

# VILNIUS EVANGELICS IN THE 20TH CENTURY

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## ABSTRACT

Article is devoted to the history of Vilnius evangelics in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The Vilnius evangelics played a significant role on the Polish protestant map in the interwar period. For the Lutherans inhabiting the North-Eastern area of Poland, Vilnius was the capital of their diocese. In turn, the Calvinists had their own Vilnius Church. It steadily developed throughout the interwar period founding its branches in central Poland. The Vilnius Calvinists never forgot about the tradition of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, keeping contact with the church in the Lithuanian Republic. The custom of Polish and Lithuanian Evangelics' cooperation was returned to after regaining independence in 1989, which is exemplified by the cooperation of Lutheran Polish and Lithuanian churches.

KEY WORDS: Evangelics, Vilnius district, interwar period, Polish Protestants, Lutherans, Calvinists, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, history of the 20th Century Poland and Lithuania.

## ANOTACIJA

Straipsnyje aptariami XX a. Vilniaus krašto evangelikų bažnyčios istorijos puslapiai. Vilniaus evangelikų bažnyčia buvo ypač svarbi Lenkijos protestantams tarpukario laikotarpiu. Šiaurės rytų Lenkijos krašte gyvenusieji liuteronai tuo metu savo parapijos neturėjo ir priklausė Vilniaus parapijai. Savo ruožtu kalvinistai taip pat turėjo savo bažnyčią Vilniuje. Ši bažnyčia tarpukario laikotarpiu pamažu plėtėsi centrinės Lenkijos link. Vilniaus kalvinistai, tuo metu atskirti nuo Lietuvos, nebuvo užmiršę Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės laikų istorijos ir palaikė ryšius su tuometinės Lietuvos kalvinistais. Lenkijos ir Lietuvos evangelikų kontaktai buvo atnaujinti Lietuvos Respublikos atkūrimo priešaušryje, 1989 m. Tai yra skatinamas Lenkijos ir Lietuvos bažnytinio bendradarbiavimo pavyzdys.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: evangelikai, Vilniaus kraštas, tarpukaris, Lenkijos protestantai, liuteronai, kalvinistai, Lietuvos Didžioji Kunigaikštystė, XX a. Lenkijos ir Lietuvos istorija.

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Protestantism in Vilnius (Wilno) area saw its heyday in the middle of the 16th century. Later on, together with the onset of counterreformation, it took a defensive standpoint and began its existence in the diaspora<sup>1</sup>. The theme of the following sketch will be the 20th century histories of two Vilnius Protestant communities i.e. Calvinists and Lutherans. Both religious groups referred to the 16th century tradition of the Polish reformation. The reformed evangelics even possessed their own authorities in Vilnius. The Augsburg Evangelics, most of whom were the descendants of the 19th century German settlers, had their own diocese founded in 1936.

## **The Vilnius Evangelical-reformed Church (the Vilnius Unity). The origins, location, the number of followers**

The Evangelical-Reformed church based in Vilnius came into being in 1557. It was founded during the peak period of the Polish reformation development by Prince Mikolaj Radziwill “Black” and called the Evangelical-Reformed Unity of the Great Duchy of Lithuania. Despite strong

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<sup>1</sup> That was a complete opposition to the situation of Klaipėda (Klaipėda), where, up to 1945, Lutheranism was dominating. After the 2nd World War it still counted on the religious map of the country. The proof was the appointment of Klaipėda bishop Jonas Kalvanas to be the bishop of the evangelical-lutheran church of Lithuania.

counter-reformational action as well as severe repressions from the Tsar after the Republic's partitions (in 1824 the Calvin Gymnasium in Kėdainiai (Kiejdany) was closed down, in 1864 in Sluck, in 1841 the church properties were secularised), the Lithuanian Unity survived as the separate church entity until the 2nd World War. In the inter-war period it functioned as one of the two acting in Poland Calvinist churches. After the Vilnius area had been connected to Poland in 1922, it came to be called the Vilnius Evangelical-reformed Church. The name was modified at the synod in 1926. It then came to be officially known as: the Evangelical-reformed church in the Eastern area of the Polish Republic of the former Great Duchy of Lithuania and Russia, the former Lithuanian Unity, represented by the Vilnius synod. The church was tiny in numbers. What was left out of the former unity was a small number of believers dwelling primarily in Vilnius itself. The whole Žemaitija (Żmudz) district, i.e. about 15 thousand in the parishes in Kėdainiai, Biržai (Birze), Kelmė (Kielmy), Papilė (Popiel), Švobiškis (Swabiszka) and Radviliškis (Radwiliszka) found themselves, after the border had been defined, in Lithuanian area. The small numbers of Calvinists stayed in Sluck, Kojdanow, Kopys and Kopyl in Belarus, i.e. in the regions connected to the Soviet Union. In the Polish borders there was actually just one Vilnius parish with two branches (the Vilnius district) as well as three Czech parishes in Wolyn (the Wołyń district). The number of reformed evangelicals left in Vilnius was insignificant. It amounted to 500 officially. The majority, however, did not take the active part in the community life. The fact testifying to that was that the services were attended by 70 up to 100 people.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, throughout the inter-war period, one of the Unity's priorities was diverting those unfavourable, threatening with the church disappearance, demographic tendencies. The church authorities, with the bishop Władysław Jastrzębski and the chairman Władysław Izycki – Herman decided to counteract those unfavourable tendencies. As a result of the actions taken at the end of the inter-war period, the parish network increased up to 20, located in the Polish eastern area and in Warsaw. The church observed, in the inter-war period, plenty of conversions from Catholicism. The reason for the trend was the liberal way of annulment of marriages from other churches. It was based on the Great Agenda from 1637, restored on the 18<sup>th</sup> November 1918. It was an old law, passed in the 20s of the XVII century, normalising the life of Lithuanian Unity members. The national authorities acknowledged it unofficially and sanctioned the decisions of marriage annulments taken by the consistory. In the inter-war Poland there were no civil weddings (except for the former Prussian partition). There was no divorce procedure, hence each who wanted to get married for the second time applied for the first's annulment. In the Vilnius Unity it was relatively easy to gain one. It was enough to convert from one's belief into evangelical-reformed. The step was mainly taken by the intelligentsia layers as well as the top figures of the Polish political life. Hence, the members of the Vilnius Unity were the Foreign Office Minister Jozef Beck, the prime ministers Kazimierz Switalski and Felicjan Sławoj-Składkowski as well as numerous military men: Bolesław Wieniawa-Długoszowski, Gustaw Orlicz-Dreszer.

The divorce policy of the secular authorities of the Unity aroused gradual opposition in the church circles. In 1929, the first to protest against such practices was priest Kazimierz Ostachiewicz. He formerly worked in Warsaw Unity. Following an argument, he was in 1932 removed from work in Vilnius Church. The numbers of critics yet increased. In 1933 one of the curators Bronisław Kader sent writing to MWRiOP, in which he asked for the financial control and enforce-

<sup>2</sup> Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas (LVIA), Wileński Konsystorz Ewangelicko-Reformowany (WKER), f. 606, sign. 9, c. 219-220.

ing changes in the church authorities. The point was probably dismissing the president of the church Bronislaw Izycki-Herman, who was mainly responsible for the direction of the church. In 1936 and 1938, the curators Adam Lysakowski and Witold Jodko resigned to protest against marriage annulment. Similar disapproval was also expressed by Waclaw Gizbert-Studnicki and Jozef Mackiewicz. The church authorities answered, however, that such policy was conducted by all churches and religious unions in Poland, using the fact that the clergymen were also registry officials. Besides, according to the consistory, the income from marriage annulments was to be spent on the development of the material resources (the construction of brick church buildings and parish houses, school and university scholarships, subsidies, orphanages in Vilnius and holiday camps for poor children.) as well as demographic ones of the church. In fact, in 1934, the church numbered about 10 thousand members. 500 of them lived in Vilnius<sup>3</sup>. At the end of the 30s, the number rose to 12 thousand, 10 thousand of whom belonged to Vilnius parish (their members inhabited the whole Poland, though). The remaining 2 thousand were scattered in the East. In the literature of the topics, there is a view however, that the genuine, not “divorce” believers constituted only 2500 of the total number (Kosman 1986:131; Alabrudzińska 1999:192-193; 2004:87).

The conflict in the Unity authorities had a strong impact on Vilnius parish evoking its alienation. After removing priest Kazimierz Ostachiewicz, some parishes, not being able to accept the fact, quit from the church structures and established a separate community with authorities in the Calvinist church in Warsaw. The rest of the parishes limited their participation in the church life through not attending Sunday services and not sending their children to religion classes.

### **System, structure and legal state**

The system of the church was that of the synod based on three pillars. The first was the synod, which was the highest decision-taking body. The next was the consistory, acting as the executive power. In their authorities there were the secular president, the clerical deputy and three members, both secular and clerical. One of them was a famous Vilnius conservative Jozef Mackiewicz. Throughout the inter-war period, the church was presided over by president Bronislaw Izycki-Herman. His clerical deputy was priest superintendent general Michal Jastrzebski, and after his death on the 17<sup>th</sup> June 1938, priest Konstanty Kurnatowski. The last body, the college of curators, was superior to the consistory. It constituted itself of elected clergymen as well as life curators (Gilbert-Studnicki 1935:15-16). Its members were chosen by the Synod. In the second half of the 30s the curators were famous conservative politicians Jozef Mackiewicz and Waclaw Gilbert-Studnicki.

Particular parishes were devoid of self-government and were subject directly to the Synod. It was exceptional among evangelical churches in Poland, where the parishes were governed by the parish councils. It was only in 1937 that some form of decentralisation was introduced through granting the councils with self-government competences. The final confirmation of the bills still belonged to the parish priests and the Synod.

Towards the end of the 30s Vilnius Evangelical-Reformed Church encompassed the following parishes and branches organised in three districts: Vilnius (parishes in Izabelin, Konna, Podblocie<sup>4</sup>,

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<sup>3</sup> Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas (LVIA), Wileński Konsystorz Ewangelicko-Reformowany (WKER), f. 606, sign. 9, c. 261

<sup>4</sup> With branches in Brzesc and Grodno.

Warsaw and Vilnius), Wolyn (Boratyn, Kupiczow, Luck, Ozerany, Michalowka<sup>5</sup>), and Bialystok (with branches in Brzesc, Grodno, Lublin, Rowne, Vilnius)<sup>6</sup>. The last district enumerated had a specific status. It was made up of communities in which the Anglican ceremonies were observed. There worked, founded at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in London in the Barbican district, the Barbican Mission of Spreading Christianity among the Jews in Poland. It was headed by pastor Piotr Gorodiszcz living permanently in Bialystok. The Mission in Bialystok was called the mission Episcopal-reformed church which had Presbyterian character, which let it in 1933 join the Vilnius unity preserving wide autonomy. It is reflected by the name: the district of Vilnius evangelical-reformed church of Anglican service based in Bialystok. It was composed by 200, baptised, Jews.<sup>7</sup>

Another national group spiritually cared for by Vilnius church, were Wolyn Czechs. They came to this area in 1870. From 1888 they were looked after by priest Michal Jastrzebski. During the 1<sup>st</sup> World War the area was visited by pastors from Warsaw Unity: Stefan Skierski and Ludwik Zauhar. The latter came from the Czech family inhabiting Zelow. The war over, the Vilnius church returned to the area with priests Michal Jastrzebski and Jan Kurnatowski. Thanks to their efforts there appeared the community in Ozerany with a branch in Siergiejowka. Together in 1934 in Wolyn there functioned four evangelical-reformed parishes together with branches amounting to 1000 members.<sup>8</sup>

Vilnius Unity incorporated besides two White Russian villages Konna (region Zelwa) and Podblocie (region Wolkowysk). They were inhabited by 400 believers who had belonged to the Polish National Catholic Church. They had services in White Russian organised for them by priest Jan Kurnatowski.

Vilnius Evangelical-Reformed Church was in 1918 bound by the Tsar Act of Foreign Beliefs published in the Laws and Orders of the former Russian empire v. XI, book II (art. 984-986) (Grelewski 1937:48). After the 1<sup>st</sup> World War the Synod restored the above-mentioned Great Agenda. It specified the system of the Church.

In February 1928 the church authorities acquainted the Ministry of Religious Beliefs and Public Enlightenment with two suggested Acts. The former concerned the attitude of the church to the state. The latter normalised its internal affairs (Krasowski 1988:275-276). Neither of them was satisfactorily solved until the outbreak of the war.

The believers of Lithuanian nationality remained, as mentioned above, in Lithuanian territory. They got organised in a separate church, based in Birze. The spiritual leader became Pawel Jakubėnas, the Biržai Synod was headed by Marcin Yčas. The president of the consistory was Jan Mikelėnas. Despite tense relations between Poland and Lithuania throughout most of the inter-war period (Vilnius case) the contacts between Polish and Lithuanian Calvinists were maintained. The official relations were started in 1929 during the church conference in Krolewiec (Alabrudzińska 1999:205). As a result, it was agreed that both churches were supposed to cooperate by means of visits of their representatives to the synods from 1933 on. Lithuanian delegates were treated by

<sup>5</sup> With branches in Lwow, Niwy Hubinskie, Nowosolka, Rozyszcze, Rowne, Siergiejowka, Stawki.

<sup>6</sup> LVIA, F. 606, sign. 9, c. 261 – 270; Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN), Ministerstwo Wyznań Religijnych i Oświecenia Publicznego (MWRiOP), sygn. 1334, the Ministry of religious creeds and public enlightenment (MWRiOP), the writing of the Bialystok Provincial Office of 23.02.1936 to the MWRiOP, c. 54; comp. Alabrudzińska 1999:194.

<sup>7</sup> LVIA, op. cit., c. 270-272.

<sup>8</sup> „Głos Ewangelicki”, Nr. 26 of 01.07.1934, p. 6.

Vilnius synod as full-right participants. Both sides tried to no avail to lead to the normalisation of the relations between Lithuania and Poland. The close, despite the national border, mutual relations were testified by the fact that in 1938 the new leader of Vilnius Unity became a priest from the Republic of Lithuania Dr. Konstanty Kurnatowski. Prior to the election, he had been the parish priest of the reformed parish in Kelmė (the patron of the parish was a local noble family) and a lecturer at the Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas (Kowno). His ordination to the leader of Vilnius Evangelics participated by evangelical-reformed church authorities from Lithuania.

The change at the post of the head of the church coincided with the normalisation of Polish-Lithuanian relations. As a result of the rapprochement between both states in June 1939 Lithuania was visited by the official delegation of Vilnius Unity, made up of Konstanty Kurnatowski, Bronisław Izzycki-Herman, Paweł Dilis, and Piotr Gorodyszcz.

### **The activities of Vilnius Evangelical-reformed Church (Vilnius Unity)**

The authorities of Vilnius Unity, as signalled before, put special emphasis on charity work. It was achieved through organising charity actions, establishing workshops for the unemployed and opening the dormitory for the poor children coming from outside Vilnius (Alabrudzinska 1999:201).

Another sign of the parish life activation was the thought to establish their own press organ. The idea was born in 1926 and was connected with the appearance of the Warsaw "Unity" organ. It was at the time the only organ presenting the Calvinist standpoint. The authorities of Vilnius church competing with the Warsaw for the priority in the Republic noticed in it the threat of their positions. In April 1936, according to the Bill of the Church Synod, there appeared a bimonthly "On the track of the Reformation". As was informed by the subheading, it was an "organ of the Evangelical-Reformed Vilnius Church". In accordance with the suggested Act regulating the relations with the state it was intended as the official writing of the consistory, which was to announce the orders of the secular and clerical authorities. It was also introduced to the authorities together with the suggestion of the Act regulating the attitude of the church to the state.<sup>9</sup> The editor became the leader of the Unity superintendent priest Michał Jastrzębski. The actual editorial duties belonged to another clergyman priest Aleksander Piasecki. The site of the journal was the building of the consistory in Zawalna Street in Vilnius.

In the "Word to the readers" published in no 1, the editorial staff motivated the need to found the journal in the following way:

... basing on the Bill of Vilnius Synod KER in Vilnius there appears a new evangelical journal in the family of the already existing ones, we want to follow the path of reformation, the path of Jan Kalvin, Jan Laski and other defenders of the evangelical faith in Poland. Our journal is to be the symbol and the sign of our life in Free and Reborn Mother Country...<sup>10</sup>

"On the track of the Reformation" was disseminated, as is shown in the list of the subscribers, in Vilnius parish generally. Among the main recipients was the president of the consistory Bronisław Izzycki-Herman as well as the spiritual leader, superintendent general priest Michał Jastrzębski (after his death in 1938, Konstanty Kurnatowski). The number of subscribers in relation to the

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<sup>9</sup> AAN, MWRiOP, sign. 1403, the writing of the consistory of 24.03.196 to the Grodzki District in Vilnius, c. 120.

<sup>10</sup> „Szlakiem Reformacji” Nr. 1, I-IV 1936.

number of church members was considerable. In the years 1938-1939 it was 597 people. The sums of money donated were diversified. Most of them however considerably exceeded the yearly donation required. Some recipients however either did not pay at all or gave up subscribing, which was due to financial difficulties. To address the problem, the editors sent the journal to some readers free of charge<sup>11</sup>. The outbreak of the war put an end to these activities. After the occupation of Vilnius first by the Bolsheviks and then incorporating it by Lithuania the journal ceased to appear.

Another journal published in Vilnius from 1938 was bimonthly "The Voice of the Youth". As the subheading implies, it was the organ of the Polish evangelical-reformed youth. The editor was the church synod led by Aleksander Piasecki. Particular issues mainly contained articles in agitational and patriotic tone. One of the texts reminded of XIV century figure of the Polish patriot Szymon Konarski (Kłaczko 2003:173-176, 301).

Another example of the efforts aiming at a strong position in the Polish Protestantism was the organisation, in 1926, of the Symposium of Evangelical Churches in Vilnius. It took place between 9 and 11 November 1926 and was connected with the unification attempts in the Polish Protestantism. The idea was first suggested by Rudolf Kesserling from Lvov. The initiative in this measure was taken by Vilnius evangelical-reformed church. It sent invitations to common talks taking place between 18 and 20 May 1926. The course of actions in Poland (the May coup by Jozef Pilsudski) made the meeting be postponed until the first half of November 1926. The convention took place in November 1926. The delegation of each church was headed by its leaders. They constituted the board of the convention managing its work. During the convention special tribute was paid to Szymon Konarski, assassinated by the Russians. The rest of the debates were devoted to report speeches and the works of the committee preparing the statute of the new organisation. They passed also the word to all evangelicals in Poland in which the sense of the convention was explained and the hope to disseminate evangelical ideas in church, social and national life was expressed. They also prepared so-called tribute telegrams to the main authorities of the country. The national authorities noticed the range and the importance of the protestant convention. The proof was the presence of Vilnius province head Wladyslaw Raczkiwicz. The convention set up the Council of Evangelical Churches based in Warsaw, with Polish as the official language with others equal in debates and correspondence. The bills were to be passed unanimously. The authorities were made by the Council and the Executive council. The first president of the council became the leader of the church Juliusz Bursche.

Special attention should be paid to the overall reverberations of the convention and general interest. The Vilnius press published articles, information and reports. Newspapers from other regions (Warsaw, Krakow, Lvov) published general information and warm comments. The convention was described by Polish and German evangelical journals. The Vilnius convention had its repercussions abroad as well. One of the organisers pastor Zoeckler received congratulation letters from Zurich and the USA. The articles and hints of the convention appeared also in the church press of the Czechoslovakia and Germany.

The organisation of the convention in Vilnius was not accidental. In the city both Calvinists and Lutherans had closely cooperated, e.g. on the forum of , established in 1916 by priest superintendent Wladyslaw Jastrzebski, the Company of Polish reformation history lovers. The deputy chairman of the organisation was Vilnius Lutheran pastor Zygfryd Oscar Loppe.

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<sup>11</sup> LVIA, WKER, F. 606, sign. 9, c. 204-207, 210-212.

Vilnius Calvinists acted also in the fields of science, education and publishing. Special renaissance came after 1936. Apart from their own magazines they started to establish organisations of various types which were to cultivate the memory of Vilnius Calvinism history. Special role was played by Waclaw Gizbert-Studnicki. He registered, ordered and opened for research the old church archives. He was also the author of a few works concerning the Unity, e.g. "The historical outline of Vilnius Evangelical-Reformed Church and its library". He also wrote a register to the archive material of the Unity, while Adam Lysakowski worked on alphabetical and factual catalogues and the register of the library collections of the Synod.

### **The history of the parish after 1939**

The period of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War and half a century occupation of Lithuania by the Soviet Union made the evangelical-reformed church go through a hard trial. Particular church institutions gradually stopped functioning. After the incorporation of Lithuania by the USSR in June 1940 the Company of Polish reformation history lovers was dissolved. It worked by Vilnius evangelical-reformed parish. The building of the church in Zawalna street served secular functions. The fence, which had surrounded the church building, was dismantled. The portal of the church had the sculptures of saint apostles and the writing in Polish "Pay tribute to the Lord" removed. The parish cemetery with the tomb of the famous modern protestant clergyman Samuel Dambrowski was completely destroyed. The number of the believers decreased drastically. Most of them moved to Poland settling in such cities as Gdansk or Torun. It was in the latter that the family of Michal Jastrzebski found their home. The last curator of the parish Bronislaw Izycki-Herman came to live in Bialystok where he died in 1946. Vilnius was then inhabited by evangelical-reformed Lithuanians. Who cultivated the traditions of Vilnius Calvinism. It was only after regaining independence in March 1990, Lithuania started to restore its church building and parish life.

### **Lutherans (Augsburgh Evengelics). Origins, structure and believers**

The Lutheran parish in Vilnius appeared in 1555. The founder was prince Mikolaj Radziwill "Black". In the times of the counterreformation the activities of the parish were hindered, the church building burnt down. It made the Lutherans move to the yard of one of private tenements in German street. It was there that they built their temple in the middle of the XVII century. Due to the counterreformation up to the end of XVIII century in Vilnius there stayed few Lutherans. There were fewer and fewer Poles among them (the last Polish clergyman Jakub Michal Krupinski stopped his service in 1782), while there were more and more German congregation. The process was accelerated at the end of the XVIII century with the arrival of German colonists at the area. From then on, Lutheranism had German national character, the proof of which is the writing in German on the XIX century church tower: Die Kirche ist gegrundet im Jahre 1555. Dieser Glockenthurm ist unter Gottes Beistand errichtet im jahre 1872. The German influence was confirmed by the belonging of the Vilnius parish to the Curland Consistory located in Mitawa. It was a part of the Evangelical-Reformed Church of Russia. At the beginning of the XX century the parish work was dominated by the German language. The parish had over 2400 Germans registered (up to 4500 according to some estimates<sup>12</sup>). A Polish service used to be held only twice a month. The parish included also 200 Latvians. The majority of the members inhabited Vilnius itself. The function of

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<sup>12</sup> „Rocznik Ewangelicki 1925”, Warszawa, 1926, p. 17; Kneifel 1971:210-211.

parish priests was held by Theodor Reinhold Liss (1901-1909), the senior of the German Synod of Lithuania Paul Tittelbach (1909-1918) as well as Latvian writer and poet Andreas Niedra-Needra (1921-1924).

The parish at the time, just like other institutions of such kind in the Russian partition, was quite affluent. It was proved by the fact that up to 1940 there had been a number of educational and charity institutions functioning by its side eg. a private German gymnasium, an old people's home (founded in 1840) and an orphanage (existing since 1898).

The activities of the first world war radically decreased the number of believers. Out of a few thousand members in 1922, there were just 1200 left. The number rose throughout the interwar period to reach 2000 in 1938. It was then much lower than in 1914. The material base of the parish was left intact.

The inclusion of the Vilnius area to Poland in 1922 opened the next chapter. On the 19<sup>th</sup> May 1922 the Ministry of Beliefs and Public Enlightenment assigned the temporary management of the Lutheran parish in Vilnius to the consistory of the Evangelical-Augsburgh church in Warsaw. He then incorporated the Vilnius Community to the newly-created north-eastern Superintendence located in Lublin. Its head was Aleksander Schoeneich. Within its framework, the parish had functioned until the autumn of 1936.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> November 1936, the President of the Polish republic Ignacy Mościcki, issued a decree on the attitude of the state to the Evangelical-Augsburgh Church. One of the points was a new administrative division of the church. On the foundations of the former north-eastern superintendence there was a new Vilnius diocese established. It encompassed, besides the Vilnius parish, the communities in Białystok, Grodno, Łomża, Suwałki and Wizajny. The senior of the new diocese was, since 30<sup>th</sup> April 1937, the Vilnius parish priest Zygfryd Oskar Loppe.

### **The activity of the Vilnius parish in the interwar period**

The authorities of the Evangelical-Augsburgh Church aimed at the gradual polonisation of their believers. It first affected, according to the bishop Juliusz Bursche's conception, the Lutherans in the main cities of the Polish state. Hence, 2 years after incorporating Vilnius, Zygfryd Oskar Loppe was sent there. He was of Polish nationality and supported Josef Piłsudski's policy. During the earlier work in the parish in Suwałki he belonged to the committee which organised the 41<sup>st</sup> Suwałki Division named after Marshal J. Piłsudski.<sup>13</sup>

Priest Zygfryd Loppe replaced at the post Andreas Nieder, arrested in 1924 by the Latvian police while participating in a theological conference. The cause of the arrest was his political commitment in 1919, when he briefly held the office of Latvian PM.

The arrival of priest Loppe in Vilnius coincided with rising assimilation and polonisation tendencies within the parish.

Priest Loppe broke with the German tradition of his direct predecessors and put special emphasis on cultivating the traditions of the Polish reformation and Evangelicism. One of his first steps in Vilnius was forming close links with the local Polish evangelical-reformed parish. The cooperation ended in calling the first meeting of the delegates of the Evangelical Churches' Council in Vilnius. Another aspect of his activity was holding ceremonious services on the national holidays eg. the 3<sup>rd</sup> May Constitution anniversary or the Independence Day. Likewise, he emphasized other important

<sup>13</sup> „Głos Ewangelicki”, Nr. 13, 29 III 1936, p. 2; Rej 2000:159.



anniversaries from the Polish history as well as Piłsudski's name day. During the services he gave sermons in a patriotic tone expressing his anti-Soviet views clearly. The example is a sermon on the 3<sup>rd</sup> May in 1936. Loppe said then "God forbid that we should celebrate the 1<sup>st</sup> May instead of the 3<sup>rd</sup> May. What would Poland look like if those elements came to power? Shame on the nation which stops being a nation, which loses its feeling and national dignity for the sake of the red international. Care for the faithfulness! Care for the national honour! No one in Poland understood, appreciated and won such honour for Poland as late Marshal Piłsudski!"<sup>14</sup> While on the Independence Day he added:

We are celebrating today the 18<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Independence of the Polish Republic. It was regained for us by those who rest in peace, headed by Marshal Piłsudski. Respect not only our external independence but the internal one too! Politically, do not heed the revolutionary, rebellious, Bolshevik slogans, but love Your Mother Country, as it is our family home. Economically, do not be pests, parasites of Poland but its diligent citizens! Ethically, have clear conscience and clean hands. Only in this way shall we keep our Poland independent both inside and outside!<sup>15</sup>

Such promotional attitude won him the support of the Polish authorities. On the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1931 he was awarded a high national Golden Cross.

On the 22 March 1936 in the Vilnius community there was a jubilee of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Z. Loppe's work in the Evangelical-Augsburgh church. It was attended by the Vilnius governor L. Bociański, who, on his and the authorities' behalf, thanked Loppe for the promotional attitude (Kneifel 1967:126). Besides the governor, the service was attended by colonel Janicki, lieutenant Podwysocki, as well as city authorities. There were also Lutheran clergymen present. The Vilnius Unity was represented by president Bonisław Izycki-Herman. A numerous attendance of the Polish Army representatives was due to the fact that priest Z. Loppe since 10<sup>th</sup> July 1923 was a chaplain in the Polish army, managing the Suwałki garrison with Augustów and Sejny. He later acted in the garrisons of Vilnius, Nowa Wilejka, Lida, Baranowicze, Nowe Troki (Rej 2000:159).

Following the above brief description of Loppe's work in the Vilnius parish, it is worth mentioning the evangelical activity among the Jewish population. In Vilnius, there was Lutheran Bazylea Mission cooperating directly with the Vilnius parish with Bernard Rosenbaum and Aleksander Omenceter as leaders. Its aim was acquainting the Jews with the Christian rules as well as running social work. Those who decided to convert were full members of the Lutheran community (Alabrudzińska 1999:83).

### **After September 1939**

Following the occupation of Poland by Germany and the USSR, the territory of the Vilnius area was transferred by the Soviet authorities to the Lithuanian republic. Priest Loppe included then the Vilnius parish in the Lutheran administration of the consistory in Kaunas. He held the function of the pastor up to 1940-ies to the times of the Soviet occupation. The Soviet authorities, following the international agreements with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Reich on the exchange of the population, evicted, at the beginning of 1941, the German Evangelics to the area of the Hitler occupation. Priest Loppe left Vilnius with them. On crossing the Soviet-German demarcation border he was instantly arrested. Through prisons in Bydgoszcz, Poznań, Berlin-Aleksanderplatz, Lipsk and Norymberga he found

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<sup>14</sup> „Głos Ewangelicki”, Nr. 20, 17 V 1936, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> „Głos Ewangelicki”, Nr. 48, 29 XI 1936, p. 5-6.

himself in the concentration camp in Dachau. He stayed there until April 1945 liberating the camp by the American army. After the war, he remained in the West.

The few scattered Calvin and Lutheran believers were cared for by priest Kazimierz Ostachiewicz. However, in 1945 he repatriated himself with the majority of the reformed to Poland. Some managed to leave for Scandinavia.

The Soviet authorities closed down the building of the Lutheran church. The parish practically ceased to exist. The church was initially changed into a factory, then a gym and finally a warehouse. The few Lutherans managed to survive the 50 years of non-existence. In the late 80s, there were sporadic Lutheran services held by the catholic parish of Saint Nicholas.

Only after Lithuania regaining independence in March 1990 the parish started to reconstitute itself. The church building had already been transferred in 1988.<sup>16</sup> It required yet capital renovation. The services were first held in a small parish hall. The basic problem in the first years was the lack of a clergyman. Initially, the parish was cared for by Kęstutis Pulokas, who having graduated from the English philology department worked as an interpreter in the American embassy. In the parish he worked as a lecturer, youth guardian and parish paper editor. Only since the mid-90s, there have been services held in the renovated temple in German street in Vilnius. The parish life developed too. It consists now of Lithuanians from central Lithuania. On the 24<sup>th</sup> April 2004, their 28 year old pastor Mindaugas Sabutis was elected the bishop of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Lithuania. The synod gathered in Tauragė (Taurogi) where there is the most numerous (5 thousand) Lutheran parish in Lithuania.<sup>17</sup> One of the first to congratulate the bishop was the leader of Polish Lutherans bishop Janusz Jagucki (whose family come from the Polish-Lithuanian border in Kramniki near Suwałki).

The Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Lithuania has now fully Lithuanian national image. There are now 25 thousand believers in 54 parishes. It is a considerable increase against the early 90s with just 27.<sup>18</sup> Its press organ is a bimonthly „Liuteronų balsas” with Povilas Pukys as the editor. The site is the Vilnius parish in Vokiečių 20. The new pastor of the parish is Alfredas Rekertas.

The Lithuanian Lutherans closely cooperate with Lutheran churches from Scandinavia. It is testified by the fact that the new clerical robes are modelled on the ones used by the clergy from Finland, Sweden and Norway.

## The End

The Vilnius evangelics played, in the interwar period, a significant role on the Polish protestant map. For the Lutherans inhabiting the north-eastern area of Poland, Vilnius was the capital of their diocese. In turn, the Calvinists had their own Vilnius Church. It steadily developed throughout the interwar period founding its branches in central Poland, eg Warsaw. The Vilnius Calvinists never forgot about the tradition of the Great Lithuania Duchy, keeping contact with the church in the Lithuanian Republic. The profound bonds between the churches were proved by the fact that in 1938 the new leader of the Vilnius evangelics became Konstanty Kurnatowski from Lithuania.

The custom of Polish and Lithuanian Evangelics' cooperation was returned to after regaining independence in 1989, which is exemplified by the cooperation of Lutheran Polish and Lithuanian churches. Between 16-17 July 2004, the Consistory organised in Suwałki a special meeting of their

<sup>16</sup> „Liuteronų balsas”, Nr. 4 (78), VII – VIII 2006.

<sup>17</sup> „Zwiastun Ewangelicki”, Nr. 11, 13 VI 2004, p. 17.

<sup>18</sup> „Zwiastun – dwutygodnik ewangelicki”, Nr. 10, 30 V 1993, p. 23.

authorities. On the 18<sup>th</sup> July, they made for Vilnius where the representatives of both churches held a common service run by Mindaugas Sabutis and Janusz Jagucki. The latter gave a sermon applying to the common history of both nations, especially during the reformation, when the Republic was a political superpower. He finished with a characteristic saying that “we all belong to one church, even when divided by borders, language and traditions. Both in Poland and Lithuania we are the church of the Diaspora. Therefore, we can take plenty of initiatives together.”<sup>19</sup> The result of the sermon was a prompt visit of the Evangelical church of Lithuania to Poland in September 2004.

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## IŠ VILNIAUS PROTESTANTŲ ISTORIJS XX AMŽIUJE

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#### Santrauka

Vilniaus evangelikų reformatų istorija glaudžiai susijusi su reformacijos raida Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės teritorijoje. Nepaisant stiprios kontrreformacinės veiklos iki XX a. pradžios Vilniaus krašto teritorijoje išliko evangelikų reformatų bažnyčios helvetiškojo tikėjimo struktūros. Nepaisant griežtų caro represijų (1824 m. buvo uždaryta gimnazija Kėdainiuose, o 1841 ir 1864 m. Slucke buvo sekularizuoti dvasininkų turtai) Vilniaus bendruomenė išliko kaip atskiras bažnytinis

<sup>19</sup> „Zwiastun Ewangelicki”, Nr. 15-16, 15 VIII 2004, p. 27.

padalinys net iki pat Antrojo pasaulinio karo laikų. Tarpukariu funkcionavo kaip viena iš dviejų Lenkijos teritorijoje veikiančių kalvinistų bažnyčių. Didesnė dalis senos parapiinės bazės liko Lietuvos Respublikos teritorijoje. Nepaisant to, Bažnyčios valdžia su vyskupu Władysławu Jastrzębskiu ir pirmininku Hermannu Izyckiu pasiekė, kad tarpukario pabaigoje parapijų tinklas išaugtų iki 20 parapijų ir filialų, išdėstytų daugiausia Lenkijos rytinėje dalyje ir Varšuvoje. Tarpukariu buvo pastebėta daug perėjimo iš katalikybės atvejų. Bažnyčios nariai buvo žymūs Lenkijos visuomenės veikėjai, tarp jų – užsienio reikalų ministras Józef Beck, premjerai Kazimierz Świątalski ir Felicjan Sławoj-Skłodkowski, daug kariuomenės atstovų. Vilniaus evangelikų reformatų bažnyčia tuo metu buvo lenkiško tautinio charakterio. Lietuvių tautybės tikintieji liko, kaip jau buvo minėta, Lietuvos teritorijoje. Nepaisant įtemptų Lenkijos ir Lietuvos santykių tarpukariu (Vilniaus krašto klausimas), lenkų ir lietuvių kalvinistų santykiai buvo labai aktyvūs. Nepaisant valstybės sienos, apie artimus jų tarpusavio ryšius liudijo faktas, kad 1938 m. nauju Vilniaus bendruomenės vadovu tapo dvasininkas iš Lietuvos Respublikos kun. Konstany Kurnatowski.

Antrojo pasaulinio karo metai ir pusę amžiaus trukusi sovietinė Lietuvos okupacija lėmė, kad Vilniaus evangelikų reformatų bažnyčia išgyveno sunkų metą. Bažnyčios pastatas Pilies gatvėje buvo paskirtas pasaulietinėms reikmėms. Istorinės kapinės buvo visiškai suniokotos. Gerokai sumažėjo parapijiečių skaičius. Dauguma iš jų repatriavo į Lenkiją. Į Vilnių atvažiavo lietuviai, tarp jų evangelikai reformatai. 1990 m. Lietuvai atgavus nepriklausomybę prasidėjo ir bažnyčios, ir parapijų gyvenimo atkūrimas.

Šiek tiek kitaip susiklostė Vilniaus liuteronų bendrijos likimas. Jų buvimas šioje teritorijoje jau XVI a. yra liudijamas istorinių šaltinių. Viename iš Vokiečių gatvės kiemų XVII a. jie buvo pasistatę savo šventovę. Bet tikras evangelikų liuteronų įsikūrimo čia faktas datuojamas tik XVIII ir XIX a. sandūroje. Tada į Rusijos okupuotą teritoriją atvyko daug kolonistų iš Vokietijos žemių. Todėl liuteronizmas Vilniuje labai ilgai buvo vokiško tautinio charakterio. Tai liudija užrašas ant bažnyčios bokšto. XX a. pirmojoje pusėje prasidėjo pirmieji lenkinimo procesai, prie jų prisidėjo ir asimiliacinė Vilniaus klebono kun. Z. Loppe politika tautiniu klausimu. Antrasis pasaulinis karas visiškai dezorganizavo parapijos gyvenimą. 1940 m. sovietų valdžia iškeldino daugumą Vilniaus liuteronų į III reicho teritoriją. Po karo bažnyčios pastatas buvo uždarytas, o jo vertingas barokinis vidus visiškai suniokotas. Viduje sovietų valdžia įrengė fabriką. Tik Lietuvai atgavus nepriklausomybę bažnyčia buvo grąžinta Vilniaus liuteronams. Vakarų bažnyčių ir liuteronų organizacijų pagalbos dėka buvo atstatytas bažnyčios vidus. Atkuto ir pastoracinis parapijos gyvenimas. Dabar parapiją sudaro daugiausia lietuvių tautybės tikintieji, kurie į Vilnių atvyko po karo iš kitų Lietuvos regionų. Vis didesnę Vilniaus liuteronų bendrijos svarbą liudija faktas, kad 2004 m. jų 28-erių metų pastorius Mindaugas Sabutis tapo Evangelikų liuteronų bažnyčios Lietuvoje vyskupu. Bažnyčia, kuri dabar yra lietuviška, šiuo metu susideda iš 54 parapijų. Nauju Vilniaus parapijos klebonu tapo kun. Alfredas Reikertas.

*Gauta 2006 m. spalio mėn.*