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Religious Education in Lithuanian Schools from 1918 to 1941

Tarpukario Lietuva religiniu ideologiniu požiūriu traktuojama nevienareikšmiškai. Bažnyčios bei Valstybės santykiai labai gerai atsispindi vertinant Bažnyčios veikimo galimybes mokykloje. Bažnyčios veikimas tarpukario nepriklausomos Lietuvos bendrojo lavinimo mokyklose laikytas aktualiu ir svarbiu, tikybos dėstymas buvo įtvirtintas Konstitucijoje, švietimo institucijose veikė Katalikiškoji Akcija. Tikybos mokymas ir dorinis ugdymas grįstas Šventuoju Raštu, Katekizmu ir Bažnyčios istorija. Profesionaliai parengta šios disciplinos programa ir mokymo metodika siekta ugdyti bendražmogiškąsias savybes, solidarumą, patriotizmą, formuoti sąžinę. Tikyba galėjo dėstyti tik pagal Konkordato reikalavimus paskirti asmenys.

Interwar Lithuania is viewed in religious ideological terms as ambiguous. The relationship between the Church and the State is very well reflected in the assessment of the Church's potential for school activities. The fact that teaching religion is enshrined in the Constitution and in the Catholic Campaign's educational institutions demonstrates that the Church's ability to participate in regular schools in interwar independent Lithuania was relevant and important. Religious teaching and moral education were based on Scripture, Catechism, and Church History. The professionally developed curriculum and teaching methodology of this discipline aimed to fulfil its goals: the development of common human qualities, conscience-building, solidarity, and patriotism. Religion could only be taught by persons who were appointed in accordance with the requirements of the Concordat.

Introduction

Interwar Lithuania is viewed in religious ideological terms as ambiguous. On the one hand, there exists a rather church-like Christian Democratic party and clerical involvement in the activities of the Seimas and the Government. On the other hand, restrictions on church activities and relations with the Apostolic See and its representation in Lithuania are present. Similarly, the influence of the Catholic Church on Lithuanian schools could be observed. This influence was most pronounced through

the teaching of religion in Catholic organizations. All this was governed by the laws of the Republic of Lithuania, and the Concordat later signed off on it in 1927. However, despite the Constitution, the Concordat or other laws in Lithuania, the rights of the Catholic Church were often ignored.

The relationship between the Church and the State is very well reflected in the assessment of the Church's potential for school activities. The fact that teaching religion is enshrined in the Constitution and in the Catholic Campaign's educational institutions demonstrates that the Church's ability to participate in regular schools in interwar independent Lithuania was relevant and important.

It should be noted that this article will not touch on the Vilnius region, which at that time was occupied by Poland and where the main task for the Lithuanians was simply to preserve Lithuanian schools. According to V. Martinkėnas, when there were no legal schools, secret ones were created. This would occur where a teacher received a pastor's recommendation from the bishop to catechize the children¹.

The aim is to introduce the possibilities of teaching religion in interwar Lithuanian schools.

Goals of the research:

1. To present the relationship between Church and State in interwar Lithuania.
2. To review the consolidation of religious teaching in the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania.
3. To show the significance of the signed Concordat for religious teaching.
4. To introduce the peculiarities of religious teaching in schools.

The axiom of the relationship between Church and State

Relations between State and Church in interwar Lithuania depended on various factors. Notably, the influence of the Catholic Church on the population was very significant and was feared by some politicians and parties.

Even with the presence of Christian Democrats in state power, problems were avoided: protests over the content of the Holy See and the Concordat of Poland, bearing in mind the status of the Diocese of Vilnius; insults from A. Zechini, the envoy of the Apostolic See in Lithuania; and indelicacy of Lithuanian diplomats in the Vatican. Under the leadership of the Left and President Kazys Grinius, the Church was not only ignored, but the rights guaranteed her were being restricted. The bishops also wrote to the president about the restriction of rights². The Church was also restricted when nationalist³ President Antanas Smetona was in power.

¹ Vincas Martinkėnas, *Vilniaus krašto lietuviškos mokyklos ir skaityklos 1919–1939 metais* (Vilnius: Mokslo leidykla, 1990), 17–18, 133.

² Vyskupų raštas prezidentui, *Tiesos Kelias* 11 (1926), 246–266.

³ Kęstutis Žemaitis, „Socialinė Katalikų Bažnyčios Lietuvoje veikla ir visuomenės ugdymas“, *Logos* 68 (2011), 169.

Looking at these facts, the natural question arises: how could any conflicts arise if there were priests in both the Seimas and the government? Alongside personal ambitions, political awareness, or perhaps lack of experience, the relationship between Church and State was influenced by the untapped potential of the Apostolic See in Lithuania. As Bishop Justinas Staugaitis testifies, the situation in Lithuania⁴ improved during the mission of Apostolic Visitor Jurgis Matulaitis.

Consolidation of religion education in the Constitution of the State of Lithuania

Relations between Church and State touched the school directly and indirectly. The restoration of Lithuania's independence included among its top priorities the establishment of a national school. This was, of course, inseparable from the teaching of the Catholic religion, as most of the population belonged to the Roman Catholic Church. Religion education in public and private regular schools was addressed not only through the practical organization of classes, but also by regulation.

November 2, 1918 in the basic laws of the Provisional Constitution of the State of Lithuania is written: "All` citizens of the State, regardless of gender, nationality, religion, and creed, are equal before the law. Creating privileges is not a creator."⁵ It is noteworthy that the document refers to freedom of religion but does not refer to schools. A similar text is echoed in the Basic Laws of the Provisional Constitution of the State of Lithuania that was adopted by the Council of the State of Lithuania at its third reading on April 4th in 1919: "All citizens of the State, regardless of gender, nationality, religion, are equal before the law. No Creation Privileges."⁶ The same is said in the Provisional Constitution of the State of Lithuania of 1920, which reproduces the 1919 Constitution editorial on freedom of religion but not for schools⁷.

The Constitution of the State of Lithuania from 1922 not only extensively discusses religious matters, but also explicitly regulates the teaching of the subject of religion in schools.

⁴ Justinas Staugaitis, *Mano atsiminimai*, 2-asis papild. leidimas (Vilnius: Katalikų akademija, 2006), 316.

⁵ Lietuvos Valstybės taryba, Lietuvos valstybės laikinosios konstitucijos pamatiniai dėsniai (1918.11.02), V.22, E-seimas, žiūrėta 2019 11 08, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/0b9707404f8511e5a4ad9dd3e7d17706?positionInSearchResults=1129&searchModelUUID=dd08725a-2a58-4f73-9c7f-f13bb1e8e5af>.

⁶ Lietuvos Valstybės taryba, Lietuvos valstybės laikinosios konstitucijos pamatiniai dėsniai (1919.04.04), VI.26, *šaltiniai.info*, žiūrėta 2019 11 08, http://www.xn--altiniai-4wb.info/files/istorija/IH00/1919_04_04__Lietuvos_valstyb%C4%97s_Laikinosios_Konstitucijos_Pamatiniai_d%C4%97sniai.IH0607.pdf.

⁷ Laikinoji Lietuvos valstybės konstitucija (Kaunas, 1920), *Laikinosios Vyriausybės žinios* 37 (1920.06.12), 1–2.

However, when drafting the text of the Constitution, it was simply surprising that the Constitutional Commission, knowing the views of each coalition partner, reached an agreement on regulating church-school relations in a draft Constitution⁸.

When the Christian Democratic Party programme required all persons belonging to a confession to provide compulsory religious teaching in public schools, on the contrary, the programme the Lithuanian Peasant People's Party stated that all schools maintained by society (or the state) must be secular⁹.

A. Veilentienė states that leftist groups strongly opposed the inclusion of compulsory religious instruction in the Constitution¹⁰. On July 1, 1922, during the third reading of the draft Constitution, the Social Democrat V. Čepinskis explained that religious teaching is a part of educational programmes and therefore it is not necessary to include it in the Constitution. He was supported by the folk M. Sleževičius, who suggested that religion was an optional subject. Representatives of the Christian Democratic bloc were of the opposite opinion. Priest J. Staugaitis explained that if this issue is of concern to 90 percent of Lithuanian citizens, it can be included in the Constitution¹¹.

On July 21, 1922, during the third reading, Chapter IX of the Constitution, which is devoted to educational matters, was considered. The most controversial issue has been paragraph 89, which mandates the compulsory teaching of religion. Social Democrats and Folks have proposed the introduction of optional religious education, but with 42 votes to 19 voted in favour of compulsory religious education¹².

On August 1, 1922, the Constituent Seimas adopted the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania. It clearly stated that religious instruction is “compulsory, except for schools set up for children whose parents do not belong to any religious organization. Religion must be taught according to the requirements of the religious organization to which the student belongs”¹³. It should be noted, however, that even before the vote, Mr Sleževičius said that the Peasant Bloc could not vote for the Constitution because it /.../ introduces compulsory religious education and should therefore be fully responsible for it. The provisions of the Socialist Group on the Constitution were spelled out by Stephen Kairys, Vladas Požėla and K. Venclauskis, who said that the Group would not vote on the Constitution because it did not separate Church from State and schools from the Church¹⁴.

⁸ Mindaugas Maksimaitis, „Centro partijų koalicija Steigiamajame Seime ir 1922 metų Lietuvos Valstybės Konstitucija“, *Jurisprudencija*, t. 53, 45 (2004), 88.

⁹ Lietuvos valstiečių liaudininkų partijos programa ir statutas (Kaunas, 1923), 11.

¹⁰ Audronė Veilentienė, „Steigiamojo Seimo darbai švietimo srityje: lūkesčiai ir problemos“, *Parlamentinės studijos* 23 (2017), 54.

¹¹ Steigiamojo Seimo darbai (Kaunas, 1920–1922), 1922 m. liepos 1 d. I sesijos 218 posėdis.

¹² Ten pat, 1922 m. liepos 21 d. I sesijos 228 posėdis.

¹³ Lietuvos Valstybės Konstitucija (Kaunas, 1922), IX.80.

¹⁴ A. Veilentienė, 56.

As we can see, the Constituent Seimas was not unanimous. Clear disagreements were seen between Christian Democrats and leftists over church separation and religious teaching at schools¹⁵. The previous coalition of the Seimas became less united. The Left opposed religious issues, but Christian Democrats did not shy away from teaching religion. Even more, Lithuania was a particularly Catholic state.

Thus, it can be argued that for the Christian Democrats who formed the majority in the Constituent Seimas, it was important for youth to be educated in a Catholic spirit, and they therefore enshrined compulsory religious education in the Constitution. Left-wing parties stubbornly defended their ideological positions in order to separate state from Church and Church from schools, although their ideas were opposed by most Lithuanian citizens¹⁶. Compulsory religious instruction is repeated in the 1928 Constitution of the State of Lithuania¹⁷.

The Constitution best met not only the requirements of the time, but also the ever-changing values of public life and individual freedom. Only a few of the provisions of the Constitution dealing with education and religion and worship are conservative¹⁸.

The 1938 constitution states that primary and secondary schools teach religion to students who belong to state-recognized churches and other similar religious organizations. In other schools, religion is prescribed by law. When the number of pupils in a church or other similar religious organization is small at the school, religion is not taught to those pupils as prescribed by law. Religion is also not taught to pupils belonging to a church or other equivalent religious organization when it is not possible to find a teacher¹⁹.

Significance of Concordat in Religion Teaching

In 1927, The Lithuanian Concordat was the first document in the history of relations between the Catholic Church and Lithuania²⁰. This document established the status of the Catholic Church in Lithuania, established the rules of the Church's activity in the territory of the Republic of Lithuania, and regulated relations between the parties. This legal document clearly, accurately, and consistently outlined opportunities for teaching religion in schools²¹.

¹⁵ Jonas Švoba, *Seiminė ir prezidentinė Lietuva* (Vilnius: Vyturys, 1990), 94.

¹⁶ A. Veilentienė, 57.

¹⁷ Lietuvos Valstybės Konstitucija (Kaunas, 1928), IX.81.

¹⁸ M. Maksimaitis, 91.

¹⁹ Lietuvos Konstitucija (Kaunas, 1938), VI.41.

²⁰ Svetlana Usova-Kurbanovienė, „Mykolo Romerio mokslinė pozicija dėl Lietuvos Respublikos ir Šventojo Sosto Konkordato (1927)“, *Jurisprudencija*, t. 100, 10 (2007), 65.

²¹ Lietuvos kultūros taryba, „Šimtmečio belaukiant: Reikšmingiausi Pirmosios Lietuvos Respublikos (1918–1940 m.) įvykiai, *Istorinė Lietuvos Respublikos Prezidentūra*, žiūrėta 2019 10 26, <http://istorineprezidentura.lt/balsavimas2/rezultatai.php?visi=irasai&rodyti=irasa&irasas=301>.

Article 13 of the Concordat deals with religious education. It may be noted that paragraph 1, to the extent that it imposes compulsory religious instruction in all public or publicly supported schools, did not correspond to either the 1922 or 1928 Constitutions under which, in accordance with the principles of freedom of religion and conscience, religious instruction was not compulsory in schools attended by children of non-religious parents.

The phrase “in all schools” sounds quite controversial. It would also be difficult to reconcile the above with human rights if higher education were to be considered. This impression is further reinforced by the fact that the 1938 Constitution, text 41, paragraph 1 speaks only of primary and secondary schools²². Although the Concordat text guarantees that religious teaching is compulsory in all schools, whether public or government-sponsored, the Concordat assumed that only children of parents of that religion would attend classes²³.

Peculiarities of teaching religion at school

In order to improve education and moral education in schools, the Government has implemented a reform of secondary schools. Religious teaching and moral education were based on Scripture, Catechism, and Church History. The professionally developed curriculum and teaching methodology of this discipline aimed to fulfil its goals: the development of common human qualities, conscience-building, solidarity, and patriotism. There were two weekly classes for religious teaching²⁴.

Religious teaching could only be taught by persons appointed in accordance with the requirements of the Concordat: “Appointment of teachers and supervision of the science of religion will, as far as the content of science and the integrity of the teachers are concerned, be conducted in accordance with Canonical Law. If the bishop deprives a teacher of his right to teach religion, he would at the same time terminate his right to teach religion”²⁵.

The teacher was required to have “appropriate qualifications, not only professional but especially moral. Teachers must be characterized by solidarity, altruism, and due diligence”²⁶. Catechetical courses have served to train religious teachers. They were trained not only for a specific group of people, but they were also established by Catholic action centres. Candidates for these courses had to prove their eligibility by

²² Algimantas Kasparavičius, „Lietuvos ir Vatikano santykiai, arba Šventojo Sosto reikšmė tarpukario Lietuvos užsienio politikai“, LKMA metraštis, 23 (2003), 304.

²³ Konkordatas Šv. Sosto ir Lietuvos Respublikos. St. XIII, *Vyriausybės Žinios*, Kaunas, 264 (1927 gruodžio 20), 45.

²⁴ Ten pat, 46.

²⁵ Ten pat, 47.

²⁶ A. Kučinskas, „Mokyklų klausimu“, *Tiesos Kelias* 1 (1927), 159.

providing a recommendation from their pastor or school chaplain and a certificate of completion of at least two courses in a seminary or they had to be students of a university²⁷.

The law predicted that those who finished courses could teach religion even after completing at least four high school or secondary school classes, which was then the equivalent of graduating from a gymnasium. These free courses introduced not only the content of the training, but also didactics and practical tasks. Theology has focused on the apologetic way of presenting it. These courses were practical, useful, and easy to organize. Having the consent of the local order was enough²⁸.

The Catholic Action recommended to Catholic parents that their children attend schools under the supervision and direction of monasteries. The best type of school for Catholics is a denominational school, especially one run by a congregation. Also recommended are schools whose programmes are in line with the teaching of the Catholic Church and whose leadership and instructors are faithful Catholics. The school should be in contact and under the supervision of the ecclesiastical authority, and the school atmosphere itself should be Catholic²⁹.

Why was the school so important to the Catholic Church? A. Šablinskas, a researcher at the Catholic Action, responds: “The school is one of the most successful tools of education. The enemies of Christianity know this and are therefore always and everywhere trying to take it under their care³⁰. So not only pupils, but also teachers were the focus of the Church. They were invited to join the Catholic Teachers' Union³¹, the idea of which dates to 1911. Visitors remember the Sun Teacher Course in Kaunas. Later, during the First World War, professor P. Dovydaitis tried to resume activities organized by educational staff. He wrote the union's by-laws and was active in its activities³². This was a way to reach other schools: The Catholic Campaign stands next to the Church and has two noble tasks: to establish and maintain their own schools, and to try to bring the Christian spirit into other schools³³.

The restoration of independence in interwar Lithuania also included the establishment of a national school, which was, of course, inseparable from the teaching of the Catholic religion, since most of the population belonged to the Roman Catholic Church. The relationship between church and state in Lithuanian schools depended not only on a legal basis but also on the attitude of parties towards the Catholic faith.

²⁷ „Kursai katechetams“, ten pat, 260–261.

²⁸ Ten pat.

²⁹ Plg. Kazimieras Paltarokas, *Katalikų veikimo centras ir svarbiausi uždaviniai Lietuvoje* (Kaunas, 1929), 8.

³⁰ Plg. A. Šablinskas, *Kūrybinis katalikų veikimas* (Kaunas: Pavasaris, 1939), 34.

³¹ In 1911 the idea of the Catholic Teachers' Union arose among the participants of the *Saulė* Teacher Courses in Kaunas. During the First World War, Professor Dovydaitis tried to renew the activities of this Union. He wrote the statutes of the Union and participated in its activities.

³² Valdas Selenis, „Mokytojų problemos 1918–1940 metų Lietuvos pedagoginėje spaudoje“, *Istorija* 1 (2016), 112.

³³ A. Šablinskas, 35–36.

Conclusions

1. The relationship between the Church and the State is very well reflected in the assessment of the Church's potential for school activities. The fact that teaching religion is enshrined in the Constitution and in the Catholic Campaign's educational institutions demonstrates that the Church's ability to participate in regular schools in interwar independent Lithuania was relevant and important.

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3. The Lithuanian Concordat was the first document in the history of relations between the Catholic Church and Lithuania. This legal document clearly, accurately, and consistently outlined opportunities for teaching religion in schools.

4. Religious teaching and moral education were based on Scripture, Catechism, and Church History. The teacher was required to have appropriate qualifications, not only professional but especially moral. Religious teaching could only be taught by persons appointed in accordance with the requirements of the Concordat.

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RELIGIJOS DĖSTYMAS LIETUVOS MOKYKLOJE TARPUKARIU (1918–1941)

S a n t r a u k a

Valstybės ir Bažnyčios santykiai tarpukario Lietuvoje vertintini nevienareikšmiškai. Pastebėtina, kad Katalikų Bažnyčios įtaka gyventojams buvo labai didelė. Bažnyčios ir Valstybės santykiai tiesiogiai ir netiesiogiai lietė mokyklą. Vienas svarbiausių Nepriklausomybę atkuriančios Lietuvos prioritetų buvo tautinės mokyklos sukūrimas. Tautinė mokykla, be abejonės, sieta su katalikų tikybos dėstymu, nes didžioji krašto gyventojų dauguma priklausė Romos Katalikų Bažnyčiai. Tad religijos mokymo bendrojo lavinimo valstybinės bei privačiose mokyklose klausimas buvo sprendžiamas ne tik praktiškai organizuojant minėtos disciplinos pamokas, bet ir visa tai reglamentuojant įstatymais. 1918 metų lapkričio 2 d. priimtuose Lietuvos Valstybės Laikinosios Konstitucijos pamatiniuose dėsniuose yra teigiama: „Visi Valstybės piliečiai, vis tiek kurios būtų lyties, tautybės, tikybos ir luomo, yra lygūs prieš įstatymus. Luomų privilegijų nėra.“ Atkreiptinas dėmesys, kad minėtame dokumente kalbama apie „tikybos“ laisvę, tačiau neužsimenama apie mokyklą.

Nors Steigiamasis Seimas buvo nevieningos nuomonės priimdamas Konstituciją ir krito į akis akivaizdūs krikščionių demokratų ir kairiųjų nesutarimai dėl Bažnyčios atskyrimo, dėl religijos pamokų mokykloje, tačiau 1922 m. rugpjūčio 1 d. Steigiamajame Seime buvo priimta Lietuvos Respublikos Konstitucija. Joje buvo aiškiai parašyta, kad tikybos dėstymas yra privalomas, išskyrus mokyklas, įsteigtas tiems vaikams, kurių tėvai nepriklauso jokiai „tikybinei“ organizacijai. Religijos privalu mokyti pagal tos „tikybinės“ organizacijos, kuriai priklauso mokinys, reikalavimus. Pažymėtina, kad Steigiamajame Seime daugumą sudariusiems krikščionims demokratams buvo svarbu, kad jaunimas būtų ugdomas katalikiškąja dvasia. Tad Konstitucijoje įtvirtintas tikybos dėstymas ir Katalikiškosios Akcijos veikimo galimybės švietimo institucijose parodo, kad Bažnyčiai nepriklausomos Lietuvos bendrojo lavinimo mokyklose tarpukariu buvo sudarytos sąlygos veikti ir jos vaidmuo vertintas kaip aktualus bei svarbus. Mokant tikybos remtasi Šventuoju Raštu, Katekizmu ir Bažnyčios istorija. Profesionaliai parengta šios disciplinos programa ir mokymo metodika siekta ugdyti bendražmogiškąsias savybes – solidarumą, patriotizmą, formuoti sąžinę. Tikybą galėjo dėstyti tik pagal Konkordato reikalavimus paskirti asmenys.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: religija, mokykla, Bažnyčios ir Valstybės santykis, Lietuvos Valstybės Konstitucija.

KEY WORDS: religion, school, relationship between Church and State, Constitution of the State of Lithuania.

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