

VILNIUS UNIVERSITY

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PARISH CLERGY IN THE DIOCESES OF VILNIUS AND SAMOGITIA  
IN THE 15th – 3rd QUARTER OF THE 16th CENTURY

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## Introduction

**Research problem.** Christianization was the first step that the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (hereinafter – the GDL) took towards the Christian civilization of Europe. The said civilization was unified by the Church – international structure which held a monopoly on ideology and science. According to Edvardas Gudavičius, the contrast between the civilizational maturity of the centre and periphery in West and Central Europe is best revealed through the Church and its satellite – school. Analysis of the most important civilizational changes on the macro level, i.e. as configurations of abstract structures and their movements on the map, shifts the focus away from the most important agent of history – man. This research paper offers a “microscopic” view of Western civilization movement exposing the ways it was disseminated and developed at the lowest level of the Church organization, i.e. parish.

The principles of the Fourth Council of the Lateran issued in 1215 provided that the parish as the fundamental stone of the communal religious life of the Church should implement a program universally referred to as *cura animarum*, which resulted in the increasing significance of the role the Church played in urban and rural communities in the 13th and especially 14th-15th centuries. Before the parish church developed into the centre of pastoral care, clergymen of the newly christened GDL faced the task to rally and nurture religious community.

Who were those priests who preached God’s word in provincial churches? Historiography offers a rather dim image of parish clergy suggesting that as a rule they would not exceed the function of pastoral duty. This study views parish clergy as a social group. The thesis aims at producing the group portrait of parish clergy focusing on the problems of identity and idiosyncrasy in the local community.

**The research object and topicality.** Until the late 18th century the total number of clergy – both diocesan and monastic – in the GDL and Poland did not exceed 0.5% of the population. Despite the unimpressive number, the clergy were granted an exclusive social and juridical status. The object of the research is the clergy that served in parish churches of the dioceses of Vilnius and Samogitia. In the first half of the 16th century the territory of the GDL was divided into four dioceses: Vilnius, Samogitia, Lutsk and

Kiev. The latter two were suffragan dioceses of the metropolitan archdiocese of Lviv, whereas the dioceses of Vilnius and Samogitia were part of Gniezno archdiocese. Following the Union of Lublin (1569) the whole Kiev diocese and the greater part of Lutsk diocese became the integral part of the Kingdom of Poland. Thus, the research was limited to the analysis of clergymen who worked in the dioceses of Vilnius and Samogitia as they were marked by common ecclesiastical subordination to the metropolitan bishop of Gniezno and manifested similarities in political, social and cultural aspects.

Parish clergy was rather heterogeneous. Institutionally it can be divided into benefice clergy (parsons, altarists and chaplains) and non-benefice clergy (vicars, church servants, etc.). The reflection of these groups in the study is rather uneven. Sources make less frequent references to non-benefice clergy than to parsons or altarists and they are usually limited to the indication of name and title. Here the common law is in operation – coverage in historical sources is in direct ratio to the social status. Another extremity was high-ranking clergymen who were in possession of parishes. In the Late Middle Ages when the phenomenon of benefice accumulation was rather common the chapter and frequently even bishops would be in charge of a parish or two. This group of clergymen was in many aspects distinct from parsons who had failed to climb up the ecclesiastical ladder. The life of high-ranking clergymen who kept one or several benefices for additional income was much more exhaustively covered in the sources than that of other groups of the clergy. The research focuses exceptionally on their activities as parsons.

The clergy of the GDL hitherto has received little attention from researchers which is unjustifiable given the significance of the *oratores* in the medieval society. The investigation into the hierarchically lowest yet closest to the congregation group of clergymen will enrich the history of social strata of both – the Church and the country. The study also touches upon the topic of the juridical status of the clergy which has been poorly covered in papers related to the legal history of the GDL. The approach to the research through prosopographic data determined attentiveness to individuals as well as certain episodes and details of their lives, thus allowing the study to broaden the knowledge of day-to-day history of the GDL.

**Chronology.** The chronological starting point was set in accordance with the realia of the Catholic Church in the GDL (Christianization), whereas the finishing point was predetermined by the periodisation applicable to the history of the whole Roman Catholic Church. The declaration of the decrees issued by the Council of Trent in 1545–1563 marked the revival of the Catholic Church, the end of the Late Middle Ages and the readiness to face challenges of the modern era – the beginning of the Catholic Reform. The starting point of the research is not strictly determined as it denotes the establishment of the Catholic Church in the GDL which in the dioceses of Vilnius and Samogitia is attributable to different periods (1387 and 1417 respectively) and is dependent on sources that in the 15th century still were rather sparse. The period under investigation concludes with the symbolic year of 1577. This was the year when the resolutions of the Council of Trent were announced in the ecclesiastical province of Gniezno, thus marking the formal beginning of the Catholic Reform in the dioceses of Vilnius and Samogitia as well as the rest of the province. The date is also surrounded by other events influential of the situation. The establishment of the nunciature of the Apostolic Throne and Luigi Lipopomano's, who was appointed the first nuncio to Lithuania and Poland, arrival in Vilnius in 1555 strengthened relations with the Pope. The situation of education in the country was affected by the Jesuits who settled in Vilnius in 1569 and somewhat solved the problem of clergy training by opening Vilnius Jesuit College in 1570 which 9 years later was converted into a university. In a few years the country saw the opening of the first priest seminaries – the seminary of the diocese of Samogitia was established in 1581 in Vilnius and a year later the opening of Vilnius diocese seminary followed. The titles of the bishops of Vilnius and Samogitia were bestowed upon the first bishops-reformers – Merkelis Giedraitis (Bishop of Samogitia in 1576–1609) and Jurgis Radvila (Bishop of Vilnius in 1579–1591, Cardinal from 1583).

The division into pre-Trent and post-Trent clergy is based on institutional as well as social changes in the structure of the clergy. The implementation of the Catholic Reform presupposed the consolidation of Pope and bishops' administrative power and control over their subordinates. Bishops exercised their function of control through the establishment of dean institution, thus influencing the territorial structure of the Church in the country. Functions of the parish clergy were also subject to change – sacral and

administrative responsibilities were supplemented with more intensive tasks of pastoral care and consistent supervision of parishioners' religious practices. The social status of parish clergy escalated from "almost undistinguished townsmen next-door" to exceptionally respected members of local communities.

As the strict observance of chronological boundaries in research related to individual persons is hardly possible, the investigation covers only those priests whose main achievements of ecclesiastical career were secured prior to 1577 subjecting to analysis exceptionally their activities in the pre-Trent period.

**The aim and problems of research.** The aim of the research is to reveal whether there were priests of local descent; representatives of which social strata opted for ecclesiastical career; how many of them performed the function of pastoral care effectively – resided in the area and were ordained; how many of them observed celibacy and other requirements for priesthood. There is no question of understanding the identity of clergymen in local communities without investigation into the extent of their perceiving themselves as part of the universal corporation of the Church. Therefore, the study also aims at establishing the degree of cohesion between parish clergy and hierarchically superior clergymen as well as other factors influential of the formation of common social identity.

**The methods of research.** The empirical character of the thesis was determined by the scarcity of research in the field by fellow historians and limitations in the source database. The prosopographic method of investigation was employed with the aim to compose a collective biography of parish clergy. Prosopographic data about parish clergy which support the conclusions of the thesis allow at least partial verification of a number of preconceived assumptions which have been prevailing in historiography. Despite certain shortcomings of the approach (chronologically uneven and sporadic source database, the tendency of homonymous names among priests and the heterogeneity of the group), it helped draw a much more specific and diverse picture of parish clergy than before.

Additional methods of research were employed in order to produce a broad and diverse image of parish clergy. The investigation is based on data acquired from sources,



therefore one of the leading methods was source analysis-synthesis. The source database that the research was built upon was rather poor and saltatory, thus requiring the method of critical description. Elements of statistical analysis proved helpful in the generalization of prosopographic data.

Analogical and chronological comparative methods helped adequately assess chosen phenomena characteristic of the dioceses of Vilnius and Samogitia and processes of their evolution in the broader context embracing Poland and Europe.

## **Short content of the dissertation**

**Structure of parish clergy.** Diversity of parish clergy in the dioceses of Vilnius and Samogitia was rather low as compared to the situation in Poland: alongside parsons there were vicars, commanders (Latin *commendarius*), church servants and teachers. Several churches had mansionarists' (Latin *mansionarius*) foundations. However, there is no mentioning of sacristans, lectors and preachers and very few references to priests working in concrete churches without benefices (Latin *gratualista*) in the sources. Prosperous parishes could have two or more clergymen serving at the same time. Chronological data analysis validated the assumption that numbers of clergymen decreased in the second half of the 16th century due to Reformation. Even though the employment of vicars and church servants was not a generally accepted practice, it was quite coherently followed in certain parishes in the first half of the 16th century.

**Parish clergy as part of the First Estate (the Clergy).** Pope Alexander III's decree *Et si cleri* issued in 1178 established that clergymen could not be tried in secular courts. The clergy's right not to be tried in secular courts and respond to claims exceptionally in ecclesiastical court was referred to as *privilegium fori*. In different countries the scope and content of the privilege was different subject to local conditions. Three basic factors determined ambit of ecclesiastical courts, namely the aspiration of the Church to withdraw all church property and clergy related cases from the competence of secular courts, the sovereigns interest to sustain control and the number of domains eligible to military service and the dissatisfaction of the nobility with the exceptional status of the Church. The Second Statute of Lithuania (1566) provided against clergymen suing laymen regarding secular matters in the ecclesiastical court.

Litigation of laymen on secular matters in the ecclesiastical court was also forbidden. Failure to comply with the rules was punishable by a fine and loss of the claim. Degree of respect to the clergy's exceptional legal status was subject to their interests and activity. It is likely that the lower clergy were ignorant of certain nuances whereas laic judges sometimes also lacked knowledge on the clergy's peculiar rights. Already in the 15th century the diocesan clergy in the dioceses of Vilnius and Samogitia was an integral part of the universal Church and would go to Rome in need of dispensation or apply to the Archbishop of Gniezno as an appeal court.

The clergy as a separate estate was interrelated by the universal organization of the Church which transcended state borders. The top of the hierarchal structure was crowned by the Papal Throne whereas the lower ranks consisted of parish clergy and the so called "proletariat" of the clergy – priests without benefices. The diocesan clergy from the dioceses of Vilnius and Samogitia was separated from Roman curia by both – a series of hierarchal levels of the Church and considerable distance. Travel inconveniences and expenses in the 15th century could not prevent GDL clergymen from travelling to Rome with supplications to repeal spiritual punishments and grant a dispensation on various irregularities. The Pope was addressed as the highest appellate institution of the ecclesiastic court.

Pyramid of the local Church administration, including deaneries, archdeaneries, dioceses and archdioceses, was of the greatest significance to parish clergy. This structure was designed to ensure the communication between separate links of the Church as well as its hierarchs and the faithful in both directions – top-down and bottom-up. Ordinaries of Vilnius and Samogitia were in immediate control of the clergy in their dioceses because such intermediate administrative links as archdeaneries and deaneries were nonexistent in the dioceses in question. Main means of control as well as channels of communication were diocesan synods and visitations. However, their organization was belated and rather fragmentary. Bishop estates served as the venues for gatherings of the clergy and parish clergymen were often listed as witnesses in various documents issued by bishops.

It is observable that parish clergy had certain group identity and were apt to keep in touch with colleagues from neighbouring parishes. The spectrum of their relations was rather broad, ranging from friendly visits to conflicts and rivalry over a benefice.

**The right of patronage.** The operation of the Catholic Church in the territory of the GDL was based on the right of patronage which implied that the founder was obliged to protect and patronize his ecclesiastical benefice and had the right to choose and propose candidates. Four groups of founders can be distinguished in the GDL: the sovereign, the nobility, the Church and city magistrate. The latter was the last to join the process of church foundation and is outside the chronological and thematic boundaries of the study. Christianization of the GDL and establishment of the church organization was first and foremost the responsibility of the rulers of the country - Jogaila and Vytautas were the founders of the first churches. Sovereign's foundations predominated in Vilnius diocese in the first half of the 15th century and in the diocese of Samogitia throughout the whole 15th century. Although in the 16th century the sovereign retained the patronage of about 30% of all churches in the dioceses in consideration, they were the oldest and most prosperous ones. The wave of nobility foundations started in the 1430s - 1440s. In the mid-16th century 65% of churches were founded by the nobility, 30% - by the sovereign and 5% - by the Church.

The disposition of the right of patronage was reminiscent of the disposition of other forms of property – it was hereditary, could be surrendered to another person or ecclesiastical institution for certain period of time and was realized by legal guardian in cases when in minors' disposition. The right of patronage could not be equated to ownership of an ecclesiastical institution, yet patrons would frequently view churches as their property. Founder's expressions like "our" church or even "our" parson occur on repeated occasions in the sources dating back to the 16th century. There were several stages to the appointment of clergymen to parish churches, altars or chapels: the patron would introduce the candidate of his choice to the bishop, the bishop would appoint him and a priest or several priests under his command would introduce the newly appointed clergyman to the benefice. Patron's decision appointing parsons was crucial whereas the bishop's role in the procedure was more of a formal nature. Upon receiving the patron's presentation, the bishop would issue a document certifying the assignation of a benefice.

The said document was directed at local clergymen who were supposed to introduce their new colleague to the benefice.

**Duration of service.** Hired priests were among those who would on occasion change parishes, whereas those who had church or altar benefices tended to be more sedentary. Duration of vicars' service is well detectable only in materials related to the visitation of the diocese of Samogitia. Tarquinius Peculus questioned five vicars representing different parishes. The vicar of Kražiai had served for less than a year but nonetheless was ready to leave due to the parson's refusal to pay the agreed wages and the manciple of the church being of quarrelsome temper. The visitation acts made references to two priests from Raseiniai and a vicar from Kaltinėnai who had served for two years. The vicar of Vilkija had entered his sixth and that of Krakės – seventh year of service. Jonas Jurgevičius, the vicar of Viduklė, stood out as a veteran in this context as he had been working in the parish for as long as 15 years and had seen four parsons succeeding each other. In the 2nd half of the 16th century neither of Viduklė parsons resided in the locality, thus it was convenient for new parsons to “take over” the vicar together with the parish. The vicar was also content with the offered terms.

There are 34 cases of references to the same altarist for several consecutive years, the longest period being 8 years. 229 cases of parsons in possession of only one parish were discovered. Their time of service spent in one parish ranged from 2-3 years to thirty or even forty. It was a common practice to keep benefices to the last and many parsons would draw their last breath in their parsonages. The fact that frequently the parson would live to be old and die in his parish implied that for certain period of time the church and pastoral care was in the hands of a person affected by the infirmities of old age. This could have reflected negatively on both – pastoral duties and management of the benefice. However, not all parsons were determined to sustain parishes till their last breath. Clergymen who were apt to climb up the ecclesiastical ladder often resigned from their parishes, especially those that were not so well-off.

**Residence.** In Christian Europe the issue of the accumulation of ecclesiastical benefices and the consequent problem of clergymen's places of residence outside their parishes had been debated since the 12th century. However, few decisive solutions to it

were undertaken by the Church before the implementation of the Reform was started. The request to reside close to one's church was time and again voiced in the diocesan synods of Poland. The resolutions of Vilnius diocesan synod of 1528 provided against priests abandoning their churches without justifications for periods exceeding 6 months. Parsons' place of residence should have been the concern of both – the Church authorities and the patrons of benefices. The 1st half of the 16th century saw the introduction of the practice of supplementing foundations with the patrons' obligation to ensure that the clergyman would reside close to the benefice under his patronage.

In the period under consideration at least one parson resided outside 117 parishes of the dioceses of Vilnius and Samogitia. There were 100 of such parishes in Vilnius diocese and 17 in that of Samogitia. The collected data disprove the well-established historiographical assumption that underfunding of parishes was accountable for the pluralism and consequent problem of non-residing parsons. The apparent tendency was that the more prosperous the parish, the greater the possibility that the parson would reside outside it. Vitebsk parish was among the best-off in Vilnius diocese, yet there is no information on any Vitebsk parson who could have resided in the parish. Just as there is no information on any Anykščiai parson who could have permanently resided in Anykščiai. In Geranainiai parish there had been no permanently residing parson since about 1528 and in Ramygala parish – since 1537. Only two out of seven known provosts of Naujieji Trakai could have resided in the parish. Analysis of the patronage of parishes which had at least one non-residing parson challenges the recurring historiographical statement that secular patrons should for the most part be held responsible for the issues with parsons' places of residence and other sores. The lowest percentage of parishes with non-residing clergymen was among those under the nobility's patronage – it was estimated that at least one parson resided outside one-fifth of all the parishes that were patronised by the nobility, whereas more than half of the churches with the right of patronage held by the sovereign and two-thirds of those patronized by the Church had their priests living outside the parish. There were two main reasons for parsons' refusal to reside in their parishes – accumulation of benefices and secular office usually in the sovereign's court.

There is no possibility to estimate the numbers of non-residing parsons who hired vicars in the dioceses in question. Only isolated cases can be detected indicating that a parson residing elsewhere hired a vicar or on the contrary - did not hire one. However, this information is too scanty and sporadic to allow more extensive generalizations. Besides, the fact that a non-residing parson did not hire a vicar does not necessarily suggest that the Mass was not celebrated and sacraments were not delivered in the church as the parson could have had an agreement with his colleague from the neighbouring parish who would occasionally come and discharge his functions.

**Education.** Researchers notice that in Poland as in the rest of medieval Europe parish clergy was well undertrained and frequently experienced difficulties even saying the Mass. Polish historian A. Petrani observed that from the 10th to the 15th century the clergy's education and training was gradually increasing, however, starting with the 16th century went into decline again. True, there is another opinion. J. Kłoczowski looked at the problem from a different angle. According to him, the origin of complaints regarding the education and morale of the clergy observable across Europe in the 14th-15th centuries lies in the increasing expectations of the faithful rather than the decline in the clergymen's manners.

In the Late Middle Ages there was no educational institution which would hold a monopoly in clergymen's training. It was not until the turn of the 17th century that the establishment of first seminaries intended for the training of the clergy was initiated as part of the Trent Reform. Education of young men seeking ecclesiastical career hitherto was the responsibility of cathedral, collegial or parish schools or even the local parson. In the dioceses of Vilnius and Samogitia young men who had the aspiration of becoming priests had to see to the acquisition of appropriate training themselves and the options were rather limited – basics of religion, perhaps a little Latin and writing could have been picked at the local parish school, if there was one, and for the consolidation of knowledge one could choose Vilnius or Varniai cathedral school.

Two cathedral schools were insufficient for the training of clergymen that were in great demand by the newly established Church in the country. In mid-16th century dozens of young men attended Vilnius cathedral school and presumably not all of them

sought an ecclesiastical career. Students who continued their training at the University of Krakow had better chances of becoming high-ranking ecclesiastical or secular officials. 66 parsons with university education were detected: 46 of them held higher benefices (canon, prelate or bishop), 20 – held office at the sovereign’s court and 8 – at the bishop’s curia. All of them were in possession of the total of 100 benefices. Cases when clergymen with university education failed to climb the ecclesiastical ladder and were content with parsonage could be referred to as isolated and attributed to exception rather than the rule. Clergymen who served in the sovereign’s or bishop’s court were undoubtedly well educated. The sovereigns used parishes which were the source of additional income as a means of motivational benefits to their secretaries, clerks, notaries and even physicians. Bishops adopted the method to express their appreciation to notaries, secretaries, treasurers, file auditors, etc. However, parishioners had little chance of frequently seeing their parsons. Even though it is often claimed that hired priests were ill-educated, some of them could definitely write Latin. The general characterization of the parish clergy’s level of education is hardly possible due to the inconsistency of the system of education and indeterminacy of control mechanisms which resulted in large variety.

**Ordination to the priesthood.** Priestly ordinations are divided into minor orders (*ordo minores*) and major orders (*ordo maiores*). Minor orders comprise four degrees (porter, lector, exorcist and acolyte) and major orders include three degrees (sub-deacon, deacon and priest). Ordination to major orders implied the irreversible commitment to serve God, obligation to observe celibacy and recite the breviary whereas clergymen of minor orders had the possibility to revert to secular life. Only ordained priests were allowed say the Mass and deliver sacraments.

In the Late Middle Ages the ordination to minor orders and shaving of tonsure were enough to be elevated to the status of a clergyman. Candidates while still at school could be ordained to minor orders, however, for major orders there was a minimum age requirement. In the early 14th century it was 18 years for sub-deacon, 20 years for deacon and 25 years for priest ordinations. Ecclesiastical law did not provide against the possibility to get benefices for the clergymen with only minor orders, yet prescribed to be ordained to the priesthood within a year. In case of failure to comply with the

requirements there was a possibility to secure the Pope's dispensation. The said situation allowed the enjoyment of the clergy's privileges and holding of ecclesiastical benefices without undertaking the obligations accompanying priesthood.

There is little data on the ordinations obtained by parish clergy in the dioceses of Vilnius and Samogitia as this information is only occasionally detected in the sources. Probably the most coherent relevant references are in parsons' presentation acts which indicated that the candidate was either a priest (*actu praesbiter*) or a clergyman with minor orders (*clericus in minoribus ordinis constitutus*).

Information on 111 ordained clergymen was traced. 94 of them were priests, 14 – with minor orders, one deacon and 2 of the clergymen were not priests yet no information on their degree of ordination is available. Hence, as much as 85% of the clergymen available for analysis from this point of view were sooner or later ordained to the priesthood and only 15% settled for lower degrees of ordination.

**Vita et honestas clericorum.** Specific external attributes (*habitus clericorum*), high moral standards (*vita et conversatio clericorum*) and celibacy were among the features that were supposed to distinguish a clergyman from the laity. Regulations of the diocesan synods provide information on the formal requirements for priests. The Church Reform and the resolutions of the Council of Trent did not provide for any cardinal innovations, yet designed more effective mechanisms facilitating the control of their observance.

The aspiration of the Church was to make clergymen easily identifiable and distinguishable from the laity. Tonsure could be indicated as the most important external attribute of a clergyman. God's servants' modest dress and trimmed hair and beard were supposed to carry the message of their exceptional devotion to the Lord and emphasize their superiority to the laity. It was not until the late 16th century that Pope Sixtus V standardized the cassock (or soutane) as the item of clerical clothing in his constitutions of 1589. Prior to that all diocesan synods defined the priest's dress as one distinguished from clothes worn by the laity for modesty and chastity.



In the eve of the Catholic Reform the requirements for tonsure and cassock as well as that for celibacy were ignored. The clergy paid little attention to the dissociation from the laity and emphasis of their status via the demonstration of exceptional virtuousness and disdain for secular pleasures. Parish clergy made no attempts to emphasize their exceptional status; on the contrary, they strived to be part of the local gentry and townspeople.

With the Christianization of Lithuania the requirement for the observation of celibacy had become a norm with the clergy. Vilnius synod of 1528 issued a strict requisition providing against clergymen having secret cohabitants, suspicious women or even blood relatives – especially girls – living together or separately. Single breach of celibacy resulted in a warning whereas repeated offence was punishable by imprisonment or even withdrawal of benefices. There is no evidence of consistent implementation of the said sanctions. The established facts of clergyman's punishment for molestation suggest that only clergymen of exceptionally immoral and impertinent manners were subjected to stricter punishments.

The sources provide only occasional references to clergymen's private life. Most information on this sensitive issue is detectable in sources dating back to the period of the Catholic Reform. Upon his appointment as the Bishop of Samogitia, Merkelis Giedraitis complained to F. Sunyer, Jesuit Provincial, about his failure to find any priests who would be capable of performing their functions and had no concubines. T. Peculus' visitation acts make references to the private life of 18 priests indicating that more than half of them had women "for the wrong reasons". Canons and prelates also could not be distinguished for the purity of manners. The above described situation was in no way peculiar in the context of the whole Europe. In the 13th-14th century Europe concubinage of the clergy was a commonplace phenomenon – some priests would even opt for church marriage and frequently have their sons pursue ecclesiastical career and even inherit their fathers' benefices. Clergymen were under no pressure from the parishioners regarding the observance of celibacy and, as a rule, had no reasons to conceal their liaisons with women and their children.

**Geographical origin of clergymen.** The early 16th century saw the increasing concern of bishops and church patrons with the implementation of catechesis in the native language of the parishioners. In 1501 the Grand Duke of Lithuania Aleksandras (Alexander) transferred the right of patronage over 28 parish churches to the Bishop of Vilnius Albertas Taboras on the condition that the latter would appoint well qualified priests with good command of the Lithuanian language. A few years later, in 1503, similar privilege was granted to the Bishop of Samogitia – the Grand Duke transferred the right of patronage over 7 parish churches in the diocese of Samogitia to Bp Martynas and his successors. The said privilege also makes reference to the Bishop's request to appoint Samogitian or Lithuanian speaking priests to minister the parishes. From the beginning of the 16th century founders of parish churches started supplementing their privileges with the prescription to hire vicars with good command of the Lithuanian language. However, the majority of such examples refer to the end of the 16th century. Official position of the Church of the GDL regarding the Lithuanian language becomes evident only from the resolutions of Vilnius diocesan synod of 1528 which prescribed parsons to hire Lithuanian speaking vicars and teachers to use Lithuanian and Polish as languages of instruction. Discussion of language related issues requires consideration of complex ethnical, political and cultural structure of the GDL. There are no questions regarding the topicality of the issues related to the knowledge of the Lithuanian language in the diocese of Samogitia, yet in the diocese of Vilnius it should be considered with certain reservations as only part (60%) of parish churches were situated in the ethnic Lithuanian lands whereas the rest (40%) were located in the Slavic powiats of the GDL, including Podlachia.

There is data indicating the place of birth of 263 clergymen. The total number of foreigners (159 priests) exceeded that of the locals (104 priests), yet the ratio is less drastic than it has been believed to be. The group of foreign clergymen was apparently dominated by the Polish (115 priests). Separation of Podlachia-born clergymen into a separate group revealed the importance of the region (37 priests). The majority of clergymen from Podlachia held parishes in the diocese of Vilnius with only few reaching the diocese of Samogitia. The majority – 64 - of GDL-born clergymen were from the diocese of Vilnius, 12 - from the diocese of Samogitia and 26 with no relevant data

available. The first clergymen of local origin started service in the parishes of Vilnius diocese in the first half of the 15th century and in the diocese of Samogitia – in the second half of the said century. Information about the origins of the clergymen who worked in the first half of the 15th century is rather sparse and thus insufficient to allow any generalizations. Surprisingly data related to the second half of the 15th century suggest that at that period there were more GDL-born priests than foreigners. Contingent data can hardly disprove the assumption that in the first century following the Christianization the dioceses of Vilnius and Samogitia were dominated by Polish priests. In the 16th century the ratios of numbers of clergymen representing the GDL, Poland and Podlachia remained unaltered – the majority came from Poland, a little fewer from the GDL and still fewer from Podlachia.

The first initiative to promote local clergymen in the GDL was the land privilege issued by the Grand Duke of Lithuania Kazimieras (Casimir) in 1447 by which the sovereign was obligated to propose GDL indigenes to all vacant ecclesiastical benefices under his patronage and only in cases of shortage of qualified local candidates recruit useful and reputable foreigners. The implementation consistency of the said principle was in direct ratio to the interest Lithuanians manifested towards certain benefices. Initially the Polish seized the high-ranking offices in the Church but were shortly displaced by the locals. The tendencies of the ecclesiastical career of the Polish in the GDL are closely linked with the general tendencies of their immigration into the country. Clergymen were part of the flow of Polish immigrants who pursued and happened to find more gainful employment than in their motherland.

**Social background of the clergy.** The sources contain only occasional references to the issues related to clergymen's social background. The most accurate evidence of a clergyman's high blood is the attribution of the Latin title *nobilis*. However, its usage was rather inconsistent as the clergy's status was emphasized by means of special honorary titles such as *honorabilis* and *venerabilis* in Latin texts and *князь* in Ruthenian sources. Occasionally a clergyman's social background is detectable from the information about his relatives or family when data on their background or possession of land is available. There are records on the social background of 109 clergymen indicating that 83% of them were from the nobility. Social structure of the GDL was

influential of the fact – the nobility dominated social and political life of the country, the network of towns was rather sparse and the peasantry was increasingly enslaved in the 15th-mid-16th century. The primary preconditions for choosing ecclesiastical career in the Late Middle Ages included individual liberty, circumstances of the family allowing it to support a member in his training to become a clergyman and financial interest in the said career.

There were observable differences in the tendencies regarding the social background of the parish clergy in the dioceses of Vilnius and Samogitia and the situation in Poland. In the 15th-16th century and later the majority of Polish clergymen were from townspeople whereas those descendant from the nobility made up about a third of the total number. As the numbers of clergymen with bourgeois background were constantly increasing, the nobility implemented measures restricting their possibilities to take benefices in the chapters of cathedral and collegial churches.

In the Late Middle Ages an individual was fully dependent on the whole of social relations and functioned as a part of larger social structures. Extended family can be identified as the most important of them. The fact that frequently a clergyman's parish was at a considerable distance from his native soil might have affected his relationship with the family. The above described situation suggests that the clergyman could not rely on his family in the attempts to consolidate his authority and status in the local community and resolve any arising conflicts. Clergymen sustained their status as full members of their families, thus participating in all succession and property relations that required family approbation. As clergymen had no legitimate posterity, their patrimony and other property was inherited by relatives - mostly siblings or nephews and nieces - rather than children.

Successful ecclesiastical career of one of the sons could lay foundations for other members of the family to opt for priesthood. Clergymen's attention to other members of their families is evidenced in the cases when they would transfer the parish to a brother or some other relative. Mostly such generosity was characteristic of high-ranking clergymen whose general income was little affected by revenues from one parsonage. Employment of a relative as the steward of the church is an example of a mutually

beneficial cooperation. Stable income from the benefice allowed clergymen to surrender the right to part or all of patrimony lands to other members of their family.

**Economic activities.** Clergymen in possession of parsonages and altar benefices were entitled to use all the land and other property assigned to the benefice and received various tributes. Structure and proportions of their income varied, yet was secured for life. Hired clergymen, however, were in a much less secure situation – their income was small and fully dependent on the agreements with the employing priest. Several forms of the vicar's remuneration are distinguishable: money, grain, fixed part of the parishioners' offerings and certain tributes.

Structure and proportion of parsons and altarists' income varied from case to case. The basic elements of provision for benefice included land, tithes, right to produce and sell alcoholic beverages also various tributes the most significant being grain and monetary. Certain part of income was collected from offerings for ministration. The leading factor influential of the proportion and structure of a benefice's property and revenue was the founder's will. Parsons would also undertake initiative to increase the property of their benefice. Requests to increase the income of a benefice were mostly based on the fact that the present revenues were not sufficient to keep a church servant or a teacher. The clergyman had the right to manage and use the benefice's property and income without decreasing them. Two institutions were authorized and responsible for the monitoring of church property management, namely the patron and the local bishop.

The main source of clergymen's – as well as noblemen's – income was land. The land assigned to parsons and altarists could be empty or with peasants. In the 16th century the clergy administrated and transferred land as well as litigated on related matters in the same way as noblemen. Nonetheless, certain restrictions from the Church as a legal entity and the Grand Duke and the noblemens as patrons were imposed. Patrons participated in the administration of the benefice's property with various degrees of intensity. In Poland, as in Western Europe, parsons were obliged to share income with the owner of the church and later, following the introduction of the right of patronage, with the patron. No direct evidence of the said sharing could be detected in the GDL sources though. Certain control of the benefice property sustained by the patron was not

entirely a negative phenomenon. The patron assumed an important role once the benefice became vacant. The patron of the church would administrate the property and hand it over to the new parson or altarist. Location of benefice's lands was subject to the patron's will and potential, thus clergymen oftentimes had several possessions rather distant from each other – part of them could be close to the church whereas the rest could be dozens of kilometres away. This was a common situation when speaking about the land owned by both – the clergy and the nobility. Church privileges granted the rights of land possession, however, practical realization of the said rights was in the hands of clergymen holding concrete benefices. Administration of land was accompanied by constant quarrels with both – local peasantry and noblemen.

In Western Europe the tithes were collected from all inhabitants but in the GDL the tithes as well as other tributes were levied by founders or donators on the whole estate or indicated domain. Identical order of tithing was observable in Poland – the territory subjected to the collection of tithes did not necessarily coincide with parish boundaries and was simply assigned by the founders together with other revenues. Even though paying of the tithes was not mandatory in the GDL, there were cases when the majority of parish noblemen were levied.

*Kalèda* (Latin *colenda*) was one of the most longstanding tribute-related practices in Poland. Originally a voluntary contribution it eventually developed into compulsory taxation. *Kalèda* was levied on parishioners of lower social status, namely townsmen and peasantry, whereas the nobility had no obligation to pay this tax. In the dioceses of Vilnius and Samogitia *kalèda* was introduced late. In Lithuania it ranged from 1 to 12 Groschen.

The right to produce and sell alcoholic beverages was an important source of cash. The Grand Duke of Lithuania Jogaila was the first to assign inns to the Church. Running an inn was a profitable business especially in bigger cities and towns – sometimes income from an inn exceeded that from the benefice.

Churches received various aids, including cash, honey, wax, squirrel skins, etc. Certain tributes and taxes collected by Polish parsons could not be detected in relevant

sources related to the dioceses of Vilnius and Samogitia. There is no mentioning of *meszna* and *stołowa* or *mensalia*.

As in each separate case the income from a benefice was determined by a different composition of various components, the calculation of its more exact value is hardly possible. Even more so as the clergyman was not necessarily in charge of all the property of his church or on the contrary – not all revenues were recorded in legal acts. Collection of tithes and other taxes as well as the protection of the monopoly of the right to produce and sell alcoholic beverages was the clergyman's business, thus alongside pastoral duties parsons were engaged into a number of household and economy related affairs.

**The role of parish clergy in local community.** Parish clergymen were important figures of social life who rallied the parish community in the church and performed certain religious rites (baptism, wedding and funeral), thus entering the parishioners' private lives. The dioceses of Vilnius and Samogitia occupied the most extensive territories in the Christian world; besides, a well developed network of Orthodox parishes was in operation in the eastern part of Vilnius diocese. The abovementioned reasons are accountable for the fact that by far not all inhabitants of the country were full-fledged parishioners entitled to religious services. Religious life in parish churches corresponded to West European standards – Masses were celebrated on Sundays and festal days (in more prosperous parishes even more regularly); sometimes sermons were preached; the most important sacraments, including baptism, matrimony and the Holy Eucharist, were delivered. However, it is obvious that the variety of religious practices in the GDL and the intensity of the congregation's involvement into them were lower as compared to the countries where Christianity had been well rooted. As in the medieval times the watershed between secular and ecclesiastical spheres as well as state and church was rather indistinct, the clergy had certain responsibilities, namely the organization of educational and charitable activities, which at present are no longer associated with religion. In the 15th-early 16th century almost every third parish in the dioceses of Vilnius and Samogitia had a school. The period in consideration saw the predawn of the establishment of almshouses. The sources provide evidence that local parsons were trusted and approached in need of help. However, it is difficult to estimate

the degree of importance of their social status as clergymen and that of their ability to assume obligations of this kind.

The church itself was not only a sacred but also a public place. In the Late Middle Ages churches were used as the venues for community gatherings, various meetings and festivals. In the dioceses of Vilnius and Samogitia such meetings were rather held in the nearby parsonage than in the church.

## **Conclusions**

1. Parish clergy was rather heterogeneous. It can be divided into three main groups: hired clergymen, parsons and altarists and high-ranked priests who held parish benefices. Parsons employed vicars and priest-commanders whose responsibility was to assist the employer with the duties of pastoral care and discharge his function in cases when the parson was absent or non-ordained. Social prestige of vicars was lower than that of the benefice clergy. In many aspects they are comparable to servants. Economic well-being of vicars was subject to their agreement with the employer, i.e. the parson. Church hierarchs kept out of parson-vicar relationships and most disagreements were solved by letting the hired clergyman leave the parish. The abovementioned reasons were accountable for the fact that vicars changed parishes quite regularly. High-ranked priests with parish benefices were the opposite extreme. The most prosperous parishes in the dioceses of Vilnius and Samogitia were reserved for chapter canons and prelates. Sometimes even bishops held parish benefices. This slender group of clergymen was part of the country's intellectual elite but its members seldom visited their parishes. Sources expose isolated cases when such parsons failed to set foot in their parishes at all. They normally held the most prosperous parishes to the last which occasionally meant 30-40 years. In such parishes vicars were responsible for the religious service. Brief definition of "normal" parsons and altarists is the most challenging as this group embraces a huge variety of clergymen allocated between hired and high-ranked priests.
2. Despite internal differences the clergy shared common identity determined by membership in the universal organization of the Church and exceptional legal status. Already in the 15th century the diocesan clergy in the dioceses of Vilnius and



Samogitia was an integral part of the universal Church and would go to Rome in need of dispensation or apply to the Archbishop of Gniezno as the court of appeal. Diocesan synods and visitations served as the main means of control of the diocesan clergy as well as communication channels with the bishop. However, their organization was belated and rather fragmentary. Clergymen serving in the same or neighbouring parishes were apt to form small communities. The spectrum of their relationship was rather broad, ranging from friendly communication to conflicts and rivalry.

3. The collected data disprove the well-established historiographical assumption that underfunding of parishes and allocation of the right of patronage to the laity were accountable for the accumulation of benefices and consequent problem of non-residing parsons. The apparent tendency was that the more prosperous the parish, the greater the possibility that the parson would reside outside it. The lowest percentage of parishes with non-residing clergymen was among those under the nobility's patronage – it was estimated that at least one parson resided outside one-fifth of all the parishes that were patronised by the nobility, whereas more than half of the churches with the right of patronage held by the sovereign and two-thirds of those patronized by the Church had their priests living outside the parish. There were two main reasons accountable for parsons' refusal to reside in their parishes, namely the accumulation of benefices and secular office usually in the sovereign's court.
4. In the dioceses of Vilnius and Samogitia young men who had the aspiration of becoming priests had to see to the acquisition of appropriate training themselves and the options were rather limited – basics of religion, perhaps a little Latin and writing could have been picked at the local parish school, if there was one, and for the consolidation of knowledge one could choose Vilnius or Varniai cathedral school or volunteer to serve the local parson. Well trained clergymen with university education held high-ranked ecclesiastical benefices and offices in the sovereign's court.
5. 85% of the clergymen available for analysis from the ordination point of view were ordained to the priesthood. All vicars had undergone ordination otherwise there would have been no sense in hiring them. Almost all non-ordained parsons are

attributable to the second half of the 16th century. Mostly they included high-ranked priests and officers of the sovereign's court who held parish churches but refused to reside in the parishes.

6. Clergymen's everyday life, its social and personal spheres were comparable to those of the laity. In the eve of the Catholic Reform the requirements for tonsure and cassock as well as that for celibacy were mostly ignored.
7. Priests of Polish origin made up almost half of the parish clergy. Clergymen from Poland relocated to the dioceses of Vilnius and Samogitia in pursuit of a more prosperous ecclesiastical benefice than that which awaited them in the homeland not affected by priest shortage. Acquisition of the local language was limited to the minimum required to organize the social environment and arrange daily living needs. The first clergymen of local origin started service in the parishes of Vilnius diocese in the first half of the 15th century and in the diocese of Samogitia – in the second half of the said century. The majority of GDL-born clergymen were from the diocese of Vilnius.
8. 83% of the clergymen available for analysis from the point of view of their social background were representatives of the nobility. Social structure of the GDL was influential of the fact – the nobility dominated social and political life of the country, the network of towns was rather sparse and the peasantry was increasingly enslaved in the 15th-mid-16th century. Clergymen sustained their status as full members of their families, attended to property related issues and even acted as representatives of their relatives in court. Successful ecclesiastical career of one of the family members served as a substantial foundation for his relatives determined to embrace the priesthood. Income from benefices, even those that were not listed among the most prosperous ones, ensured certain standard of living which allowed the clergymen to aid their relatives who were facing financial embarrassment.
9. The basic elements of provision for benefice included land, tithes, right to produce and sell alcoholic beverages and various tributes the most significant being grain and monetary. Certain part of income was collected from offerings for ministrations. Administration of the land as well as collection of tithes and other taxes, protection of

the monopoly of the right to produce and sell alcoholic beverages, etc. was the clergyman's who held the benefice business. Thus alongside pastoral duties parsons were engaged into a number of household and economy related affairs. All signs of exceptional respect to the estate of the clergy vanished as soon as a conflict between a layman and a clergyman emerged. Normally the parties in conflict would not associate property related issues or outbreaks of violence with religious beliefs.

10. Parish clergymen were important figures of social life who rallied the parish community in the church and through certain religious rites (baptism, wedding and funeral) entered the parishioners' private lives. Religious life in parish churches corresponded to West European standards – Masses were celebrated on Sundays and festal days (in more prosperous parishes even more regularly); sometimes sermons were preached; the most important sacraments, including baptism, matrimony and the Holy Eucharist, were administered.
11. Results of the investigation challenge the idea of the scope of vices attributable to the medieval clergy elaborated in historiography. It is true that part of the parsons resided outside their parishes, some benefices were held by non-ordained clergymen, quite a few priests were lacking theological background, a number of them had poor command of the Lithuanian language, etc. On the other hand, the situation was not as dramatic as it had been depicted in previous historiographies. Retrospective assessment of the medieval clergy based on the contemporary conception of the clergyman disregarding the standards and requirements of those times is faulty. Non-residing parsons were not considered as violating the canon law provided they hired a vicar and visited their parish at least twice a year. Clergymen who had not been ordained to major orders could hold a benefice for a year and then secure a dispensation or hire a priest to discharge their functions. The issue of the geographical origin of clergymen was important only in the attempts of the Church to control the flow of "clergymen-nomads". The requirements of patrons and bishops were confined to the request to hire a vicar with good command for the native tongue. No clergymen training syllabus was available in the pre-Trent period and the formal requirements were minor and adequate to the situation. Parish clergy in the dioceses of Vilnius and Samogitia echoed the general tendencies of ecclesiastical life

observable in medieval Europe though their manifestation in all areas was weaker – smaller number of clergymen and less diversity among them, underdeveloped system of education, shortage of priests of the local origin and less variety in forms of worship.

# Vilniaus ir Žemaičių parapiinė dvasininkija XV–XVI a. trečiajame ketvirtyje

## *Santrauka*

Disertacijoje iškeltas tikslas ištirti XV–XVI a. Vilniaus ir Žemaičių vyskupijų parapiinę dvasininkiją, kaip specifinę socialinę grupę. Tyrimo metu siekta patikrinti ar buvo vietinės kilmės dvasininkų; kokių socialinių sluoksnių atstovai pasirinkdavo dvasininko luomą; kiek jie efektyviai atliko sielovadinį darbą – ar rezidavo, ar turėjo šventimus; kiek paisė celibato ir kitų dvasininkų gyvenimo būdai keltų reikalavimų. Specialaus dėmesio nusipelno dvasininkų ryšiai su vietos bendruomene. Taip pat siekiama ištirti, kiek glaudūs buvo parapiinės dvasininkijos ryšiais su hierarchiškai aukštesniais dvasininkais, taip pat kitus bendrą luominę savimonę formavusius veiksnius.

Tyrimas atskleidė, kad sąlygiškai negausi parapiinė dvasininkija buvo labai nevienalytė. Galima išskirti tris svarbiausias grupes: dvasininkai samdiniai, aukštesnės bažnytinės karjeros nepadarę klebonai ir altaristos bei parapiinės beneficijas laikę aukštieji dvasininkai. Didesnį socialinį prestižą ir stabilias pajamas turėjo klebonai ir altaristos, o samdytų dvasininkų statusas nedaug kuo skyrėsi nuo kitų samdinių grupių. Nepaisant vidinių skirtumų, egzistavo bendra dvasininkų savimonė, kurią kūrė priklausymas visuotinei Bažnyčios organizacijai ir išskirtinis teisinis statusas. Surinkti duomenys teikia pagrindo manyti, kad daugelis ikitridentinei dvasininkijai priskiriamų negerovių nebuvo taip paplitusios, kaip manyta iki šiol. Dažniausiai nerezidavo turtingiausių parapijų klebonai. Priešingai, nei buvo kartojama historiografijoje, nereziduojantiems dvasininkams savo patronato teisei priklausančias bažnyčias dažniau suteikdavo vyskupai ir valdovas, o ne bajorai. Bendrų standartų nebuvimas ir kontrolės stoka lėmė labai plačią dvasininkų išsilavinimo įvairovę – nuo kanoninės teisės daktarų iki išsilavinimo neturinčių asmenų. Aptariamam laikotarpiu pasitaikydavo klebonų, neturėjusių kunigo šventimų, bet ne tiek daug, kaip buvo manyta iki šiol – kunigo šventimus turėjo 85% visų dvasininkų, apie kuriuos turima tokios informacijos. Kiek daugiau nei pusė Vilniaus ir Žemaičių parapijose dirbusių dvasininkų buvo atvykę iš

Lenkijos. Vietinės kilmės dvasininkai žinomi nuo XV a. pirmosios pusės. Dauguma parapijose dirbusių dvasininkų buvo bajorų kilmės. Dvasininkai išlikdavo visateisiais bajorų giminės nariais ir palaikydavo artimus ryšius su giminaičiais. Klebonai, net pasirinkę dvasininko tarnystę, savo gyvenimo būdu likdavo veikiau bajorų nei kunigų luomo atstovais: dažnas jų nevaržė savęs kunigiška disciplina, vengdavo priklausymą dvasininkų luomui pabrėžti išoriniais ženklais (sutana, tonzūra), šeimyniškai gyveno su moterimis. Klebonai ir altaristos patys valdė beneficijos turtą ir pajamas. Jų ūkinio-buitinio pobūdžio rūpesčiai beveik nesiskyrė nuo bajorų. Parapijoje veikę dvasininkai telkė parapijiečių bendruomenę bažnyčioje, o per religines apeigas (krikštą, santuoką, laidotuves) dalyvavo svarbiausiose jų asmeninio gyvenimo įvykiuose. Istoriografijoje pasitaikantys viduramžių dvasininkijos vertinimo kriterijai, daugeliu atveju pagrįsti moderniais laikais atsiradusia kunigo samprata, dažnu atveju nėra adekvatūs to meto sąlygoms ir turi mažai ką bendro su to meto vyskupų ir tikinčiųjų reikalavimais bei lūkesčiais.

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