

REV. STANISŁAW LUDWIK PIECH, *Parafia na świętojakubowym szlaku. Dzieje parafii Najświętszej Maryi Panny Matki Kościoła i św. Jakuba Apostoła w Brzesku 1385-2010* [Parish on the St. James' Way: The History of the Parish of Blessed Virgin Mary Mother of the Church and St. James the Apostle in Brzesko 1385-2010], Brzesko: Brzeska Oficyna Wydawnicza 2012, p. 343.

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The ability to create monumental and detailed monographs and to wisely popularize knowledge is typical of a historian. There is no doubt that the monograph *Parafia na świętojakubowym szlaku. Dzieje parafii Najświętszej Maryi Panny Matki Kościoła i św. Jakuba Apostoła w Brzesku 1385-2010* by Fr. prof. Stanisław Piech, an outstanding historian at the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Cracow, is an example of such skills. The book is characterized by both the magnitude of the material presented and the simplicity of the style. The rapid flow of the narrative makes the reader involved in the story. Reading the book does not burden him with an unbearable ballast of detail, but organizes and systematizes his detailed knowledge. The objective of the author was to write a book that would be a reliable, in-depth study of the section of the historical landscape, a part of what is Polish and Catholic. He wanted to write a book both informative and educational, a book available to a wider circle of readers than only specialist historians. This task has been fulfilled. The initiative of Fr. Piech shall be considered successful also from a pastoral perspective. There is no doubt that for each of the Brest parishioners who read the book, it may bring not only the specific knowledge about their roots, but also a deeper rootedness in the faith and in the life of their particular church community. At a time when historical memory, including the memory that preserves the continuity of the experience of faith in its own habitat, declines, writing down the history of specific parishes is a great contribution to the present building of their cohesion, historical and theological integrity. This pastoral dimension of the book should be emphasized. It does not make the monograph loses its objectivity. Perhaps, on the contrary – starting from the assumption of the existence of historical and existential continuity in the life of the parish, it extracts an important research aspect: it interprets the history of the parish unit with a great sense of its essence and meaning, which can often be disregarded in the tangle of human affairs. For this reason, the book becomes an invaluable pastoral aid for priests working in Brzesko and for the faithful themselves, whom it offers an insight into the beauty, vitality and inestimable value of their “homeland” Church.

The main focus of the analysis is the history of author's home parish in Brzesko, whose patron is Blessed Virgin Mary Mother of the Church, and co-patron is St. James. The history of the parish dates back to the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and is dynamically inscribed in the history of Brzesko and the fate of the Polish part of *Camino de Santiago*. In fact, these three issues are the basis of the story, the main subject of which is, above all, the parish itself. However, the author realizes that the history of the parish, and the history of the Church in general, can not be reduced to the Church itself. The history of the parish is a story of a certain type of environment, its culture, customs and social changes that periodically occurred in the fundamental structures of small homelands, these micro-worlds of human relationships.

The structure of the book is transparent and facilitates quick orientation in its content, and thus the initial periodization of the history of the parish and the city of Brzesko. The monograph

consists of six chapters: the first chapter covers the oldest history of the parish (pp. 19-27) and is the shortest one, due to the scarcity of the archival material available. The subsequent chapters of the book reveal its history during the time of national captivity (pp. 29-78), in a reborn homeland (pp. 79-100), during the German occupation (pp. 101-106), during the communist period (pp. 107-193) and finally in independent Poland (pp. 195-296). In addition, the book contains a short introduction and conclusion, annexes with new documents (pp. 301-313), poor but valuable bibliographic tips (pp. 314-315), a carefully arranged and comprehensive index of names (pp. 316-325) and as many as 99 multicolored illustrations. The book has no footnotes: the attentive reader will find all the references necessary to expand his knowledge in the main text. The author's query takes into account a wide range of available sources, from documents and archives (in particular the files of parish visits, chronicles) to the texts of memories, studies and publications included in the parish press.

In the discussed monograph, the reader will find a meticulously described state of knowledge, concerning everything that contributes to the life of the Brzesko parish (including its relations with the followers of other religions, especially Judaism). The author is primarily interested in people, the paths of their lives, and experience. He focuses on parish priests, presenting not only their contribution to the life of the parish community, but also personality and character traits. The monograph gives an insight into the history of architectural changes in sacral buildings and their equipment, not leaving aside what is most important: various visions of the Church's life conditioned by both the spirit of time and the multiple pressing needs. The author shows an image of a living parish community that, in the face of many historical experiences and problems, becomes itself, grows, enriches itself and fights for the preservation of its dual identity: church and national.

Therefore, all we have to do is recommend this quick story that goes far beyond the boring report, and shows the reader a beautiful, dynamic image of a small community of believers, aware of the heritage in which they participate. The monograph *Parafia na świętojacobowym szlaku* is also worth recommending to all those who are working on the history of various parishes. By combining the noblest features of the scientific and popularizing styles, it can serve as a good example of the genre.

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