

Maria Bogucka

TOWNS IN POLAND AND THE REFORMATION.
ANALOGIES AND DIFFERENCES WITH OTHER COUNTRIES

The Reformation was undoubtedly one of the greatest events in the evolution of Early Modern Europe and the attitude taken by particular societies towards it determined their development for centuries to come. A. Peyrefitte, the author of a recent French bestseller,¹ using a metaphor taken from the New Testament, contrasts the "countries of Martha" developing favourably until today, i.e. those countries in which the Reformation was victorious, with the "countries of Mary", i.e. those in which adherence to Catholicism determined, according to him, the backwardness of the social and economic structure up to and including the 20th century. This reasoning can be considered as referring, to a certain degree, to that found in the already classic works of Max Weber and R. H. Tawney;² the problem of a correlation between social and economic progress and the Reformation occurs in numerous other historical works (in England: H. R. Trevor-Roper, C. Hill, D. Little). However, we are not at this time interested in the consequences of the Reformation but in the causes which resulted in its specific course in particular countries and especially in Poland.

Scholars who have conducted research on the history of the Polish Reformation (H. Barycz, O. Bartel, J. Tazbir) in ascertaining its predominantly gentry character, perceive in this trait a national specificity of a movement which practically in all of Europe (England, Switzerland, the Netherlands and partially also France and Germany) overwhelmingly embraced the masses

¹ A. Peyrefitte, *Le mal français*, Paris 1976.

² M. Weber, *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, Berlin 1964 - 65; R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, 1 ed., London 1926.

of the urban population.⁸ Yet we know that the Reformation trends reached Polish towns rather quickly; it is with them that, to a great extent, one should connect the wave of social disturbances which took place in the years 1517-1526. The course of the upheavals in Gdańsk, Toruń, Elbląg, Braniewo, Warsaw and Lublin are best known;⁴ these centres do not, however, end the list in which unrest of the town poor and the middle class burghers occurred: altogether 27 towns of the Polish Crown, including Royal Prussia and Warmia, excluding Silesia and Lithuania.⁵ All of these movements, however, ended relatively quickly; they did not change the social and political urban structure to any great extent. It is true that in many towns they resulted in the introduction of institutions of the so-called third order (a representation of the middle class burghers, artisans and small merchants in the city authorities) but as a rule they were soon taken over by the richer representatives of the middle class and made dependent upon the patriciate; nowhere did the revolts bring about even a temporary victory of the Protestant faith.

⁸ Works directly related to this problem are: G. Moeller, *Reichsstadt und Reformation*, Gütersloh 1962 and B. Hall, *The Reformation City*, "Bulletin of the John Rylands Library," vol. LIV. 1971-72, p. 103 sqq.; recently: S. E. Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities. The Appeal of Protestantism to Sixteenth Century Germany and Switzerland*, New Haven 1975.

⁴ For Gdańsk cf. S. Gluecksmann, *Ruchy społeczne w Gdańsku w początkach reformacji 1522-1526* [Social Movements in Gdańsk at the Beginning of the Reformation], Warszawa 1937, and among recent works: M. Bogucka, *Walki społeczne w Gdańsku w XVI w.* [Social Struggles in Gdańsk in the 16th century] in: *Pomorze średniowieczne*, ed. by G. Labuda, Warszawa 1958; G. Schramm, *Danzig, Elbing und Thorn als Beispiele städtischen Reformation (1517-1558)*, in: *Historia Integra. Festschrift für E. Hasinger zum 70. Geburtstag*, Berlin 1977. For other towns cf. among the recent and most important works: J. Buława, *Walki społeczno-ustrojowe w Toruniu w pierwszej połowie XVI w.* [Social and Political Struggles in Toruń in the First Half of the 16th century], Toruń 1971; H. Zins, *Revolta w Elblągu w r 1525* [The 1525 Revolt in Elbląg], "Zapiski Historyczne," vol. XXII, 1958, No. 1; idem, *Początki reformacji na Warmii* [The Beginnings of the Reformation in the Region of Warmia], "Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce", vol. II, 1957; T. Strzembosz, *Tumult Warszawski 1525 r.* [The Warsaw Disturbance of 1525], Warszawa 1959; R. Szczygieł, *Konflikty społeczne w Lublinie w pierwszej połowie XVI w.* [Social Conflicts in Lublin in the First Half of the 16th Century], Warszawa 1977.

⁵ Cf. R. Szczygieł, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-99.

The end of the revolts did not mean, however, an end to the infiltration of the Reformation into the towns. In this second phase of penetration, however, which occurred in the second half of the 16th century, it was adopted not only by the middle class burghers and the poor, but also by the upper strata of urban society. Only in the towns of Royal Prussia did the Reformation gain a definitive victory which was also recognized by the state authorities. In 1557, using a favourable political and economic situation, and after paying an enormous sum of 100,000 Polish zlotys. (30,000 as a gift and 70,000 as a loan) into the royal treasury, did Gdańsk, Toruń and Elbląg receive privileges from the King guaranteeing religious freedom for their inhabitants; on this basis a Lutheran Church strongly connected with the city authorities was organized. The situation of the followers of the Protestant faith in the towns of Warmia, an episcopal domain, was much more difficult.⁶ The fate of the Reformation was also not very fortunate in the towns of Central Poland. The greatest successes of the Reformation took place in the medium-sized towns of Greater Poland (Wschowa, Brojce, Międzyrzecz, Skierzyna, Czaplinek, Wałcz as well as partially in Kościan, Konin and Kalisz);⁷ Protestant communities also existed under the patronage of the magnate Górka and Ostroróg families in Poznań up to the beginning of the 17th century. In 1619, however, it was prohibited to grant non-Catholics town rights in Poznań.⁸ Limited successes were won by the Reformation in the towns of Little Poland; but during the second half of the 16th century one finds here a rather numerous group of adherents in Cracow itself⁹ and also in such smaller towns as Biecz, Jasło,

⁶ H. Zins, *Początki reformacji na Warmii* [*The Beginnings of the Reformation in Warmia*], p. 53 sqq.

⁷ J. Dworzaczkowa, *Wprowadzenie reformacji do miast królewskich Wielkopolski* [*The Introduction of the Reformation to the Royal Towns of Greater Poland*], "Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce," vol. X, 1965, p. 53 sqq.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 76 sqq.

⁹ R. Zalewski, *Zaburzenia wyznaniowe w Krakowie. Okres przewagi różnowierców 1551 - 1573* [*Religious Upheavals in Cracow. The Period of the Predominance of the Dissidents 1551 - 1573*], "Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce," vol. VI, 1961, p. 91 sqq.; cf. also G. Schramm, *Reformation und Gegenreformation in Krakau. Die Zuspitzung des konfessionellen Kampfes in der polnischen Hauptstadt*, "Zeitschrift für Ostforschung," vol. XIX, 1970, pp. 1 - 41.

Cieźkowice, Gorlice, Osiek and Dębowiec.¹⁰ It is worthwhile to remember that one of the outstanding representatives of the Reformation movement in Little Poland was Jakub from Iłża, a burgher.¹¹ In the second half of the 16th century one can also speak about a dissemination of the seeds of the Reformation in the cities of Lublin,¹² Lwów,¹³ and Wilno (in Lithuania).¹⁴ On the other hand the Reformation was completely unaccepted in the towns of Mazovia including Warsaw.¹⁵

This second stage of the spreading of the Reformation in Polish towns did not last long since it waned already at the end of the 16th and at the beginning of the 17th centuries. In addition, this was not a mass movement since it embraced relatively small groups of burghers with but a few exceptions. As a rule the Polish urban population remained faithful to Catholicism.

In order to explain such a course of events it is necessary to analyze briefly the situation of the Polish towns in the period under discussion, especially considering that many historians (in Poland—J. Dworzaczkowa and of the German scholars F. Arnold and A. Rhode) perceived the solution to the puzzle precisely in a general “weakness of their position”.

As far as the degree of urbanization was concerned, the Polish state presented itself not unfavourably even against the European background of the 16th century. Practically 20 per cent of the inhabitants lived in towns. Of course, the degree of

¹⁰ W. Urban, *Reformacja mieszczańska w dawnym powiecie bieckim* [Burgher's Reformation in the Former District of Biecz], “*Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce*,” vol. VI, 1961, p. 130 sqq.

¹¹ H. Barycz, *Z epoki renesansu i baroku* [From the Renaissance and Baroque Epoch], Warszawa 1971, p. 222 sqq.

¹² G. Schramm, *Lublin und das Scheitern der städtischen Reformation*, “*Kirche im Osten*,” vol. XII, 1969, pp. 33–57; S. Twork, *Zbór lubelski i jego rola w ruchu arianskim w Polsce w XVI i XVII w.*, [Community of Antitrinitarians in Lublin and Its Role in the Polish Reformation in the 16th and 17th Centuries], Lublin 1966.

¹³ G. Schramm, *Lemberg und die Reformation*, “*Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*,” vol. XI, 1963, pp. 343–350.

¹⁴ Idem, *Protestantismus und städtische gesellschaft in Wilna (16–17 Jahrhundert)*, “*Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*,” vol. XVII, 1969, pp. 187–214.

¹⁵ G. Schramm, *Problem reformacji w Warszawie w XVI w.* [The Reformation in Warsaw in the 16th Century], “*Przegląd Historyczny*,” vol. LIV, 1963, No. 4, pp. 557–571.

urbanization of particular regions was unequal; alongside highly urbanized areas where the inhabitants of the towns constituted over 30 per cent of the entire population (Greater Poland, Little Poland, Pomerania) in certain regions the town population reached only up to 15 per cent (Mazovia) or a few per cent in the Eastern parts of the country. Historians agree that in the second half of the 16th century there existed about 700 towns and small townships in the so-called Polish Crown (Central Poland), including Royal Prussia. However, only 8 of them had more than 10,000 inhabitants: these were Gdańsk (over 50,000 at the close of the 16th century), Cracow (ca. 28,000), Poznań (ca. 20,000) as well as Toruń, Elbląg, Lublin, Warsaw and Lwów. At the close of the 16th century Wilno (ca. 15,000) was a significant town in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Towns with from 4,000 to 5,000 inhabitants were considered medium-sized (Sandomierz, Kazimierz Dolny, Gniezno, etc.). Dominant were those urban centres with inhabitants numbering from 500 to 2,000.¹⁶ The problems of urban demography are, however, still rather controversial.

The 16th century is considered as a period of a favourable development and enrichment of the Polish towns which at that time grew significantly and gained magnificent Renaissance architectural and decorative forms. Those towns which participated in the export of grain and agricultural products to the West (mainly Gdańsk, but also numerous others along the Vistula, e.g. Cracow, Sandomierz, Kazimierz Dolny, Warsaw and other Mazovian towns, Włocławek and Toruń) seemed to develop and thrive economically particularly rapidly. The same applies to the great markets and centres of big international trade (Lwów, Lublin, Poznań) which lay along the routes running from Lithuania, Russia and the Black Sea to Greater Poland or Silesia and further to Western Europe. Of lesser importance for the wealth of the towns was their artisan production although the artisans constituted the majority of the population of many towns (from 50 to 75 per cent). Already at that time Polish artisans began to feel the impact of the competition of industrial

¹⁶ S. Herbst, *Miasta i mieszczaństwo renesansu polskiego* [Polish Towns and Their Inhabitants during the Renaissance], Warszawa 1954, p. 7.

articles imported from Western Europe and preferred by the Polish gentry. Production was conducted in the Polish towns in the outdated but still strong guild system and based on small establishments where, just as in the Middle Ages, a master employed two or three helpers. The elements of early capitalism appeared rarely and most frequently in the form of a domestic system and the dependence of direct producers upon the richer master or merchants. One can speak about the occurrence of these elements on a larger scale only, however, in the rich and well developed towns of Pomerania.¹⁷ Larger establishments which came close to early manufacture, were to be found sporadically and mainly in such branches of production as the iron and ship industry, paper and glass works as well as in mining—salt in Wieliczka and Bochnia, silver and lead in Olkusz; the latter was a leading terrain for the development of the elements of early capitalism.¹⁸ In general, however, the beginnings of the new system of production were weak and this made the economic level of the Polish Commonwealth unfavourable in comparison to the level achieved in the 16th century by the rapidly developing economy of many of the West European countries, especially of England. Particularly unfavourable was the fact that only a very small part of commercial capital accumulated in Polish towns was destined for productive investments. The largest part of it was absorbed by consumption expenses, connected with an extravagant style of life in the towns (construction of magnificent houses and their opulent furnishings, luxury in clothing, jewelry, etc.) or spent, despite legal prohibition, on purchasing property in the countryside. Both these trends in expenditures resulted from a fascination, common among the burghers, with the gentry way of life, from a yearning to

¹⁷ Cf. M. Bogucka, *Gdańsk jako ośrodek produkcyjny w XIV - XVII w.* [*The City of Gdańsk as a Centre of Production in the 14th - 17th Centuries*], Warszawa 1962, *passim*.

¹⁸ Cf. D. Molenda, *Kopalnie rud ołowiu na terenie złóż śląsko-kra-kowskich w XVI - XVII w.* [*Lead Ore Mines of the Silesia-Cracow Region in the 16th - 18th Centuries*], Wrocław 1972; A. Wyrobisz, *Szkło w Polsce od XIV do XVII w.* [*Glass in Poland in the 14th - 17th Centuries*], Wrocław 1968; B. Zientara, *Dzieje Małopolskiego hutnictwa żelaznego XIV - XVII w.* [*The History of Ironworks in Little Poland in the 14th - 17th Centuries*], Warszawa 1954, *passim*.

equal it and even to penetrate into the ranks of the nobility either through official ennoblement or at least illegally. This was linked with a specific pattern of social and political relations which emerged in the Commonwealth during the 16th century.

The second half of the 15th and the first half of the 16th century constituted a period in which the form of the so-called Commonwealth of the gentry was taking shape in Poland; at the same time it was a turning point in the history of Polish towns. Both of these phenomena were closely connected with each other. By the middle of the 15th century the future was still unsolved, it remained an open question whether in the consolidation of the country and remodeling of the Polish State, the Monarch would lean on the gentry or use the burghers for purposes of strengthening his own power as was the case in numerous European countries at that time. The specificity of the development of Poland consisted of, among other things, the fact that for different reasons the gentry became the main ally of the King in his undertakings and, subsequently, a force which he was dependent upon; already in the second half of the 15th century the gentry constituted the head of Polish society as its most active leading group. The winning of social and political predominance by the gentry was accompanied by limiting of the role played by the towns. Anti-urban laws, initiated already in the 15th century, with a prohibition of purchasing landed property by the burghers (1496) were continued throughout the entire 16th century (a 1538 repetition of the prohibition of land purchasing with the exception only of the inhabitants of a few of the largest towns, attempts at abolishing guilds in 1538 and 1552, introduction of price lists for urban products and prohibition of conducting an active foreign trade by the Polish merchants in 1565).¹⁹ There was no room for representatives of the towns in the emerging Polish Parliament at the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th centuries. Only a few of the most important towns such as Cracow, Poznań,

¹⁹ A. Popiół-Szymańska, *Problematyka handlowa w polityce "miejskiej" szlachty w Polsce centralnej w XV i XVI w.* [*The Problems of Trade in the "Anti-Urban" Policy of the Polish Gentry in the 15th and 16th Centuries*], "Roczniki Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych," vol. XXI, 1970, pp. 45 - 83.

Lublin and, after the Lublin Union of 1569—the city of Wilno, as well as the towns of Pomerania were allowed to send to the Polish Diet [the Sejm] their representatives who had, however, only the right to take the floor as advisers in connection with urban problems (1565). Gradually burghers also lost their right to hold state offices while special prohibitions limited their access to higher Church positions.

The majority of towns at the beginning of the 16th century had complete or almost complete self-government won in the course of the preceding centuries. In the 16th century this self-government was subject to a gradual limitation in favour of the interests of the gentry (e.g. the constitutions of 1538 and 1567). In the royal towns the influence of the King's officials—the *starostas*, grew (limitation of the authority of the municipal council and the influence of the *starosta* upon its choice, control over finances and urban administration, etc.). In private towns, the number of which grew rapidly, self-government was even more limited and its scope was dependent upon the will of the owner of the town.²⁰ Competition between particular towns (conflicts concerning storage privileges, the rights of merchants to trade in those urban areas where they did not have city rights, trials concerning the competence of guild authorities, etc.) resulted in the fact that each of them jealously guarded its mediaeval laws and privileges against the burghers of other centres. An inter-urban solidarity and a developed social consciousness could not arise in such conditions and was unable to play a defensive and unifying role in the face of the aggressive policy of the gentry.

The only exception within a weak and internally divided Polish bourgeoisie were the three great Pomeranian towns headed by Gdańsk. They owed their position to an exceptionally favourable economic situation. During the 16th century Gdańsk had practically acquired a complete monopoly on Polish foreign trade (ca. 80 per cent of the export of manor farm products and a large part in import); Toruń and Elbląg played a supplementary

²⁰ A. Wyrobisz, *Rola miast prywatnych w Polsce w XVI i XVII w.* [*The Role of Private Towns in Poland in the 16th and 17th Centuries*], "Przegląd Historyczny," vol. LXV, 1974, No. 1, p. 19 sqq.

role.²¹ The legal basis for the exceptional position of Gdańsk in the Polish state was ensured by a number of privileges granted in 1455-1477 by King Casimir the Jagiellonian as a reward for the intensive participation in the Thirteen-Year War against the Teutonic Knights (among others, Gdańsk was granted enormous rural properties and a broad autonomy, certain customs were abolished, privileges concerning the administration of the seacoast and regulation of marine traffic were bestowed, etc.).²² The economic strength and the convenient legal and political status of the towns in Royal Prussia was expressed in the fact that they participated in the sessions of the regional diet known as the Prussian Little Sejm. This consisted of two houses: the Land House of the gentry and the Town House with representatives of the towns. The burghers of Royal Prussia also had the right to purchase and own landed property, (confirmed in the constitution of 1538). The three great cities of Gdańsk, Toruń and Elbląg sat alongside the highest Pomeranian dignitaries in the autonomous government of Royal Prussia, the so-called Prussian Council. When after 1569 the government of Royal Prussia was transformed according to the Polish structure, the situation of the local towns was influenced by it only to a slight degree. The Prussian Council, however, was liquidated. Its gentry members obtained place in the Polish Diet, but the towns of Gdańsk, Toruń and Elbląg were from that time on to send their observers only; however, such an arrangement suited them since they were separatistically indifferent towards the majority of the common problems of the State and mindful solely of the interests of the local patrician groups. The authorities of the Pomeranian towns, and especially of Gdańsk, knew that they could anyhow effectively defend themselves against any aggression of the gentry. The representatives of the towns remained members of the Prussian regional diet until the end of the

²¹ S. HOSZOWSKI, *The Polish Baltic Trade in the 15th - 18th Centuries*, in: *Poland at the XIth International Congress of Historical Sciences in Stockholm*, Warsaw 1960, p. 119 sqq.

²² E. CIEŚLAK, *Przywileje Gdańska z okresu wojny 13-letniej na tle przywilejów niektórych miast bałtyckich* [*The Privileges of the City of Gdańsk from the Time of the Thirteen-Year War Against a Background of the Hanseatic Privileges*], "Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne," vol. VI, 1954, No. 1, p. 61 sqq.

existence of the Commonwealth of the gentry (only the representatives of small towns lost their places in 1662),²³ always playing a dominating role in its sessions.

Thus, the situation of the towns in Poland, with the exception of Royal Prussia, differed substantially from the situation in Western Europe and even more so since in the 16th century the burghers of many countries expanded their political privileges and entered into a victorious competition with the gentry in numerous spheres of life. This state of affairs also influenced the development of the Polish Reformation although undoubtedly we have here an opportunity to deal not with one causal factor but with a whole sequence of them.

Some scholars consider that the reason for a weak reception of the Reformation in the Polish towns lay in the fact that in the 16th century these towns were already fully Polonized (contrary to the 14th and 15th centuries when patricians of German or Italian origin retained their national and cultural distinctness). This would explain the victory of the Reformation in the towns of Royal Prussia and also its relatively strong development in some of the towns in Greater Poland where, as late as the 16th century, there existed a strong and un-Polonized German population. However, one should remember that in spite of the "German character" of Protestantism it was possible for a significant part of the Polish gentry and magnates to accept it. Undoubtedly one of the stimulating factors could be the linguistic and national closeness, stressed by G. Schramm while examining the course of the Reformation in Gdańsk, Elbląg and Toruń. But Schramm, at the same time, points to the fact that one should not identify this closeness with a feeling of state allegiance.²⁴ A certain role was played by the geographic factor—wherever the important centres of the Reformation were not too distant and lively contacts were maintained (e.g. Gdańsk and Wittenberg) the progress of the Reformation could be facilitated and the reception of the new ideas accelerated. One should, however,

²³ *Historia państwa i prawa Polski* [The History of the Polish State and Law], vol. II, ed. by J. Bardach, Warszawa 1966, p. 161 sqq., 435 sqq.

²⁴ G. Schramm, *Danzig, Elbing und Thorn als Beispiele...*, p. 131 sqq.

remember that even such a fully Polonized and far away town as Lwów maintained contacts with the centres of the Reformation (merchants' and students' journeys and migrations) and this created a basis for the passage of new ideas despite the great distance. There must also have occurred other factors, resulting in the failure of the Reformation in Polish towns.

Among these factors one must place the problem of the attitude, of the King towards the Reformation as recently correctly emphasized by J. Dworzaczkowa.²⁵ The victory of the Reformation in many of the German towns was certainly connected either with an open support or at least with the vacillating attitude of the local dukes towards the new creed. In England the entire process was initiated by a break with Rome by Henry VIII. In Poland, however, the situation was quite different. Both Sigismund I and Sigismund Augustus remained faithful to Catholicism and this made an eventual adopting of the new confession by the Royal towns, (a group of the largest towns in Poland) very difficult. The peak of the Reformation movement in the Commonwealth occurred at the Piotrków Diet in 1555, when it seemed that a Polish National Church, independent of Rome, would emerge. Sigismund Augustus agreed, at the time, under the pressure of the gentry, to suspend Church jurisdiction and to send an envoy to the Pope in order to gain permission to call a national synod. The gentry was granted the right to keep Protestant ministers in their estates and to receive communion in both kinds. However, the King simultaneously took care that none of these resolutions should pertain to the towns where he even intensified his action against the Protestants. Only a week after the close of the debates conducted by the Diet, on June 27, 1555, there appeared another mandate against the Protestants in Poznań. On January 20, 1556, a similar mandate was directed to Konin in Greater Poland. On March 1, 1556 the King proclaimed the next three edicts, two of which once again pertained to Greater Poland, the region most threatened by the progress of the Reformation. The first addressed the *starostas* and ordained them to suppress religious innovations and not to permit the dissenters to congregate, preach or worship in villages

²⁵ J. Dworzaczkowa, *Wprowadzenie reformacji...*, p. 67 sqq.

and royal towns, even in homes owned by the gentry and thus exempt from city jurisdiction. The second edict, addressed to the Starosta General added that he should arrest all the Bohemian Brethern living in Poznań.²⁶ During the Warsaw Diet in 1556 - 1557 the King agreed to prolong the Piotrków interim but already very clearly excluded all towns from its resolutions. "Item the royal towns and others since they cannot equal the gentry either in freedom or in dignity, should not be included into this permission [...] this is why His Royal Majesty does not wish to make them equal by this freedom with you [i.e. the gentry—M.B.] but leaves them all *sui ipsius dispositioni*". This formulation which flattered the gentry was not questioned by the deputies—noble adherents of the Reformation. What is even more, they did not support attempts for revoking this decision undertaken at the Diet by representatives of Cracow, who, as a result, were unsuccessful.²⁷

Of course, royal power in Poland was not very strong or efficient. This was the reason why the development of the situation in private towns depended exclusively on the attitude of the owner. As a result in certain private towns Protestant communities developed and survived even when the Counter-Reformation was winning victories in the whole country; a good example of this phenomenon was the town of Węgrów in Podlasie, the property of the powerful magnate Radziwiłł and Kiszka families.²⁸ In royal towns it was most important who was holding office of the *starosta*. In Greater Poland, for example, a significant role was played by the fact that in the decisive years of 1552 - 1564 Janusz Kościelecki, a fervent Catholic held the office of Starosta General.²⁹ In the town of Wschowa the Reformation was introduced with the support and the co-participation of the Lutheran starosta Maciej Górski from Miłosław.³⁰ In Między-

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 68.

²⁷ *Diariusz sejmku walnego warszawskiego z r. 1556 - 7* [Warsaw Diet's Diary 1556 - 57], ed. S. Bodniak, Kórnik 1939, p. 50.

²⁸ T. Wyszomirski, *Z przeszłości zboru protestanckiego w Węgrowie w XVII i XVIII w.* [From the Past of the Protestant Community in the City of Węgrów in the 17th and 18th Centuries], "Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce," vol. IV, 1959, p. 137 sqq.

²⁹ J. Dworzaczkowa, *Wprowadzenie* ..., p. 69.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 70 - 71.

rzecze the Protestants were also upheld by the local starosta, Mikołaj Myszkowski³¹ while in Warsaw a group of protestants acted under the patronage of the Warsaw starosta, Zygmunt Wolski and the Rawa Voievode, Anzelm Gostomski;³² these examples can be multiplied. Thus, the success or failure of the Reformation in towns depended upon the *starosta* who influenced the course of town matters; it was also important whether the nearby region was inhabited by Protestant magnates who were willing to support their urban co-religionists.³³ This personal factor which was of an entirely accidental character, decided frequently the fate of the entire movement. In addition, support given to Protestant burghers by the gentry was not only often insufficiently strong and consistent but also, as J. Dworzaczkowa correctly pointed out, frequently harmed the interests of the towns as a whole (among others by excluding the gentry homes from urban jurisdiction) and thus could not have been very popular. It was obvious that the Reformation opened up for the gentry an additional path for intervention into urban questions; in this situation the burghers received not so much advantages from a change of religion, it rather brought further limitation of their rights. In the royal towns a certain role was also played by a fear of the King's disfavour and eventual repressions. All this limited the mass character of the movement, especially where neither linguistic ties nor national factors appear in its favour. Thus in Polish towns one sees a lack of the most important factor which elsewhere was the basis for the victory of the Reformation, i.e. the support of numerous groups of people who were not so much engaged because of the ideological values of the new faith, but because of their definite economic or social interests. This was linked with a rather weak connection between the Reformation movements and social movements in Polish towns during the second half of the 16th century. After the disturbances in the 1520s, struggles between the guilds and the middle merchants and the town councils ceased in many town centres for a long time to come. In the

³¹ *Ibidem.*

³² G. Schramm, *Problem reformacji w Warszawie...*, p. 562.

³³ J. Tazbir, *Spółeczeństwo wobec reformacji [Polish Society and the Reformation]*, in: *Polska w epoce odrodzenia*, Warszawa 1970 p. 215.

second half of the 16th century more serious disturbances among the urban poor also did not occur. This was the result of various factors such as a relative prosperity of many Polish towns connected with an economic boom and favourable for Poland's terms of trade which was felt to a certain extent by all groups of the towns' inhabitants, and of a weak development of the elements of early capitalism which elsewhere at that time sharpened the class struggle and antagonisms within the town population. The intensification of social conflicts and a new wave of movements both of the urban poor and the middle class was to occur in Polish towns in the following "crisis" century, when the unfavourable fate of the Reformation was already decided not only in the towns.

In order to obtain a full picture of the situation it would seem, however, that one cannot omit a group of psychological factors. Until now scholars did not often take these factors into consideration since the studies on "states of mind" and so-called history of social mentality in general are rather a novelty and have been developing, especially in Poland, only recently. Here the question of the education of the town population would be a fundamental one; already L. Febvre stressed that the Reformation could not develop in a milieu deprived of "a high intellectual civilization".³⁴ Literacy must have been particularly important since individual study of the Bible played a basic role in the Protestant Church. According to Peter Clark and Peter Slack literacy in England during the 17th century amounted to more than 60 per cent in provincial towns and about 75 per cent in London.³⁵ French scholar E. Le Roy Ladurie estimates the literacy among the French burghers at the end of the 16th century at about 90 per cent³⁶ which seems to be far too optimistic. The Italian (or rather American) scholar C.M. Cipolla

³⁴ *A New Kind of History. From the Writings of Lucien Febvre*, edited by Peter Burke, London 1973, p. 115.

³⁵ P. Clark, P. Slack, *English Towns in Transition 1500 - 1700*, London 1976, pp. 73, 153. See also L. Stone, *Literacy and Education in England 1640 - 1900*, "Past and Present," vol. XLII, 1969 and R. Schofield, *The Measurement of Literacy in Pre-Industrial England*, in: *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. J. Goody, Cambridge 1968.

³⁶ E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Les paysans de Languedoc*, Paris 1966, p. 321.

believes that the average literacy for the 16th century in Western countries should be estimated at more than 50 per cent of the towns' population.³⁷ It means better conditions and a more developed culture than we perceive in the Polish towns in this time.

Latest research shows enormous disproportions in this sphere among the Polish urban population. For example, in the towns of Little Poland, at the close of the 16th century, the ability to both read and write characterized around 70 per cent of the patriciate while among the middle burghers about 40 per cent, and the poor—only 8 per cent.³⁸ This means that only the more prosperous burghers participated in an animated intellectual life of Poland's "Golden Age" as a result of attending outstanding academic secondary schools of the period (the schools in the cities of Gdańsk, Toruń and Elbląg which won the well-deserved titles of "Academies" achieved a particularly high level), of studying in Polish and foreign universities and travelling abroad extensively. Thus, only the "upper" strata of the town population was intellectually fully prepared to receive the Reformation and it was they who introduced it in the Polish towns during the second half of the 16th century. This coincided with the fact that anti-clericalism, the feeling which could bring the illiterate burgher to the new creed—was in Poland most strongly developed among the gentry but in towns various positive results of the activity of the clergy prevailed (the organization of hospitals, schools, charity work, etc.). Anti-clerical propaganda and literature was not as developed in Poland during the 14th and 15th centuries as it was in England; a trend of anti-clericalism did exist but we had neither Langland nor Chaucer although the life of the Polish clergy furnished many causes for

³⁷ C. M. Cipolla, *Literacy and Development in the West*, London 1969, 50 pp. See also R. Engelsing, *Analphabetentum und Lektüre. Zur Sozial Geschichte des Lesens in Deutschland zwischen feudaler und industrieller Gesellschaft*, Stuttgart 1973.

³⁸ W. Urban, *Umiejętność pisania w Małopolsce w drugiej połowie XVI wieku* [Knowledge of Writing in Little Poland in the Second Half of the 16th Century], "Przegląd Historyczny," vol. LXVIII, 1977, No. 2, p. 251.

reproach.³⁹ It also seems that in Polish towns, beginning with the 15th century, conflicts with the gentry played a much more important role than the collisions with the clergy; the struggle between the gentry and the burghers thus overshadowed the conflict with the Catholic clergy which played such an important role in the development of the Reformation in Germany and in England. The strongest anti-clerical feelings appeared in the towns of Royal Prussia which, due to their strong economic and legal position, did not feel the aggressiveness of the gentry. Anticlericalism in Poland was mainly of a peasant and gentry character (controversies over tithes) while in the towns it lacked a sufficient basis, if only because the urban clergy and monks had to observe appearances more. It seems that the country parsons could permit themselves more easily to keep young and pretty housekeepers while in the towns a great discipline was observed as the sad events from the life of old Copernicus had proved.⁴⁰ The excesses committed by the church dignitaries (for example the legendary conduct of Bishop Gamrat) were well-known rather in the court and gentry circles and, at any rate, they gave rise more to antimagnate than to anti-clerical feelings; but the burghers were not interested in a struggle with the magnates. One also should not forget that in conditions when for the burgher any secular career was difficult to attain, a church career appeared frequently to be the only path towards desired social advancement.

Reformation in Western Europe was closely connected with a nobilitation of town professions which in Poland were still treated with disdain; this attitude was reflected in the works of the most outstanding gentry writers of the 16th century (Rej, Orzechowski). The burghers themselves did not take pride in their professions, they demanded to be portrayed on family gravestones in armour (Seweryn Boner and his famous sepulchre in the Church of Our Lady in Cracow) and manufactured for

³⁹ Cf. J. Tazbir, *Znaczenie obyczajów kleru dla rozwoju i upadku polskiej reformacji* [The Role of the Moral Conduct of the Clergy for the Development and Decline of the Polish Reformation], "Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce," vol. VIII, 1963, p. 91 sqq.

⁴⁰ J. Sikorski, *Mikołaj Kopernik na Warmii* [Nicolaus Copernicus in the Region of Warmia], Olsztyn 1968, pp. 109 - 112.

themselves knightly genealogies. To praise work, thriftiness or a productive and not consumptive way of life was alien to the ideology not only of the gentry but also of the majority of the burghers. Isolated voices of progressive authors (Frycz-Modrzewski, Rozdzieński) could not change this image. Already in the 16th century the Polish burghers, with but a few exceptions, found themselves under the influence of models and ideals spread among those "of gentle birth"; by the use of all means they strove to enter into that group. The hierarchy of values valid in the Polish towns referred either to the Middle Ages (egalitarian tendencies, the treatment, at least in theory, of the entire life on earth as a preparation for a better existence after death through ascetism and contempt for material prosperity) or it was an adaptation of values promoted by the gentry (disdain for commerce and artisanship, an idealization of the style of life typical for the gentry). This was linked with a recognition of land as the highest value, a characteristic trait of the mentality of an agrarian society with a predominance of landowning gentry. "The land will remain but we shall die" said the Warsaw patrician Michael Fukier in the autumn of 1618, to his colleague Alexander Giza, who later complained in court: "And he plowed up some fields of my land and added it to his own".⁴¹ This anecdotic fragment from Warsaw court acts illustrates the principal trait of the mentality of the Polish burghers of that period. The new social group—the modern bourgeoisie in Western Europe—emerged already in the 15th century, participated in large trade, navigation and geographical discoveries, invested large capital in the development of manufactures and gained profits from all these undertakings which demanded a willingness to take risks. This modern Western bourgeoisie needed a new and bold religion to supply it in its risky undertakings with an ideological support.⁴² The Polish burghers, on the other hand,

⁴¹ Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych w Warszawie, Stara Warszawa [The Central Archives of Old Acts in Warsaw, The Old Warsaw Section], 545, p. 117.

⁴² Cf. M. Nerlich, *Kritik der Abenteuer-Ideologie. Beitrag zur Erforschung der bürgerlichen Bewusstseinsbildung 1100-1750*, Bd. I-II, Berlin 1977.

did not seek or need such a religion; they were apathetic, conservative and showed little initiative; they gazed upon their own fading greatness and did not even attempt to struggle for a better place in society. They were unable to create a social solidarity which would counterbalance the local interests of the individual towns. Such a solidarity was achieved only from time to time by the towns of Royal Prussia despite the fact that they also conducted among themselves sharp competition, especially Gdańsk with Elbląg and Toruń. Perhaps the lack of larger and united economic actions which in England or in the Netherlands took the form of colonization enterprises, overseas expeditions and the activity of great trading companies, was of decisive significance. In Poland trading companies, as a rule, did not extend beyond one town; perhaps only Gdańsk was an exception with its numerous Gdańsk-Dutch companies, but they also generally were based on agency rights and not equal partnership. Foreign trade and navigation were dominated by Gdańsk and foreign merchants who did not permit the inhabitants of the majority of Polish towns to be active in this field; this policy enjoyed the support of the gentry. The Seym constitutions of 1565 forbade Polish merchants to engage in foreign trade or to travel abroad. Thus the political and social passivity of the Polish burghers in the 16th century was matched by deepening economic stagnation in the towns. This was however a broader phenomenon which certainly expanded beyond the towns although it was there that it occurred especially sharply. Particularly from the end of the 16th century the entire Polish economy, enclosed within the narrow borders of the manor farm, became ever more passive and strongly characterized by a conservative quietism, which expressed itself, among other things, in a general conviction that it was the "foreigners" who needed greatly Polish grain and should come for it.⁴⁸ Only an extreme danger (the Turks, Cossacks and Swedes in the 17th century) could awaken such a society to some military

⁴⁸ C. Czubek, *Pisma polityczne z czasów pierwszego bezkrólewia* [*Political Writings from the Times of the First Interregnum*], Kraków 1906, p. 422.

effort; while, on the other hand, all social and political or economic activities for any improvement or simply for a change cannot but fail. This was probably the reason why a struggle for the "Reform of the Commonwealth" and even the gentry Reformation died down so quickly; quietism, typical of agrarian societies was here of great significance, it enabled the victory of the Counter-Reformation which meant a return to the old, facile forms of worship which appealed more to the imagination and emotions than to the intellect and eliminated the risk connected with the search for new expressions of piety. Thus an unwillingness to undertake an economic risk, to introduce more progressive, modern methods in production and commerce had to be linked with a reluctance towards changes in the sphere of religion, i.e. with religious conservatism.

To sum up: the Reformation had various aspects and was linked with equally various political, social, economic and psychological needs which appeared in the 16th century. The situation and characteristic traits of the Polish bourgeoisie in this period made it impossible, however, for this movement to become more deeply enrooted in the urban milieu. In Poland the Reformation, as a form of political struggle and an instrument of competition for power, became the monopoly of the gentry. Polish towns relegated to the sidelines of political life, did not participate in the struggle for the "Reform of the Commonwealth", which flared up in the 16th century. Even the gentry, once the struggle for "Reform" died down, put aside arms supplied by the Reformation and returned *en masse* to the fold of Catholicism and, as if with certain relief, to the old, comprehensible, well-known and facile forms of piety offered by the Catholic Church. The Reformation could have been, as was the case in many Western European countries (the Netherlands, partly England), a form of a social, political, economic and even mental overturn, but the Polish towns were not mature enough for it. As a result and at the same time as a catalysis of new mental attitudes connected with transformations in the sphere of political, social and economic relations, the Reformation proved to be alien to the Polish burghers. The victory of the Re-

formation in the towns of Royal Prussia, at a different level of development and in a legal and social situation which differed from other towns of the Polish Commonwealth, only confirms the remarks presented above.

(Translated by Aleksandra Rodzińska)