek's book for a general overview of the history of the Reformation in Poland should look elsewhere. What this work offers is a series of vignettes on different aspects of the Reformation in Poland, with a particular emphasis on the anti-Trinitarian community, known as the Polish Brethren or the Minor Church. No overall narrative or central thesis is provided. Many of the individual studies were originally given as conference presentations and/or have previously been published, either in Polish or in English. Wilczek's introduction, focusing on the historiography of early modern Poland, offers a helpful entry-point into how the Reformation in Poland has been portrayed in both older and more recent works of scholarship. Wilczek pleads eloquently for more attention to be paid to Poland's experience in the early modern era, pointing out that Poland and Central Europe's experience of the Reformation needs to be understood as an "equal and integral part of European history" (12).

In the main body of the work, Wilczek offers essays on the changing attitudes towards the role of religion in Poland's various Reformations. The resurgence of Catholicism in Poland from the seventeenth century onwards largely obscured the significant impact of various forms of Protestantism in Poland in the previous century. Yet, as Wilczek notes, the Reformation remained "only an episode" (22) in Polish religious history, largely due to the failure of Protestant communities to put down more permanent social and theological roots. He analyzes John Calvin's impact in Poland through the reception of the Genevan Reformer's writings, and points out that no full translation of Calvin's *Institutes* is yet available in Polish. In his analysis of writings on the Polish Reformation, he argues that new scholars and new research are needed, and particularly laments the assessments of the Polish Reformation done by scholars without access to primary sources or a strong knowledge of Polish. He carefully disentangles the trends in Polish-language research on the anti-Trinitarians, noting the ways in which that research in the mid-twentieth century was shaped by communism's interest in the anti-Trinitarians' history in Poland as a foil to the ongoing influence of the Catholic Church.

Among the strongest sections of the work is the essay on anti-Trinitarian theology, providing a succinct summary of the key Socinian doctrines. Wilczek's presentation of other aspects of Polish anti-Trinitarian activity, including the Racovian Catechism and polemics with the Jesuits, helps flesh out English-language readers' understanding of the impact of the Polish Brethren in the early modern era.

Those with an interest in early modern Jesuits may be most interested in the section that discusses sixteenth-century debates between Jesuits and Protestants. Wilczek carefully explains the characteristics of early modern polemic and notes the importance of stepping away from twenty-first-century norms of theological discourse to understand the forceful language of these debates within the context of the time. He surveys in particular the polemical works of Polish Jesuits Marcin Łaszcz and Piotr Skarga. Łaszcz wrote tracts against the Polish Brethren and against Luther, suggesting that Luther was in fact in league with the devil. For his part, Skarga engaged in polemic with Socinians over the authority of the Bible in establishing and interpreting true doctrine.

In his last section, Wilczek offers a few case studies of poets and writers from the Polish Brethren, analyzing in particular their religious trajectories and the content of their writings.

Given the relative dearth of current publications in English on the Reformation in Poland, Wilczek's collection of essays serves as a helpful foretaste of

what could be achieved by Polish or international scholars invested in connecting the history of the Reformation in Poland more effectively to the wider field of Reformation studies.

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