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**Rafał Prostek, *Ogród murem oddzielony od pustyni. Relacje Kościół-państwo, wolność sumienia i tolerancja religijna w myśli pierwszych baptystów*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Chrześcijańskiej Akademii Teologicznej w Warszawie, Warszawa**

Professor Rafał Prostek, Head of the Department of International Relations at the Cracow University of Economics, belongs to a group of recognized scholars of American political thought. His main publications – two widely cited monographs *Rzecz o sprawiedliwości. Komunitarystyczna krytyka współczesnego liberalizmu amerykańskiego* (Kraków 2004) and *Teista w demoliberalnym świecie. Rzecz o amerykańskich rozważaniach wokół rozumnej polityki* (Kraków 2014) are concerned with this area of knowledge. Also, a dissertation published in 2020 entitled *Ogród murem oddzielony od pustyni. Relacje Kościół-państwo, wolność sumienia i tolerancja religijna w myśli pierwszych baptystów* fit into this academic field of interest.

His latest work is at the same time an analysis in the field of the political science of religion, which as far as possible includes ecclesiology and religious politics. The monograph consists of an extensive methodological and theoretical introduction, two main parts and a conclusion rich in findings. The first part, entitled *Wolność wyznawcy warunkiem czystości Kościoła. Swobodne sumienie w myśli pierwszych baptystów*, is a kind of historical excursion on which the author takes the reader and guides him through the world of dogmas and church doctrines that were thoroughly revised by the Reformation, which in turn laid direct foundations for Baptism. Rafał Prostek flawlessly captures the genesis and specificity of this branch of Protestantism. He also introduces the figures who made the greatest contribution to the conceptualization and justification of Baptism. As the author is particularly interested in the politics of religion, he devotes most attention to analyzing the thought of those Baptists who proposed new solutions in this area of life, as well as in relation to the freedom of individual conscience and religious tolerance. On the ground of General Baptism, he describes the intellectual proposals of Thomas Helwys, John Murton, Leonard Busher, and John Smyth; and on the ground of Particular Baptism, the considerations of Christopher Blackwood and Samuel Richardson. Rafał Prostek dedicates a separate chapter to each of these thinkers, and those chapters are followed by ones of contextual analysis in which he quotes the findings of other Baptist scholars. An important procedure is also indicating the reactions

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to the radical Baptist views, i.e. *de facto* the reasons for the rejection of this branch of Christianity by Anglicanism and Presbyterianism.

The second part of the book, entitled '*Ciernie i osty*' w 'ogrodzie' Kościoła Massachusetts. *Relacje Kościoła z państwem w myśli pierwszych baptystów na ziemi amerykańskiej*, addresses the origins and development of Baptism in North America. Thus, we speak of the Republic of Saints in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, where a unique system of reference to the secular and the ecclesiastical was born. In such a context, the author analyzes the thought of Roger Williams (a man of 'desert' longing for a 'garden') – a prominent preacher, pastor and creator of an ideal model of State-Church relations, based on the necessity of separation of these entities and secularization of public power. Rafał Prostack uses a rich argumentation in his analysis, which leads him to a convincing postulate of including Williams' thought, along with those of other Baptist leaders (such as John Clarke), in the anthology of the most important texts in the history of religious policy reflection. The author succeeds in convincingly demonstrating that American Baptist thought, and postulates that they are a consequence of the achievements of London Baptists, and that the denominator of all these reflections is a radical turn to the time before the reign of Emperor Constantine the Great.

The authors conclusion provides an exemplary listing of research findings. The main, positively verified hypothesis – "Freedom of conscience and religious tolerance, as absolute and non-negotiable values, are at the center of Baptism" – is recalled. Thus, basing on new arguments, Rafał Prostack supports the findings of perhaps the best-known scholar of Baptist history, Edward Bean Underhill. Like the 19<sup>th</sup>-century author, he argues that "Baptists were the first and most radical in their expectations defenders of freedom in spiritual matters in modern Europe" (reference) . Arguing in turn with other authors (including William S. Lamont and John Coffey), Rafał Prostack proves that the promotion of freedom of conscience, tolerance and pluralism of worldview is not an opportunistic tactic of American Baptists on their way to establish the reign of Christ on earth, but it is their absolute first choice – not so much within the framework of their own ecclesiology, but in the sense of the imperative of public policy. Additionally, the author's reflections on the evolution of Baptism are interesting. From them one can derive the hope that Rafał Prostack will continue his extremely successful research in this area.

The book should be of interest primarily to scholars of the politics of religion, or more broadly, the political science of religion. Among the recipients, there should also be religious scholars and historians of Great Britain and the United States of America. It is impossible to overlook the fact that while Baptists in Poland are a small religious community, they form the largest Protestant denomination in the United States.