

Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius: Selected Letters of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (Pope Pius II)*.

Trans. Thomas M. Izbicki, Gerald Christianson, and Philip Krey. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006. xvi + 436 pp. index. bibl. \$ 79.95. ISBN: 0-8132-1442-4.

In 1463, a contrite Pope Pius II (1458–64) issued an official retraction of his earlier, pro-conciliar writings. “Believe the old man more than the youth,” he commanded in the bull, *In minoribus*: “Reject Aeneas; accept Pius!” (396). The pontiff’s plea inspired the title but not the contents of this important new book. The volume’s seventy-six letters chart in detail the long and labored path Aeneas travelled from conciliarism to papalism. Culled and translated from Rudolf Wolkan’s now-rare Latin edition of Pius’s pre-papal correspondence, most of these documents appear here in English for the first time. A significant contribution to conciliar and papal history, *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius: Selected Letters of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (Pope Pius II)* offers a detailed portrait of one of Renaissance Europe’s most influential figures and a revealing window onto the world in which he lived.

Aeneas's dramatic about-face has long been a lightning rod for scholarly debate and an easy target for attack. By letting Aeneas explain in his own words his ideological shift, the translators of this volume offer material for a more nuanced reading of his transformation. Their selection of letters spans more than two decades, when Aeneas rose from low-ranking administrator at the Council of Basel to secretary to the antipope Felix V to a position of confidence in the imperial chancery and, finally, to the bishoprics of Trieste and Siena. At all stages of his career, Aeneas moved in powerful circles: the recipients of his letters read like a who's who of high politics. Some he wrote as official dispatches, others as requests for favors and patronage. Many record his concerns, frustrations, and opinions about the *status ecclesiae* and the nature of Church authority. The longest (#76) is a work of revisionist history: known as the *De rebus basiliae gestis commentarius*, Aeneas's narrative overturns his earlier and explicitly pro-conciliar accounts of the Council of Basel. To fill out their primarily political portrait of Aeneas, the editors have folded in letters on "love, literature, and . . . leisure" (xi); and to round out his journey from Basel to Rome, they include translations of the two papal bulls he issued condemning appeals from pope to council and his own conciliarist beliefs.

The volume's introduction identifies four major themes in Aeneas's correspondence: his gradual distancing from the conciliarist camp, his unwavering desire for religious unity, his equation of sound leadership with "reliable discernment" (5), and his interests as a humanist. The letters also speak to other issues of interest to Renaissance scholars: they immerse us in the labyrinth of fifteenth-century politics, in the rituals and dynamics of the Renaissance court, and in the logistical challenges of routine communication. Perhaps most important, however, is what they reveal about the author himself. Nowhere in his vast corpus of writings does Aeneas appear more human, more complex, and more captivating than in his correspondence. We discover here his sharp (and often sharp-tongued) observations about human nature, his growing awareness of his own mortality, his wry sense of humor, and his profound attachment to his friends. Aeneas is at his most candid and his most arresting when addressing one such friend, Giovanni Campisio, and when, in two strained letters to his father, he confronts the delicate issue of his illegitimate children.

Izbicki, Christianson, and Krey have made their volume useful to a wide audience. Aeneas's sometimes stiff formality is rendered into readable English, while the eloquence and charm characteristic of so much of his writing emerge clearly in translation. A substantial introduction offers both a general sketch of Aeneas's life and a detailed chronicle of his journey through ecclesiastical politics. Prefatory remarks to each letter effectively anchor his correspondence in this larger narrative, while underlining the translators' four central themes. The notes to the text serve primarily to identify the letters' substantial cast of characters, but they also document Aeneas's references to biblical, classical, and legal texts, and make useful corrections to the Wolkan edition. The volume concludes with helpful indices of names, places, and subjects, and a selected bibliography. Additional

details about the Wolkan edition, and about the criteria the editors employed for selecting from it, would have been useful.

As Pope Pius II, Aeneas expressed regret that his youthful writings had not “languished in obscurity” (394). *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius* rescues many of them from such a fate. Pius himself might not have been grateful, but students and scholars of Church history, of Pius II, and of the Renaissance more generally most certainly should be.

EMILY O'BRIEN

Simon Fraser University