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**Natalia Nowakowska, *King Sigismund of Poland and Martin Luther: The Reformation before Confessionalization*, Oxford UP, 9780198813453, hbk, 2018**

**Review by Suzanna Ivanič (University of Kent)**

Why were Lutherans not persecuted in the lands of the Polish monarchy under King Sigismund I (1506-1548)? This book takes as its subject a seemingly peripheral conundrum about a largely forgotten region. Natalia Nowakowska contends that this was not a case of pragmatic toleration, but, rather, it was due to a lag in understanding how Christianity was changing. She traces how Sigismund and his associates still lived according to a late medieval ecclesiology in which the church was understood to be broad, inclusive and universal, and where doctrinal debate was an ongoing process. Meanwhile, Luther had redefined doctrine as fixed and absolute. *Sola fide* no longer left any room for debate, or deviation (p.30). At the crux of Nowakowska's argument is her analysis of the changing discourse of doctrine, initiated by Luther and which precipitated a fundamental shift in the core concepts of Christianity in the early sixteenth century.

Whilst Sigismund considered Lutherans to sit broadly within the Christian church and therefore did not deem them to be a heretical threat, Lutherans who strongly opposed Catholicism flourished in his realms largely unchecked. They were allowed to take hold in the Hanseatic towns of Royal Prussia, although efforts were made to control an uprising in Danzig in 1525-6. Sigismund appointed his Lutheran nephew, Albrecht of Brandenburg, Duke of Prussia in 1525 and vassal of the Polish Crown. Eleven anti-Lutheran edicts were issued in the *korona* between 1520 and 1540, but no crackdowns on heretics ensued. Of 59 cases against accused Lutherans in Polish and Prussian dioceses, 56 received no penalty (p.159). Sigismund's non-action left a vacuum in which Lutheranism thrived.

A decade ago John van Engen wrote about the 'multiple options' of belief and practice in the late medieval church. He suggested that this outlook continued to shape religious culture in the sixteenth century, because many of those who had grown up in this late medieval culture still lived by it. Nowakowska's research now provides a detailed case study tracing how this played out in the lands of the Polish monarchy. It further convincingly pinpoints the fundamental shift, not merely to a narrowing down of options, but to the changing discourse about doctrine initiated by Luther (Part I). Using J.G.A Pocock's Cambridge School advocating the contextual reading of political languages as inspiration for her methodology, Nowakowska analyses the contemporary language used in relation to 'Lutheranism' and 'Catholicism' in Part IV to further examine how these concepts were understood as they began to emerge.

The implications of the hypothesis are far-reaching. Much scholarship on the history of religion in the Reformation period in recent years could be characterised as falling into two broad areas: that concerning religious identity and that relating to toleration and coexistence. This work challenges the idea that confessions quickly and neatly split from each other in the early decades of the sixteenth century. Confessions were still being thrashed out, and we should take care not to label them with the clarity of hindsight. Rather, Nowakowska shows how a significant proportion of the population still held a worldview bound to late medieval ecclesiology. She advocates that historians of this period should take care to navigate this by writing about 'pre-confessional' and 'confessionalized' Catholicism (p.33) and by careful use of 'catholicism' and 'Catholicism'. For debates about toleration, Nowakowska shows how we should not mistake these groups talking past each other for coexistence and toleration. The paradox of Sigismund's reign reveals how men and women lived in different conceptual worlds at the same time.

It is perhaps not so surprising that Sigismund and his associates were slow to see how revolutionary Luther's change in the conceptualisation of doctrine was. This Polish case plays out at the very moment of conceptual rupture. They did not have the benefit of perspective, and some hoped that with time Lutherans would once again be subsumed into the church. Work on the late sixteenth century, for example by Howard Louthan, has however shown that this irenic perspective lingered on. Nowakowska's work should prompt us anew to investigate a chronology of confessionalization in

order to establish the fine grain of the development of confessional differences and identities, and the speed of change amongst different communities and social strata.

This book shows how important the study of Central and Eastern Europe is to the history of the Reformation. As the first monograph on the subject for over a century it brings the Polish material back into view and into contact with the core scholarship. On a higher level it prompts us to think not only about the catalysts for historical change, but also about how people lived through, experienced and recognised great historical changes as they happened.

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