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Religious Relations and the Issue of Religious Tolerance in Poland and Lithuania in the 16th and 17th Century

Much has already been written on the topic of religious tolerance* in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 16th and 17th centuries, or separately about tolerance in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Tazbir 1973 and 1993; Wasilewski 1974; Kosman 1978; Seredyka; Mironowicz 2002). This has, in one respect, brought positive educational results for Polish society, as knowledge on the topic became widespread. To some extent, the work of Janusz Tazbir made an international audience aware of the topic. On the other hand, in our Polish view of religious relations of the time, some simplified judgments appeared, which later transformed into lasting stereotypes. What I have on my mind here is the view that the Commonwealth was an oasis – the only one – of religious tolerance in 16th century Europe. In another common stereotypical concept, the Polish and Lithuanian sovereigns from the Jagiellon dynasty carried out of intentionally tolerant religious politics towards their subjects. In fact, their policies were defined more than anything by a great dose of pragmatism, which sometimes arose from external reasons, but more often constituted an answer to internal conditions. It is important in this context to distinguish between the policies carried out by the last two Jagiellons –

* However, using the term “religious tolerance” with respect to the description of certain religious attitudes present in early modern Europe makes some of the historians doubt, mainly in fact in Poland, though it seems that it is difficult to replace this undoubtedly ambiguous notion with another

Sigismund I the Old (time of rule 1506–1548) and Sigismund II Augustus (time of rule in Poland 1548–1572) – especially in respect to the Reformation.

In the current Polish historiography devoted to the subject of religious tolerance the tendency to present relations mainly between Catholics and Protestants is dominant. This has obviously resulted from the fact that Polish historians have tried to show what this problem in the Commonwealth looked like in comparison to other European countries. However, the specific conditions of Poland and Lithuania were not stressed enough. Perhaps the most important factor in shaping religious tolerance in Poland and Lithuania in the period of the Reformation was multiculturalism and religious diversity present in both countries, especially in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Mironowicz 2002: 339–344). The great conquests undertaken by the great Lithuanian sovereigns in the East between 13th and 15th century meant that the territory of Lithuania consisted, in the main part, of old Ruthenian land, previously part of the Kievan Rus'. This also meant that the members of the Orthodox Church constituted the great majority of Lithuanian society. That Władysław Jagiełło accepted baptism according to the Latin rite in 1385 (at the time of the conclusion of the union between the Crown of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania) did not change this situation significantly. In the beginning of the 16th century about 4 times more Orthodox Ruthenians lived in Lithuania than Catholic Lithuanians (mainly in the so called Aukštaitija).

Representatives of other religions (other than Christianity) also lived in Lithuania. At the turn of the 15th century Vytautas the Great – the Great Duke of Lithuania – settled a few thousand Tatars* and a smaller

*The Tatar settlement in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania concerned earlier times, which means the first half of the 14th century. About Tatars in Lithuania see: Tyszkiewicz 1989; Sobczak 1984.

number of Crimean Karaites (Zajączkowski 1961; Szyszman 1980; Gąsiorowski 2008). Both groups were granted full religious freedom in the area of their settlement. At the same time, they were, however, not given those political rights reserved only for Christians (at the beginning only for Catholics) and the gentry. This treatment was similar to that of the Jewish population, which started to arrive to Lithuania in larger contingents in the second half of the 15th century (Beršadskij 1883). At first, Jews lived mainly in the Western towns but gradually they settled in fortified towns in the Central and Eastern parts of Lithuania.

The existence of such a religious mosaic was only possible thanks to the tolerant politics of the Lithuanian rulers. There would have not been so many so successful conquests (at times actually bloodless) on the part of Lithuania in the Ruthenian lands without the pragmatic policy towards conquered lands that the Gediminids and later the Jagiellons implemented. The Ruthenians were granted complete religious freedom and also significant political and economic influence in the area. It is also worth remembering that part of the Gediminids accepted the Orthodox faith before the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was baptised according to the Latin rite (Liedke 2000). The Jagiellons transferred the tradition of the coexistence of people of different denominations and religions to the area of the Polish Kingdom, though it was not anything new there either. Also, Polish Catholic rulers from the Piast dynasty, who had for many years had contact with Ruthenian culture, learned to live in peace alongside representatives of other religions.

All this had established foundations for religious tolerance both in Lithuania as well as in Poland. Not only did this tradition of tolerance concern the policy carried out by the rulers that followed, but also all kinds of social relations. It is also necessary to remember here that Catholics in

the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and in the Crown of Poland – against the Pope’s restrictions – very often entered into marital unions with members of the Orthodox Church. The principal example for this actually came down from the top in the form of the marriage of Alexander Jagiellon and Helena, the daughter of the Moscow prince Ivan III in 1494.

Nevertheless, after accepting baptism by Władysław Jagiełło, Catholics had privileges under the law in Lithuania. However, the Great Duke of Lithuania, Zygmunt Kiejstutowicz, gave the Orthodox and Catholic boyars the same rights in 1434 (Lewicki 1894, vol. 3 531–532; Czermak 1903: 374–393; Halecki 1919, vol. 1: 316–317; Błaszczuk 2007, vol. 2 part 1: 683–684). The royal privilege issued at that time abolished almost all restrictions concerning the Orthodox in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. As a result of the previous Union Act in Horodło in 1413 they could still not hold some of the most important offices in the country*. They could also not build new churches (especially ones in stone) in the towns belonging to the Grand Duke of Lithuania. But in fact these restrictions only concerned the ethnically Lithuanian areas and additionally those areas, where the number of Catholics and Orthodox was similar. This was the case, for instance, in the capital Vilnius (see: Czermak 1903: 348–405; Chodynicki 1919/1920; Kempa 2001). In practice these restrictions were often ignored (Kempa 1999: 11 ff.). An average Orthodox believer in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is unlikely even to have known about the existence of legal restrictions concerning him and his co-believers.

In the Kingdom of Poland, no formal restrictions with regards to members of the Orthodox Church existed. If any religious conflicts arose they took place in larger cities and, in fact, were more frequently a result of economic issues. This happened in Lviv and Kamianets–Podilskyi where

*It’s about four high positions which gave access to the so called *ścisła rada wielkowska*: voivode of Vilnius, castellan of Vilnius, voivode of Trakai and castellan of Trakai.

Polish people (Catholics) tried to restrict the Ruthenians' access to the city's offices of authority and to the guilds. The Orthodox were often restricted from being judged under the law of the city (Gudziak 2008: 120–122). It is characteristic that the Armenians – of whom there were decidedly fewer – did not experience such difficulties, neither in Lviv nor in Kamianets–Podilskyi. Orders (or dictates) resulting from the Canon Law functioned differently, but these concerned Catholics as well as the members of the Orthodox Church.

The appearance of the Reformation in Europe did not cause too much internal turbulence in Poland and in Lithuania. The disturbance it caused here was in no way comparable to that which occurred in Western Europe. Nevertheless, King Sigismund I the Old (1506–1548) initially reacted firmly to the reformers' activities. In July 1520, he issued an edict which forbade the works of Martin Luther to be brought to Poland and to Lithuania, and thereby, in fact, stopping reformers from spreading his views. Other edicts of the king directed at the Reformation were published sporadically until 1543 (Wojak 1977: 29–37). Although the last edict against the Reformation was issued by Sigismund II Augustus in 1550 the vast majority of edicts were issued by his predecessor. However, it is important to remember here that the ownership of books supporting the Reformation, frequenting Protestant academies abroad, or promoting Protestant views in the Commonwealth resulted in severe punishment: banishment and/or the confiscation of private property (capital punishment did not feature as a possible sentence!). Such sentences were passed very frequently. And although, in practice they mainly concerned burghers and only sometimes clergy of noble origin, the spread of the Reformation was successfully halted during the reign of Sigismund I the Old.

The central role in the battle with the Reformation was played by ecclesiastical courts. The teaching of Luther was condemned during a number of Catholic synods under the rule of Sigismund I. Primate Jan Laski (died 1531) and his successor Maciej Drzewiecki (died 1535) were particularly active in suppressing the progress of the Reformation. It is important to underline that they could count on the King's support in this matter, who ordered his starostas to execute the ecclesiastical court's verdicts. This activity of some Catholic bishops, and in particular courts under their authority, forced the emigration – especially from large cities (Krakow, Poznań, Vilnius) – of many contemporary informal leaders of the Reformation from Poland and from Lithuania. Some of them found refuge in Silesia and some in Prussia. This concerned, among others, the 'father' of the Reformation in Little Poland, Jakub of Iłża (he fled to Wrocław in 1534), the founders of the Protestant school in Vilnius: Abraomas Kulvietis and Stanisław Rapagelonis (Rafajłowicz), or the propagator of Lutheranism in Poznań – Jan Seklucjan (all three eventually left for Königsberg in the 1540s).

However, in the estates of the gentry, the Reformation developed without any major obstacles. Some Reformation thinkers found shelter and protection under the wings of rich gentry and magnates. Sigismund I did not, in fact, fight Protestantism in the ranks of the gentry because he had to take into account the power of the enforcement movement where the main parts were played by the supporters of Reformation. On the other hand he reacted where religious slogans disturbed the social order. Hence, Sigismund I's expedition to Gdańsk in 1526 and the beheading of 15 leaders of a plebeian rebellion, which had led to the fall of the city authorities in 1525. Then, the restoration of Catholicism was formally announced in the city. This harsh reaction on the part of the King probably resulted from the

fact that he wanted to show the hierarchy of the Church (and above all – the Pope) his devotion to Catholicism, contested after he had agreed for the secularization of Prussia, and to the introduction of Lutheranism there by Prince Albrecht Hohenzollern. That this was the case can be observed if one examines the free development of Lutheranism in Gdańsk and other Prussian cities in the following years, in spite of the fact, that only in the years 1557–1559 did Sigismund I formally guarantee the cities of Gdańsk, Toruń and Elbląg the freedom to remain Lutheran and to further expand religious activity, subsequently extending these rights to the whole of Prussia (Maliszewski 1994: 259–260; Załęski 1900, vol. 1 part 2: 535; Tazbir 1975: 727).

Pragmatism was dominant In Sigismund I's actions towards the Reformation, although, it has to be said, the ruler did undertake specific endeavours in order to decrease the influence of the Reformation in Poland and in Lithuania. His actions were, in fact, stifled by his wife Bona Sforza. The King's actions did transgress certain borders. Among other things, it was precisely because of the limited activity of the King that both Poland and Lithuania avoided bloody religious battles. The Reformation did enter both countries, but did so slowly and consistently. The acceleration of its development took place during the rule of Sigismund II Augustus, the last Jagiellon on the Polish and Lithuanian thrones (he ruled in Poland from 1548 to 1572, while in Lithuania his rule began in 1544). The fast progress of the Reformation should not only be seen to be connected to the King's tolerant politics, but most of all to the activities of the rich gentry and magnates who accepted the new religious teaching. In some areas (e.g. Royal Prussia or Land of Wschowa) the development of Protestantism was also a result of the influence of Germans among the townsmen.

In the Grand Duchy of Lithuania Sigismund Augustus's issuing of Privilege of Vilnius in 1563 constituted an important turning point in the legal ratification of religious tolerance. It abolished restrictions of access of members of the Orthodox Church to the aforementioned most important offices in the country. The fact that it was issued was meant to be a step to facilitate the acceptance on the part of the Ruthenians of the new union with the Crown of Poland (the Union of Lublin was concluded in 1569). The confirmation of this privilege in 1568, which had been extended by the clause concerning retention of their titles by the Ruthenian princes, also served this purpose (edited in *MRPL* 1925, vol. 1: no 4–5, pp. 14–28). It is important to point out that the provisions of this privilege of 1563 explicitly point out that they also concerned Protestants (*MRPL* 1925, vol. 1: no 4, pp. 17). Therefore Lithuanian magnates, who had previously been Catholic, and who at that time were mainly Protestant, did not oppose the issuing of the Privilege, while in the first part of the 16th century, in order to preserve their dominant position in the political elites of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Lithuanians protested many times against the ruler breaching the existing restrictions concerning the Orthodox (e.g. Kempa 2001: 9). From a legal point of view, the Privilege of 1563 began the period of full religious tolerance in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania which lasted until 1596 (see Bardach 1998: 23).

In the Polish Kingdom, this was also the time of 'golden' religious freedom, at least with respect to the gentry. The Privilege of 1563 constitutes the first step on the way to the Warsaw Confederation of 1573. In 1570 the representatives of three Protestant denominations in the Commonwealth (the Lutherans, the Calvinists and the Czech Brethren) had already concluded the Sandomierz Agreement. These agreements had proven that, also in dogmatic matters, it was possible to focus on what

connected the dominations rather than on what divided them. Although the main creators of the Warsaw Confederation were the Protestants, it was supposed to grant religious freedom to all confessions including the members of the Orthodox Church, who were mentioned separately in the context of possessing their own churches. One of the main reasons for the Warsaw Confederation was the news of bloody religious fighting that reached the Commonwealth from Western Europe. The events of the St Bartholomew's night massacre in France had a huge impact in the Commonwealth (Tazbir 1987: 184–186). As a result most Catholics decided that it was necessary to form long-lasting foundations for religious peace in the Commonwealth, as long as it did not breach the rights of the Catholic Church. Although the Confederation was accepted on initiative of the Polish magnates and gentry, it was easily accepted by the Lithuanians as well (Wasilewski 1974: 118–119). At a later period of the history of the Commonwealth, when in the Crown of Poland the Warsaw Confederation was undermined by some Catholics, it became a part of official legislature in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, in that it became part of the Third Statute of Lithuania (ch. 3, § 3), approved by Sigismund III Vasa in 1588 (*Statut* 1988: 112–114).

While the gentry of the Crown and Lithuania possessed complete religious freedom, a more complicated situation prevailed in the cities of both the Crown and Lithuania. In private cities the owner's 'will' decided about the citizens' situation, usually not restricting their religious freedom. In the Royal and Ducal cities of the Commonwealth, the religious majority usually served in the main offices in the cities authorities, sometimes not letting in the religious minorities. However, it was mainly economic competition between the religious factions which decided in these matters. This happened in the Protestant cities of Prussia, in Orthodox towns in the

east of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Mogilev, Gomel, Orsha, Vitebsk, Mstsislaw and others), and also in many cities of Little and Great Poland that were dominated by Catholics. Where a relative balance of power among the religious and ethnic minorities existed, relations became complicated because of the division of influence in the local government as well as in the main guilds. Irrespective of this, in the majority of cities from the middle of the 16th century, when the persecutions of supporters of the Reformation stopped, the religious minorities were given complete freedom to worship. This 'golden era' of religious tolerance did not last as long in the majority of Crown cities as it did in Lithuanian cities. This was a result of the Counter-Reformation having begun earlier in the Crown of Poland than in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Moreover, the Reformation had, overall, been somewhat weaker in Poland than it had been in Lithuania.

Sometimes specific solutions were adopted in order to solve the issue of division of power in cities. For a long time, this allowed for a peculiar status quo among the representatives of various religions to be maintained. This happened in Vilnius for example. The strong presence of Ruthenians in this city caused Sigismund I to pass a privilege (so called statute) in 1536 which guaranteed them half of the seats in the city council (as part of the so called 'Ruthenian bench'. The whole council consisted of 24 councilors and 12 mayors; two mayors were on duty on continuous basis – one of them was Ruthenians – and four councilors – two from the Ruthenian nation, see: Łowmiańska 1929: 136–139). The remaining seats could be taken by Catholics. This privilege was confirmed by the following rulers including Sigismund III Vasa in June 1607 (Dubiński 1788: 53–56). The development of the Reformation meant that the 'Lithuanian bench' (formally Catholic) also included representatives of the Reformed denominations, mainly economically strong Lutherans. Actually this fact

points out that, in reality, religion was not the main reason that the council was split into two parts, but rather that its members were affiliated either with the Latin or the Ruthenian cultural circle. A similar rule of parity was adopted in the guilds of Vilnius (before the Union of Brest). There was, therefore, an equal number of “Greeks” and “Latinists” among the guild’s elders (Chodyncki 1925: 4–5).

The issue of the introduction of the Gregorian calendar in the Commonwealth in the years 1582–83 caused serious perturbations. It caused conflicts between Protestants and members of the Orthodox Church, who at first did not accept the reform of Pope Gregory III and the Catholics. It complicated the lives of citizens as far as the multitude of religious holidays was concerned. One of the biggest ‘calendar unrests’ in the Protestant community, which also had its roots in conflict between different social groups, took place in Riga (Ziemlewska 2007). The biggest conflict between Orthodox and Catholics took place in Lviv in 1583–84, and concerned the matter of using different calendars. This argument, initiated by the Latin bishop of Lviv Jan Dymitr Solikowski, was prevented from becoming a serious conflict by King Stephen Báthory (1576–1586), via the mediation of a select group of magnates (including Konstany Ostrogski). It ended in the victory for the Orthodox, whom the King guaranteed celebration of their religious holidays in accordance with the Julian calendar (Milkowicz 1895, vol. 1, part 1: no 76, pp. 107–108; Kempa 1997a: 124–125).

Undoubtedly, at the time the Warsaw Confederation was enacted, some Catholics treated this document as the lesser of two evils, as a necessity to avoid religious civil war in the Commonwealth. It was not a coincidence that the confederation was accepted a few months after the St Bartholomew’s night massacre in France. Therefore some Catholics

considered this document to be no more than a temporary concession to the Protestants. In particular, the majority of Latin bishops approached the treaty in this fashion. Their attitude (especially among the members of the upper church hierarchy) towards the Warsaw Confederation was also influenced by the consistently negative position of the Papacy towards it. In the Polish and Lithuanian episcopates the main opponent of confederation and, at the same time, the most important promoter of Catholic reform in the Commonwealth was the bishop of Warmia, Cardinal Stanislaus Hosius. From 1577, the higher church hierarchy in the Commonwealth started adopting the idea of Counter-Reformation. The formal beginning of this process took place during the synod in Piotrków, when the Catholic Church of the Commonwealth formally accepted the decisions of the Council of Trent. In effect, this meant stronger commitment on the part of the bishops to the reform of the church, and at the same time a commitment to fighting the Protestant Reformation. It is important to add that during the synod a resolution was made concerning the excommunication of the supporters of the Warsaw Confederation. Despite this resolution being passed and later accepted by the Pope, the Catholic Church in the Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was not yet ready to act upon it. In the following years the fact that this resolution existed remained unmentioned (Korolko 1974: 80–81).

At the turn of the 1580s a group of bishops who acted in the Counter-Reformation spirit appeared in the Polish Episcopate. The group included: Jan Dymitr Solikowski, Hieronim Rozrażewski, Wojciech Baranowski, Jerzy Radziwiłł. Later they were joined by other eminent hierarchs who had been educated in Rome, such as Bernard Maciejowski and Marcin Szyszkowski. They encouraged the other bishops and lower clergy to actively introduce the provisions of the Council of Trent. These

were aimed at the internal strengthening of the Catholic Church by, among other things, regular visitations of parishes, placing greater stress on the education of clergy (by opening new seminaries) and also by increasing the role of bishops in ensuring the moral discipline of the clergy.

The bishops were joined in their attempts at Counter-Reformation by two influential magnates, Mikołaj Krzysztof “the Orphan” Radziwiłł and Lew Sapieha. No wonder they both belonged to the group of converts (in this case from Calvinism). Such conversions occurred more and more frequently. As Andrzej K. Banach has noted, the Catholic Church undertook “a tactic of slow erosion of Protestantism by breaking up influential poly-religious circles, and by recruiting to Catholicism powerful heralds of these circles, or their children”. Let us add that attempts at recruiting the latter took the form of individual conversations. Another effective method of “converting” influential Protestants was through the influence of their relatives (Banach 1985: 27; *Lista protestanckich konwertytów* 1985: 28–34). Similar attempts were also undertaken towards the most significant representatives of the Orthodox Church. Sometimes in this case, it was enough to promise to recognize the superiority of the Pope for the price of preserving Eastern rituals. This way, the two most eminent representatives of the Orthodox Church of the 16th century Prince Jurij Semenowicz Słucki and Konstanty Ostrogski were “converted” (Šmurlo 1913, vol. 2, part. 2: 339; Chodyncki 1934: 227–228, 243–244) – Ostrogski between 1583 and 1585 (Krajcar 1969; Kempa 1997a: 122–130).

Representatives of the Society of Jesus achieved the greatest success in converting to Catholicism influential magnates as well as influential representatives of the gentry and rich townsmen. The Jesuits were the main weapon in the hands of Latin bishops during the Counter-Reformation in the Commonwealth. After their arrival to the Commonwealth in the middle

of the 1560s, the influence of the Jesuits significantly increased in the following two decades. The countrywide development of Jesuit Colleges, starting from the first centres in Braniewo, Pułtusk and Vilnius, was crucial (Natoński 1969 and 1994: 34–62). In the mission of “converting” the representatives of the Orthodox Church in the Ruthenian land of the Crown, the College in Jarosław established in 1575 played a significant part (Gottfried 1933; Pelczar 1995). On the other hand colleges in Vilnius (from 1569, an Academy from 1579) and in Nesvizh (from 1585) played an important part in influencing both Orthodox and Protestants in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Jesuit Colleges attracted the young with their high standards of education and also with the fact that, if necessary, it was possible to study for free at these institutions (Kosman 1973: 115). Moreover, different activities which were attractive to the young place took place there: theatre performances, excursions and disputations (Piechnik 1984: 172). Jesuits were also able to win over representatives of the lower classes of society. For example, they influenced the citizens of cities where their colleges were present by organizing various charitable events (for instance by creating charitable brotherhoods and philanthropic funds). The number of students in Jesuit colleges increased rapidly. In Vilnius itself, 1000 students studied in schools run by Jesuits at the end of the 16th century (in the Academy, as well as in parish and cathedral schools, see: Piechnik 1984: 118). The number of Protestants and members of the Orthodox Church who studied there was also increasing. In 1578, for example, a third of students in the Vilnius College were Protestant. To attract the members of the Orthodox Church in 1579 the Vilnius Academy introduced Ruthenian lessons (Piechnik 1984: 121). In accordance with the recommendations of the authorities of the order, representatives of other religions were not forced

to take part in Catholic services. At the same time they were no obstacles if they wanted to attend an Orthodox or a Protestant Service. The lectures were also asked not to offend the religious beliefs of the students. At least this was the case during the rule of Stephen Báthory (Natoński 1994: 53–54; Załęski 1900, vol. 1, part 1: 253). As a result the Jesuits enabled Protestant or Orthodox parents to make the decision to send their children to study in one of the Jesuit colleges.

Of course the members of the Society of Jesus did not give up influencing their pupils regardless if they were Catholic or other believers. With regards to the latter it was done in a very subtle way, e.g. by concentrating on sermons which were heard by all students. The greatest influence on members of other confessions was their Catholic peers, especially the newly converted ones. Jesuits commented on this situation in this way: “they come to us only for knowledge – that is what they say – and we accept them, and if not immediately, but after some time they absorb Catholicism so much that they break with their fathers’ beliefs” (quoted after Piechnik 1984: 172, see also 116). The situation of non-Catholics in Jesuit colleges started deteriorating at the end of the 16th century. At least in some of the schools belonging to the Society of Jesus religious tolerance towards other faiths decreased significantly (Kosman 1973: 143; Natoński 1994: 54, 61).

Initially, the Protestant educational system could successfully compete with Jesuit colleges as far as the level of education was concerned. However, from the middle of the 1580s, the network of Jesuit colleges in the Commonwealth was bigger than the number of Protestant middle schools, including all Protestant confessions. Therefore, it was easier for many parents to send their sons to a Jesuit school located in their immediate vicinity, especially when it provided an adequate level of education.

Members of other religions, despite numerous attempts, were not able to receive permission to establish their own higher education establishments in the Commonwealth. This role was fulfilled partly by the University in Königsberg, and to a certain extent by middle schools, which were famous for their high standard of education (Lutheran: Gdańsk and Toruń; Czech Brethren in Leszno; Polish Brethren in Iwye (1585 – 1593) and later the famous academy in Raków; Calvinist in Vilnius, and in the 17th century in Kėdainiai and Slutsk; see Kosman 1973: 32; Tazbir 1975: 731). Institutions of Protestant education were to a greater extent than Catholic institutions vulnerable to changes resulting from their patrons' death or conversion to another confession (except for Lutheran colleges in Toruń and Gdańsk, and Calvinist schools founded by the Biržai line of Radziwiłłs in the Grand Duchy).

For this reason, the death of rich and influential patrons led to closure of Protestant schools and churches. It also weakened the whole Protestant camp because the poorer Protestant gentry and townsmen distinctly felt the lack of support from the richer patrons. This became apparent at the end of the 16th century when on one hand the Counter-Reformation movement increased in momentum, and on the other hand a large number of significant magnates and rich gentry converted to Catholicism (see Banach 1985: 21–35; Jarmiński 1992: 15–28). For example, we can point to the death of the richest representative of the Polish Brethren – the castellan Jan Kiszka –, which had serious consequences for the Arian movement in Lithuania. Most of his property fell into the hands of the Calvinist line of the Radziwiłł family, who liquidated Arian congregations and closed the Arian school in Iwye, previously established by Kiszka (Tazbir 1986: 362–363; Asadauskienė 2003: 206–207; see also Szczucki 1959). In Great Poland, the Reformation was

seriously weakened by the death of the voivode of Poznań, Stanisław Górka, in August 1592. Despite the fact that he was an ardent Protestant he had a good relationship with Poznań Jesuits and the local Catholic hierarchy. Thanks to this he successfully defended the position of non-Catholics in Poznań. After Górka's death his property was taken over by the Catholic Czarnkowski family, who liquidated the complete collection of Protestant books in his inheritance. Another blow for Protestants, this time in the region of Masovia, was the death of the voivode of Rawa, Stanisław Gostomski, in 1598. The standing of families of the Protestant gentry from the region of Masovia was therefore weakened significantly, as was the Warsaw congregation (Choińska-Mika 1998: 131).

Where there were no rich patrons, religious unrest occurred more easily. Most often it took place in large cities and especially in those where there was a complex religious structure. Obviously the representatives of religious minorities were victimized. The best-known unrests in the Commonwealth were the ones organized by 'overzealous' Catholics, their victims most often being Protestants.

More serious riots had begun in the middle of the 70s following an attack on the Protestant Congregation (the so called *Bróg*) in Krakow. There were regular attacks on Protestant cemeteries and funeral processions (in 1575, 1577, 1578, 1580, 1581, 1585 and in 1597). Also in 1578, Arian printing houses were destroyed and in the years 1575, 1577, 1579 and 1587 both the *Bróg* and Protestant preachers were attacked. The opponents of Protestant presence in Krakow got their way in May 1591 when they finally managed to destroy the Protestant church. At the same time an Arian church was destroyed (Żelewski 1962: 7-14, 20-69, 170-187; Sobieski 1902: 41-45, 55-58; Wisner 1982: 83-86). After the destruction of Protestant churches, the private homes of Krakow Protestants were

attacked. The first such attack took place in 1593 (Sobieski 1902: 63–64). Assaults on Protestant preachers also became more common (Orzelski 1858: 111).

There was an equally tense atmosphere in Poznań after the death of Stanisław Górka. When alive, the voivode managed to soothe the anti-Protestant demonstrations in 1591. Two years later Jesuit students attacked the Church of the Czech Brethren, but were not able to cause considerable damage (Łukaszewicz 1832: 110). In the following years, other demonstrations by Catholics against Protestants took place. In June 1591, the first serious religious riot occurred in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. During the riots, the Calvinistic church in Vilnius was damaged, though not completely destroyed. Yet again, Jesuit students were the leaders of those disturbances. An investigation carried out by the royal commissioners explicitly blamed them for the event, but the Vilnius Diocese's administrator (future bishop) Benedykt Woyna did not permit having them punished. This even led to the Lithuanian Tribunal (the highest court for the gentry) passing a sentence of banishment for the Catholic superior, but it was never put into practice (*MRPL* 1925, vol. 1: no 11–18, pp. 63–92; Schramm 1968: 213; Kosman 1973: 89).

It is characteristic that the number of riots increased in the beginning of the 1590s when Sigismund III Vasa had already become king (1588–1632). The politics of the former Jesuit student clearly favoured the development of the Counter-Reformation, and indirectly supported religious unrest. Obviously the monarch himself did not instigate such events, but he mostly remained passive when it came to punishing perpetrators of demonstrations against non-Catholics. Typically, the destruction of Protestant and Arian churches in Krakow occurred during the King's stay in the city. To justify Sigismund III's behaviour we can add

that the angry mob which attacked both churches was difficult to pacify by the army of magnates who were present in Krakow at the time. Nonetheless, the monarch's reaction to the unrest in Krakow in 1591 was very tame. It encouraged the mob to carry out further attacks, not only in Krakow. Likewise, the King did not show consistency in punishing the perpetrators of riots in Vilnius. None of them were punished for their actions.

Apart from his reaction to riots organized by religious Catholic fanatics, another indication of Sigismund III's Counter-Reformation attitude was his appointment policy. A few years after ascending the throne (around 1591), he clearly started favouring Catholics in nominations for the highest offices and titles, especially senatorial ones (Barwiński 1921: 51–57). This meant a significant decrease in political and partly economical influences for non-Catholics in the Commonwealth.* This in turn caused gentry and magnates to convert to Catholicism for economic reasons.

In the east of the Commonwealth, crowds of Orthodox gentry and magnates left their beliefs in favour of Catholicism or one of the Protestant confessions. Very often, with a detour through Protestantism, they finally became Roman Catholics (Liedke 2004a and 2004b). Generally speaking, the reason for this situation was a deep internal crisis the Orthodox Church was going through in the Crown lands, in Lithuania and also beyond the ecclesiastical province of Kyiv (which covered the whole territory of the

* Henryk Lulewicz's research shows how the number of non-Catholic senators in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was changing. On one hand it resulted from Sigismund III appointment policy and on the other hand from the large scale conversion of Protestants to Catholicism. In 1596 among secular senators from Lithuania there were 9 Catholics, 10 Protestants and 5 Orthodox (whereas in 1586 in Senate there were 9 Catholics, 13 Evangelicals and 4 Orthodox). In 1606 in Senate were 15 Catholics, 9 Protestants and only one Orthodox and finally at the end of rule of Sigismund III – in 1632 – the Lithuanian Senators were Catholics only. In the following years, thanks to Wladyslaw IV politics in the Lithuanian part of Polish Senate a few non-Catholics appeared (Lulewicz 1977: 427). In essence Sigismund III found in secular senatorial offices 41 non-Catholics whereas in 1606 only several of them remained, most from Lithuania. For the situation among Polish senators see Dworzaczek 1962: 53-54.

Commonwealth). It was clearly visible most of all in the decline of Orthodox education and, very often, in the low morale of the Orthodox clergy. Besides, many appointments to higher spiritual ranks in the Orthodox Church were accidental because a Catholic King or magnates (mainly non-Orthodox) wielded the power to decide in these matters. Some men received ranks of great spiritual authority for services rendered in war.* These appointments were treated as a form of reward for faithful service whether military or court service by the king, who had the right to decide on Episcopal appointments. Orthodox bishoprics were awarded to gentry (at most moderately rich) and sometimes townsmen, because magnates were not interested in them at all, due to their limited prestige and the small income they generated.

The weakness of the Orthodox Church and also the tradition of long coexistence with its believers resulted in the view that it was not in significant opposition to Catholicism. Polemic battles carried out by Jesuits and other Catholic theologians concentrated on the competition for 'souls' with Protestants. However, in the times of an increasingly potent Counter-Reformation, the time had come for the Orthodox faith. This is not the place for an analysis of the reasons for the Union of Brest, which took place in 1595-96, but it is important to mention that its conclusion, at least to some degree, resulted from Counter-Reformation activities of members of the Catholic Church hierarchy. On the side of the Orthodox Church an important reason for the union was the desire to reform the Church which had been experiencing deep crisis. A considerable role was, however, also played by members of the church hierarchy, that is, the supporters of the union. The union with the Roman Catholic Church, which was supposed to cover all

* For example, on 16 February 1592 in reward for war service, Sigismund III presented the honour of the archbishop of Połock to Calvary Capitan Bogusz Sielicki. As the archbishop (until his death in 1595) Sielicki did not engage himself in the life of Orthodox Church (*Vitebskaja Starina* 1988: no 54, pp. 86-87; Kempa 2004: 6).

members of the Orthodox Church in the Commonwealth, finally became a fact on Christmas Eve in 1595, when Pope Clement VIII issued a formal bull proclaiming unity. In October 1596, unity was once more proclaimed during the ceremonial synod in Brest Litewski. However, it turned out that the majority of Orthodox believers from the area of the province of Kyiv was not willing to submit to the Pope's formal superiority. However, from the point of view of the Polish authorities, including Sigismund III who supported the Union, the new Uniate Church became the only rightful heir of the pre-Union Orthodox Church. The Orthodox, therefore, had to fight for recognition of their legal existence in the Commonwealth yet again. It was not about providing guarantees for the freedom to worship, because in most cases they had kept it, but about the reconstruction of the structure of the Orthodox church, that is, its higher hierarchy, which was necessary to provide continuity within the church. Most of the bishops (six out of eight) supported the Union of Brest. According to both the plans of the king and the pope, after the death of the remaining two Władyks, their ranks were to fall to supporters of the Union. Sigismund III was supposed to take care of it. Another key issue for the Orthodox was the defense of particular churches and monasteries (before being taken over by the Uniate Church). The Union of Brest led to lasting divisions among Ruthenians living in the East of the Commonwealth. Among the Orthodox, who up to then had been faithful citizens, arose a group which started looking for support outside of the Commonwealth (in Muscovy) for their fight for religious freedom. Part of this circle was a group of Władyks (including their leader, Izajasz Kopinski) which had been ordained by the Patriarch of Jerusalem Teofan in 1620, who was staying in Russia at the time. This act of ordaining new bishops could not be accepted by Sigismund III because the right to grant bishoprics (both Orthodox and Catholic) was part of his authority. On the side of the

Orthodox Church stood Zaporoski Cossacks, who became staunch promoters of its demands. This would have consequences for the future relations between Polish authorities and the Cossacks. It is important to stress that the majority of Orthodox believers remained faithful to the Commonwealth. Among those centers that remained loyal to the king were the most important centers of Orthodox ideas in Lithuania and in the Poland, that is, in particular, Vilnius and the Lviv brotherhoods as well as Kyiv. Here, the famous Kyiv–Mohyla Academy was later established by the most eminent member of the Orthodox hierarchy in the Commonwealth in the first half of the 17th century, the archbishop of Kyiv, Peter Mogila.

Despite Sigismund III politics which clearly favoured the Uniate Church and the Roman Catholics, the members of the Orthodox Church still perceived the King as the embodiment of the Commonwealth's majesty. Its reflection can be found in the contemporary polemical literature and in local chronicles whose authors were Orthodox believers (e.g. *Barkulabovskaja letopis* 1962; Naumow 1999). Atanazy Filipowicz not only clearly distinguished between the attitudes of Sigismund III and that of his son Władysław IV (1632–1648) towards the Orthodox, but also fervently criticized Sigismund III in his polemical works for his religious politics (Naumow 1999: 133–134). He became famous for his strong protest against the erection by King Wladyslaw of an obelisk in Warsaw in honour of Sigismund III, the so-called Sigismund's Column (Kempa 2007: 496–497). The conflict between the supporters and the opponents of the Union at the beginning of the 17th century certainly weakened the tradition of religious tolerance, which had been considerably stronger until then. Some religious murders took place during this period, for which the Zaporozhian Cossacks were responsible. The best-known case was the drowning in the river Dnieper Eastern Church viceroys archbishop of Kyiv Antoni Hrekowicz in

1618; again in 1625 the Cossacks killed the Mayor of Kyiv Teodor Chodyka although it is not certain that it was a religious murder (Kempa 2003; Drozdowski 2008: 125–132).

The Union of Brest, which the majority of Orthodox believers treated as no more than an attack on their rights and freedom, and the increasing number of religious riots against Protestants naturally resulted in the aspiration of establishing collaboration between the members of the Orthodox Church and the Protestants in order to protect their freedom to worship. As a result, an informal political block was established which competed with Catholic supporters of the Counter-reformation <check> in the Sejm and in regional councils (which elected gentry members of parliament). Members of the Uniate Church belonged to the 'Catholic' faction. Without the support of the Roman Catholics, and especially Rome which was very interested in the fate of the Union of Brest, the Uniate Church would have had no chance of survival. The establishment of informal collaboration between Orthodox and Protestants constituted a reaction to the increase of religious intolerance from Catholics and the government's indifference towards acts of violence. This cooperation had begun during the Protestant synod in Toruń, which took place in 1595 (see: Kempa 1997b; Jarmiński 1992: 109; Sławiński 2002a and 2002b: 206–220). The most influential patrons of both faiths decided about the form and intensity of collaboration. Representatives of the Calvinist Birżai line of the Radziwiłłs and the Leszczyńskis (Andrzej the voievode of Brześć Kujawski and his son Rafał, the voievode of Rawa) on the side of Protestants were the most important leaders of this cooperation on the Protestant side. On the Orthodox side stood Konstanty Wasyl Ostrogski, the voievode of Kyiv, the richest magnate in the Commonwealth at the turn of the 17th century (Kempa 2008). These men had great political influence and means, which

also meant an established network of clientele. This made it possible for them to act effectively in the interest of Protestants and Orthodox believers in the Sejm, in regional councils and in court, or at least to do so sometimes. An especially fierce religious fight was fought in the Tribunal Courts (separate for the Crown and for Lithuania) which were the court of appeal for the gentry (see: Kempa, in print).

The main common goal for Protestants and Orthodox believers became the fight to pass laws which would clearly describe the procedure for punishing the instigators of religious unrest (so-called enacting the process of confederation <?>). The terms of the Warsaw Confederation were not precise enough to invoke it in such cases. Sigismund III and other supporters of the Counter-Reformation did not want to give their agreement to passing these laws. For a long time, non-Catholics found allies in some Catholics who valued the freedom of the gentry and did not want to see it breached. They considered the freedom of worship (at least among the gentry) as one of the foundations of the Commonwealth's political system. However, this group of so-called 'Catholic-politicians' (*katolicy-politycy*) began to shrink quickly in the following decades of the 17th century.

Polemics became more and more intense, especially between the Catholics and Protestants. The actions of Rome and some members of the church hierarchy also caused the group of Catholics who were ready to defend the Warsaw Confederation to shrink fast. They were expecting greater activity from the magnates and gentry in the area of religion and in the political actions undertaken in the Sejm and in regional councils. In the 1630s, the disagreement between the gentry and the clergy about the so called '*compositio inter status*', which had been going on for a very long time, was finally resolved. The main differences between secular Catholics and

the clergy then disappeared. Finally, the fear of a possible civil religious war – which had threatened Polish–Lithuanian society in the 70s and 90s of the 16th century – finally subsided (Wasilewski 1974: 124). This resulted from the temporary calmness of the political and religious situation in Europe at the beginning of the 17th century. Another reason was the fact that Protestants and Orthodox believers could no longer constitute a counterbalance for Catholics. With regards to the meaning and even as far as the number of believers were concerned, Catholics significantly outnumbered non–Catholics in the Commonwealth. Eventually, all this started to tip the scales in favour of the Counter–Reformation towards the end of Sigismund III's rule.

However, it is important to stress that even during times when polemics about religious issues on the Sejm's forums were particularly harsh, Catholics and non–Catholics were able, at the same time, to sit together at a table, visit each other and often be friends with each other (see Jewłaszewski 1860: 12–13). This even concerned those men who were deeply involved in religious disputes, on one side Catholic bishops (including those of the Eastern Church) and on the other side leaders of the Reformation. The Friendship of Krzysztof II Radziwiłł, the leader of Lithuanian Protestants, and the bishop of Vilnius, Eustachy Wołowicz, is well–known. The private relationships of both eminent politicians often led to a solution of disputes which arose against the background of religion in Vilnius or in other places in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Seredyka: 103–106; Kempa 2007: 349). Radziwiłł, like many other non–Catholic magnates, also maintained contacts with Catholic and Uniate monastic clergy (Wisner 1968: 215–217; Seredyka: 106–109). However, he generally did not allow for the building of Catholic Churches on his property unless he had been

forced to do so, as he was during the conflict in Kėdainiai (Seredyka 2003: 111–139).

Rarely was the attitude of religious tolerance taken as far as the secular Orthodox leader and the opponent of the Union of Brest, the voivode of Kyiv, Konstanty Wasyl Ostrogski, took it. In his estate, apart from Orthodox Churches, there were also Protestant (also Arian) congregations, Tatar mosques and Jewish synagogues. In 1582 he led the revival of a Catholic parish in the ancestral home of the Ostrogski dynasty (his main residence) – Ostroh in Volhynia (Kovaliv 1993: 58; Kempa 1997a: 112–113). This church functioned normally even at the end of the 1590s and at the beginning of the 17th century, when Ostrogski was closely involved with the fight against the Union of Brest. It can be said that the conflict between supporters of the Counter–Reformation and other believers – both political ones as well as the ones visible in the polemical literature – very rarely translated into personal relationships between magnates and gentry. Henryk Wisner accurately described this situation: ‘Strong ties of solidarity among the gentry led to an interesting situation: the fight against different religions became quite an abstract entity, and in no way influenced social life’ (Wisner 1968: 217).

Also in the cities, despite a religious contest which assumed many different forms, the Counter–Reformation did not lead to a serious weakening of relationships between people of different religions. The biggest religious conflicts occurred in large royal cities where non–Catholic influences were gradually being reduced. As far as Protestants were concerned, they were deprived of their seats in the local government. In a number of cities – among them Krakow, Poznań and Lublin – Protestant churches were destroyed. The Orthodox also began experiencing greater oppression after the Union of Brest. In Lviv, local authorities not only

restricted their access to local institutions, but also tried to limit public forms of Orthodox worship, e.g. a procession passing through the city center, or using Orthodox Church bells during Catholic services (Milkowicz 1895, vol. 1, part 2: no 335, pp. 568–570, no 338, pp. 574–577, no 344, pp. 586–589, no 357, pp. 608–611; T. Kempa 2007: 71). In Vilnius, the Orthodox lost all their churches to Eastern Catholics. Only one temple remained (dedicated to the Holy Spirit), which had been built after the Union of Brest, the construction of which the archbishops of the Eastern Church in Kyiv had also tried to prevent. In 1621, all Orthodox members of the city council were expelled under the false accusation of espionage on behalf of Turkey. These men were members of the Orthodox Church brotherhood, which was in fact the intellectual center of the Orthodox Church in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Kempa 2006: 277–290). Churches were being taken away from the Orthodox even in cities where they were in the majority. Josaphat Kuntsevych, the archbishop of Polotsk, did so repeatedly, for example in Orsha, Mogilev, Polotsk, Vitebsk and other cities in the east of Lithuania. This process came to an abrupt end when Kuntsevych was murdered by Vitebsk townsmen in November 1623. He became the best-known victim of religious fighting between the supporters and opponents of the Union of Brest in the east of the Commonwealth. It has to be stressed that the King's reaction to this murder was immediate. A court of commissioners was court appointed by the King, which in January 1624 sentenced to death 19 townsmen who took part in the murder. 74 other people (including five clergymen) received the same sentence in absentia. Punishment was also felt by the citizens of Vitebsk, as the city was deprived of the rights of the Magdeburg charter (see: Kempa 2004: 14–26).

On the other hand it was possible to come across social attitudes in the cities which did not accept the religious divisions caused by the

Counter-Reformation and the Union of Brest. Let us quote the case of the Vilnius juror (a member of the Uniate Church?) who in his Will, drawn up in 1662, left sums of money to all Roman Catholic, Uniate and Orthodox monasteries in Vilnius. Moreover he helped with his legates hospitals 'all is Ruthenian as well as Roman' in this city (Vilnius, Lithuanian State Historical Archives, SA 5099: fol. 326–329). Almost at the same time (in 1657) another Vilnius townsman, the Orthodox merchant Samuel Matfiejewicz, left sums of money in his will for Orthodox and Uniate temples and institutions in Vilnius (Vilnius, Lithuanian State Historical Archives, SA 5099: fol. 129–130). More of this kind of townsmen's wills, not only in multicultural Vilnius, can be found in the archives. The vast majority of society tried to nurture the tradition of religious tolerance. Quite often, people simply did not understand the reasons for the religious conflicts that started that took root towards the end of the 16th century.

The wars of the second half of the 17th century became a real tragedy for the Commonwealth. They had to fight non-Catholic enemies: Protestant Sweden, Prussia and Transylvania, Orthodox Russia and Muslim Turkey and the Tartars. The huge depopulation of the Commonwealth and the material destruction resulting from these wars led to the increase of xenophobia among the gentry and the final triumph of Counter-Reformation. In 1658, the Sejm banished the Polish Brethren from the Commonwealth. More and more gentry would see their country not only as a bulwark of Christianity (in the context of wars with Turkey) but also of Catholicism.

The role of non-Catholics in public life became marginalized during only two decades of Jan Kazimierz's rule (1648–1668). For the last time a non-Catholic became the Marshal of the Lithuanian Tribunal in 1662 (Wsilewski 1974: 126). The last Protestant (Lutheran) senator, Zygmunt

Guldenstern (died in 1666), was appointed by Jan Kazimierz for the post of the castellan of Gdańsk. Most probably, the last non-Catholic senator was the Orthodox castellan of Trakai, Aleksander Ogiński, who died in 1667 (Dworzaczek 1962: 55; Lulewicz 1977: 440). The Sejm convocation on apostasy of 1668 forbade the departure from the Catholic Church, and, moreover, obliged parents of mixed marriages to bring up their children in the Catholic spirit. Next, non-Catholics were denied access to the gentry in 1673. Although these laws were not strictly adhered to at the time, one could always refer to them when necessary. In the following years, non-Catholics gradually lost the possibility to hold court offices and also perform functions in parliament. Although formally these restrictions did not concern the issue of worship, the number of Protestant congregations and Orthodox churches decreased significantly both in Poland as well as in Lithuania, as more and more non-Catholic passed estates into Catholic hands (Kempa 2007: 522–523).

In the second half of the 17th century, the Catholic gentry of the Commonwealth, while still distinguishing themselves through the extensiveness of the freedom of their estate, stopped stressing the solidarity towards non-Catholics. For some of them, a non-Catholic nobleman was a worse nobleman. In the case of most gentry, the Counter-Reformation ideology of the Catholic Church became an inherent part of their self-image. Therefore, in comparison to the 16th century, a fundamental change in the gentry's attitude had occurred.

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