

INTRODUCTION



Research into the origins of the Polish statehood and the roots of the Christian religion grafted onto it in the second half of the tenth century has continued since the establishment of modern historiography in the nineteenth century. A variety of questions have been posed throughout the past two centuries regarding the role and significance of Christianity of the Latin Rite in the history of the Piast state, the succeeding Jagiellonian monarchy and the reborn Republic of Poland. Successive generations of historians, archaeologists and theologians have indefatigably sought to expound on the phenomena appertaining to the imposition and consolidation of the new religion in the area of emerging Poland within a wider historical and territorial context. The upcoming 1050th anniversary of the act of baptism of Mieszko I has strongly encouraged deep reflection upon the subject; an idea to adopt a broad perspective on the concatenation of events of the second half of the tenth century and present them against the background of Christianity spanning the European continent was therefore born in the Poznań historical milieu. It is intended that the process that in 966 prompted Mieszko I to adopt Christianity, which then consolidated in the eleventh and twelfth centuries owing to the activity of his successors, is to be examined in three volumes. The first volume looks at the dissemination of the new religion throughout the European continent and in its immediate vicinity in the first millennium AD; others will seek to explore the expansion of Christianity into the Younger Europe (East-Central Europe) and, finally, its installation in the Piasts' *regnum* in the second half of the tenth century.

In this book – the first part of the planned ‘trilogy’ – sixteen authors discuss the origins of Christianity, its rise and consolidation both within the Roman Empire and beyond, up to the tenth century, ground-breaking in this respect. The first texts cover the earliest centuries of Christianity in the Roman Empire. Maria Dzielska provides an overview of religious issues with which the Romans dealt from the times of Augustus

up to the sixth century (*Religious issues in the Roman Empire*), while Kazimierz Ilski elucidates the legal aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman Empire. The processes of the spread of Christianity in the first centuries AD are set out by Fr Stanisław Adamiak and the issues appertaining to the organisational structures of the Church in early Christianity are systematised by Sławomir Bralewski (*'Priority resulting from seniority' – administration of the Church in early Christianity*).

Two other great universal religions related to Christianity are referred to by Rafał Witkowski and Zdzisław Pentek. R. Witkowski addresses the issue of Judaism (Mosaism), particularly the development of Proselystic trends within Mosaism, while Z. Pentek describes the relations between the followers of three great religions, to wit: Christianity, Judaism and Islam in the Early Middle Ages. Both authors go far beyond the boundaries of continental Europe, showing the Judeo-Christian-Islamic contact area in Asia Minor, the Middle East, the Iberian Peninsula and Sicily.

Leszek Paweł Słupecki and Stanisław Rosik are interested in pre-Christian (primary) religions of the tribes occupying Europe. The authors' focus is on the Slavs, Balts and Germanic peoples along with the religions professed by these societies in the context of ethnic and comparative studies. S. Rosik explores the ethnic paradigm in the investigations of the religious systems of the Slavs and Balts in the pre-Christian period, while L. P. Słupecki outlines the panorama of beliefs of the Germanic peoples in the face of outside influences.

The last and most extensive part of the work refers to the expansion of Christianity beyond the borders of the Roman Empire, mostly in the region of broadly defined *Barbaricum*. It begins with the paper by Krzysztof Stopka, who examines the problem of Christianity on the border between Europe and Asia (Armenia, Caucasian Albania, Persia, Asian missions), and in Ethiopia. Jan Prostko-Prostyński and Dariusz Andrzej Sikorski look into the Germanic world undergoing Christianisation. The former scrutinises the Germanic peoples who penetrated the Roman Empire and encountered Christianity therein, while the later inquiries into the propagation of the new religion among the peoples of Germanic Germania. Jerzy Strzelczyk and Maksymilian Sas take us into the world of culture and Christianity peculiar to the British Isles. J. Strzelczyk acquaints the Reader with the processes and phenomena that accompanied the Christianisation of Ireland, while M. Sas considers the course of conversions of rulers and illustrates his reflections with an example of Æthelberht of Kent and Edwin of Northumbria.

The volume concludes with three texts, the first of which, by Maciej Salamon, at the same time prefigures our meticulous explorations to follow, i.e., the spread of Christianity throughout the 'Younger Europe', notably in the context of missions. Adam Krawiec synthetically shows the civilising role of Christianity in the Early Middle Ages, while Marek Cetwiński sums up the volume, putting an emphasis on anniversary themes (1050th anniversary of the baptism of Poland, or of Mieszko I) and the ways and methods of studying cultural and religious phenomena.

Based on detailed investigations, this collection of papers was intended as an attempt to highlight the importance of religious, social and ensuing cultural transformations that occurred throughout the first millennium AD and shaped the medieval *Respublica Christiana*, thereby forming our own civilisation. In our studies on the phenomena of both the past church institutions and religiousness in general, we have constantly sought original ways of expression and new research methods, yet we still have had to deal with scant, commonly biased sources, which are difficult to interpret. It behoves us to hope that *The Christianisation of Europe* will spark off fresh, not only anniversary discussions on the history of the Church and religiousness.

Poznań, December 2014

Józef Dobosz, Jerzy Strzelczyk