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BETWEEN INTOLERANCE AND PERSECUTION.  
POLISH AND LITHUANIAN PROTESTANTS  
IN THE 18TH CENTURY

The years 1560–70 marked a turning point in the history of Polish and Lithuanian Protestantism. Jan Łaski (d. 1560) did not succeed in uniting the Protestants; what is more, the Reformed Church split into *ecclesia maior*, faithful to Calvinism, and *ecclesia minor*, comprising the Polish Brethren<sup>1</sup>. It was obvious that no Protestant denomination would gain a decisive predominance. It was even doubtful if they would manage to retain their rights, for Catholicism launched an offensive after the Council of Trent. In 1570, the Calvinists, Lutherans and Bohemian Brethren concluded an agreement in Sandomierz the theological foundation of which was the *Sandomierz Confession* worked out on the basis of *Confessio Helvetica Posterior*<sup>2</sup>. In 1573 the Confederation of Warsaw guaranteed political rights to dissenting noblemen; this was to be a barrier to intolerance<sup>3</sup>.

The first half of the 17th century witnessed a re-Catholicization of Polish and Lithuanian societies, the nobility as well as magnates. In the middle of the 16th century non-Catholics played an important role in the Sejm and there were also many Protestants in the Senate. During the next fifty years the number of Protestant magnates and noblemen decreased con-

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<sup>1</sup> H. Kowalska, *Działalność reformatorska Jana Łaskiego w Polsce 1556–1560 (Jan Łaski's Reformatory Work in Poland 1556–1560)*, Wrocław 1969.

<sup>2</sup> O. Halecki, *Zgoda Sandomierska 1570 (The Accord of Sandomierz 1570)*, Warszawa 1915.

<sup>3</sup> A. Jobert, *La tolerance religieuse en Pologne au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, in: *Studi in onore di Ettore Lo Gato e Giovanni Maver*, Firenze 1962, pp. 337–43; S. Świdziński, *Religionstoleranz-Phaenomene in Polen 1517–1663*, "Kirche im Osten", vol. XIII, 1970, pp. 63–73; W. Weintraub, *Tolerance and Intolerance in Old Poland*, "Canadian Slavonic Papers", vol. XIII/1, 1971, pp. 21–43.

siderably<sup>4</sup>. It was the wars with Lutheran Sweden and Brandenburg and with Orthodox Russia that dealt a blow to the Protestant community in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. As a result of growing xenophobia, “heretics and schismatics” were strongly disliked; another reason for this antipathy to dissenters was the fact that some prominent representatives of non–Catholic communities collaborated with the invaders. At the end of the century Polish and Lithuanian Protestants found themselves isolated, as a result of which they developed the complex of a “besieged fortress” in the next century<sup>5</sup>.

Whereas progress has been made in research into the Polish Reformation, especially the situation of the Polish Brethren and Lutherans in the 16th century, not much is known about the Protestants and their culture in the 18th century. All we have are obsolete sketchy treatises and some analytical studies and contributions<sup>6</sup>.

Since the times of Voltaire it has been asserted that in the 18th century the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth was extremely intolerant of non–Catholics<sup>7</sup>. *Loci communes* of this kind should always be checked. Further research is needed into the reasons for the exceptional tolerance of religious differences in Poland–Lithuania in the 16th century and the alleged intolerance in the 18th. It would also be worth while to compare the situation of religious minorities in the Polish–Lithuanian state with the situation of such groups in other European countries, including Protestant ones. The first step should be an analysis of the legal and social status of the religious minorities which lived in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth at the end of the modern period.

It is the aim of this essay to briefly present the results of research into the legal, social and political status of the Polish–Lithuanian Protestant communities in the years 1696–1796. In addition to the literature mentioned in the footnotes, I have made use of source materials kept in Polish and foreign libraries and archives<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> A. Mączak, *Confessions, Freedoms and the Unity of Poland–Lithuania in: Crown, Church and Estate. Central European Politics in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. R. I. W. Evans, T. V. Thomas, London 1991, pp. 270–86.

<sup>5</sup> O. H. Prentki, *Essai historique sur le déclin de la Réforme en Pologne*, Montpellier 1927; B. Stasiewski, *Reformation und Gegenreformation in Polen. Neue Forschungsergebnisse*, Münster Westf. 1960.

<sup>6</sup> A. Kotarska, *Bibliografia reformacji za lata 1945–1960 (Bibliography of the Reformation for the Years 1945–1960)*, “Archiwum Historii Filozofii i Myśli Społecznej”, vol. IX, 1963, pp. 169–202; G. Schramm, *Die polnische Nachkriegsforschung zur Reformation und Gegenreformation*, “Kirche im Osten”, vol. XIII, 1970, pp. 53–66.

<sup>7</sup> E. Rostworowski, *Voltaire et la Pologne*, “Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century”, vol. LXII, 1968, pp. 101–21; W. Dzwigala, *Voltaire’s Sources on the Polish Dissident Question*, *ibidem*, vol. CCXLI, 1986, pp. 187–202.

The rights of the Protestants began to be formally restricted by the state<sup>9</sup> in 1658, when the Sejm adopted an Act banishing anti-Trinitarians from the Commonwealth. The atmosphere surrounding non-Catholics was determined by “the vows of Lwów” taken by King John Casimir, who confided the Commonwealth to the care of the Holy Virgin. The two acts were a direct consequence of the crisis which the Polish-Lithuanian state experienced during an armed conflict with Lutheran Sweden, for the latter gained the support of dissenters, including some anti-Trinitarians and Calvinists headed by the Radziwiłłs.

In 1668 the Sejm adopted an Act forbidding apostasy, that is, conversion from Catholicism to another denomination. The Act was interpreted in a broad sense by the judicature. It is by virtue of this Act that in 1692–1767 Protestant clergymen were forbidden to carry out pastoral practices, celebrate funerals and wear gowns outside the church, for such acts were regarded as propagation of faith, as an inducement to apostasy<sup>10</sup>. In 1696 Mennonites and Quakers, small numbers of whom lived near Gdańsk and Elbląg, were excluded from the terms of the Confederation of Warsaw<sup>11</sup>.

At first, the authorities of the Roman Catholic Church sought to restrict the freedom of pastors' work and reduce the number of Protestant churches. Their endeavours were successful in Great and Little Poland, to a lesser extent in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, where Protestant communities and clergymen were better protected by the law. In order to use anti-Arian legislation against Protestants, an artificial construction, Calvinism, was created, and this enabled the authorities to prosecute Calvinists, who were accused of Arianism. Theological terms, such as “heresy” and “heretics”, discarded in the 16th century, began to be used again. The Catholic clergy exerted an influence on verdicts passed by the noblemen's courts, the tribunals, which in the 18th century were composed almost exclusively of

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<sup>8</sup> Lithuanian Academy of Sciences — Central Library, Vilnius; Bibliothèque Universitaire de Genève; Bibliothèque Universitaire de Lausanne; Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel; Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen; Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg.

<sup>9</sup> S. S a l m o n o w i c z, *O sytuacji prawnej protestantów w Polsce, XVI–XVIII w. (The Legal Status of the Protestants in Poland, 16th–18th Centuries)*, “Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne”, vol. XXVI/1, 1974, pp. 159–73.

<sup>10</sup> M. W a j s b l u m, *Ex regestro arianismi. Szkice z dziejów upadku protestantyzmu w Małopolsce (Ex regestro arianismi. Essays on the Collapse of Protestantism in Little Poland)*, Kraków 1937–48.

<sup>11</sup> K. H. L u d w i g, *Zur Besiedlung des Weichseldeltas durch die Mennoniten*, Marburg/L. 1961; E. K i z i k, *Mennonicy w Gdańsku, Elblągu i na Żuławach Wiślanych w drugiej połowie XVII i w XVIII wieku. Studium z dziejów małej społeczności wyznaniowej (Mennonites in Gdańsk, Elbląg and the Vistula Lowlands in the Second Half of the 17th and the 18th cc. A Study in History of a Small Religious Community)*, Gdańsk 1994.

Catholic judges. But the practice whereby the verdicts of episcopal courts were enforced by civilian administrative authorities was not revived<sup>12</sup>.

At the beginning of the 18th century there was a trend to deprive Protestant clergymen of the rights which the Sejm had guaranteed them in 1632. They were denied the status of clergymen and attempts were made to put them under the control of Catholic bishops. As early as 1692 a secular court put a pastor of the Reformed Church, who was accused of maintaining contacts with co-religionists in England and Holland, under the surveillance of the bishop of Cracow. The aim was to separate Polish Protestants from European Protestants and from the universities where they had gained qualifications, for there were no higher theological Protestant schools in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth<sup>13</sup>.

From the beginning of the 18th century the Catholic clergy demanded that Protestants pay them for religious services (weddings, funerals, baptisms) performed by pastors; these double payments were to induce poorer non-Catholics to convert to Catholicism. Protestant burghers living in towns where Protestant worship was not legalized had to take part in Catholic church ceremonies, such as masses and processions; they could be exempted from participation if they agreed to pay a specific sum.

At the beginning of the 18th century aversion to heretics increased and further restrictions were imposed on them. This was a result of the war with Lutheran Sweden in 1701-1710 and the prolonged presence of Saxon and Russian troops, which were made up mostly of non-Catholics. In 1717 this xenophobia led to the adoption of an Act which prohibited the construction of Protestant churches and ordered that the churches built after 1632 be destroyed. This was a heavy blow especially to the Lutherans in Great Poland who, despite Polish intolerance, came to Poland from Germany, set up Lutheran communities, built churches and schools<sup>14</sup>.

An Act of 1717 banned public worship outside the Protestant churches built before 1632 and restricted home religious services to prayer and Bible reading, forbidding singing and sermons. Another discriminative measure was the injunction to debar non-Catholic noblemen from offices and privileges if these were sought by a Catholic. This blatant discrimination within the noble estate was designed to debar dissenters from profitable leases of royal estates and honorary court and district offices.

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<sup>12</sup> S. Salmonowicz, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

<sup>13</sup> M. Wajsblum, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

<sup>14</sup> A. Rhode, *Geschichte der evangelischen Kirchen im Posener Lande*, Würzburg 1956, Marburger Ostforschungen, Bd. IV.

The Acts adopted by the Sejm in 1733, after the death of Augustus II, marked the last stage in the legal restriction of the liberties of non-Catholics. Dissenting noblemen were forbidden to hold state and honorary offices, organize meetings and maintain contacts with the authorities of neighbouring countries. These decisions made it impossible for dissenters to hold synods and seek help from non-Catholic governments. This was contradictory to the provisions of the peace of Oliva which ended the Polish-Swedish conflict in 1660. The Oliva treaty gave its non-Catholic signatories the right to defend the liberties of their co-religionists in Royal Prussia, a provision which was used by the neighbours, in particular Great Britain, Sweden and later Prussia and Russia, to interfere in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's relations<sup>15</sup>.

During the reign of Augustus II, in addition to legal restrictions approved by the Sejm, restrictions contravening public law were introduced. Endeavours were continued to subordinate Protestants to the jurisdiction of the Catholic clergy in the sphere of civil law. A verdict issued by the papal nunciature in 1723 ruled that marriages given by Protestant clergy were invalid. The verdict did not have legal force, but in 1725 Konstanty Felician Szaniawski, Bishop of Cracow, issued an edict which ordered Protestants living in the Cracow diocese to remunerate Catholic parish priests for services administered by Protestant clergymen and to contract marriages in Catholic churches. This regulation, which subordinated dissenters to Catholic courts in the field of civil law, was observed in Little Poland, for the Calvinist Church was weak there<sup>16</sup>.

The practice of restricting the political and public rights of the non-Catholic nobility was continued; of symbolic significance was the sentence passed on Zygmunt Unrug, a Lutheran, who was exiled (in 1715) for possessing notes which the Catholic judges regarded as blasphemous. After a few years the verdict was rescinded, but aversion to dissenters did not abate, and in 1718 Andrzej Piotrowski, a Calvinist, the only dissenting deputy, was expelled from the Sejm<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> J. Feldman, *Sprawa dysydencka za Augusta II (The Question of Dissidents under Augustus II)*, "Reformacja w Polsce", vol. III, 1924, pp. 89-116; L. R. Lewi t e r, *Peter the Great and the Polish Dissenters*, "The Slavonic and Eastern European Review", vol. XXXIII, 1954, pp. 75-101.

<sup>16</sup> Biblioteka Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego (Library of Warsaw University, henceforward referred to as *BUW*), Warszawa, papers concerning the Ref. Ev. Church in Małopolska in the 18th Century — record *SER* (Reformed Evangelical Synod).

<sup>17</sup> A. K r a u s h a r, *Sprawa Zygmunta Unruga. Epizod historyczny z czasów saskich 1715-1740 (The Case of Zygmunt Unrug. An Historical Episode from Saxon Times 1715-1740)*, vols. 1-2, Kraków 1890.

No change was made in the unfavourable legal status of the non-Catholics after 1736. *Libellus supplex...*<sup>18</sup>, a study by Daniel Ernest Jabłoński, superintendent of the Calvinist Church in Great Poland and court preacher at the Prussian court, contains a list of dissenters' demands. They asked for freedom of public worship, abolition of restrictions imposed on Protestant clergymen and revocation of the ban on the construction and repair of Protestant churches. As regards judicial questions, they demanded that the tribunals give them equal treatment with the Catholics and that the courts stop harassing non-Catholic clergymen and schools. They demanded that the enforced payments to the Catholic clergy and episcopal surveillance be abolished and that the term "heretics" should not be used in official documents. As regards political rights, they demanded that Protestant delegates should be given back the right to sit in parliament and law courts, and that Protestant noblemen should be admitted to state posts.

These demands were not enacted until 1768, during the reign of Stanislaus Augustus, and began to function only after 1775. It is from that year on that one can speak of the restoration of full tolerance, although the ban on conversion from Catholicism to any other religion was kept in force. It seems, however, that at the end of the 18th century the legal status of Protestants in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth did not depart from the norms binding in the neighbouring Catholic countries.

To sum up, one can say that in the late 17th and early 18th centuries the legal status of non-Catholics of all estates deteriorated considerably in Poland-Lithuania. However, the restrictions were not vital to the existence of the dissenting communities. The three territorial unions of the Calvinist Church and the Lutheran Church structure survived the period of limited tolerance and relative persecution. Out of some 570 Protestant communities existing in Poland-Lithuania at the end of the 16th century only 60 churches and schools survived to see the restoration of tolerance under Stanislaus Augustus, but the number of Protestant churches had been decreasing since the beginning of the 17th century, when dissenters were not persecuted.

The impact of anti-heretical legislation was softened by the weakness of the administrative apparatus, which was unable to exact binding court verdicts. An important role was also played by the intercessions of domestic and external protectors of Protestantism; under Augustus II this role was played in particular by the king's officials and courtiers from Saxony as well as by ambassadors of non-Catholic countries which, like Russia and Prussia,

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<sup>18</sup> [D. E. Jabłoński], *Libellus supplex Serenissimo et Potentissimo Principi ac Domino Augusto II etc. etc., ut et congregatis in Comitibus Regni Anno 1718 Illustrissimis Reipublicae Ordinibus humillime et reverenter exhibitus...*, s.l. 1718.

successfully exerted pressure on the Polish authorities<sup>19</sup>. This is why many antiheretical resolutions remained a dead letter.

It should be added that the Catholic Church and the state authorities lacked firmness in implementing anti-dissenter legislation. In the first half of the 18th century Protestantism was not thought to endanger the ruling Catholic confession in the Polish-Lithuanina Commonwealth, and crises, like the notorious Toruń tumult of 1724<sup>20</sup>, occurred when religious animosities coincided with political conflicts. This happened at the beginning of Stanislaus Augustus' reign when the problem of dissenters once again gave the Russians a convenient pretext for intervening in the Commonwealth's affairs in order to halt state reforms<sup>21</sup>.

The number of Protestants and the social structure of their communities in 18th century Poland-Lithuania cannot be satisfactorily reconstructed because of a lack of adequate sources. We shall therefore have to confine ourselves to estimates. Calvinist communities were grouped in three unions of the Reformed Church: those of Little Poland, Great Poland and Lithuania. The Lutheran Church had a less formalized structure; its adherents were concentrated in Royal Prussia and Great Poland; some single congregations were scattered in other parts of Poland-Lithuania, the most important among them from the middle of the 18th century being the Warsaw community<sup>22</sup>.

It can be said on the basis of written sources, private correspondence and the rare cases of national self-identification that the Lutheran and Calvinist communities differed from each other as regards national identity, if such a criterion can be applied to the 18th century reality. Some of the Lutherans were people who had come to Poland relatively late, in the late 17th or early 18th centuries, and were not yet Polonized. Another important fact was that some immigrants settled in compact groups in the Polish-German borderland, which allowed them to retain their cultural identity<sup>23</sup>.

The situation of the Calvinists was diametrically different, their three territorial unions being linguistically and culturally almost completely Polish in the 18th century. This was natural in the case of the Little Poland

<sup>19</sup> G. Rhode, *Brandenburg-Preussen und die Protestanten in Polen. Ein Jahrhundert preussischer Schutzpolitik für eine unterdrückte Minderheit*, Leipzig 1941.

<sup>20</sup> S. Salmonowicz, *O toruńskim tumultie z roku 1724 (The Toruń Tumult of 1724)*, "Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce", vol. XVIII, 1983, pp. 161-84.

<sup>21</sup> C. M. Łubieńska, *Sprawa dysydencka 1764-1766 (The Question of Dissidents 1764-1766)*, Kraków 1911; B. Stasiowski, *Zur Kirchenpolitik der Nachbarstaaten Polen-Litauens in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts*, in: *Die erste polnische Teilung 1772*, hrsg. von F. B. Kaiser, B. Stasiowski, Köln-Wien 1974, pp. 96-115.

<sup>22</sup> E. Kneifel, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Augsburgische Kirche in Polen*, Eging 1964.

<sup>23</sup> Ch. S. Thomas, *Altes und neues vom Zustande der evang.-lut. Kirchen im Königreiche Polen...*, Breslau 1754; H. Swochow, *Die deutsche Ansiedlung in der Provinz Posen*, Lissa 1908.

Union, which consisted mainly of Polish noblemen and a small number of burghers of Scottish<sup>24</sup> and German descent. The situation in the other two Unions was more complex in the 16th century, but they succumbed to Polonization. The Calvinist Church in Lithuania promoted knowledge of the Lithuanian language, but this was a pastoral necessity, for the Union included peasant communities which had not been Polonized. The majority of the adherents of the Calvinist Church, especially its elites in Lithuanian and Byelorussian territories, belonged to Polish culture. The situation did not change in the 18th century.

The Calvinist Union of Great Poland experienced a complex evolution. Set up in the 16th century by Czech immigrants and strengthened in the 17th century by the inflow of Czech exiles after the battle of the White Mountain (1620)<sup>25</sup>, it had been Polonized by the end of the 17th century. In the second half of the 18th century it slowly succumbed to Germanization, despite the opposition of its Polish noble elites. In the 19th century the descendants of the Bohemian Brethren melted away into the mass of newcomers from Germany.

The social structure of the Polish Protestant communities was also differentiated in the 18th century. The Lutherans were mainly townsmen and peasants. Noblemen of Polish and German (Silesian, Pomeranian) descent accounted for an insignificant percentage, although until the end of the period of intolerance, that is, until the 1770s, their leadership was unquestionable. The overwhelming majority of the Lutherans lived in western and southern Great Poland where they constituted a large percentage of the population<sup>26</sup>.

Waves of Lutheran migrants arrived in Great Poland also in the 18th century. As a result of these demographic processes, urban elites from such towns as Poznań, Leszno, Rawicz and Wschowa<sup>27</sup> began to play an important role in the Lutheran Church in Poland in the second half of the 18th century. The relatively prosperous and expansive urban elites of these towns, composed of merchants and craftsmen, soon became competitors of the traditional noble elites. An important role in this process was played by the Warsaw Lutheran community, which had been developing unofficially

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<sup>24</sup> *Papers relating to the Scots in Poland 1576–1793*, ed. A. F. Stewart, Edinburgh 1915.

<sup>25</sup> *Index seniorum Ecclesiae Reformatae Bohemicae Confess. in Polonia majore...*, "Tempe helvetica. Dissertationes atque observationes", T. VI, sec. I, Tiguri 1742; R. Řičan, *Dějiny Jednoty bratrské*, Praha 1957.

<sup>26</sup> J. A. Lewicki, *Stosunki wyznaniowe w wielkopolskiej części diecezji poznańskiej w II poł. XVII w. (Denominational Relations in the Great Poland Part of the Poznań Diocese in the Second Half of the 17th Century)*, in: *Z badań nad dziejami zakonów i stosunków wyznaniowych na ziemiach polskich*, ed. E. Wiśniewski, Lublin 1984, pp. 89–138.

<sup>27</sup> T. Wotschke, *Die Reformation im Lande Posen*, Lissa 1911.



since the 17th century; it came out into the open at the beginning of Stanislaus Augustus' reign and was legalized after 1768<sup>28</sup>. Less important and less numerous were the Lutheran communities in Lithuania; the largest of them had been functioning for a long time in towns (Wilno, Kowno, Birże), but they were not very active<sup>29</sup>.

We know least about Lutheran peasants; they lived mostly in villages owned by Protestant noblemen or towns with a large percentage of Protestant population. A certain number of Protestant peasants, difficult to ascertain, settled in landed estates belonging to Catholic landowners who, in defiance of the policy of the Catholic episcopate, supported the settlement of dissenters, hoping that this would be to their own advantage<sup>30</sup>.

The Calvinist community presented a completely different picture. To begin with, the Calvinist communities functioned within three territorial organizations which were loosely linked by the institution of general synods. In the 18th century the synods were held sporadically; prior to 1768 they were organized in Royal Prussia (Gdańsk, Toruń) several times, but they did not play an important role. It was the urban parish or, to a lesser extent, the peasants' congregation that was characteristic of the Lutheran communities. The form of religious worship most typical of the three Calvinist Unions was a noblemen's village congregation. This estate character of the Calvinist communities, which frequently built their houses of prayer near landowners' manor houses, made them a strong and important factor in the Polish-Lithuanian state in the 16th and 17th centuries. The connection between ecclesiastical structures and the "political nation", the nobility, was of great importance also during the period of restrictions in the first half of the 18th century, and allowed many parishes to survive. But it had also many obvious defects which in the late 18th and 19th centuries led to the collapse of the old Polish Calvinist Church<sup>31</sup>.

The numerical strength and social structure of the Calvinist community was different too. The main role was played by the nobility, descendants of the families, few as they were in the 18th century, which in the 16th century

<sup>28</sup> T. Wotschke, *Die evangelische Gottesdienst in Warschau in den ersten Jahrzehnten des 18. Jahrhunderts*, "Evangelisches Kirchenblatt in Polen", 1933, pp. 11–21.

<sup>29</sup> G. Schramm, *Protestantismus und städtische Gesellschaft in Vilna*, "Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas", Neue Folge, vol. XVII/2, 1969, pp. 187–214.

<sup>30</sup> J. Michalski, *Sprawa dysydencka a zagadnienia gospodarcze w opinii publicznej w pierwszych latach panowania Stanisława Augusta* (*The Views of Public Opinion on the Dissident Problem and Economic Questions in the First Years of Stanislaus Augustus' Reign*), "Przegląd Historyczny", vol. XL, 1949, pp. 156–63.

<sup>31</sup> Bogislaus Ignatius (J. G. Elsner), *Polonia Reformata, oder zuverlässige Nachricht von denen evang.-reform. Kirchen, Gemeinden und Lehrern...*, Berlin 1754; H. M e r c z y n g, *Zbory i senatorowie protestancy w dawnej Rzeczypospolitej* (*Protestant Communities and Senators in the Old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth*), Warszawa 1904.

adopted the “Geneva” confession. After the wave of conversions to Catholicism in the 17th century, probably only some 500 noble families remained faithful to Calvinism. The propertied elite, the elite which exercised the greatest influence in the Calvinist Church, consisted of a small group of several score families of wealthy landowners. A certain percentage (about 8%) of the Calvinist community consisted of persons of foreign (German, Czech, Scottish) descent who assimilated to the Polish and Lithuanian nobility in the 17th and early 18th centuries<sup>32</sup>.

Burghers did not play a significant role in the Calvinist Church for they were a small, financially weak group. The only exception was the Warsaw congregation which was informally set up probably in the early 18th century. We know that Isaac Ollier<sup>33</sup>, a Huguenot immigrant from France who became a merchant in Warsaw, was its cashier at that time. Small groups of Calvinist burghers also lived in Little Poland: in Cracow, Zamość, Tarnów and Lublin. It was the Lithuanian Union based in the 16th and 17th century foundations of the Radziwiłł family that represented the greatest numerical, intellectual and financial potential; groups of Calvinists also lived in some towns in Lithuania and Byelorussia (Słuck, Birże, Kiejdany)<sup>34</sup>.

A surprising fact in the history of Protestantism in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth was the survival of small groups of Calvinist peasants in the northern areas of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Organized on the Radziwiłłs’ estates in the 16th century, they were composed of Lithuanians and used Lithuanian liturgy; they withstood Polonization and successfully survived the period of intolerance in the 18th century; some peasant congregations still exist within the framework of the Calvinist Church of the Lithuanian Republic.

The lack of precise information about the legal status of the Polish and Lithuanian Protestants in the first half of the 18th century and our imprecise knowledge of that group’s social structure make it impossible to present a detailed picture of that community and its situation in the period regarded as the worst in the history of Protestantism in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth.

What is the most difficult to ascertain is the actual relationship between the Catholic majority and the relatively small religious minorities in the

<sup>32</sup> S. Konański, *Szlachta kalwińska w Polsce (The Calvinist Nobility in Poland)*, Warszawa 1936, reprint: Warszawa 1992.

<sup>33</sup> A. Grodek, *Warszawski dom handlowy lat 1723–1727 (The Warsaw Business Enterprise in 1723–1727)*, “Roczniki Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych”, vol. XII, 1950, pp. 2–23.

<sup>34</sup> J. Łukasiewicz, *Dzieje Kościoła wyznania helweckiego na Litwie (The History of the Calvinist Church in Lithuania)*, vols. 1–2, Poznań 1842–43; documents in the Central Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Science, Vilnius, record ERS.

Commonwealth. This is not due to a lack of sources, for historical literature, 18th century publicistic writings as well as documents and correspondence about in accounts of alleged persecutions. The problem is that these are mostly second-hand sources of a publicistic, even a propaganda, character. Most of the contemporary publications describing religious conflicts in Poland-Lithuania in the 18th century were written from a religious point of view; to some extent this applies also to historical literature up to our times<sup>35</sup>.

The frequently sensational reports written and printed in Poland and abroad (accounts of the Toruń Tumult of 1724 being a classic example) are of little use in the reconstruction of facts. They are first-rate material for research into the tendentiousness of press information and disinformation in the service of state and Church policy. This applies to both Catholic and Protestant publications. Unfortunately, the documents of the Crown Tribunal, the supreme court of the nobility, burned down in Warsaw in 1944; these were irreplaceable documents for verifying the narrative sources which we have to use now.

A cautious analysis of the surviving material of both Catholic and Protestant provenance shows that Protestant parishes worked in difficult conditions. Congregations on Protestant noblemen's estates or in royal and private towns which had granted privileges to Protestants were in the best situation. The plight of peasant congregations on estates belonging to Catholics and of dissenters living in diaspora was the worst. Calvinists in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Lutherans in Great Poland thrived best during the period under review. The heaviest losses were suffered by the Calvinist Union of Little Poland<sup>36</sup>.

Narrative accounts contain many descriptions of conflicts, tumults and acts of aggression by Catholics. But they are tendentious, mainly because of their ignorance of the administration of justice in Poland-Lithuania. Many of these accounts are unverifiable, but some have been confirmed by other sources. We know for certain that in the first half of the 18th century some Catholic bishops (Konstanty Felicjan Szaniawski, Bartłomiej Tarło, Krzysztof Antoni Szembek) tried to execute antiheretical legislation. For instance, after 1717 the illegally built Protestant churches in the Poznań diocese were closed down. This activity was carried out ruthlessly and acts of violence were perpetrated on dissenters who defended their churches and

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<sup>35</sup> T. Wotschke, *Glaubensbedrückungen im 18. Jahrhundert*, "Aus Posens Kirchlicher Vergangenheit", vol. V, 1915/16, pp. 1-29.

<sup>36</sup> J. Łukaszevič, *Dzieje Kościoła wyznania helweckiego w dawnej Malej Polsce (The History of the Calvinist Church in Old Little Poland)*, Poznań 1853.

cemeteries. But this was a single operation and it was confined to the territory of but one, though large, diocese inhabited by many Protestants<sup>37</sup>.

The overwhelming majority of other conflicts of an institutional character took place in the relatively correct form of a court trial. It is surprising that very often these trials ended with an accord under which the dissenter paid a large sum of money to the plaintiff. Some Catholic priests were accused of harassing Protestants by lawsuits for the sake of profit. There is evidence in documents of Protestant congregations in Little Poland that in some dioceses Protestants had to make unofficial payments if they wanted to be left in peace by the ruling Church<sup>38</sup>.

Some information on most drastic forms of conflicts has survived from the years 1696–1767. Outrages (killings, assaults and batteries, robberies) were perpetrated on Protestant clergymen and laymen. There were also cases of Protestant churches being destroyed and houses of clergymen robbed. All these offences were committed by individual persons or groups which officially did not represent state or ecclesiastical institutions. In the majority of cases the perpetrators stood trial, but they usually went unpunished. It is difficult to ascertain whether religious motives played a decisive role in these happenings. It is certain, however, that the atmosphere of social antipathy to dissenters, especially to Protestant clergymen, did play a part, and this was the work of the Catholic clergy<sup>39</sup>.

Acts of violence as well as restrictions (financial contributions) intensified at the end of the period under review, during the war of 1768–1772. These years, known as the period of the Confederation of Bar, were the time of an anti-Russian movement in defence of the Commonwealth's independence. The confederates fighting against Russian forces treated all representatives of non-Catholic denominations as Russia's potential allies, for they identified the struggle for independence with defence of Catholicism which, in their view, was threatened by external enemies and their internal allies, dissenters<sup>40</sup>.

This was a result of Russia's policy in the years 1766–68, a policy which used Polish and Lithuanian dissenters as a tool for interfering in the Commonwealth's affairs. In 1767 confederations of dissenting noblemen were

<sup>37</sup> L. Freytag, *Die Zerstörung der evangelischen Kirchen von Althütte, Fitzerie und Raddun im Jahre 1719*, "Aus Posens Kirchlicher Vergangenheit", vol. V, 1915/16, pp. 56–61.

<sup>38</sup> [G. Lengnich?] *Die Schicksale der polnischen Dissidenten*, vols. 1–3, Hamburg 1768–70; documents in BUW: record SER.

<sup>39</sup> [Ch. Arnold], *Sendschreiben von dem Zustande und den Drangsalen derer Dissidenten... in Pohlen und Lithauen*, Freystadt 1719.

<sup>40</sup> W. Szczygielski, *Konfederacja barska w Wielkopolsce 1768–1770 (The Confederation of Bar in Great Poland 1768–1770)*, Warszawa 1970.

set up in Toruń and Słuck under the protection of Russian forces with a view to restoring public and civil rights to non-Catholics. Their activity supplied Russian politicians with a pretext for an operation the ultimate aim of which was to revoke state reforms introduced at the beginning of Stanislaus Augustus' reign<sup>41</sup>.

When at the end of 1768 fighting broke out against Russian forces stationed in the Commonwealth, Polish and Lithuanian dissenters fell a victim to that policy and became the target of the confederates' revenge. There is evidence of robberies and requisitions carried out by undisciplined confederates' units in regions inhabited by Protestants. One of the most brutal excesses committed on religious grounds was the murder of a Calvinist pastor at Żychlin near Konin in Great Poland. The murder was most probably motivated by religious reasons, but the murderers of pastor Joachim Samuel Majewski also plundered the presbytery<sup>42</sup>.

Most of the accounts about the confederates' excesses are from the south of Great Poland, where many Protestant settlements and towns, relatively rich, became targets of attacks by Polish and Russian forces. We also have reliable accounts of summary convictions and executions by Polish commanders of German Lutheran settlers who put up resistance or were suspected of collaborating with the enemy<sup>43</sup>.

These incidents must have assumed large-scale proportions and were a serious threat to the Lutheran community in the south-west of Great Poland. There is evidence of dissenters leaving small localities and seeking refuge in Silesia or in large cities. It is also known that the Polish Lutheran community organized collections of money for refugees from the districts affected by the war. This is the only known case in that epoch when anti-Protestant excesses led to temporary migrations<sup>44</sup>.

As in the previous cases, it is difficult to say how many of these excesses were caused by religious animosity and how many were a result of a war-time deterioration of security. The Bar confederates' forces were composed of Catholic zealots and Protestant officers, some of whom were

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<sup>41</sup> *Schriften die Sache der Herrn Dissidenten in Polen und ihre Conföderation zu Thorn betreffend*, vols. 1–8, 1767–68; [G. Wernsdorf], *Eines evangelischen Mitgliedes der ehemaligen Conföderation zu Thorn ausführlicher Erweis...*, Berlin 1772; G. T. Łukowski, *The Szlachta and the Confederacy of Radom 1764–1767/68. A Study of the Polish Nobility*, Romae 1977.

<sup>42</sup> W. Kriegseisen *Zbór ewangelicko-reformowany (kalwiński) w Żychlinie koło Konina (The Calvinist Community at Żychlin near Konin)*, "Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce", vol. XXXVII, 1993, pp. 103–114.

<sup>43</sup> W. Szczygielski, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

<sup>44</sup> The Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw: record *Zbór Ewangelicko-Augsburski*.

promoted to high ranks<sup>45</sup>. There is no evidence that the commanders of the units which committed crimes against non-Catholics carried out a policy dictated by the authorities of the Confederation, for these dissociated themselves from anti-dissenter plans in their official enunciations, even though they accused Protestants of supporting Russia's policy<sup>46</sup>.

The first partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth carried out by Russia, Austria and Prussia in 1772 and the pacification which ensued in the rest of the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian state made it possible to put into effect the decisions adopted in 1768 and restore most of the civil and political rights to non-Catholics. The year 1775 marked the beginning of the emancipation of the burgher estate in some Lutheran communities in Poland. The rich and well educated Protestant burghers in Warsaw, taking advantage of an economic boom<sup>47</sup>, began to demand a greater say in the way the community and even the whole Lutheran Church were governed<sup>48</sup>.

A conflict soon broke out between the Protestant burgher elites and the Protestant Church authorities composed of noblemen. In this conflict, which for nearly ten years split the Protestant community in Poland-Lithuania, the influential Russian embassy took the side of the Lutheran nobility and the old system of Church authority (Catherine II's ambassadors, von Saldern and von Stackelberg, were Lutherans and maintained close contacts with Lutheran noblemen). The burghers' anti-nobility opposition in the Lutheran Church was supported by the Calvinist nobility of Little Poland and the Calvinist community of Warsaw. Through the intervention of the Russian ambassador, von Stackelberg, the matter acquired political importance and the Warsaw Lutheran burghers did not succeed in depriving noblemen of their influence on the Church authorities<sup>49</sup>.

The Lutheran burghers' movement outdistanced the emancipation claims of the whole of the Polish burgher class<sup>50</sup>, for the latter did not put

<sup>45</sup> W. Kriegseisen, *Schütz Antoni (1764–1780), general major*, biography in: *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, vol. XXXVI, pp. 56–58; see W. Konopczyński, *Konfederacja barska*, vols. 1–2, Warszawa 1991, *passim*.

<sup>46</sup> "Gazette d'Altona", 16 IX 1769; *Konfederacja województwa krakowskiego... (The Confederacy of the Cracow Voivodship, Cracoviae 10 X 1769*.

<sup>47</sup> B. Grochulska, *Warszawa na mapie Polski stanisławowskiej. Podstawy gospodarczego rozwoju miasta (Warsaw on the Map of Poland under Stanislaus Augustus. The Foundations of the City's Economic Development)*, Warszawa 1980.

<sup>48</sup> L. Otto, *Beitrag zur Geschichte der evangelisch-augsburgischen Gemeinde zu Warschau 1651–1781*, Warschau 1881.

<sup>49</sup> A. F. Büsching, *Neueste Geschichte der Evangelischen beyder Confessionen in Königreich Polen... 1768 bis 1783*, "Büschings Magazin", vols. 18–21; [Ch. G. Friese], *Unparteyische mit öffentlichen Urkunden versehene Nachricht...*, Warschau 1783.

<sup>50</sup> D. Stone, *The End of Medieval Particularism. Polish Cities and the Diet 1764–1789*, "Canadian Slavonic Papers", vol. XX/2, 1987, pp. 194–207.

forward its demands until the Great Sejm (1788–1792); this testifies to the important role played by Protestant milieus in the development of the Polish Enlightenment. Latest research has shown that the Protestant burgher elites sometimes played the role of an intermediary in the adaptation by the Polish–Lithuanian third estate of social ideas formulated in Western Europe. In the second half of the 18th century Protestant burghers played a similar role in contacts with European cultural centres as was played by the middle nobility in the 16th century<sup>51</sup>.

What is interesting is that whereas in the 16th century the opinion-forming West European milieus were interested in the situation of dissenters in Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, this interest clearly waned in the 18th century. Research into the writings of some non-Catholic European countries (Germany, Switzerland) has shown that their level of knowledge about Polish and Lithuanian Protestantism was low. The majority of the publications concentrated on reporting sensational single events. There was less information on the organization, numerical strength and current problems of Protestants in Poland–Lithuania.

The majority of the articles published in informative and learned periodicals concerned the problems of Lutheran communities in Great Poland and especially the culturally–German Protestant community in Royal Prussia (Gdańsk, Toruń). Calvinist communities in Little Poland aroused less interest. It emerges from up to date research that the strongest Calvinist Church in Poland–Lithuania, the Lithuanian Union, was *terra incognita* for the majority of European Protestants<sup>52</sup>. This lack of information must have been the reason why the publicists' writing, in the best of faith, about Protestantism in 18th century Poland–Lithuania made glaring errors and simplifications, and perpetrated in the consciousness of their readers a simplicistic image of the plight of Polish and Lithuanian dissenters in the period we have been discussing.

(Translated by Janina Dorosz)

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<sup>51</sup> *Ausführlicher Bericht eines polnischen Einwohners von dem Schicksalen der sämtlichen Dissidenten in Polen unter dem Regierung des Stanislaus Augustus*, vols. 1–2, Lemgo 1774–79.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. the lack of information on Lithuania in a rare Dutch publication [B. D. Cassius], *Memoires concernant les Eglises reformées dans le Royaume de Pologne, par Mr. R. D. Cassius, Ministre du St. Evangile à Zoelen en Gueldre, s.l., s.a.*, about 1778. See also J. Wojtowicz, *Sprawy polskie epoki rozbiorów w niemieckim czasopiśmiennictwie końca XVIII stulecia (Polish Questions during the Partition Period in the German Periodical Press at the End of the 18th Century)*, "Zapiski Historyczne", vol. XXXVII/4, 1972, pp. 69–79.

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