Protestants in Lithuania

Report of a visit to the Evangelical-Reformed Church in Lithuania, 17th April - 2nd June, 1991

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The next pages contain my three lectures on the history of Christianity in Lithuania, given at the University of Kaunas, 2nd - 16th May, 1991

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1. How did Lithuania become a Christian nation?
(In the actual lecture in Kaunas I have not tired the audience to the extent of summing up all details which are given here.)

Before I can deal with the conversion of Lithuania, I want to talk briefly about the methods of conversion which have been practised in the lands around your nation. Let me start with the conversion of the Saxons, who lived in (what is now called) Germany. By the end of the eighth century (from 772) the emperor Charlemagne (768-814) made a terrible war against the Saxons, which they lost. As a result they had to turn to the Christian faith. It would take too much time to tell the whole history of the forced conversion of the Saxons, but it is important to emphasize that Charlemagne was a "Christian" emperor, that he wanted to reign over a "Christian" empire, and that the tribes which he conquered were not free to accept or to reject Christianity. Yet, this policy was criticized by Charlemagne's adviser Alcuin, a well known scholar.

We may assume that the missionaries who preached the gospel and who baptized the people were very much convinced that to these pagan tribes they offered the best they had: salvation, remission of sins, a new life through Christ - but we should be aware how much Christianity was connected with power, with the state, with the authorities. Western Europe was looked upon as a Christian empire, corpus christianum.

Yet, in spite of the large extent of compulsion which was exercised with regard to the conversion of the people, the Christian faith became solidly rooted in these countries. After some generations many of the Saxons were grateful that they had turned away from their pagan gods to the God of the Christians, to salvation through Jesus Christ. Yet, once again I want to point to an important feature of this history of conversion: it was carried out within the sphere of influence of a Christian empire, an empire which even wanted to extend its boundaries and to christianize the pagan peoples which it met.

It may surprise you that I also have to say something about Israel/Palestine, the Holy Land, as it is called. Up to the tenth century many Christians went there as pilgrims, in order to visit the holy places and to see where Jesus Christ had lived. But in the tenth century the Muslims (mainly the Turks) got more influence and authority in Palestine, and they hindered the Christian pilgrims. In reaction to that, from western Europe crusades were organized in order to protect the holy places against the Turks. Also Saxon warriors went to Palestine in order to fight the Turks! As a matter of fact, for them it was a good opportunity to travel and to see foreign countries and to lead an adventurous life. But in spite of all the efforts, the crusaders lost the battles and they had to leave Jerusalem and all the other places in Palestine to the Turks. They had to withdraw from Palestine and were worthless.

One of the orders that had been founded for the crusades was the Teutonic (German) Order of St. Mary's. In 1190 it started an hospital in Jerusalem, and in 1198 it was transformed to an order of fighting knights. Since the crusades were lost in 1291, the order had to withdraw from Palestine; finally, in 1309, its headquarter was established in Marienburg Castle (Malbork in Prussia, 50 km south-east of Gdansk). Instead of protecting or defending the Christian sites in Palestine, these German knights now organized crusades in their own region. Even in the thirteenth century (1230-1283) they already have fought and conquered Prussia, which is now the north-eastern part of Poland and a Soviet republic. Prussia became a state of the Teutonic Order, and the original population had the choice, either to convert to Christianity or to be killed. And indeed, many of the
pagan Prussians were killed. This method of conversion by means of violence and coercion was much criticized, as similar campaigns had been criticized before. But the Teutonic knights continued their campaigns.

Moreover, in 1202 the Livonic "sword's order" had been founded, which was united with the Teutonic Order in 1237. The knights conquered Baltic peoples, like the Curonians, the Letts, the Estonians, etc., and they forced them to accept the Christian faith and be baptized - or die. Many of these people accepted the new religion; sometimes they hoped that the Teutonic Order would help them against the attacks of the Lithuanians! So in the course of the thirteenth century many of the peoples around Lithuania had been christianized, but Lithuania had mainly remained pagan.

A leader of Aukštaitija was called Mindaugas; he also claimed to have authority in Žemaitija. He fought the Teutonic Order in 1243-44, but another Lithuanian leader, Tautwila, who also claimed the authority over Žemaitija, fought Mindaugas with the assistance of the Livonic Order! In 1248 he even had himself baptized in Riga. In Polock, the eastern and slavonic part of Lithuania, he reigned for more than 15 years, and during this period the Roman Catholic mission could do its work among the people. But in 1251 also Mindaugas made contact with the Livonic Order about his possible conversion to Christianity. The pope, Innocentius IV, was very happy about this new development, especially since he wanted to make a front against the Muslim Tartars, who menaced Europe since 1240. The pope urged his bishops to accept the conversion of Mindaugas, to baptize him, and to crown him as a king! But part of the Teutonic Order was not in favour of this baptism and crowning, so the ceremonies took place only in 1253. In change, Mindaugas ceded Žemaitija to the Teutonic Order, so that now it had one long area from Prussia to Livonia, without interruption. (Žemaitija was a sort of bridge between the two lands.) The pope also expected that now the population of Žemaitija would be christianized, but the mission was not successful. In 1260 a heavy battle took place between the Žemaitijans and the Teutonic Order; the Žemaitijans were led by Treniota, Tautwila's brother. The Teutonic Order lost this battle, and afterwards (in 1262) even Mindaugas deserted the Teutonic Order. But this sudden change of Mindaugas did not make him more popular among the people of Žemaitija: in 1263 they killed him. For more than a century, there was no possibility of a "Christian" kingdom in Lithuania.

After Mindaugas' death, the two brothers Tautwila and Treniota both had authority over the Lithuanian tribes. We will not dwell on this period; some rulers were: Vaisilkaė (who was Greek Orthodox!), Traidenis and Vytenis. Vytenis was a great-great-grandson of Mindaugas, and in 1297-1299 the inhabitants of Riga asked him to help them against the Teutonic Order! This was because of the cruelties of the Teutonic knights... Vytenis died in 1315/6, and left behind him a large and powerful Lithuanian nation.

A younger brother of Vytenis, Gediminas, born in 1275, took over the power in Lithuania, and in the time of his reign (until 1341) the Teutonic Order was kept out of his country; Lithuania even expanded to the east and to the south. In 1325 he made an alliance with Poland, and as a guarantee he gave his daughter Aldona (Anna) in marriage to a Polish prince, Kasimir III. Yet, the relationship with Poland could not be called good, especially after Aldona died in 1299. Gediminas conquered Podlachia and made it part of Lithuania. But Kasimir did not react. Even the Tartars did not attack Lithuania at that time. Gediminas appointed his brothers and his sons as governors in all parts of Lithuania and in the conquered regions, like Kiev, or he appointed slavonic rulers who were responsible to him. Part of his brothers and sons belonged to the Orthodox church; in this respect Gediminas was very tolerant. In spite of his battles with the Teutonic Order, he gave all freedom to Roman Catholic German traders, who lived in
Vilnius. He promised more or less that he would convert to Christianity too, but this has not happened — especially because of his fights with the Teutonic Order! Every year the knights organised a campaign against Lithuania in order to fight paganism. The order also tried to conquer Žemaitija, as a bridge between Prussia and Livonia. But the German knights were not successful. — When Gediminas died in 1341/2, he left behind him a still larger Lithuania, which was looked upon as an important and powerful nation by Scandinavia, Moscow, Hungary and the Tartars down the Volga.

In 1345 two of Gediminas' sons, Algirdas and Kęstutis, had acquired all power in Lithuania, at the cost of their brothers. For 35 years they have reigned in full concord, and during their reign Lithuania was a mighty nation in eastern Europe. They kept out the Teutonic Order, although it had many allies. In 1344 even a Dutch count, William IV, a reckless adventurer, fought with the Teutonic Order against Lithuania! The Polish king Kazimier III conquered a part of the new regions of Lithuania, Halytsch-Wolhynia, and the borders were much devastated because of all the battles. But still Lithuania was a mighty nation which Algirdas expanded to the Russian principalities in the east. Neither Algirdas nor Kęstutis were ever baptized, although some of their relatives were. The brothers and the Lithuanians in general were not fiercely against Christianity, but they just felt they were not in need of the new religion.

At the same time, Jewish merchants and Muslim Tartars, artisans and farmers, were invited to settle in Lithuania. It seems that the leaders maintained at their courts Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim scribes. If it is true what I read, at that time Lithuania was a pluralistic and fairly tolerant society, in which many religions coexisted rather peacefully.

From a sociological point of view, the Lithuanian warriors developed to "nobility" (bajoria); the more powerful of them were called bajorai. In the fourteenth century the farmers were still free, which means that they had the right to bear arms, but gradually they became tributary to the bajorai. The rulers ordered to build villages which had to produce, e.g., fur coats in order to export these. Algirdas promoted free trade, and many German and Russian traders came to Vilnius and Kaunas, and built their own churches; e.g. the Nicholas-church in Vilnius.

Algirdas died in 1377. His son Jogaila was intended to succeed him as grand-duke in Vilnius. But after a while, his uncle Kęstutis and Jogaila could not get on with each other, in 1380 Kęstutis made himself grand-duke, and Jogaila was banished. With two brothers, Skirgaila and Kaributas, he revolted against his uncle and made an armistice with the Teutonic Order; in 1382 Kęstutis was murdered, and his son Vytautas fled to the land of the Teutonic Order. Now Jogaila was the only ruler in Lithuania. He made a treaty with the Teutonic Order and promised to become a Christian and to cede Žemaitija to the knights. In 1383 he should have met the leader of the Teutonic Order, but at the appointed time and place Jogaila did not appear. The reason was, that in the meantime another possibility had arisen. It was offered to him, to marry the daughter of the Hungarian king Ludwig (Louis). After the death of Kazimier III, king of Poland, in 1370, this Ludwig had become king of Poland too. Ludwig died in 1382. His daughter Maria had succeeded him as queen of Hungary, but the Polish nobility did not accept her as queen of Poland. Instead, the Polish nobility preferred Hedwig (in Polish Jadwiga), Ludwigs youngest daughter, to be their queen. She was born in 1373/4, and in 1384 she had been crowned as queen of Poland in Krakow. Being still very young (10/11), she had been engaged to an Austrian duke, William. But now Hedwigs mother contacted Jogaila, if he would marry her daughter. Jogaila consented, so the engagement of Hedwig and William was broken. In 1385 a treaty was made in Krewo, which held that Jogaila would break his treaty with the Teutonic Order, that Lithuania would be incorporated into Poland for ever, and that Lithuania would accept Roman Catho-
licism. In change, Jogaila could marry Jadvyga and become king of Poland! The Polish nobility was ready to accept Jogaila as its king.

So, in February 1386 Jogaila was baptized in Krakow, and received the name Władysław, he was married to Jadvyga, and in March he was crowned as king of Poland. (This (personal) union of Poland and Lithuania has lasted for more than four centuries!) The diocese of Vilnius was founded, and Lithuania was christianized by Roman Catholic priests. Marriages between Orthodox and Catholic people were forbidden unless one of both converted. The nobles, who used to be warriors, received the same rights as in Poland. Jogaila first appointed his brother Skirgaila as main duke of Lithuania, whereas their cousin Vytautas received authority over the slavonic parts in the south (Grodno, Brest), but Vytautas did not agree. He asked the Teutonic Order to help him against his cousin, and in 1392 Jogaila made peace between the two: now Vytautas became grand-duke and Skirgaila received the slavonic parts in the East and resided in Kiev.

Vytautas was a powerful leader who extended Lithuania’s sphere of influence even to the Black Sea. Yet, he lost a campaign against the Tartars, and he had to cede Żemaitija to the Teutonic Order, whose help he had asked. When Jadvyga died in 1399, only 25/26 years old, some of the Polish nobility thought that the union between Poland and Lithuania should be dissolved, but Jogaila still remained king of Poland. In the following years, there were many quarrels about Żemaitija, which sometimes belonged to the Teutonic Order, and sometimes the knights had to give it up again. In 1414 there was an important council in Konstanz, where the claims and the methods of the Teutonic Order were severely criticized. As a result, Žemaitija was given back to Lithuania, where Vytautas still reigned as grand-duke, and he even received the strip along the coast near Palanga. Now the claims of the Teutonic Order were rejected for ever. At the same time, the German traders could stay in Kaunas for exploiting their factorities and selling their products. In 1430 Vytautas died, being 80 years old. In 1434 Jogaila died; at that time Sigismund, a younger brother of Vytautas, was grand-duke of Lithuania.

In a retrospect, we can first of all see that Lithuania did not convert to Christianity because it was forced to do so by the Teutonic Order, but because its leader Jogaila had the opportunity to become king of Poland. Since he accepted this possibility, he promised in change to be baptized and to admit Christianity to Lithuania. So, basically it was because Jogaila could receive something, that he accepted Christianity, not because he was forced to conversion.

A second point I want to make is, that at that time there was a very strong link between Christianity and the secular authorities. Western Europe looked upon itself as a Christian empire, and the Roman Catholic priests could do their missionary work mainly because they were protected by the emperor and his soldiers. The Teutonic Order, which met much criticism even in the Christian empire, is an extreme case. This phenomenon of a Christian empire has not existed always. In the first centuries of the Christian era the church has lived in the non-Christian Roman empire, and many of the emperors in Rome have persecuted the Christians. Then the Christian church was often looked upon as a dangerous sect, which did not accept the cult of the emperor as son of God, and which did not accept the traditional gods. In the first centuries of the church, the Christians lived more like some Lithuanian Christians have lived in the last 50 years: hindered and even persecuted. Only in the fourth century, in 313, the new emperor Constantine had given freedom to the Christian religion, since he himself was a Christian. In the course of the fourth century, Christianity became the new religion of the state, which grew even very intolerant to the Christian heresies and to the pagan religions. Since that time the Christian church
was protected by the authorities. This appears to have been favorable for the churches, but a negative aspect is, that Christianity was linked with violence and with armies... Christian soldiers had to defend the claims of their kings and emperors, Christians were invited to fight the Muslim Turks in Palestine. All this was a development which was not foreseen, and which is not taught, by the gospel of Jesus Christ. He taught, to love one's enemies and to restrict violence as much as possible. This was meant for everybody. But in the Middle Ages these words of Jesus were applied mainly to the monks: they should live according to the radical teaching of Jesus, and ordinary people, and knights and kings and emperors, were assumed to have a different responsibility, so that they were allowed to practise violence and coercion.

Yet, in spite of the fact that many countries in Europe have come to know the Christian faith by means of missionaries who were accompanied by armies, there also were true conversions. In Europe, very many people came to know God according to the teaching of Jesus Christ, and their lives were changed by that.

As for Lithuania, it must be admitted that it has mostly been christianized by Polish preists, who did not master the Lithuanian language. For a long time, Christianity was a foreign religion, which was accepted by the people rather superficially. Pagan practices like offerings to the gods and the erection of wooden poles have persisted for centuries. As for these poles, which were gradually changed into crosses, some bishops wanted to destroy them, but since the people fixed Christian symbols to them, they gradually came under the protection of the Catholic church. In general, it is possible that many of the Polish village priests in Lithuania were rather mild and understanding towards the Lithuanian people, and accepted their habits and a good deal of their traditions.

All this could happen because Lithuania had been incorporated in a kingdom that had already been christianized, Poland, and because Jogaila had to promise to accept Christianity. The motives were not quite pure, but it would be wrong to be just sceptical about the Christian faith because it has been introduced in this way. The methods of forced conversion were also criticized, and a more peaceful spreading of the Christian faith existed as well. Yet, it is clear that this history of christianizing the Baltic states evokes many questions and doubts; but also, after all, gratitude.

2. The Reformation of the church

9th May, 1991

In the sixteenth century a huge Reformation of the Roman Catholic church had started with some important reformers. Of these, I just mention the names of Martin Luther in Wittenberg, Ulrich Zwingli in Zürich, John Calvin in Geneva and Menno Simons in Friesland. Prior to the Reformation in the sixteenth century other reformatons had emerged, e.g. in Bohemia, led by John Hus. But their influence had been more restricted, whereas the Reformation which was initiated by Martin Luther quickly spread throughout Europe. An important reason for this spread was the art of printing, which made it possible that his ideas became known quickly and accurately.

What was the Reformation all about? Why did the Roman Catholic church provoke the protest of so many of its members? I could give many reasons, and deal with them for a long time, but if I did so, I would not have enough time for the Reformation of the church in Lithuania, which had its own specific motives. But in short, I just have to say something about the setting of the Reformation as a whole, in order to make the Reformation in Lithuania more understandable.

It all started with Martin Luther, an augustinian monk and priest, who was professor in biblical exegesis in Wittenberg (East Germany, between Berlin
and Leipzig. He feared God, he was even afraid of God. Yet, thanks to his study of the Bible he discovered that God was different from the image he had got of Him in his own church. For example, it was taught that in order to receive remission of sins, you could buy indulgences. These written proofs of forgiveness of sin were cunningly used for building the St. Peter, the huge church in Rome. Martin Luther protested against this practice of selling forgiveness, because he had discovered that, instead, true repentance and faith in Jesus Christ was necessary in order to be reconciled with God. But the bishops and the pope did not acknowledge that Luther bore witness to a biblical truth, and after a conflict of some years they excommunicated him from the Roman Catholic church. Luther's protest had started in 1517, and in 1521 he was excommunicated. Very quickly Luther's views had spread throughout Europe. His writings were read in many countries. His protest against the abuse of power by the Roman Catholic church was recognized by many people. Luther's main point was, that the relationship with God is given freely, only through grace, not because you have achieved anything, but just since you believe in Jesus Christ as Saviour, as the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world. In terms of the apostle Paul: man is justified (only) by faith, not by works (Romans 3:28).

Another reformer was John Calvin, who was a French jurist. He worked in Strasbourg and in Geneva, and his ideas about the reformation of the church were different from Luther's. Calvin understood the true reformation of the church as the establishment of the Kingdom of God, or the Reign of Christ, on earth. This could be realized only by a pure church which was eager to keep pure both its doctrine and its worship of God. Calvin urged the Christians to dedicate their whole life to these ideals of faith. In general it is said that Luther was mainly interested in man's salvation, whereas Calvin had a broader view of the gospel, which had to influence the whole of society. Luther was willing to cooperate with the authorities like counts and dukes, whereas Calvin did not so much have this opportunity, so that in his theology he is more critical towards the governments of the countries. Moreover, Luther used other theological terms for the sacrament of the Lord's Supper (Holy Communion) than Calvin did. But as for Luther's main point of salvation through God's grace, by faith in Jesus Christ, Calvin completely agreed with Luther. Yet, it would carry us too far if we dealt with all the differences between Luther and Calvin more in detail. I hope this short sketch is enough as an introduction of both of them.

Another name I mentioned was Menno Simons. He is just one representative of the radical wing of the Reformation, which taught that many of the rules in the New Testament had to be practised literally; e.g. baptism by immersion, of adults only; total pacifism; and not swearing oaths, like Jesus had taught in his sermon on the mount. Menno Simons came from Friesland, but also in Switzerland similar ideas had risen, and similar congregations had originated. They are called Mennonites or Anabaptists.

In general one can say that, from a human point of view, the Reformation was made possible through the cultural Renaissance, which favoured studying Greek and Hebrew, the languages of the Bible, and a critical mind towards all traditional opinions. The main goal of the reformers was, to transform the church to its original appearance, i.e. how it was in the first centuries after Christ.

This was long enough as a general introduction. Now about Lithuania. The first question is: did the Lithuanian church need a reformation?

As for the Roman Catholics in Lithuania, their priests were mainly Poles, who did not master the Lithuanian language; very often, the ordinary people had been christianized just superficially. In the eastern part of Lithuania (which is mainly outside of your actual borders), the Greek Orthodox church
was predominant, but although its priests spoke the West-Russian language, which was the language of the people, many of these priests were rather simple and unlearned people; in other words, the ordinary people usually were not very much instructed in matters of their faith. Moreover, many people in Lithuania had simply continued to adhere to the pagan religion, although they might have been baptized. But many of them even were not! In the sixteenth century, roughly 150–200 years after Jogaila had admitted Roman Christianity to his country, paganism was still strong. This is attested by several people. For example, in 1533 a Roman Catholic (Andreas Nodbar) reported that Christians in the area of Ukmerge continued to bury their dead in the groves and holy fields, worshipped oaks, stones, rivers and reptiles. And in 1595 an other Roman Catholic (Alexander Comules) wrote to the pope, that the priests were useless to the church, because they did not speak the language of the flock.

So did Lithuania need a reformation of the church? My answer is: It surely did, for to many baptized people the Protestant Reformation would be the first occasion to come to know the gospel more profoundly, and in their own language.

A very important role for the Reformation in Lithuania was played by the university of Königsberg, which is now called Kaliningrad. As I said, Luther’s influence had also touched counts and dukes; the duke of Prussia, Albrecht von Hohenzollern, had accepted Luther’s view on the gospel, and in 1545 he had transformed the Paedagogium in Königsberg into a Protestant university. Thus, between 1536 and 1548 students from Poland and from the western part of Lithuania — sons of bajorai —, who studied at Königsberg, were influenced by the new doctrines. Some of them even studied in Wittenberg! In 1539 Abraham Kulwiec founded a school for young nobles in Kaunas, which he led in the spirit of the Reformation; yet, in 1542 he was forced by the bishops to flee to Königsberg. (In Lithuania it is generally held that this school existed in Vilnius; I follow S. Kot, who argued in 1952 that in reality it was in Kaunas). Also in 1539 a Lutheran church was established in Vilnius. The Lutheran confession mainly spread among the German settlers in the towns and among the bajorai. Most influential among these bajorai was the Radvila (Radziwiłł) family. Nicola(s) (Mikołaj) Radwila the Black was the most important protector of the Reformation here at that time.

The first phase of the Reformation in Lithuania ended in 1548, when Sigismund the Old (or I), king of Poland and Lithuania, died. Sigismund the Old was an opponent of the Reformation, but he had tolerated it in eastern Prussia and in Lithuania. In Lithuania his son, Sigismund Augustus (or II), had reigned already since 1544, and he had invited two preachers who preached in the vein of the Reformation. After the death of his father, many people expected him to adhere to the Reformation, but he never did so; yet he remained tolerant towards it.

As for the German settlers, it may be understandable that they accepted the views of their fellow German Luther, especially since they heard that many parts of Germany had turned to the Reformation. But it may be less clear for what reason the Lithuanian bajorai embraced the new teachings. It should be noted that not only the Roman Catholic nobles in the western part of Lithuania converted to the Reformation, but also many Greek Orthodox nobles, who lived in the eastern slavonic part; whereas the Reformation was a protest against the Roman Catholic church, not against the Greek Orthodox church!

As for the Roman Catholics, first of all, we should not exclude the purely religious motive. It makes a difference, either to believe in God not being sure about your salvation, being afraid of judgement, for fear of purgatory or hell; or to believe in God being happily assured that he is loving and mild, that he forgives sins because Jesus Christ is our mediator and Sav-
The Lutheran way of believing in God brought about joy and freedom. This must have been an important motive for the Catholic bajoral to switch from one confession to another.

But other motives can be detected too. A Roman Catholic had to submit to the bishops and to the pope in Rome. The bishops and the priests in Lithuania were all on the side of Poland; most often they were Polish themselves. The Lithuanian bajoral were not against the union with Poland, but to a certain extent they also wanted to preserve their independence, and they did not always like to submit to the Catholic clergy. Moreover, the Roman Catholic Church did not sufficiently offer the possibility of spiritual and cultural development, in which the nobles wanted to share. - Becoming Protestant implied, that one withdrew from the spiritual and political influence of the Roman and Polish church, and that other relations with Protestants in the western countries could be established instead. The rise of Protestantism also implied that the power of the grand-duke (King Sigismund Augustus) was weakened, since he could not use the spiritual authority of the church anymore as a natural ally. All this made it attractive to turn to the new confession of freedom and salvation only by faith in Christ.

As I said, also Greek Orthodox bajoral turned to the Reformation, whereas it was intended as a Reformation of the Roman Catholic, and not of the Greek Orthodox church. Which may have been their motives? - Being Roman Catholic implied, that one was "orientated" towards western Europe; that is, the countries where new developments in arts and science, and civilisation, came from. On the other hand, one could not expect new developments from the eastern world, where everything stood still. But being directed towards western Europe implied, that one had to be a Roman Catholic, which meant that one had to accept the authority of the bishops and of the pope. This authority also had political aspects, since the kings all were Roman Catholic.

Now, since the rise of Protestantism, a new possibility was offered to the Greek Orthodox nobles, to "orientate" towards the West and to have part in the knowledge and developments there, yet without being obliged to submit to the aspirations of the Roman Catholic church.

Was it a legitimate motive, to turn to the Protestant confession partly for social and political reasons? I think it was, since faith in Jesus Christ must not be connected with political power. The connection between political power and the church, which was manifested in the Roman Catholic church, was not right, was not according to the gospel. So I conclude that turning to the new view of the Christian faith as a protest against the leading church was quite understandable, and legitimate. Moreover, the Greek Orthodox church had badly educated priests, who could hardly teach the Christian faith and explain the Bible. At that time they could not satisfy the hunger of the nobles to know more about it. Thanks to the Reformation many young bajoral got the opportunity to study in Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands.

Yet, the nobles themselves also were a political power! On their estates they invited Protestant preachers from Poland and from Prussia, who taught the gospel to them and to their household. But the nobles also had them preach to the local people in the villages. So the Reformation was very much organized by the bajoral. In this respect there was a difference between the Lithuanians in the west and those in the east: in Žemaitija many local people who used to be Roman Catholics turned to the Reformation, partly because the sermons were also preached in Lithuanian, which was something new; whereas those in the slavonic parts of Lithuania mostly remained faithful to the Greek Orthodox priests. So in the east the Reformation did not really influence the local people in the countryside, but mainly the bajoral.
The Lutheran phase of the Reformation lasted until 1556. After that time, the Calvinist confession became more influential, especially since Nicolas Radvila switched to this confession. In my introduction I have tried to say something about the doctrinal and practical differences, and I think it would lead too far to explain more in detail in which aspects the confessions were different. In any case one can note that Radvila was convinced by the Polish Calvinist reformer Jan Zaski to change his mind in some matters of the Lord's Supper and perhaps of the organization of the church. In 1557 Zaski had come to Vilnius in order to inspire the Reformation in Lithuania, which brought about that many of the nobles followed Radvila and turned to Calvinism, even as far as the Dniepr! The local people who used to hear Lutheran preachers, were now instructed in the Calvinist way.

As a sign of learning and study of the Bible in the original languages, in 1552 a translation of the New Testament into Polish has been made by the Lutheran Jan Seklucyan. In 1563 a Polish translation of the whole Bible was printed in Brest (Brzesko), payed by Radvila. Between 1579 and 1590 Jonas Breitkunas made a translation into Lithuanian, but since at that time it was too expensive to print it, it has never been used. (I read in Musy Sparmaj 65 (1990) that also in 1555 a Lithuanian translation of the Bible has been made according to Luther's translation. In the textbooks this edition is not mentioned. I guess that it has been translated out of German.)

Apart from the Lutheran and the Calvinist wings of the Reformation, Lithuania also knew a more radical current, which corresponded with the developments in western Europe. I mentioned the Mennonites or Anabaptists, who wanted to return even more radically to the New Testament than the other Reformers would, but there were other currents too. In Switzerland Michael Servet had agitated against the dogma of the Trinity. In 1553 he has been burned alive in Geneva, the town of John Calvin. Servet thought that Christians should also abolish the doctrine that the one God consists of three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, since this would not be a biblical dogma. Indeed the dogma of the Trinity has been formulated only in the fourth century, in reaction to those who put the Son, Jesus, on a lower level than the Father. It would take quite a lot of time to explain the motives why at that time the church decided to declare that God is triune, and I think it is better not to deal with this in much detail. To say just shortly what the whole conflict was about: the question was, if our salvation was basically worked by a man, Jesus Christ, or given by God, who sent his Son, who was equal to Him. Is salvation by Christ a free gift from God, or can we only attain salvation by following Jesus Christ on his way to God?

Anyway, the teaching of Michael Servet also reached Poland and Lithuania, and here it found some ardent adherers. I will mention just some names: Peter of Goniadz, Simon Budny, and the Italians Fausto Sozzini and George Blandrata. They did not all have the same opinions. Some of them were more radical than the others; e.g. Peter of Goniadz propagated absolute pacifism: Christians should never bear arms, and they should not accept public functions (because of the violence which a functionary sometimes has to practice). He denied the divinity of Christ and rejected infant baptism. He advocated that congregations were real communities and shared their possessions. - Simon Budny was radical in another sense; as a biblical scholar, he detected many interpolations in the Bible (as he saw it), he denied the divinity and preexistence of Christ (which means that Christ was with God the Father from all eternity and thus, God himself). Yet, he acknowledged that the authorities had to guarantee peace and order, if necessary by means of violence. He was not a pacifist, and was more or less conservative as for the position of the nobility and their possessions and subjects. - All of these theologians went through a personal evolution. E.g., Peter of
Goniadz first was Roman Catholic, then he became a Calvinist, he ended as an "Antitrinitarian" (which is one of the names of this current). Simon Budny originally was Greek Orthodox, he also became a Calvinist, finally he was a "Unitarian", since he believed that only God the Father was really God.

For the Calvinist Reformation the rise of the Antitrinitarians meant a considerable weakening of their position. In their synods they condemned those who adhered to the radical doctrines, but many of them were not convinced. In the last years of his life even the main reformer of Lithuania, Nicolas Radvila, was involved in the Antitrinitarian movement, so that he favored and protected it. The Polish Calvinists were greatly relieved when he died in 1565! But the movement continued, as it found other protectors, like Jan Kiszka, Radvila’s cousin, starost of Žemaitija.

We see that the Reformation of the Christian church in Lithuania has developed in several directions. It has often been alleged that, in spite of the theological dissension of all the different currents, the atmosphere in Lithuania remained mostly relatively peaceful. Historians have pointed to the fact that in matters of religion Lithuania of the sixteenth century could be characterized by a rather peaceful coexistence of many different confessions: Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Lutherans, Calvinists, Anabaptists, Unitarians; and not forgetting the Jews and the Muslim Tartars and the pagan religion. For a long time, Lithuania had been accustomed to a religious variety, and although people did not always agree with each other, it is assumed that they usually tolerated their respective differences; anyway, that their polemics were mostly confined to verbal disputes. Yet, I found some exceptions to this pretended rule. In 1566 the Anabaptist congregation of Vilnius was forced to leave the town; this expulsion was mainly organized by a young German theologian, Georg Weigel. And in 1591 there was an anti-Jewish riot in Vilnius. So it is not completely true that the Lithuanians did not practise violence against each other for religious reasons.

A tendency towards more unity appeared in 1570, when the Lutherans and the Calvinists recognized their respective confessions as being truly Christian and orthodox. In western Europe this mutual acceptance had not been possible! This is called the Consensus of Sanomier (Sandomierz in Poland), which dealt, among other things, with the different views on the Lord's Supper. Concerning the Roman Catholic and the Greek Orthodox churches it should be said, however, that both of them were rather weak and not sufficiently energetic to defend themselves on a theological level. They did not have the theologians who were able to convince those people who were eager to study and to broaden their horizon. The next lecture will deal with the Roman Catholic answer to the loss of many of its members.

As for the Reformation, a weak point can be detected in what appeared to be its strength: it was spread and organized by the nobles, and thus the Reformed faith became dependent on the favours of these bajoral. Suppose they changed their mind, who would pay the wages of the preachers? If the chapel of their estate was not at the disposal of the congregation anymore, where could it come together? So, although many nobles turned to the Protestant faith in order to get free from the Roman Catholic church and its political influence, at their turn they also connected the Protestant churches with their own political influence. The next time we will see, which were the consequences of this typical feature of the Reformation in your land.
In this third lecture I will mainly deal with the reaction of the Roman Catholic church to the Protestant Reformation and with its effects on the Protestant churches. But before I will deal with the attempts to win back Poland and Lithuania for the Roman church, it is necessary to say briefly what was happening within the Roman Catholic church in general. In 1545 a council was organized in Trent, in the north of Italy, by then the most southern part of the German empire of Charles V. The council of Trent has lasted eighteen years, but in fact it consisted of three shorter periods: 1545-1548, 1551-1552, and 1562-1563. The bishops discussed the whole of their theology, sometimes they slightly modified the medieval doctrines, often they specified their theology in reaction to the Protestant doctrines. The outcome of this council was partly a sort of Catholic reformation, but to a large extent its effect appeared to be a restauration of the Roman Catholic church.

Even prior to this council Ignatius of Loyola had founded the Society of Jesus, the order of the Jesuits, with the aim of defending the Roman Catholic church against the Reformation and of undertaking missionary work among the non-Christian peoples. The order had been recognized by the pope in 1540. Ignatius had trained many gifted men in a profound spiritual life, in philosophy and theology. They should be the theologians which the church needed in its discussions with Protestants.

Yet, for Poland and Lithuania their help was not called in immediately. In 1555 the pope, Paul IV, sent a nuncio to Poland, in order to save the Roman Catholic church from its total collapse. His name was Aloystius Lippomani, an Italian. The pope had written a severe letter to King Sigismund Augustus II, accusing him that he supported the Protestants and that especially the duke in Vilnius, Nicolas Radvila, defended the heresies. Lippomani also wrote a letter to Radvila, since he was the king's brother in law and his friend, and thus he had much influence upon him and upon the whole of Poland and Lithuania. Lippomani reproached him, e.g., for introducing the communion of two kinds (sharing bread and wine at the Lord's supper), abolishing the worship of the saints and the prayers for the dead. He tried to reconvert Radvila to Catholicism, but it was all in vain. Radvila answered the written accusations in rather polemical language; the correspondence was published at Königsberg in 1556. So this first intervention in the spread of the Reformation was without any result. Instead, Radvila accepted the influence of Jan Zaski, the Polish reformer, who convinced him of the Calvinist views whereas until then he had adhered to the Lutheran teaching.

Another attempt to combat the Reformation in Poland and Lithuania occurred in 1558 when the Dutch Jesuit Petrus Canisius came to Poland in order to come to know the situation; but his visit and talks with Polish priests did not have any immediate result either. Canisius had come to Poland because the Jesuits had been invited to send someone. They had been invited by Stanislaw Hosen (Hosius), who at that time was the bishop of Warmia (Ermland / Polish Prussia). He was born in Krakow from a German family, he was partly educated in Vilnius and partly in Krakow, and he had continued his studies in Italy. He was a learned and pious man. In 1561 he had been nominated cardinal. In 1564, when he returned from the council of Trent, he saw that Protestantism had spread more and more in Poland and Lithuania, and he was very alarmed at the deplorable condition of the Roman Catholic church. For that reason he called in once again the order of the Jesuits, and now they accepted his call more eagerly. As for Lithuania, the Jesuits arrived in Vilnius in 1569; they founded a college so that young people in Lithuania could study on a good level with-
out being seduced by the Protestant doctrines. - In the year of their arrival, 1569, also the Union of Lublin was concluded, i.e. the pact of total unification of Poland and Lithuania instead of the personal union which had existed until then.

But even before the Jesuits had arrived in Vilnius in 1569, the decline of the Reformation had emerged already. In 1567 one of the sons of Lithuania's great reformer Nicolas Radwina the Black, Nicolas Christoph Radwina, had converted to Catholicism, and he induced his three brothers to do the same. One of them, Jerzy (George) was even nominated bishop of Vilnius and cardinal. It is told of Nicolas Christoph Radwina that he bought all the copies he could get of the Bible of Brest which his father had printed in 1563, and burned them publicly in the market-place of Vilnius.

The reason of this move back to the Roman Catholic church may have been that some of the Protestant bajorai were much annoyed by the grave splittings and quarrels among the Protestants. There were Lutherans, Calvinists, Anabaptists, Antitrinitarians, etc., so it is imaginable that earnest believers longed for a stable church. It appears that thanks to the council of Trent and thanks to people like cardinal Hosen the Catholic church had won back some of its respect. Together with the disunity among the Protestants this may have caused the reconversion of part of the bajorai.

When the Jesuits founded other schools in Lithuania, and printed religious texts in Lithuanian, more and more people were won back for the Roman Catholic church. Apart from the reasons I gave already, it appears that the Protestant conviction of the nobility had often been rather superficial, so that when the Jesuits came, these nobles did not have enough theological knowledge in order to answer the arguments of the Jesuits, and easily agreed with them.

The year after the Union of Lublin and after the Jesuits had arrived in Vilnius, the Protestants also tried to reach more unity. In 1570 the Protestants of Lutheran and Calvinist confession, and thirdly the Bohemian Brethren (refugees who had settled in Poland and Lithuania), concluded that their confessions were close enough to recognize each other. In 1570 they made the Consensus of Sandomir (Sandomierz, 200 km south of Warsaw). It is very remarkable that in Poland and Lithuania Lutherans and Calvinists declared that they recognized each other's orthodoxy, e.g. in matters of the Lord's Supper, as at that time in western Europe such a unity has never been attained. - Yet, other Protestants were definitely excluded from this unity, namely the Anabaptists and the Antitrinitarians or Unitarians. And many gifted preachers had even moved to these congregations! It appears that the Lutherans and the Calvinists lost their people both on the side of the Roman Catholic church and on the side of the radical Reformation.

It may be interesting to give the estimated number of Protestant congregations in Lithuania which had accepted the Consensus of Sandomir; approximately 190 in 1570. Often these congregations gathered in the estates of the nobles or in houses; usually they did not have churches of their own. In 1650 about 93 Reformed congregations had remained. Gradually the number of these congregations has decreased: the decline of the Reformation was irreversible. In 1718 51 Protestant churches could be counted in Lithuania, and as you know this number has decreased all the time.

In 1572 king Sigismund Augustus II had died. Although he had never become a Protestant, he had always been tolerant towards Protestantism. In 1573 the Sejm in Warsaw declared that all confessions, also Jews and Tartars, had equal rights of citizenship. In 1576 the Hungarian (Transylvanian) ruler Stephan Báthory was crowned king of Poland and Lithuania. Being Roman Catholic, he opposed the persecution of Protestants. During his reign the Jesuits could found many schools, but the freedom of religion was warranted. It is told that he prevented the Protestant church in Vilnius from
being plundered, which means that the Catholics tended to be violent. Yet, the printing press of the Protestants in Vilnius was plundered, at the instigation of Nicolas Radzila, who wanted to compensate for the heresy of his father! Báthory thought that wherever a religion was supported by fire and sword, and not by doctrine and good conduct, it always led to internal commotions and domestic war. He reigned until his sudden death in 1586.

In 1537 Sigismund III (from Sweden) was crowned king; he has reigned until 1632, and during his reign very much has changed in Poland and Lithuania. Several activities of the Jesuits of this period merit to be told. As you know, in the sixteenth century the eastern, slavonic part of Lithuania was Greek Orthodox (one might also say: Russian Orthodox). Usually the ordinary people had remained faithful to their church, whereas part of the nobles had turned to the Calvinist confession. The Jesuits not only tried to convert these individuals to their Roman Catholic church, they even attempted to win the whole of the Greek Orthodox church for Rome! The Orthodox churches of the east and the Roman Catholic church of the west had split between 867 and 1054. Both churches had reached Lithuania either from the west or from the east. When Jogaila had accepted Roman Christianity for his country, mixed marriages were forbidden. Yet, both churches had rather peacefully coexisted. But since the Jesuits had arrived, they attempted to convince the Greek Orthodox bishops to acknowledge the authority of the pope, that is to say, to become Roman Catholics! Yet, apart from that, they would be allowed to preserve their own Orthodox tradition. They could maintain their slavonic liturgy, they did not need to use Latin, and married men would be allowed to be ordained as priests. By the end of the sixteenth century these attempts appeared to be successful. In 1596 there was a synod of the Roman Catholic church with those Orthodox bishops, who were willing to accept the union with Rome; this synod took place in Brest (Brześć), so that this union is known as the Union of Brest. But in fact the consequences were not so unifying as the Jesuits had hoped: many of the Orthodox bishops did not agree with the union, they excommunicated their colleagues who did follow it, so that the result was three sorts of churches: the Roman Catholic church, the Orthodox church united with Rome, and the Greek (or Russian) Orthodox church. In the eastern part of Poland they still coexist all the three of them. Yet, in spite of the split of the Greek Orthodox church, the position of the Roman Catholic church had become more solid.

As a result, the Protestants and the Greek Orthodox attempted to make one front against the Roman Catholic church. As long as the Reformation had existed, there had been no possibility of working toward any unity in matters of faith, but now Protestants and Orthodox met in order to conclude a political pact. In 1599 representatives of both confessions concluded the Confederation of Vilnius, but in reality it did not have any effect of more cooperation.

Until then, the contention between the different confessions had been fierce but - at least as far as we know - without much violence. This changed in 1611, on the day of the Roman Catholic festival of Corpus Christi. In Vilnius there was a Reformed pastor, Franco, who was an Italian by birth. In Poland he had converted to the Calvinist faith. When he saw that the host was carried in procession through the streets of Vilnius, representing the body of Christ, Corpus Christi, he was struck by this ceremony which he considered to be idolatry. In public Franco declared that the sacrament which they worshipped was nothing but bread. He was arrested and accused of having meditated murder, either of the king, Sigismund III (who was present too) or of the bishop. He was condemned to death and executed in the castle. The day after Franco's execution a mob, led by the pupils of the
Jesuits, attacked the Protestant church in Vilnius, destroyed and burned it entirely, and the Protestant pastors were maltreated. Yet, Krasinski, who relates this story in his book of 1840, also transmits an oral tradition which he heard in Vilnius from the Protestants, and which is important for our view on the Roman Catholics of that time. When the infuriated mob was dragging in the streets the Protestant pastors, Franciscan monks arrived and asked that the pastors should be handed over to them. They said that they had the right to punish them, as these pastors had preached in the parish of their convent. But when the pastors were led into the Franciscan convent, they were treated very well by these monks, and they were conducted to a safe place. This story makes clear that not all Roman Catholics were as fierce and violent as the Jesuits were. After the death of Sigismund III, in 1632, his eldest son, Władysław IV, was crowned king of Poland and Lithuania. He reigned until 1648. He was opposed to religious persecution; he did not even admit Jesuits to his court! In the year of his crowning he accepted the dedication of a new edition of the Protestant Bible, which was addressed to him by Duke Christoph Radvila. In 1639 it appeared that the enmity of the Jesuits had not disappeared. Their students in Vilnius beat the rector of the Protestant school, Hartlib; they plundered some houses of rich Protestants, and in 1640 the Protestants were forbidden to have their services within the walls of Vilnius; so they were obliged to leave their church and to move to a suburb, whereas the pastors were not allowed to enter the town. The Protestant school was forced to stop after these incidents. The only places where Protestants were rather safe, were the estates of the nobles who had remained faithful to the Protestant confession. — Sad to relate, a negative feature of Protestant life in their area's was, that these nobles often used to force the population to attend the Reformed services. Unwilling peasants were even fined. In spite of the admonitions of the synods, this practice has persisted in the first half of the seventeenth century. At that time most of the nobles had turned to the Roman Catholic church again. To a large extent Lithuania as well as Poland became Catholic lands, although with a Protestant minority. Apart from them, there were other minorities too; the next lecture will deal with the Jews and with the Muslims who also lived here. As for the Antitrinitarians and Anabaptists it must be said that in the seventeenth century they were much persecuted, so that they had to close their schools or even to leave the country (in 1660). Much more could be said about the disasters which happened to Poland and Lithuania: the wars and gradual decline of its power, the attacks of the Russians and the Swedes in 1655... I read that in this period many Lithuanians fled their land and that part of them went to Holland, where they printed many books. And finally one should mention the partition of Poland in 1795, which meant for Lithuania that henceforth it was part of the Russian empire. The union with Poland, which had lasted for four centuries, was over.

As a conclusion I would like to evaluate this history of the Reformation and the Counter-reformation in Lithuania. Up to today we see that the Counter-reformation has been successful, since Lithuania is predominantly a Roman Catholic land. The radical sects of the sixteenth and seventeenth century have disappeared, although similar congregations have arisen again: I mean Baptists and Full Gospel congregations. As for the Roman Catholic church I would like to say, that I would not blame the Catholics of this time for what has happened three or four centuries ago. I think that the behaviour of the Jesuits was not always very Christianly, but I also have my doubts about the conviction of all these Protestants who gave in to the Jesuit pressure and turned to the Roman Catholic church again. Neither I
can appreciate the compulsion by means of which nobles induced the local population to attend the Reformed services.

The reason why the majority of Lithuania has become Roman Catholic again, can be found on both sides. The Roman Catholic church was fully justified in attempting to win back the lost area’s, and especially in the beginning the Jesuits did not have any violent means for reaching this goal. Yet, most of the nobles turned to the Roman Catholic church! It is important to see the weakness of the Reformation in Lithuania, as it depended so much on the favours of these nobles.

I would not like to reach by means of these lectures, that the relationships between Roman Catholics and Protestants would deteriorate here and now! Quite the contrary, I hope that Protestants of all different denominations and Roman Catholics can recognize each other as Christians, as people who all believe in God and who intend to follow Jesus Christ, and who seek the inspiration of the same Spirit. The organization of our churches may be rather different, but in many countries it has been experienced, that these differences can be overcome by good personal contacts and by the intention to listen to each other’s motives.

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