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KUNIGŲ SEMINARIJA MARIJAMPOLĖJE: ATKŪRIMAS

The Seminary in Marijampolė: Re-Establishment

SUMMARY

Under favourable circumstances, the seminary of the Diocese of Vilkauskis was re-established. The re-establishment of the seminary was intended to increase the number of vocations and to influence of cultural activities of the Church in the diocese. However, the re-establishment of this educational institution was a decisive step that was not fully considered. Nevertheless, the re-establishment of the seminary in Marijampolė and its six years of active academic and educational activity have become a significant historical event for the Catholic Church in Lithuania, which had a positive impact on the education and pastoral activity of the clergy of the diocese.

SANTRAUKA

1999 m. buvo atkurta Vilkauskių vyskupijos kunigų seminarija. Dėl seminarijos atkūrimo turėjo padidėti pašaukimų skaičius, kultūrinė Bažnyčios veikla vyskupijoje. Vis dėlto šios mokslo ir ugdymo įstaigos atkūrimas buvo iki galo neapsvarstytas žingsnis. Tačiau Vilkauskių vyskupijos seminarijos Marijampolėje atkūrimas ir jos šešerių metų aktyvi akademinė ir ugdomoji veikla tapo reikšmingu Katalikų Bažnyčios Lietuvoje istoriniu įvykiu, turėjusiu teigiamos įtakos vyskupijos dvasininkų ugdymui ir sielovadinei veiklai.

INTRODUCTION

The history of clergy training in Lithuania goes back to the bishops George Radvila (1556–1600). Bishop Jurgis Radvila established a seminary in Vilnius in

1582, and the Seminary of Samogitians in Varniai in 1622. Later, a seminary was established in Sejny in 1826. In interwar Lithuania, seminaries were established

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: seminarija Marijampolėje, atkūrimas, rezultatai.

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in Kaunas, Telsiai (after the establishment of the diocese of Telsiai) and Vilkaviskis (before that in Zvypliai and Giziai). Vilnius Seminary was theoretically a part of the Catholic Church in Poland, as was Vilnius and much of the Vilnius region. In the Soviet era, only the Kaunas Inter-Diocesan Seminary remained, and the seminary operated underground. In 1989, the Bishop of Telsiai, Antanas Vaičius, issued a decree re-establishing the Telsiai Seminary.

In 1989, at the beginning of the movement for the liberation of Lithuania and the Soviet occupation, Bishop Antanas Vaičius of Telsiai restores the closed Telsiai Seminary, and in 1993, at the beginning of independent Lithuania, Metropolitan Audrys Juozas Bačkis, Archbishop of Vilnius, restored the Vilnius Seminary. The only remaining school that is no longer in operation is the Diocese of Vilkaviskis Clergy Training School. However, in 1997, Bishop Juozas Zemaitis of Vilkaviskis re-establishes

the seminary, but no longer in Vilkaviskis, but in Marijampole, and in 1999 it begins its activities.

The re-establishment of the seminary of the Diocese of Vilkaviskis has caused a lot of debate. It was a fact that was received with mixed feelings. Whether the re-establishment was a timely and much-needed event, or whether it was a courageous, but not fully thought-out act. Several years later, the seminary ceased its activities due to lack of students. The question that remains unanswered as the main problem of this thesis is: under what circumstances and with what objectives was the Blessed George Matulaitis Seminary of the Diocese of Vilkaviskis re-established.

This work is based on the documents of 1997-2000 that reveal the establishment of the seminary and the beginning of its activities (the documents of the Diocesan Curia of Vilkaviskis, Fr. Kęstutis Zemaitis' personal archive, memories, and other documents).

CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE FOUNDATION

After the restoration of Lithuanian independence in 1990, relations between the Church and the State changed radically. The Sąjūdis forced the Soviet government to make concessions to the Church. Already during the first (founding) congress of the Movement on 22 October 1988, the return of Vilnius Cathedral to the faithful was announced. This was not a very benevolent act on the part of the Soviet authorities, but rather an inability to stop the enthusiastic upsurge of the Lithuanian people and their thirst for freedom. This was fol-

lowed by St. The return of Casimir's relics followed. Here is what the chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church, which was still underground, wrote that year. On 4 March 1989, the coffin with St. Casimir's body was returned to the church. In 1989, 1989, the cortege with the relics of St. Casimir from the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul returned to the Cathedral. A moving celebration. On that day, Vilnius residents and visitors, full of reverent solemnity, moved in one direction – towards Antakalnis." (Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania

(news from dioceses), No 81, 19 March 1989, page not shown). The civil authorities were no longer able to ban such events. A very joyful event was related to Archbishop Martyr Mėcislovas Reinis. In the same issue of the LKB Chronicle it is written: "The Curia of the Vilnius Archdiocese has received a report that on 20 February. The Curial Curia of the Vilnius Archdiocese rehabilitated Bishop Mėcislovas Reinyš on 20/20/20, by the decision of the Supreme Court of the Lithuanian SSR" (Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania (Rehabilitated Bishop Mėcislovas Reinyš), No. 81, 19 March 1989, page not indicated).

The appointment of Bishop Vincent Sladkevičius of Kėisadioryš as President of the Lithuanian Bishops' Conference was also an extraordinary event in Lithuania. This was a very solid event, because Sladkevičius was not elected by the bishops, but appointed by Pope John Paul II himself. Sladkevičius was comparatively independent and did not try to coordinate church affairs with the Soviet government, which was still in Lithuania at that time. Another positive circumstance was that already in 1990, the commissioners of the Council for Religious Affairs in the Lithuanian SSR ceased to function.

Perhaps the most important circumstance was the events of 11 March 1990, when the Supreme Council adopted the Act "On the Restoration of the Independent State of Lithuania". Although after the promulgation of this act the occupying Soviet army remained in Lithuania until 31 August 1993, the KGB finally ceased its activities in Lithuania in October 1991.

An important idea of the new Constitution is: "Article 26. Freedom of thought, belief and conscience shall be unrestricted. Everyone shall have the right freely to choose any religion or belief and to profess it freely, alone or in community with others, privately or publicly, to perform religious rites, to practise his faith and to teach it" (Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, 1992: Article 26) guaranteed the establishment of denominational schools and seminaries. Since his appointment as Bishop of the Diocese of Vilkauskis in 1989, "Bishop Juozas Zemaitis also envisaged the restoration of a seminary" (Zemaitis 2016: 71).

From the ecclesiastical point of view, the establishment of the seminary of the Diocese of Vilkauskis was not necessary. It could be re-established as the old seminary of Vilkauskis, which was descended from the old seminary of Seinai, with all its spirit (Katilius, 2021: 189-205), as no ecclesiastical authority had officially ceased to operate. Church law guaranteed that a legal person does not disappear if it is destroyed only by the civil power: "Kan. 120 § 1. A juridical person, by its very nature, is perpetual; but it ceases to exist if its activity is lawfully terminated by the competent authority or if it has been inactive for a period of one hundred years" (Code of Canon Law. Codex Iuris canonici). The canon speaks of the authority competent in this area – that is, the ecclesiastical authority.

To re-establish the seminary, the question of its premises had to be resolved. A sewing factory was set up in the old seminary in Vilkauskis. Already in the post-war period the buildings were occupied, and soldiers' uniforms were being made,

but during the years of independence other orders were accepted and more than two hundred workers were employed. The buildings were reorganised and adapted for production. It was almost impossible for the seminary to return there: many workers would have to leave their jobs, and it would require a large investment to rebuild the seminary, which had been “damaged”. And Vilkauskis itself was not the best place for such an institution to function. All eyes turned to Marijampole. The bishop’s curia was there, and there were better connections with Marijampole. In fact, there were also thoughts of establishing a seminary in Liškiava near Druskininkai. The old Dominican monastery had been renovated and the premises would have been sufficient, but the main reason for the negative conclusion was that the distance from the centre of the diocese was too far, and it would be inconvenient for the lecturers to get there (Zemaitis, 2022: 3).

One of the realistic options appeared quite unexpectedly. Ramutė Vailokaityte wrote a letter from the USA to the Lithuanian government, asking for the return of the Paezeriai manor, which had belonged to her in the interwar period (Vailokaityte, 1997), and proposing that the Diocese of Vilkauskis use it. The seminary could have been located there, but the civil authorities did not accept this proposal and the state kept the manor (Zemaitis, 2022: 3).

Another project was the construction of a completely new building. This required a plot of land. A site adjacent to the Drama Theatre was considered, but this proved too complicated and expensive. Even the Drama Theatre was discussed, as it was also owned by the Church before World War II (Zemaitis, 2022: 4). When this project also failed, a lease agreement was finally agreed and signed with the Province of the Lithuanian Marian Monastery, and the remaining unrenovated part of the Marijampole Monastery building (about three-fifths of the building) was given to the Diocese of Vilkauskis for fifty years. After renovation of the premises and landscaping, it became a seminary (Zemaitis, 2022: 3).

The restored seminary of the Diocese of Vilkauskis was given the title of Blessed George Matulaitis (Bishop of Vilkauskis, Juozas Zemaitis, Decree No. 152, 13.04.1999), and the chapel of the seminary was given the title of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross by the bishop (Bishop of Vilkauskis, Juozas Zemaitis, Decree No. 412, 06.12.1999) and the right to celebrate the feast day of the Holy Cross. Joseph of the Holy Trinity. Mary’s Betrothed (19 March), the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (14 September) and the Eucharist of St. Joseph (14 September). The feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary (8 December). (Bishop Juozas Zemaitis of Vilkauskis, Decree No. 307, 13.08.1999).

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SEMINARY

During the Soviet years, the number of priests dropped significantly. At the beginning of the Sajūd period and at the

beginning of independence, there was a strong Catholic presence in religious services and church attendance. It seemed

then that this upsurge was just beginning, or at least would continue. That there would be more people preparing for the priesthood in their own seminary also seemed to be an indisputable truth. And the diocese of Vilkauskis in Kaunas

had enough seminarians with which to start a new clergy training institution.

The number of seminarians at the Kaunas inter-diocesan seminary as of the first day of November 1990 (Catholic Calendar Handbook, 1991: 279):

Diocese of Kaišiadorys	Archdiocese of Kaunas	Diocese of Vilkauskis	Diocese of Telsiai	Vilnius Archdiocese
22	55	34	12	39

In 1993 there were 39 students in the first year of studies in Kaunas, 7 of whom were seminarians of the Diocese of Vilkauskis. Three years later, 43 seminarians, 9 of whom belonged to the Diocese of Vilkauskis, were in the first year of their studies in Kaunas (Catholic Calendar Directory, 1996: 89–90).

There was a sense of religious patriotism among the young people, most of the seminarians were idealists, and they had before their eyes moral examples such as Archbishop Teofilus Matulionis (1873–1962, bishop 1929, archbishop 1962, beatified 2017), who was declared blessed by Pope Francis (Zemaitis, 2021: 90–96).

Probably, Bishop Juozas Zemaitis of Vilkauskis had another goal in the creation of the seminary, which was to have a greater influence on the preparation of future clergy for his diocese than he had in Kaunas Seminary (Zemaitis, 2021: 2).

The Bishop of Vilkauskis prepared for the re-establishment of the seminary in advance. In his letter *Pro memoria*, he says: “Being well aware that the re-establishment of the seminary in the context of today’s ecclesiastical norms is a very responsible step, I have tried from the very beginning to take steps that were planned and thought out in the ecclesiastical spirit. As soon as the first opportunities arose, I arranged for the

training of priests and laymen for this purpose, who, having acquired the necessary academic qualifications, would be the teachers and spiritual directors of the restored seminary (Zemaitis, 1998: 3).

Bishop Juozas Zemaitis was aware of the history of the training of clergy in Uznemune since the time of the seminary in Seinai. His goal was not only to rebuild the seminary, but also to make sure that it would be on the level of a high school and that the students would receive a university education. Since Kaunas had a Faculty of Catholic Theology attached to Vytautas Magnus University, the focus turned to Kaunas. In principle, the university agreed to affiliate the Marijampole seminary, thus making it another branch of the university. On 31 May 1999, the Rector of the University signed the following order: “In accordance with the Statutes of the University, the resolution of the Senate of 25 March 1999, the request of the Curia of the Diocese of Vilkauskis on 18 March 1999, the consent of the Grand Chancellor of the Faculty of Catholic Theology and the consent of the Metropolitan of Kaunas on 14 March 1999: ‘I hereby establish a branch of the Faculty of Catholic Theology of the University of Vytautas the Great in the Diocese of Vilkauskis from the following year. 2. I

grant the rights of a legal person to the branch of the Faculty of Catholic Theology of Vytautas Magnus University of Vilkauskis Diocese <...>” (Rector of Vytautas Magnus University, Order of 31 May 1999, No. 180)

When the seminary was re-established, a branch of Vytautas Magnus

University was also established. The teaching related to the Bachelor’s degree was combined in accordance with the requirements of the Catholic Theological Faculty and the University. The seminarians studying at the seminary also graduated from the Faculty of Catholic Theology at Vytautas Magnus University.

RESULTS

During its six years of active academic activity, the Seminary of Blessed George Matulaitis of the Diocese of Vilkauskis has trained several new priests, who have joined the ranks of the diocesan pastors. This is perhaps the most important goal and result.

The renovation of the buildings, which served the purposes of the seminary and the theological branch (later the theological department), has left them to serve the diocese: the pastoral centre, the Caritas, the youth centre, the reception of pilgrims and various diocesan events. Thus, the funds accumulated and used for repairs are used for the pastoral care of the diocese, even when the seminary is no longer functioning (Zemaitis, 2021: 2).

During the six years of its operation, the seminary in Marijampole had become not only a centre of education but also a cultural centre. Scientific conferences, literary evenings and exhibitions of the city’s artists were held here. Politicians, heads of government and foreign diplomats visited the seminary, and various topical issues were presented and discussed (Zemaitis, 2021: 3).

The diocesan seminary had a sufficient intellectual potential, which was

able to maintain the educational process in accordance with the Church’s regulations and to maintain the level of education in accordance with the requirements of Vytautas Magnus University (Zemaitis, 2021: 2).

However, the overall outcome was not encouraging, with the number of admissions to the seminary declining each year. According to the data of 2001, there were 47 seminarians in the seminary (Catholic Directory, 2001: 31), the following year 37 (Catholic Directory, 2002: 31), the next year 35 (Catholic Directory, 2003: 30), and in the last year only 24 students (Catholic Directory, 2005: 31).

This decline in enrolment can be explained not only by changes in demographics, but also by the process of cultural secularisation and desecularisation of values. “Due to the low number of students, the seminary ceased to function in 2005, and seminarians moved to Kaunas Seminary to continue their studies” (Zemaitis, 2016: 72). Thus, the seminary in Marijampole had to suspend its education and training process again after six years of its active operation. Only this time, not because of external factors, but because of an internal decision, the activities were interrupted for an unknown period.

Nevertheless, the re-establishment of the seminary in Marijampole and its six years of active academic and educational activity became a significant historical

event not only in Uznemune, but also in the process of training and pastoral care of the clergy of the Catholic Church in Lithuania.

CONCLUSIONS

The opportunities for the activities of the Catholic Church have increased considerably with the changes in the political situation in Lithuania. The laws and authorities of the independent state no longer persecuted church institutions. Taking advantage of this, the Bishop of Vilkauskis re-established the activities of the Vilkauskis diocesan seminary in Marijampole, where the conditions were right for this. The restoration of the seminary was also favoured by the laws of

the Church. The reestablishment of the seminary was intended to increase the number of vocations, to maintain the level of higher education, and to become a focal point for cultural and social activities. However, the re-establishment of the seminary did not foresee the realities of the future – the decline in vocations to the priesthood. This became the short-term period of the seminary's activity when, after six years, it was no longer rational enough to continue its activities.

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