

INTRODUCTION

Historiography usually considers the Reformation as something much bigger than just the aspiration to reorganise spiritual life by turning to a transformed and more profound interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. It led to the creation of a new management model within Christianity that was based on the *Summus Episcopus* principle. This model not only advocated autonomy for specific territorial units of the Church, which was linked to the secular authorities in each country, but also prompted the secular authorities to impose their control over the network of churches, and assume direct responsibility for the pastoral care of their members.

Although Biblicism, an evangelical approach to the Bible based on the principle of *sola scriptura*, did not make the Bible the only source of theology (the faith), it referred to it as the ultimate and supreme authority. This approach led to the academic training of theologians, along with the emergence of the basic literacy that was necessary to integrate the postulates of the faith into daily life. These challenges created preconditions for the potential of the academic theologian to emerge, which was concentrated in newly established or reorganised universities, and created new directions for research, focusing on a deeper critical knowledge of the sources of the Holy Scriptures and the tradition of theological thought. Demands emerged to assess the sources critically, as did efforts to understand the peculiarities of the linguistic contexts arising from the source translation.

Even today, the most important achievement of the Reformation is considered to be the systematically implemented provision to develop the faith and communicate its postulates in the vernacular languages. This provision not only stimulated the development of individual national languages, the use of which used to be confined to a domestic milieu. The gradual but active development of primary and secondary education in the mother tongue, which covered an increasing number of different sectors of society, replaced the role Latin had played in the public (and later religious) life of society, typical of the pluri-cultural political entities of Medieval Europe, where its sphere of influence was restricted to rather narrow public elites.

Through the rapid expansion of the press, the Reformation encouraged confessional pluralism, which created preconditions for the establishment of the Anglican, Lutheran and Reformed confessions several years later. At the same time, it provided an opportunity to advocates of radical currents within the Reformation to disseminate their ideas. When these began questioning the fundamental Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity, the leaders of the Reformation were forced to react strictly: Jean Calvin condemned Michael

Servetus (Miguel Serveto) to death in 1553, and Philipp Melanchthon refused to engage in discussion with Petrus Gonesius (Piotr z Goniądz), a radical Lithuanian reformer who questioned the dogma of the Trinity in 1556. Confessional pluralism, which developed against the background of the complex political and social processes triggered by the Reformation, and the old Church, which began to actively defend its position, caused religious wars in Central Europe, which often escalated into spontaneous social rebellions.

In Western Europe, religious wars, the persecution of dissenters, and intolerance between believers of different currents in the Reformation, produced a huge wave of 'refugees of conscience', in addition to the existing flows of economic migrants. They sought refuge in the countries of the southeast Baltic region in the 16th and 17th centuries. Scots, Germans, Austrians, French Huguenots, Dutch and Swiss, as well as supporters of the Unity of the Brethren (Bohemian Brethren), all found a relatively safe haven under the patronage of powerful patrons of the Reformation. Their economic prowess facilitated their integration into local society, and all of this was often accompanied by legal guarantees that allowed them to profess their faith openly, in addition to conditions for the free and open-minded nurturing of spiritual values.

This collection of articles focuses on this region on the southeast coast of the Baltic Sea, more than on an individual historical entity. We aim to move away slightly from interpretations of the Reformation within the boundaries of individual political structures that historiography has long been dominated by, and draw attention to the whole region. In the southeast Baltic, the ideas of Church reform received a relatively quick response. Despite the fact that it were spread unevenly across different sectors of society, overall, the Reformation provided a strong cultural impetus. However, with a few minor exceptions, its impact did not develop into armed confrontation. This is why the southeast region of the Baltic Sea became an area where, unlike Western and Central Europe, changing political, moral and economic currents evolved into relative tolerance between confessions, in spite of a few intense struggles over religious ideas between followers of different faiths.

In the historical narratives that the countries on the southeast coast of the Baltic Sea have developed so far, the belief is quite firmly rooted that the ideas of the reformed church came from the homeland of the Reformation, that is, present-day Germany. The Duchy of Prussia is seen as a bridge for the dissemination of these ideas, and participants in the *peregrinatio academica*, young people who studied at various European universities during the period of major transformations, are considered to be the milieu through which these ideas became established in local societies. This interpretation has provided many valuable statements and insights, which is why the mechanism of engagement with the ideas of the Reformation, its origins, and knowledge of the dissemination processes, have all been fairly well investigated.

This set of articles not only returns to the topic of the establishment of the Reformation in certain areas of the region (the article by Friedrich Johannsen and Jens Riechmann on Prussia, and the article by Ulrich Schoenborn on Courland), but also attempts to touch on a few less often considered aspects. One of them is the reflection of the ideas of the Reformation in the material culture (the contributions from Kristi Viiding, Raimonda Nabažaitė and Ojārs Spārītis). Although the amount of research on material artefacts is still relatively small for a comparative analysis, this direction is obviously promising, and might open up many new opportunities to understand both the spread of the Reformation and the general cultural context. Of course, this requires not only a new approach to these artefacts, but also the competence and ability of the relevant researchers to apply an interdisciplinary approach.

Most contributions in this book deal with the establishment and spread of the Reformation in the Duchy of Prussia, the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia, and the rest of the former Livonian Confederation. Compared to these areas, Royal (Polish) Prussia, the rest of Poland, and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania are not so well covered, and even omitted. These areas have been analysed quite thoroughly in historiography, although it is often done, as is mentioned above, within the boundaries of a single state. Nevertheless, these regions are not completely excluded from the treatment. They often make an appearance in one context or another, whereas the contribution from S.C. Rowell deals specifically with appeal cases that appeared before the Consistory Court in Gniezno and involved residents of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Although this has little to do with the spread or the establishment of the Reformation, it complements comprehensively our knowledge on the establishment of Catholicism in the area (especially in Samogitia/Žemaitija, the region between Prussia and Livonia) in the Reformation period.

Probably the weakest link in the current national historiographies of the Reformation lies in the examination of its long-term effects. For instance, a number of researchers of the Commonwealth of the Two Nations still believe that, with the failure in the creative powers of the Reformation, and the transition of structures created by the Reformation to the stage of preserving existential positions, the impact of the Reformation on society in the region fundamentally declined. It is believed that in many key areas that shaped society, it gave up its position to the Roman Catholic Church. Many researchers assume that, from the moment when the Reformed churches began to act as minorities, it is no longer possible to talk about the impact of the ideas that formed during the Reformation period on the societies of the southeast Baltic. From that moment, the impact of these ideas should allegedly be restricted to the Protestant communities themselves, but these communities were too weak to be able to leave a deeper footprint on the development of the whole country. Perhaps the only exception in this field of research is the long-term impact

of the ideas of the Reformation on the non-German subjects of the Prussian Duke (also represented in the collection, with articles by Darius Petkūnas and Žavinta Sidabraitė). Even so, those who deal with the Prussian Lithuanians rarely connect the long-term impact of the Reformation on them with that in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. But Hartmut Rudolph's article on the activities of Daniel Ernst Jablonski shows that the ideas that were born in the Reformation period, typical of the Commonwealth of the Two Nations, were 'retransmitted' and found a significant resonance among the political elites of the Prussian court in the early 18th century. This makes it necessary to reexamine well-established statements that the effects of the ideas of the Reformation lasted until a much earlier point, and this is true not only about the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

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It is evident that there are still many under-researched aspects relating to the Reformation, its spread, and its impact on society, while the comparative element in this research, the understanding of changes in the whole of the southeast Baltic region, still needs to be developed. This remains a prerequisite for the future in Reformation studies.

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