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The Radical Reformation in Lithuania: The Minor Reformed Church (*Lithuanian Brethren*), 1565-1617¹

Vilius Rudra Dundzila

Rev. Vilius Rudra Dundzila, Ph.D, D. Min., is professor of Humanities and Comparative Religion at Harry S. Truman College (City Colleges of Chicago). His current research interests are in Baltic religion, mythology, and spirituality.

Lithuania served as one of the sources for Unitarianism. Histories usually omit this from analysis for two reasons: Unitarianism did not survive in Lithuania, and Poland developed a much more influential and long-lasting branch of Unitarianism. Over the last century, there have been four principal scholars researching this area: the Pole Stanisław (Stanisław) Kot, the Americans Earl Morse Wilbur and George Huntston Williams, and the Lithuanian Ingė Lukšaitė. The first three included Lithuania peripherally as part of Poland and only Lukšaitė focuses exclusively on Lithuania. The present article surveys the development of Unitarianism in Lithuania to understand how it contributed to the generation of Unitarian thought. It reviews the Unitarian antecedents known in Lithuanian historiography as the Radical Reformation, focusing on its most important political and religious leaders and explores the theological, liturgical, and social thought of the Lithuanian Brethren that contributed to the development of modern Unitarian views.

The term “Radical Reformation” names a decentralized movement within Protestantism that rejected both Lutheranism and Calvinism. It was the third wave of the Reformation. The radicals, primarily identified with the Anabaptists, sought to recreate Christianity based on the Bible alone, abandoning the developments of history, tradition, and dogma. The term “Unitarian” refers to a strand of the Radical Reformation that originally rejected as non-Biblical the fourth century dogma of the trinity. As an organized movement, it evolved initially in Transylvania as Unitarianism and in Poland-Lithuania as Socinianism (named after its leading theologian Faustus Socinus, 1539-1604). It later developed into the most liberal wing of Christianity and eventually post-Christian Liberal Religion.

Lithuania had a history of religious toleration that precedes the Reformation, but the Reformation tested the limits of this tolerance. In 1324, messengers to the Papal legates in Riga reported with annoyance that the Lithuanian ruler Gediminas (ca. 1275-1341) allows not only Catholic Germans to worship according to their rites, but also Catholic Poles, the Orthodox Rus', and the pagan Lithuanians. For the history of Unitarian thought, it is noteworthy that the pagan king adds, “and all of us have one god,” referring to all the peoples and religions in his reign (Pašuta, 127, 129). By the onset of the Reformation, Catholics, Orthodox, Jews, and Muslims lived in Lithuania, enjoying religious freedom (Wilbur, History [XX, 2]). Lithuania encompassed two large ethnic groups: the Lithuanians and the more populous Byelorussians. Socially, Catholicism had a weak foothold among the ethnic Lithuanians, because they had been nominally baptized rather late by European standards: in 1385, or only 132 years before Luther's theses, without ensuing proselytization or missionization (Kiaupa 272). This left the Lithuanians as virtual pagans. In contrast, the ethnic Byelorussians were Christianized in the tenth century and were firmly Orthodox.

Two Patrons

The internal political administration of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania resided in the hands of more-or-less hereditary palatinates and castellanies, some of whom were very powerful (Wilbur, History [XIX, 5]), a structure which continued when Lithuania became part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1569. This led to an interesting reflex of the *cuius regio, eius religio* principle, wherein local rulers – but not the crown – supported one or another branch of the Reformation ([XIX 8]). This structure included the politically appointed Catholic hierarchs that served as temporal rulers over church lands. By the time the Reformation reached Lithuania, Catholicism in Lithuania and Poland had become so notoriously

corrupt that it even rejected the Counter-Reformation reforms of the Council of Trent ([XX 11]). For many magnates, the Reformation offered an opportunity for religious exploration and fulfillment, as well as for political reasons. For example, Duke Albert Lutheranized Prussia, a Polish fiefdom (Williams 617), and founded an independent state. A similar development took place in Livonia.

Within the existing social-religious system, the primary supporters of the Radical Reformation in Lithuania were the two magnates Mikalojus Radvila Juodasis the Black (Polish: Mikolaj Krzysztof Radziwiłł) (1515-1565) and his nephew Jan Kiška (Jan Kiszka) (1552-1592). These noble patrons were very well educated, widely traveled, well read, and well versed in their theologies. From ca. 1556 to 1592, the religious radicals flourished in Lithuania under their political, financial, and religious protection.

Radvila the Black, as Lithuania's chancellor, was the most politically powerful palatine in the country. The extent of his and his family's influence includes his close personal friendship with King Sigismund II August (Zygmunt August),⁴ (1520-1572), who as a Catholic monarch tolerated the Reformation, and family ties. His cousin Barbora Radvilaitė (Polish: Barbara Radziwiłłówna) (1520-1551) was the king's second wife and queen. Radvila, and other less influential gentry, embraced and propagated the Calvinist branch of the Reformation known as the Reformed Church and under the influence of this large and powerful family, most of the Lithuanian gentry (boyars or szlachta) converted to the Reformed Lithuanian Church (*Unitas Lituaniae*), which he founded in 1555 (Wilbur, *History* [XIX, 10], Kiaupa 269). Radvila himself, however, was drawn to the Radical Reformation, which in Lithuania became known as the Minor Reformed Church, while in continuous correspondence with Calvin (Wilbur, *History* [XIX, 10]). Calvin chastised Radvila for his radical bent, which Radvila derided, asking rhetorically what power the Mayor of Zürich had over the Chancellor of the Grand Duchy (Lukšaitė 311). After Radvila's death in 1565, a few years before the creation of the Commonwealth and the commencement of the Counter-Reformation, his children, who inherited his lands, converted to Catholicism.

In 1565, the Minor Reformed Church of Lithuania formally split in schism over its liberal views from the Reformed Church. It adopted the abbreviated appellation of the Lithuanian Brethren. The Brethren were quickly ousted from Vilnius and most of ethnic Lithuania, except for Kėdainiai. Historical research on the church traces the exiles to Byelorussian lands, but mostly ignores the remnant in ethnic Lithuanian. In Byelorussian Orthodox lands, the Brethren were granted refuge on the estates of Ona Radvilaitė Kiškienė (Anna Kiszka), Mikalojus Radvila's sister, and her son Jonas Kiška (Jan Kiszka) ([XXIII, 5-6]). Virtually no information is available about Ona, the historical research having focused on Jan instead. Ten congregations, several schools, and two presses remained in existence under their protection. The situation changed in 1595-96, when most of the Orthodox in Lithuania pledged allegiance to the Pope and became Eastern Rite or Uniate Catholics: the remaining Orthodox initially sought association with the Brethren and protection from their sponsors, but later turned to the Reformed Church (Lukšaitė 482, 488).

The support for the Brethren ended with Jan's death in 1592. He died childless and his lands reverted to Catholic branches of the Radvila family. The remaining Brethren dwindled until they disappear from the historical record in 1617 (Lukšaitė 319, 473, 479-480). Wilbur believes they survived until 1654, but provides no justification (*History* [XXIII 6]).

In contrast to our modern practices, the Brethren received support and protection from wealthy politically connected patrons. These patrons financed churches and congregations as well as synods and appointed, controlled, and paid ministers. The feudal system and social structure of the country facilitated this type of religious polity.

Two Theologians

The Brethren had two leading minister-theologians, Peter Gonesius (1530-1573) and Simon Budny (1530-1595). Gonesius was of peasant stock. His appearance coincided with the 1555 start of the Radical Reformation in Lithuania. He went to study in Italy as a Catholic but returned a radical reformer and became the junior radical theologian. Starting in 1556, various Reformed synods reviewed his teachings and found him to be a heretic (or excommunicated him) because of his Unitarian, anti-Trinitarian, and Anabaptist views. He also argued against the preexistence of Christ. To correct his views, he was sent to Wittenberg, but to no avail. King Sigismund II Augustus ordered his imprisonment, although he may not have served any time. He found a publisher for his first two books (both in Latin). Under pressure, his followers reluctantly signed a Reformed confession. His other views were socially radical, probably an influence from his association with the radical Moravian Brethren: egalitarianism, pacifism, and disregard for the mundane world. He also opposed holding public office, service in the army, and carrying arms (Pietrzyk, "Piotr Gonesius" 79-81; Wilbur, *History* [XX, 5-13], [XXVII 7]). To accentuate his pacifist views, he carried a wooden sword (Williams 1009). In terms of social justice, he taught that the Sermon on the Mount was to be obeyed literally. After his initial support from Radvila, he found protection with Jonas Kiška. Kiška made him pastor on his estate in Węgrów (Poland) and published four of his books, three in Polish for popular appeal and one in Latin. Gonesius became head of the Minor Reformed Church in the year it was established (Pietrzyk, "Piotr Gonesius" 79-81; Wilbur, *History* [XX, 5-13], [XXVII 7]).

The second leader of the Brethren was Szymon Budny, the son of a squire. He was the senior theologian, with radical theological and moderate social views, in contrast to Gonesius. He was the leading Reformed theologian in Lithuania under Radvila and a pastor, successively, at Vilnius in Lithuania, and Klyetsk and Nyasvizh in Byelorussian lands. He furthered Radvila's goal of a single, unified Protestant Church with a Calvinist theology in Lithuania.⁷ It would include the

gentry and peasants alike (Williams 1057). During 1568-1570, Budny abandoned Reformed views and adopted a proto-Unitarian position that denied the divine birth of Jesus and questioned miracles (Pietrzyk, "Szymon Budny (Budnaeus)" 12-13). He continued his unifying approach after joining the Brethren, progressively including Orthodox⁸, Judaic, and Islamic views in his ecumenical striving (Williams 1150). Kiška, who was theologically more radical than Radvila, gave Budny refuge and made him pastor in Losk in Belarus.

Budny was a prolific author. His most notable achievement was a critical edition of the New Testament. He articulated a set of theological ideas regarding critical scriptural interpretation that predated Historical Biblical Criticism by several centuries. Budny's revised translation (1574) of the New Testament was based on comparisons between Greek, Latin, Old Church Slavonic, and other Slavic versions, as well as philological and theological critical reading. The various sources were important, since they provided alternative translations that indicated notable discrepancies from a presumed original source. There were three types of errors: transcription, incorrect translation, and intentional mistranslation. His findings proved that even the oldest extant Western manuscripts – believed to be reliable – included corruptions (Lukšaitė 314). Budny's translation included a preface and his critical notes. Although common today, this was scandalous at the time, because it showed disrespect for the sacred text. Commentary was allowed, but not in the same tome as the Bible.

In spite of his notable Biblical scholarship, Budny unfortunately edited the translation to suit his proto-Unitarian theology. He eliminated passages as later additions that apparently substantiated the Trinity (Pietrzyk, *Szymon Budny* [Budnaeus] 12-13, 61-64; Williams 1148-49). The issue went beyond the removal of the well-known forgery of the Trinitarian Johannine Comma, that is only found in Latin manuscripts, but not in the Greek.⁹ Had he not undertaken the editing, his critical edition would have certainly superseded Erasmus' Biblical work.

Budny wrote 23 books in Latin, Polish, and Byelorussian, 15 after joining the Brethren. It is noteworthy that Budny attempted to proselytize the Byelorussian population. His Byelorussian works were catechisms and the like, not works of theology. He was trying to address the common people, many of whom could not read. Pastors, teachers and members of the gentry, however, could read them aloud to the peasantry. His was apparently the first Protestant tome in Byelorussian. In contrast, the other reformers and their gentry supporters all used Polish and Latin. Church affairs, such as worship and synods, were conducted in Polish, even in Lithuania. Synods with foreign presence used Latin. There is no indication that the Brethren tried to address the Lithuanian peasantry in its own language (Williams 992, 1047, 1051). In contrast, the Lutherans began to publish in Lithuanian as early as 1547, successfully converting Lithuania Minor to Lutheranism. Ultimately, Budny's Byelorussian attempts failed, since the Byelorussians remained Orthodox or Eastern Rite Catholic.

Budny participated in numerous debates and discussions on his proto-Unitarian views. His other theological positions opposed the Trinity, the immortality of the soul, the resurrection, as well as the adoration of and prayer to Jesus (482; Williams 1149). On the last point, he was in agreement with the Hungarian Unitarian minister and theologian Dávid Ferenc (1510-1579), with whom he had contact. Ferenc had appealed to the Polish Brethren, the sibling church of the Lithuanian Brethren, to support his views on non-adoration. The Polish Brethren opposed both Budny and David Ferenc (482). In addition, Budny taught that the Old Testament was more important than the New Testament. The New did not replace the Old, but only released it from unnecessary formal ritualism (Pietrzyk, *Szymon Budny* [Budnaeus] 11-15). Furthermore, he rejected the preexistence and divinity of Jesus, the virginity of Mary, and the *filioque* ("and the son") clause that the Roman Catholic Church added to the Nicene Creed (Williams 1047-48). The later was a point of agreement with the Orthodox that the Reformation had not yet addressed. Ivinskis claims Budny's theology includes "foggy" and "nonsensical" interludes (283). The Brethren excommunicated Budny in 1582 or 1584 because of his views against the worship of Jesus (Wilbur, *History* [XXVII 5]; Kot, *Socinianism* 108). Budny recanted some of his more extreme theology in 1588 (Pietrzyk, *Szymon Budny* [Budnaeus] 16).¹⁰

Liberal Religious Thought

Given the above background information about the leading individuals involved with the Radical Reformation in Lithuania, it is now time to address the religious thought of the Lithuanian Brethren. In terms of theology, they wanted to purify the faith from complicated formulations and interpretations that had evolved over the centuries. They wanted to restore an erstwhile or pristine Christianity (Lukšaitė 480). Their attempts went much farther than the two leading Protestant churches that focused on purging Catholic corruptions from Christianity.

Shortly before the schism of 1565, Vilnius had two Reformed congregations, one of which was radical, i.e., soon to become the Brethren. A Lutheran minister with Reformed leanings, Georg Weigel, shed some light on the teachings of the radicals. After the death of Radvila, he used his political connections to expel the Brethren, including the Vilnius mayor, who was among their number (Lukšaitė 318). Weigel had three sets of complaints against the radicals: theological, liturgical, and social. Theologically, he had three complaints: the radicals were Arians, they practiced rebaptism, and they did not require preparation for the Lord's Supper.

Weigel's claims can be easily explained. Although he used the term "Arian" as a pejorative, Arianism for the Brethren meant that God is one, not a Trinity. They found no Biblical justification for the doctrine of the trinity. Consequently, in addition to Arians, the Brethren were also dubbed anti-Trinitarians. Furthermore, Jesus is not God, but his authorized messenger or prophet, in accordance with the scriptures (the synoptic Gospels make no claims about the divinity of Jesus,

for example). Ivinskis correctly noted that the Brethren were divided on the divinity of Jesus and the Holy Spirit (282). The issue of the Holy Spirit was resolved by accepting a modified Orthodox position, i.e., it proceeds from the father alone, as in the original Nicene Creed. It is not God, but a power of God (Williams 1047).

The Brethren spent many synods on the issue of Jesus. For example, Gonesius taught Jesus is not the same as God, but of a subordinate substance, having received power from him. Budny went even further. He emphasized the humanity of Jesus and opposed his worship (Lukšaitė 313). Jesus was not God, and not eternal (Williams 1148). This eventually became a clearly articulated Unitarian position. Faustus Socinus, leader of the Polish Unitarians, participated in a Lithuanian synod in 1588 to refute some of Budny's more extreme theological views (Lukšaitė 478). Several more synods discussed the issue, eventually declaring in 1600 that Jesus Christ is God and worthy of worship, but rejecting the trinity (479). Echoing Ivinskis's earlier comment about Budny, the stance of accepting the divinity of Jesus while rejecting the trinity seems to be "foggy." There appears to be a contradiction between the two points: how could Jesus be God without a trinity? Does that mean there are two Gods? This issue was not lost on the Brethren: individuals and synods discussed at length whether the disputed trinity meant three Gods, two, or one, with the Unitarian view of one undivided God gaining prominence (312; Howe 66; Williams 1018, 1053).

For Budny, the Christian God the Father was the same as the Jewish Yahweh and the Muslim Allah (Wilbur, *History* [XX 10]). This was a heretical view for his times. The religious connection of Christianity to Judaism and Islam as three successive religions in the tradition of Abraham was important for the Brethren. Their religious worldview went beyond an isolated, exclusivist Christianity. This too was a radical notion in the Christian theological landscape. It obviously contradicted such Christian doctrines and practices that had led to the persecution of Jews by the Crusaders in the twelfth century (and their migration to Lithuania for refuge) or the bloody expulsion of the Jews and Muslims from Spain in the fifteenth century. Such radical ideas led to the stereotypical anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic scapegoating of Unitarian thought as Jewish or Muslim.

Weigel's second theological complaint was that the Brethren favored the Anabaptist practice of adult baptism after a personal conversion experience. They discussed the baptism of children, and rebaptism, but these were not significant issues overall. Williams believes they adopted the Orthodox practice of immersion, instead of sprinkling, under influence from their predominantly Orthodox surroundings (1051). Ultimately, they decided it was not baptism that made one a Christian, but conversion (1055). They progressively moved further away from ritualism. Budny opposed rebaptism, but he agreed to his own rebaptism by immersion as a concession. Decades later, the Polish Brethren eventually concluded that baptism should be limited to adults and *not* required for conversion (Howe 77).

Weigel's third theological disagreement regarded Communion. As a Lutheran, he believed in the sacramental "Real Presence" of Christ in the consecrated bread and wine. In contrast, the Reformed believed in a nonphysical spiritual presence alone. As non-Biblical, the Lithuanian Brethren quickly, and apparently without much discussion, rejected both the real and spiritual notions. They concluded the Lord's Supper was a memorial meal that reminded them of Jesus. Any believer could conduct the memorial, not just clergy. This was another step away from ritualism. Incidentally, the Lord's Supper was apparently discussed only in consideration of a union with the Reformed Church (Howe 77). Both the Lutheran and Reformed churches, however, repeatedly rejected the Lithuanian Brethren on this and other grounds (Lukšaitė 488).

These various Unitarian theological issues of the Brethren came to epitomize the differences between the Reformation in general and the Reformed Church in particular. The Brethren developed a Unitarian position. They acknowledged only one God who is the same for Christians, Jews, and Muslims. They rejected the Trinity. Significant discussion and debate led them to the majority conclusion that Jesus was God. The minority of the Brethren strongly believed in the humanity of a nondivine Jesus. Later Unitarians adopted this position. The Holy Spirit is the power of God. The Brethren questioned the accuracy of scripture, seeking to establish an authentic reliable text by critical means. They advocated adult baptism, but not as a sacrament; and similarly considered the Lord's Supper as a memorial.

In terms of liturgy, Weigel protested that the radicals prophesize instead of preaching sermons (Lukšaitė 316; Williams 1061). Worship services might well have included prophecy in the Anabaptist sense. No other information is available. Unitarian-Universalist Historian Atkinson interprets Weigel's charge of prophecy to be a form of sermon "talkback," i.e., congregational discussion of the sermon or scriptural readings (5). Ultimately, this question remains unresolved.

Weigel was most indignant about the social program of the radicals: the Brethren held wealth in common. They disrespected the government, courts, and classes. They called each other brother, regardless of rank. The gentry and peasantry sat together in churches. The Brethren proclaimed the equality of the classes. They allowed uneducated commoners to lead liturgy and participate in decisionmaking (Lukšaitė 316). Like Weigel, Ivinskis objects to the dangerous social and economic reforms of the radicals, although without explanation (282).¹¹

Weigel's complaints about equality and democracy may seem commonplace today, but they were radical at the time of the Reformation. Society was based on static socioeconomic classes, as explained above, and Protestant church leadership was still determined hierarchically. The Brethren practiced a form of tempered social radicalism. Their attempted equality between the gentry and serfs serves as an historical example of radical Christianity that tried to eliminate class distinctions. Unlike the other Reformation movements, the Brethren included the gentry, the peasantry, and city dwellers alike (Lukšaitė 481).

The Brethren preached and practiced social equality, but with participation in governmental and social structures. They progressively focused on the relationship of an individual with both political power and society (Lukšaitė 474). Overall, they held a Christian moral ethic (477). They sought to live in accordance with the Ten Commandments, not just profess them (481). The determination of social issues took time for the Brethren to develop. Two alternative positions were developed: one radical, the other moderate (Kiaupa 270).

The radical camp of the Brethren questioned the feudal order of serfdom, with peasants bound to the land. This included the right of one person to punish another. The radicals advocated equality for all people. At the extreme, they also questioned if one person can live off the work of another (Lukšaitė 315). Some even proposed that ministers live off the offerings of the congregation, rather than off the patronage of the gentry (Williams 1161). Gonesius advocated the radical social position. In spite of the teaching, very few gentry released their serfs. The test case of the radical position became Jan Tyszkiewicz from Bielsk. He was a convert from Orthodoxy who sided with the radical social views. In 1611, he was executed in a complicated political intrigue, after he refused to take an oath of office that included a Trinitarian phrase (Wilbur *History* [XXXIV 3-6]).

The moderate position, represented by Budny and supported by Kiška, believed in the right to own land and wealth, conduct the affairs of government, engage in defensive war, hold office, and rule over people. However, Biblical moral duty 64 constrained social interaction. Those in power were morally obligated to view those in their charge as people and to rely on the fruits of their labors with reason. Nobles were to treat serfs fairly (Lukšaitė 315, 476, 478; Williams 1136-37, 1161). Budny taught that Jesus advocated magnanimity, not equality (Williams 1149). Kiška's last will and testament required his inheritors to maintain this approach. The position on war reflects a practical stance. Lukšaitė rightly points out that only a very few of the wealthiest nobles could opt out of military duty in time of war without losing their lands. Moreover, neighboring Czarist Russia continuously threatened Lithuania (477). The moderate position reflected the attempts of the radicals at living a Christian way of life and not merely professing an empty Christianity.

Budny's social interpretations of Christianity and scripture were moderately at odds with the Polish Brethren. Unlike the Poles, the Lithuanians believed Christians could hold office, secure property, promote justice, defend themselves, and use weapons for these purposes. Christians also had social duties to perform. They could not become recluses from the world. They had to treat the rich and the poor (i.e., the lords and the serfs) equally. The gentry had to treat their serfs with magnanimity, but did not have to release them from feudal bondage (Williams 1048-49). Budny argued that all earthly rule came from God, and rulers were to exercise their authority as God's servants. In particular, they had to care for the well-being of their serfs, the impoverished, and orphans. Even ministers could have serfs. Moreover, they should not have to beg alms for their sustenance. The well-to-do caring for the less well-off is a religious obligation (Kot, Socinianism, 101-102).

The moderates prevailed in Lithuania. Consequently, some of the leading radicals moved to Rackow in 1569 for the three-year long synod that developed and supported the more radical Polish position (319-20). Gonesius traveled as well. Some returned to Lithuania, and participated in local synods on this issue, where the moderates nevertheless prevailed in 1582. No future synod returned to this topic (476). The Brethren held egalitarian views within the established social order, which they believed to be divinely ordained. They supported the state and society, emphasizing the need for the more fortunate to care for the less fortunate. The sacred worldview had to become a living reality in worldly affairs. Participation in the state required people to maintain their religious ethics, in particular avoiding exploitation. The position of the Brethren anticipated some later Unitarian tendencies. The Brethren established an ethical worldview that preceded the modern Social Gospel movement. Like their Hungarian coreligionists in Transylvania, but unlike their Polish counterparts, they adopted ethical support for the state as a religious duty. This included paying taxes and going to war. Later generations of Unitarians continued to debate this last position.

Two overarching principles emerged in the history of the Brethren: reason and tolerance. The tradition of discussing theology was based on the faculty of reason and the democratic process. They emphasized rational discussion in clarifying their beliefs. Even the phenomenon of prophesy had to be interpreted with reason, using the Bible (Lukšaitė 481). Their approach to dialog included propagating ideas via published books and then discussing and debating them at synods. They accentuated a nondogmatic reflection of religion. Although they did not reject authority, they did not agree on who or what could be that authority. Their structure became a peership of equals, rather than hierarchical. They emphasized rational thought, critical interpretation of the sources, and verification of theoretical claims. They effectively accepted a rational approach to religion (314-15). Moreover, they became an intellectual religious movement that fully practiced the independent search for truth, in Lukšaitė's estimation (481). These aspects became an historical stalwart of the Unitarian movement that the Brethren helped launch.

Reason led to tolerance. The discussions of the Brethren included a great diversity of religious opinions, primarily about the nature of Jesus and the correct type of baptism (Williams 1053). Some of the discussions were protracted. Notions were deliberated, decisions were made, and some were later reopened and revised. Overall, the movement came to advocate tolerance in religious matters (Lukšaitė 481). In fact, several synods adopted statements of tolerance (Howe 66). The entire 66 process was very democratic, finding an appeal from all levels of the gentry (Wilbur, *History* [XXVII 9]). Moreover, the synods voted on democratic lines. The church never developed any form of centralized control (Williams 993). Weigel's objection about everyone participating in decisions, mentioned earlier, indicates that church polity resided within the congregation. However, the congregations were ultimately controlled by the gentry, who financed congregations,

authorized synods, and appointed ministers. The practice of deciding all issues via discussion and debate was a significant religious development for the Brethren. In contrast, the other Protestant churches, like the Reformed Church, relied on hierarchical religious authority, such as deferring to Calvin's determinations in Switzerland.

In Ivinskis's interpretation, the Brethren overemphasized theological debates and disputes. At first, it was a powerful force. He focuses on the gentry who continuously defined and redefined their own theological positions. Their discussions degenerated into endless infighting, ultimately weakening and disintegrating the movement (283). Ivinskis makes good points on this issue. The recurring debates drained energy from the movement. However, it was mostly the clergy, not the gentry, who fueled them intellectually (the gentry did host and, of course, finance them). Atkinson overlooked this point in his praise of the dialogic tendencies of the Polish and Lithuanian Brethren (7). The church spent seemingly substantial efforts in debate, at the same time as it was engaged in congregational development, propagation of the faith, and defense from outside attacks, especially from the Reformed and later Catholic churches. In the cases of Gonesius and Budny, hardly a year went by when they did not participate in a synod or two to debate some theological issue. Some issues remained unresolved for a long time, for example the disputes about Jesus and baptism.

As mentioned earlier, Budny was excommunicated and lost Kiška's support at the same time (478). He was not alone. The Brethren had limits to tolerance. The excommunications contradict Atkinson's interpretation of an "untiring pursuit of engaged dissent;" the synods appear to have grown tired of the discussions and silenced a few of the most extreme individuals (6). The singular handful of excommunications mars an otherwise promising history of engaged theological discussion and debate. More importantly than theology, the use of reason, tolerance, discussion, and debate by the Brethren serves as one of the origins for the Unitarian tradition.

The Minor Reformed Church of Lithuania (1565-1617) with its antecedents in the Radical Reformation was a short-lived early Unitarian phenomenon in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. It is typically associated with its Polish counterpart, although the two churches differed on a number of issues. Like its contemporaneous Polish and Transylvanian coreligionists, it maintained close connections to political and financial support structures in response to the organization of society at that particular time and place. Out of necessity, later Unitarianism would reject this approach. The Lithuanian Brethren contributed to the developing Unitarian thought of the era that rejected the trinity, emphasized one God, and sought to understand the nature of Jesus. It rejected ritualism. For its times, it advocated a radical concept of social justice within the established fabric of society. The principles of its social message were equality and care for the less fortunate. It advocated modern democratic values of reason, tolerance, discussion, and debate for expressing and developing religious ideas. All this reflects the enduring Unitarian tradition.

1. This article commemorates the fifteen-year anniversary of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Riga which serves as the first reappearance of Unitarianism in the former territories of Lithuania-Poland since the existence of the Minor Reformed Church of Lithuania (Lithuanian Brethren). At the time, present-day Latvia was divided between Livonia and the Duchy of Courland which, in turn, were fiefs to Lithuania and Poland from 1565 to 1620. Those dates roughly correspond to the history of the Minor Church.
2. The edition of Wilbur's writings oddly lacks page numbers, therefore chapter and page number are used for citations.
3. "Whose rule, his religion," i.e., the sovereign determined the religion of the country. A succession of rulers could result in a succession of religions, as sometimes happened, for example in England.
4. He was the fifth generation great grandson of the aforementioned Gediminas. He was also the uncle of King John Sigismund of Transylvania (?-1571), who became the first and only Unitarian king and issued the 1568 Edict of Torda that granted religious tolerance for the first time in history.
5. The *szlachta* is the theoretically undifferentiated nobility of Lithuania and Poland. Lithuania has several levels of socio-economic stratification: the rich higher gentry, the lesser gentry with limited or no resources, city dwellers, and the peasantry (Musteikis 14).
6. The youth association of the Evangelical Reformed Church of Lithuania, i.e. the Calvinists, is named "Radvila," after its Reformation era patrons and predecessors.
7. In contrast to Wilbur, Williams believes Radvila envisioned a single, unified Christian Church along humanistic lines (1014).
8. Oddly, Lukšaitė labels Orthodoxy "heretical," without explanation (319).
9. The Greek version of 1 John 5:7-8 reads, as follows: "(7) There are three that testify: (8) the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree." The Latin Vulgate version inserts the "Johannine Comma" between the two verses: "[in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. (8) And there are three that bear witness in earth]." This insertion has served as Biblical proof for the Trinity in the Christian West. Scholars agree the Comma is not part of the original New Testament.
10. In 1982, a statue of Budny was erected in Nyasvizh, Belarus, reflecting his Reformed work (16).
11. He was a 20th century Lithuanian historian whose own pro-Catholic bias often distorted his interpretation, as in this instance.

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