

Liechty, Daniel. *Sabbatarianism in the Sixteenth Century: A Page in the History of the Radical Reformation*. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1993. x + 94 pp. Paper, \$13.95.

Sabbatarianism in the Sixteenth Century broadens the scope of Liechty's earlier attention to Reformation and post-Reformation sabbatarians (persons observing Saturday as their special weekly day for rest and worship). In several previous articles and in his earliest book entitled *Andreas Fischer and the Sabbatarian Anabaptists* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1988), Liechty's focus was on Anabaptist sabbathkeepers; in this new volume his coverage has expanded to include Transylvania. In my review of his earlier title, I furnished information about his personal qualifications and study in Eastern Europe that made him eminently qualified to do research on Sabbatarian Anabaptism (*AUSS* 28 [1990]: 169-171), and that information is relevant for this volume, too.

This new book consists of two major parts: "Anabaptist Sabbatarianism in Silesia and Moravia" (9-41), and "Unitarian Sabbatarianism in Transylvania" (43-84). The main text is followed by endnotes (85-91) and a bibliography (93-94).

The first part of this new work covers some of the ground as that which Liechty treated in his earlier volume, albeit with certain important shifts in emphasis (especially the fact that now there is less information on Fischer and more on Oswald Glaidt). The major contribution of this new publication, however, comes in the second main part of the book. There, Liechty first gives brief information on "Hungary at the Time of the Reformation" (45-47); on "The Rise of Unitarianism" in Transylvania, a region which in the sixteenth century was located within the boundaries of the Kingdom of Hungary (47-50); and on "Francis David and Unitarian Radicalism" (50-53). After detailing the relevant religious and political backgrounds in the above-mentioned subsections, Liechty shifts his focus to the main core of his study, the sabbatarians in Transylvania (53-84). This was a group that emerged within the Unitarian community, but which formally broke away from it in 1588.

In the earliest history of Transylvanian Unitarian sabbatarianism (from 1585 to 1638), two periods may be distinguished, when the leaders were Andreas Eössi and Simon Pechi, respectively. The sabbatarianism of Eössi was derived from his own careful study of Scripture; a contemporary chronicle stated that he reached his sabbatarian conclusions because he "read his Bible too long [!]" (56). His sabbatarianism embraced various Jewish ceremonies, but it was nevertheless, according to Liechty, a Christian confession rather than a Jewish one.

Our author sets forth in some detail the beliefs and practices of the first-generation Transylvanian sabbatarians (57-67), introducing this discussion with the following summary statement: "What we find in these writings [of Eössi and the early Unitarian sabbatarians] is a form of Christianity which has grounded itself thoroughly in the Old Testament, which attempts to follow the teachings of the Bible exclusively, and which has been strongly influenced by the

chiliastic eschatology of Matthias Glorius. There is also clear concern in this theology to find bridges of commonality with Judaism" (57).

Pechi, although he was a disciple and adoptive "son" of Eössi, soon led the sabbatarians of Transylvania into a more Judaistic mold. In fact, he removed from Transylvanian sabbatarianism all elements that had distinguished it as Christian except for the "Our Father in Heaven" (referred to by present-day English-speaking Christians as "The Lord's Prayer"). The text of this prayer contains no truly unique Christian expressions, but is worded in such a way that Jews, as well as Christians, could recite it (72).

The whole episode of the rise of Unitarianism and then of Unitarian sabbatarianism in Transylvania occurred within the context of complex religio-political struggles, intrigues, and shifts in official positions regarding what was called "religious innovation" (a negative characterization applied especially to the sabbatarians). The Unitarian sabbatarians, after flourishing (with congregations in at least thirty villages and towns), suffered two severe persecutions in the years 1618 and 1638. From the latter, the movement never fully recovered, though for centuries there were still sabbathkeepers in Transylvania. Moreover, even some members of the group who under pressure joined the Catholic, Reformed, or other "recognized" churches, continued their adherence to sabbatarian beliefs.

For a period of 230 years, from A.D. 1638 to 1868, the Transylvania sabbatarians suffered repeated persecutions (78-79). The death knell to these East-European sabbatarians did not come, however, until "after 1941 and the Nazi occupation" (83).

Liechty has presented his discoveries with both authority and balance. However, although he has documented well the ties to Judaism, he has said virtually nothing about any possible Islamic influence that might have been related to the rise of Transylvanian Unitarianism. Perhaps there was none. But since the Turks were virtually the political overlords of Transylvania, beginning about the year 1526, a paragraph or two on the matter would have been helpful.

The reference in the book's title to the "sixteenth century," which is fully appropriate for the Anabaptist sabbatarians, should be broadened in the case of Transylvania, for most of the history of sabbatarianism there falls into the seventeenth and subsequent centuries. One further minor criticism may be mentioned: the endnote style is rather peculiar and, furthermore, reference after reference uses the abbreviation "ff." instead of giving *exact* citations.

Liechty's *Sabbatarianism in the Sixteenth Century* should be widely read, for it gives an intriguing and competent account of heretofore little-studied developments which deserve a rightful place in religious history and are instructive in the matter of religious liberty and in the impact of religio-political concerns on both Christians and Jews. Liechty makes a point of the fact that among the Reformation-era and post-Reformation-era Christian sabbatarians there existed a non-prejudicial attitude toward the Jews (2-3), a rare occurrence in the Europe of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.