RADICAL REFORMERS IN POLAND: A REVIEW ARTICLE

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George H. Williams; Editor, Translator, and Interpreter.
The Polish Brethren: Documentation of the History and Thought of Unitarianism in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and in the Diaspora, 1601-1685. Harvard Theological Studies Number 30: Scholars' Press, Missoula, Montana, 1980. In Two Parts, $8.00 each part (paper).

It was almost two decades ago that George H. Williams introduced Reformation scholars to the term "The Radical Reformation," with many articles and his book by the same name. Of the three basic divisions within that designation (Anabaptists, Spirituals, and Evangelical Rationalists), the first two groups have received continued attention with documents and books concerning them appearing regularly. One gets the impression, however, that the third group, being more diverse and with more individualistic interpretations, has received relatively less attention than the other two. There were Evangelical Rationalists who interpreted the Bible while remaining in the Roman Catholic Church (such as Cardinal Ximenes, Jacques Lefevre d'Etaples, and Erasmus). There were others who criticized certain doctrines of the major reformers (such as Servetus), some emphasized freedom and toleration (such as Castellio); while others espoused Unitarian views (such as Laelius Socinus and his nephew, Faustus Socinus). Now Williams has returned to the Evangelical Rationalists, and has prepared for us a collection of documents which reflect the influence of Faustus Socinus, among others, and one major national group within the century following Socinus' own death (d. 1604). This is a welcome addition to the story of one segment of the Evangelical Rationalists, known variously as the "Polish Brethren," the "Unitarians," or the "Arians," depending on how much or how little one respects this theology.

In two parts Williams presents us with a 773-page work with many helps for the scholar finding his way into the materials. There are before us 40 documents pertaining to 17th Century Poland—actually, his numbering system goes from I to XXXV, but in at least five instances, two related documents are listed under one number, such as XXXV-I and XXXV-II. The earliest work is a summary of a colloquium of 1601, largely the work of Faustus Socinus toward the end of his life (Document III); while the last in chronological order is from the year 1684, a history of the century concerning one who had lived through most of it (Document I). The subject of this history was Andrew Wiszowaty, a grandson of Socinus. Between these dates there are

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documents of a theological nature and of political policy, letters, decrees, sections of histories of the group written within the 17th Century, a statement of Church order, and pleas for understanding and toleration. Some documents were translated from Polish, some from Latin, and some are contemporary editions of translations from an earlier era. Each is followed by a thorough set of footnotes. Preceding each document is a "Preface" giving some of the context and the significance of each piece in the development of the 17th Century Church. The prefaces are likewise thoroughly documented.

In addition to the printed documents, there are 18 Plates indicated with the letters A to R. Most of them are photographs or paintings—of churches or of people significant in the developing story. The final Plate is a fold-out map, showing in great detail the Poland-Lithuania of the 17th Century. That the same map is placed at the back of each volume is a help for the researcher who has only one volume at his disposal. The detailed "Narrative Explanation of the Map" (7 pages) comes only at the end of the second volume. One of the most interesting Plates for this reviewer is numbered H (pp. 376f.). It is entitled "Arianismus Proscriptus," and shows in the foreground a gathering of officials, Church and lay, deciding the fate of the dissenters (Polish Brethren/ Unitarians). Many of the figures are identified. In the background one can see the exiles making their way out of Rakow in 1638, after they were banned. Unfortunately, a careful reading of the explanation which accompanies the Plate indicates certain discrepancies. The text points out that in the foreground there are eight chairs, four on each side, in which certain individuals are seated with their backs to the reader. Alas, the printed version shows only six chairs! A printing error resulted in the painting's being so severely cropped as to eliminate one chair—and one participant—on either side of the picture. Furthermore, the text refers to the book in the foreground, at the bottom of the picture. Unfortunately, this has also been trimmed off! Williams plans to reissue the picture in a later work on the same Church developments so the reader can see the whole work. It is of special interest that a copy of this painting was provided to Williams by Karol Cardinal Wojtyla before he was elected Pope John Paul II.

Other helps are provided for the scholar who is working his way into this land far removed from most Reformation studies which relate to Western Europe. Williams has composed a "Conspectual and Analytical Index" before the first document. This is a systematic summary of theological ideas under 17 major headings, covering 14 pages with dozens of sub-heads. These references are then coded to the relevant page in the work, whether in documents or in footnotes. Likewise, for the reader who is not knowledgeable concerning the complex history of the Polish-Lithuanian people, the editor has compiled in seven pages a "Table of Events" from 1587 to 1701. This gives another context for the events referred to in the documents not only the religious history, but also the political and military developments which were so crucial for the Church of the Polish Brethren.

The Polish, the Hungarian, or the Lithuanian languages are not a part of most Reformation scholars' preparation, and because most of us relate more to religious developments of various Western European countries, the developments farther east are less known to us than they should be. For these same reasons, most of us know less than the minimum concerning the history and the geography of the region. In the Introduction to the total collection of documents Williams gives a sketch of the political history of the area. Because there are no natural boundaries to the vast land, political divisions have changed drastically from century to century. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was the largest state in Europe at the beginning of the 16th Century, although this included many smaller groups subjugated to their political jurisdiction. Two peoples (Poles and Lithuanians) were related because of a common king since 1386, and in 1572 were even more closely associated constitutionally by the Union of Lublin. Conflicts with the growing power of Russia were already beginning, and by 1600 the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was second in size as compared with the expanding Russian Tsardom. Even so, in 1600 Polish-Lithuanian control extended from the Baltic almost to the Black Sea, and from Prussia east to both Kiev and Smolensk, and included the Ukraine as well. During the 17th Century Poland-Lithuania fought Sweden, Turkey and Russia, and lost territory in most of the battles. This was one cause of internal turmoil for the Polish-Lithuanian government which had an influence on the religious changes. By 1795 what had been the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was completely divided three ways by Russia, Austria and Prussia, and Poland was no more until the settlements after World War I again carved out a nation.

The religious developments within the Commonwealth were likewise diverse and complex. A major factor in the ecclesiastical complexity of the region is the vague line which passes through Poland dividing the Roman Catholic from the Eastern Orthodox rites. The Polish people were largely Roman Catholic, and the Lithuanians and their subject peoples to the south and east, largely Orthodox. There were many Jews in the region who had attained certain privileges and some Muslims, surviving from the Tartar invasions or penetrating to the Ottoman Empire to the south. Protestant Reformation movements of many persuasions came to Poland by mid-16th Century. There were Hussites who came north from Bohemia. Lutheranism came in from the north by way of Danzig and Kőnigsberg, especially since there were many German-speaking citizens in all the large towns of Poland. Reformed influences, from Geneva as well as from Zu" rich, were strongly represented. Both Bullinger and Calvin were in correspondence with Polish and Lithuanian leaders, including the king. Mennonites and other Anabaptists came, largely from the Netherlands via the delta of the Vistula River. Finally, Caspar Schwenckfeld, of Silesia bordering royal Poland, brought a spiritualizing interpretation of the Radical Reformation. Because the Polish nobility or landowners (*szlachta*) maintained a political stance somewhat removed from

complete loyalty to the reigning monarch, they had certain freedom to maintain religious traditions different from the establishment. For a time there was tolerance among the various Christian groups, but then differences were magnified. In the Consensus of Sandomierz of 1570 the Lutheran, the Reformed and the Czech Brethren formed a federation which excluded the Polish Brethren ("Unitarians"). The latter group considered themselves part of the Reformed tradition and came therefore to be known as the Minor Reformed Church. They complained that after rejecting Roman Catholic doctrines, they had been proclaimed heretics by followers of Calvin "their companions in reforming the Church" (Document I, p. 22). Furthermore, in the Warsaw Confederation of electors of 1573, the majority of Senators and Deputies entitled to vote accepted the *Pax Dissidentium,* guaranteeing freedom to all dissenting for matters of faith before they proceeded to elect Henry Valois (later Henry III of France) as their king.

In 1579 a most influential leader arrived in Poland. He was Faustus Socinus (1539-1604) from Siena, Italy, who ultimately gave his name to the movement of the Polish Brethren. He remained in Poland until his death, except for a brief sojourn in Transylvania. Socinus had lived in Basel, and had written several theological works before this date. He brought the largely unorganized Polish Brethren into a more coherent order, although not all of his theological ideas were accepted by the Brethren, as will be noted below. He is represented in this collection by two documents. The first is a summary of a Colloquium held in Rakow in 1601 (Document III). The other is his last known letter written six weeks before his death (Document VI-I).

The Polish Brethren looked to the city of Rakow as their center from its founding by like-minded individuals in 1569. Although they were referred to disparagingly, the Brethren founded a strong center, establishing a school and a printing press in addition to the Church. In an attempt to allay misunderstanding and criticism for other religious groups, George Schomann, the minister at Rakow, wrote his *Catechesis et confessio fidei* in 1574. This was the first theological summary of the anti-pedobaptist, proto-Unitarian group in Poland. This statement would later be thoroughly rewritten and expanded into the *Racovian Catechism* (1605). Ulitmately, however, prejudice and opportunism had its results. In 1638, after more than a half century at Rakow, the Polish Brethren were expelled (see Plate H, pp. 376-378, noted above). Document I tells some of these details (pp. 27f.). A small group of students caused a small riot and destroyed a crucifix. Blame was unjustly placed on the Unitarian congregation. Officials took this as an opportunity to bring the Unitarian group into judgment. A hasty hearing was arranged and the Brethren were condemned and exiled. Their property, printing press, and school were destroyed. Thereafter (until 1660) they made their center at Kieselin, almost 200 miles to the east (Document XXI).

The idea of peace for the dissidents, which had been the law since 1573, was reiterated in the election of John Casimir (King of Poland-Lithuania,

1648-1668) (see Document XXIV-I, p. 645), but rescinded by him ten years after he became king (Document XXVI, printed as embedded in Document I, p. 39). The reasoning was that the Polish Brethren were not dissident Christians, but Arian heretics, and as such should not come under the *Pax Dissidentium* (Document XXIX). This rejection of the long-standing promise for freedom gave "Arians" three years to dispose of their goods and leave the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, or convert to Roman Catholicism. Later the time was reduced to two years, and the exodus and dispersion came in 1660 instead (Document XXX). In the latter year a colloquy was held in Roznow in which Polish Brethren and Roman Catholic representatives debated their differences (Document XXXI). This made no difference, however, and the Brethren were driven to Transylvania, Prussia, Silesia, and especially to the Netherlands. Two letters written in 1661 and 1663 by exiles are included (Documents XXXIII-I, II).

One major aspect of the development of the Polish Brethren was the Racovian Catechism. As noted above, a preliminary statement was published in 1574 by George Schomann. The definitive statement, however, called "II Catechism" by Williams, is much longer and more comprehensive and became the standard text for the next century. There were 13 editions of the more complete Catechism II within the 17th Century. That these involved revisers and printers in three countries outside Poland shows some of the often overlooked international character of the theological movement. The Polish original was completed in 1605 (Rakow) (Document VI-II) with another edition in 1619. Latin editions were as follows: 1609 (dedicated to King James I of England, and soon burned by authorities there) (Document VIII), 1651 (London), 1665[1] ("post annum 1659," in "Irenopolis," actually Amsterdam—the unusual publishing details were to mislead censors) (Document XXXVI-I), 1680 (Amsterdam), 1681, 1684, 1793. There were four editions in the Dutch language: 1659, 1665, 1666, 1667. Two appeared in German: 1608 (with a preface dedicated to the senate of the University of Wittenberg), 1612. Finally, in English there were two editions: 1652 (Amsterdam), 1818 (London). The title page of the 1605 Polish edition, which Williams translates, indicates some of their distinct theology. "Catechism of the Church of those people who, in the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and in other Domains belonging to the crown, affirm and confess that no other than the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the only God of Israel and that that Man Jesus the Nazarene, who was born of the Virgin, and no other besides Him, is the only begotten Son of God" (Plate E, p. 180f.)

This catechism is also called by its author, an "Institute of the Christian Religion, drawn from the Scriptures" (Document XXXV-I, p. 689). It was composed by close followers of Faustus Socinus, and was probably based on some theological writing in which he was engaged at the time of his death.

[1]This date of "1665" is correct ("post annum 1659"), whereas footnote 7, p. 188, has a type-setting error, erroneously listing a document 10 years earlier—hence not "post 1659."

Williams includes only the Table of Contents of the original because the one extant copy of the 1605 edition was not available to him (Document VI-II). He also includes several sections taken from the 1609 Latin edition (Document VIII). He notes that the same basic content appears in all versions, although often in a slightly different order. Finally, a significant section from the last revision (1680, Document XXXV-I) shows how there were modifications because of cultural changes. The 17th Century editor indicates this without apology when in his statement "to the pious reader" he states: "We do not think that we ought to be ashamed if in some respect our church improves" (Document XXXV-I, p. 694).

Because it was fairly consistent standard throughout the whole 17th Century, we will look at some of the theological contributions of the Polish Brethren according to the outline of the Racovian Catechism of 1605 (Document VI-II). This will not be a summary of the Catechism, but certain similar emphases distilled from other documents will be noted. The first section is entitled "Of the Holy Scripture." By calling this movement an aspect of the Evangelical Rationalists, we do not suggest that reason was used at the expense of scripture, but rather, that a reasonable approach was taken to the scriptures themselves. In 1578, for example, Socinus had written *De Auctoritate Sacrae Scripturae.* The literal understanding was to be used, which is the main reason the group rejected the Nicene philosophical concepts, and the Chalcedonian speculation. They conceived of revelation embodied especially in the New Testament, but according to their understanding, their respect for the scriptures was every bit as devoted and sincere as that of other Reformers. One example of this is their scriptural exposition of the Apostles' Creed (Document XXII). In their explanation they used 575 New Testament references and 50 from the Old Testament. Indeed, it is stated: "Scripture shows how the Church ought to believe, but the creed shows how it did believe, even from the beginning" (p. 391). They presupposed the necessity of revelation, but this was through their understanding and interpretation of the scriptures.

The heading of the second section of the catechism is: "Concerning the way of Salvation." The emphasis was not on a divine Being united with human nature, but rather on an obedient man to which God granted certain powers, and even a special status after his resurrection and ascension. More ideas on salvation and atonement appear in a later paragraph in contrast to the document written by Hugo Grotius.

Sections III and IV refer to the Knowledge of God, and of Christ, respectively. Document XXI is an exposition in 1631 concerning the Unity of God in which the author (John Krell) stated: "It seemed requisite to full explication of that Unity [of God] that we should show that most high God to be One, not in essence only but also in Person and to be none other than the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (p. 312). To know that God was only one, and that He chose Jesus for a special purpose is necessary for one's salvation. Likewise they presupposed that Jesus was a man as noted above, "Nor can anything be

found in the writings of the apostles regarding the divinity of Christ" (Document XXII, p. 408). God proved the teachings of Jesus to be true by using miracles. Furthermore, they presupposed that the Holy Spirit was a gift or a power not separate from God. "We believe and confess that the Holy Spirit is a divine Spirit, which is a holy divine power, being always with God" (Document VII, Sec. 7).

Sections V, VI and VII refer to the three-fold role of Jesus Christ as Prophet (Teacher), King and Priest, respectively. Williams points out that this triple function of Christ was reflected in the earlier *Catechesis* of 1574, but even before that it was a part of the thought of Erasmus, Martin Bucer and Calvin and was then carried to Poland by John Laski. Among the aspects of Christ the Teacher there are teachings under 11 sub-headings, including the Supper of the Lord, baptism and Free Will. It was with reference to two of these doctrines that Socinus came into conflict with those who later took his name. Because he had partially spiritualized baptism, he failed to consider it a necessity (Document VI-I). In fact, he refused rebaptism of adults by immersion (p. 179), although adult baptism had become normative among the Polish Brethren. As a consequence, he was refused the communion, which he believed to be an unjust act. Believers' baptism as understood in 1646 is included in Document XXXII, C. The eucharist is celebrated "in commemoration of the Lord" (Document XXIII, D). The will is free: "They to whom the gospel is declared or announced can accept this holy faith if they wish, and they can spurn it if they wish, and . . . they who accept this holy faith can lose it through their hardness of heart and their carelessness" (Document VII, p. 203). (See also Document VIII, B.4.)

One further aspect of the Prophetic (teaching) role of Christ concerns his death. This was necessary only because it preceded the more important resurrection and ascension. Indeed, there were *two* ascensions of Christ. The first was to gain knowledge before he became a teacher. "We believe that the Son of man, even before he proclaimed the gospel, ascended into heaven, and descended from heaven" (Document XXII, p. 408). The second ascension was so that he could take his place at the right hand of God.

The Kingly role of Christ refers to his ruling from the right hand of God (Document VII, C). The Priestly role relates to his sacrifice and his redeeming man from sins. This could be fulfilled only after Christ was no longer on earth (Hebrews 7:26). Some Brethren argued that unrighteous persons, and pre-Christians of all races and nations would not be resurrected. To counteract the concept of purgatory, the Brethren along with other radicals, argued that the soul went to sleep at death to await resurrection with the body (Document XV).

The eighth and last section of the Racovian Catechism concerned the Church. This is the visible and invisible body of believers in the true scriptural doctrine over which Christ rules as King or Priest. Interestingly, the Ecclesiastical Polity of 1646 (Document XXIII, B) lists six offices of the Church.

The first is the political patron, who owned the land and the Church property. The four orders of Calvin are condensed to three with the amalgamation of Doctor-Pastor. The last two are the communicant members already immersed, and the young in the beginning stage of faith. Discipline with the congregation was taken very seriously, perhaps due to earlier Hutterite and ongoing Mennonite influence (Document XXXV-I-C). Finally, there was disagreement as to the relation between the church and the state, the interpretation of Romans 13, and the use of the sword. In general the Brethren tended toward pacifism (Document XXXV-II).

A special discussion relating the thought of the Netherlands Lawyer, Hugo Grotius, with the theology of Socinius is included in the collection. In 1578, Socinius had finished *De Jesu Christo Servatore (Concerning Jesus Christ, Savior),* while he was in Basel. In 1617, Hugo Grotius, the Remonstrant, defended what he believed to be the orthodox Anselmian-Calvinistic doctrine of the atonement in "A defense of the Catholic Faith Concerning the Satisfaction of Christ against the Sienese Faustus Socinus." This 224-page document is condensed by Williams to 20 pages, and with a preface and notes appears as Document X. It is Williams' contention, however, that while Grotius opposed Socinius, he was also influenced by him and produced what in fact is neither Anselmian-Calvinistic, nor Socinian. Rather, he presented an alternative view related at some points with either the one or the other. Since the idea of the atonement is a significant contribution of the thought of the Polish Brethren, we will summarize and contrast these three approaches briefly.

Anselm (d. 1109) in his *Cur Deus Homo* argued that the honor of God has been jeopardized because of sin and that satisfaction must be made to restore the honor of God. Man while *needing to do this,* because of inferiority and sin could not do it. Only a divine being on the level with God *could do this,* but did not need to do so. Consequently, he argued that Jesus Christ as the God-Man both could make the satisfaction (as God) and ought to make satisfaction (as man). This, of course, presupposes the Nicene-Constantinopolitan formulation of the Trinity of three *hypostaseis* united in one *ousia*, as well as the Chalcedonian Christology of the divine and human natures united in one person Jesus Christ.

Socinus presented a different approach because he began with different presuppositions on most of the above assertions. Anselm argued that the demand for satisfaction was a part of the nature of God, and His nature should not be compromised. Socinus argued, instead, that satisfaction relates to the will of God. Consequently, for Socinus, God's nature does not demand, nor need satisfaction; the obedience of man is sufficient. Jesus Christ, for Socinus, was not a Chalcedonian God-man, but rather was a Man, "divinized" by God. Furthermore, it was not in the death that the atonement was accomplished, but in the example of obedience. He quoted I Peter 2:21: "Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps." This obe-

dience was confirmed by the resurrection which emphasized more than the voluntary death. The "satisfaction" was a type of "acceptilation"—a Roman legal term meaning a "token" payment in place of a much larger punishment that might be demanded.

Hugo Grotius agreed with Socinus that man was created mortal and that death was not a result of sin. He also emphasized the idea that God's part in the atonement was because of His will and not demanded by His nature. The Dutch lawyer, however, presupposed the Chalcedonian divine-human Christ. Grotius was thus presented with a problem: How to make the death of an innocent person appear to be both just and reasonable—how to make Calvary appear humane. He assumed what has been called the "government" or "rectorial" theory of the atonement. God is not the offended party but is the ruler of all. His purpose is not to receive satisfaction, but to maintain order and justice. God's right to punish is not for His own good, but the good of the community. God is not subject to the law, but the administrator of it, and the law demands administration of justice. God chooses to punish one innocent person rather than maintain the threat over all people for all ages. It is not, however, unjust that God chooses an innocent man, for God's acts are for the good of all, and in a sense beyond the letter of the law. What God does cannot be deemed unjust. By punishing one innocent man God chooses to relax the law of justice, which is according to His will, His extreme mercy and His love. As such, however, it is an administration of justice and not an "acceptilation" of which Grotius accuses Socinus. The death on the cross was for Grotius, as for Anselm-Calvin, a once and for all sufficient sacrifice to restore God's honor or his justice. For Socinus, however, it was an example of perfect obedience which was only the beginning of a life-long commitment on the part of the believer.

Unfortunately, the ideas of toleration and understanding which the Evangelical Rationalists emphasized so strongly, were not heeded or even heard by others. Pleas for toleration appear in Documents XI-I, XIV, XXIV-I, and XXIX. Perhaps the best summary of the concept is in the last edition of the Racovian Catechism, where we read: "Whilst we compose a Catechism, we prescribe nothing to any man: whilst we declare our own opinions, we oppress no one. Let every person enjoy the freedom of his own judgment in religion; only let it be permitted to us also to exhibit our view of divine things, without injuring and calumniating others" (Document XXXV-I, p. 690).

The foregoing are only samples of the vast mine of information which these two volumes of documents provide. Five of the "documents" (numbered 16 through 20) appear with numbers and chapter headings only—chapter titles are actually in Document XXXIII, Foreword, p. 637. They are part of the *Historia Reformationis Polonicae*, by a Polish knight, Stanislas Lubieniecki (d. 1675) published in 1685 (Amsterdam). This writing was commissioned by the Synod, and presents a unified history of the Polish Church of the early 17th Century. It has been referred to at many points in these documents.

Williams is preparing a new edition of the material written by Lubieniecki as a companion narrative closely related to these documents. It is to be issued as another of the *Harvard Theological Studies* in the near future. The same Polish historian is also represented in this collection of sources by Documents XIII and XXIX. A biographical sketch of Lubieniecki appears as Document XXVIII.

The present collection (along with the future history chapters on the Reformation in Poland) presents a way in which the specialist who does not know the Polish language can begin to understand the complex relation these peoples had with the Reformation in other parts of Europe. Alas, the documents are hardly something one would attempt to read through at one sitting! Rather, they are to be read, re-read, compared with each other, and related to the larger Polish and even European picture. Perhaps this extended review will give enough of the flavor of this collection that others will become curious enough to sample the religious history of Poland.

The user of the indices of these volumes is advised, however, that there are problems here. The Index of Modern Authors (1700 to the Present) is keyed to Documents, or Prefaces and Notes related to documents, posing no problems. Unfortunately, however, in the Index of Proper Names, and the Index of Places both at the end of the Second Part, and the extensive "Conspectual and Analytical Index" at the beginning of Part One, a serious discrepancy is noted. In these three indices, every page reference after p. 355 (*i.e.*, every reference to Part II) is off by 4 pages, and the reader must subtract 4 from the printed number. For example, in the Index, p. 737, the lone reference to Anthony of Padua is indicated as p. 684, whereas in fact it will be found on p. 680. The second reference to Alexander the Great (Index, p. 737) is indicated as p. 614. It is not on p. 610 as we might expect, but in the bottom line of p. 609! These indices were prepared from proof copies, according to pagination suggested by officials of the Scholars' Press. Why the changes were made in the final printed copy is unknown, but it is both confusing and inexcusable.

The volumes are dedicated to Williams' son-in-law and grand-daughter both of whom perished in an ice skating accident in December, 1974.