

Letter to the Editor

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To the Editor:

I am pleased that John Radzilowski found the slim book that I edited, *Oskar Halecki 1891-1973: Eulogies and Reflections*, interesting enough to review. However, I am disappointed that he focuses primarily on my reflections, "Oskar Halecki, My Mentor" (Gromada 37-49), and does not refer to various other parts of the book. For example, he does not comment on the significant foreword (Gromada 5-12) by eminent medievalist Jerzy Wyrozumski, the secretary general of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences (Polska Akademia Umiejetności, or PAU). Also, the addendum (Gromada 50-71) is ignored; it contains photos of important letters by notables, such as Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, and materials containing Halecki's handwritten manuscripts plus letters. The author of the review concludes that the book "does not provide the reader with a fuller and deeper assessment of Halecki's life and work" (Radzilowski 209). But the book was never meant to be such a study. Rather, it is a personal reflection(s) about a great historian and philosopher of history on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of his death. Granted, there are those in American academic circles suspicious of émigré historians who have charged Halecki as being an apologist for Polish nationalism and for the Catholic Church. By and large, though, American academia, particularly scholars in the field of Slavic and Eastern European studies, have shown a high regard for Halecki's research and work.

In the interwar period, Halecki was already an internationally renowned historian. When he arrived in the United States (US) as a political refugee in 1940, he was almost immediately invited by Fordham University to serve on the faculty of its Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. Later, in the 1950s, Columbia University encouraged him to join the faculty of the newly created Institute on East Central Europe. It was Halecki's book *The Limits and Divisions of European History* that influenced Columbia to establish this new institute. The institute continues to flourish to this day. At another juncture,

in 1970, the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (AAASS) named Halecki a Distinguished Contributor to Slavic Studies, the AAASS's highest honour.

Halecki's strong opposition to Communism and to the Communist regime in Poland made it impossible for him to return to his homeland. He became a non-person in Communist Poland during the Cold War. In the US, however, he was more active and productive than ever, despite his advanced age. Halecki, in addition to undertaking university duties and researching and publishing books, helped establish the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of America (PIASA), based in New York City, which functioned for some time as Poland's Academy in Exile, with Halecki as the *spiritus movens*. Its members were not only Polish émigrés but Polish American and other American scholars who championed academic freedom and human rights.

Halecki was never completely forgotten. Moreover, Polish historians have generally continued to regard him very highly. Before the downfall of Communism, Jerzy Kłoczowski, the director of the Institute of East Central Europe at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, had Halecki's books translated into Polish, and he organized conferences where Halecki's views were discussed in an open forum by historians. More recently (in 2013), the University of Warsaw reprinted Halecki's *Dzieje Unii Jagiellońskiej* (*History of the Jagiellonian Union*; originally published in 1919-20) within the series *Klasyca Historiografii Warszawskiej* (Classic Authors of Polish Historiography). Also, Małgorzata Dąbrowska of the University of Łódź edited an impressive three-volume set, entitled *Oskar Halecki i jego wizja Europy* (*Oskar Halecki and His Vision of Europe*). It includes the essays of over thirty historians; most of them are Polish historians, and a few are foreign scholars.

Radzilowski wonders how Halecki would have "viewed developments in Europe from the time of the election of Pope John Paul II in 1978—the rise of Solidarity, the collapse of Soviet Communism" (Radzilowski 208). Judging from what Halecki wrote as a philosopher of history in his magisterial *The Millennium of Europe* (1963), he would not have been overly surprised. At the height of the dangerous Cold War, Halecki never lost hope that peace and freedom would come to Poland and to the nations of East Central Europe. Indeed, prophetically, he believed that they would come not at the inhuman price of another war but through moral power and peaceful methods (Halecki, *Millennium* 384-85). Moreover, he envisioned a supranational Atlantic community called Euro-America—made safe and free for national diversity and the inalienable rights of the human being (Halecki, *Millennium* 378-79).

Without question, Halecki, in his over thirty years in the US (1940-73), greatly enriched and broadened American historical scholarship. He will be

remembered for his erudition and for being a champion of academic freedom and the respect for human individuality.

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Professor John Radzilowski has chosen not to respond.