

Before the first German incomers settled down in multicultural and multinational Piotrków, the Reformation had arrived. The beginnings of the Reformation in Poland, which date back to the twenties of the 16th century, did not have any significance at first. To unify the nation under one faith at any cost, the Parliament of Piotrków (1538) threatened Polish citizens studying in the schools of Wittenberg (where Martin Luther's teachings were spreading) with the loss of fortune or office if they refuse to return to their country.

However, the new idea started to spread, and finally the Polish nobility received the right to freedom of religion.

During a meeting of the Parliament in 1555, the first holy masses in Polish (instead of the Latin) took place in the noblemen's manors in Piotrków, including the communion under both kinds, contrary to the Catholic tradition. The Lutherans and Calvinists of that time called for the reformation of the Church in Poland.

In 1565 a colloquium of Evangelical Faith was held in the palace of the Province Governor and the Grand Marshall of the Crown Jan Firlej. Among the participants were Arians (Hieronim Filipowski, Grzegorz Paweł from Brzeziny, Jan Lutomirski, Jan Niemojowski, Mikołaj Siennicki, Grzegorz Szoman) as well as Calvinists (Jan Firtlej, Stanisław Myszkowski, Jakub Ostroróg, Jakub Sylwiusz, Krzysztof Trecjusz and Stanisław Sarnicki – the author of "Piotrków's Colloquium" ("Colloquium Piotrkowskie to jest rozmowa o Panu Bodze").

When the Counter Reformation arrived, the king Sigismund III Vasa's Catholic universal from 1621 obliged the town residents to give permission to settle in Piotrków only to those who had been approved by the parish priest. This huge power over conscience and worldview was confirmed by the king John Casimir in the confraternity's privilege (1659), which excluded all non-Catholics.

At the end of the 18th century, Protestants arrived in Piotrków again,

this time with the support of the Prussian administration. The families coming from the West were usually accompanied by a cantor, who was their moral and spiritual guardian, teacher and pastor. Initially they settled down mostly in small villages near Piotrków, eventually in the town itself.

In 1793 there were about 1000 Evangelicals in Piotrków, mainly officials, soldiers, craftsmen and traders. They were under the care of the chaplain - pastor Schraum. Because they did not have their own temple, the newly created Evangelical parish used a private House of Prayer. In 1796 they bought (from the Primate Ignacy Krasicki) a burnt and abandoned church at Rwańska Street, previously owned by the Piarists.



The interior of the Evangelical Church

The over two-hundred years history of the Evangelical parish in Piotrków was impeded only by the Napoleonic Wars, when the church was turned into a military granary. Later, in 1813, the Russian army placed a hospital there. It was not until 1817 that the parish finally managed to get their church back. The adjacent property was bought with the idea of building a parish house there. However, due to financial difficulties, it was built no earlier than in 1846.

They set up an elementary school in the new building, where Bogumił Rondthaler taught 37 children – not only Evangelicals, but also Catholics and Jews. Because the number of students increased, the school was relocated to Robert Krueger's building, at the crossroads of Mickiewicza and Wojska Polskiego Street.

In 1819, a school for girls of Amelia Arndt was founded. It was available for

all female students regardless of their nationality and confession.

The percentage of Evangelical students was always higher than Catholics (in 1871 twice as high), as well as the percentage of people capable of reading and writing (in 1882 – 71% and 48% respectively).

Evangelical teachers: Jan Aspis, Ernst Ferdynard, Bogumił Flatt, Karol Henryk Rudolf von Grofe, Ferdynand Haberkant, Ferdynand Lefkiet, Karol Preis and the secondary school headmaster Ernest Schaffer made huge contribution to the middle school education in Piotrków. Invaluable services in this regard were provided also by the Evangelical priests: Ludwik Müller, Leopold Marcin de Otto and Gotfryd Zygmunt Rother.

In 1795, the Evangelical parish bought a piece of land at Wrocławskie Przedmieście (today Reymont and 3 Maja Street) to place a cemetery there. It was closed down in 1995, however already since 1877, Evangelicals have been buried in the Evangelical cemetery at Cmentarna Street. Many descendants of German immigrants rest in Catholic cemeteries, too. The chestnut avenue which leads to them was built thanks to pastor Ludwik Juliusz Daniel Müller and Teofil Netzel.



Teofil Netzel's family grave

In 1793, Piotrków had 1947 residents, 12% of whom were Evangelicals. Later the statistic is too general to observe the percentage changes (it

only shows the number of Jews and Christians).

The Evangelical parish in Piotrków reached a peak, also in numbers, in the eighties and nineties of the 19th century. Gradually Evangelicals integrated into the society, participating in its social and cultural life and working for charities (for example: the Evangelical Charity, constituted in 1907 or the old people's home) as well as for educational organisations.



Rwańska Street, a view of the church

In the past, people used to associate Evangelicals with Germans, which is groundless today. In consecutive generations some incomers converted to Catholicism and some native residents of Piotrków joined the Evangelical church. According to statistics, in 1882, 62% of the Evangelicals used the Polish language in their everyday life and considered themselves Poles. They put their declarations into action. After the defeat of the November Uprising in 1831, when cultural life of Poles could prosper only in churches, the Evangelical church in Piotrków played the lead role in this regard.

The local organist Józef Goleński organised and led the first amateur mixed choir (1847-1888), which performed not only in the church, but also – charitably - in Span's theatre. The church brass band, founded in 1920, was also very successful. Even today, the Evangelical church at Rwańska Street attracts local music lovers, thanks to events such as the Chamber Music Days.

In 1939, the Evangelical parish in Piotrków had about 5 thousand members. The war took many of them, including the entire Gampf and Wünsche families. The residents of Piotrków with German roots proved their courage and patriotism, joining the Home Army and making use of their origins to help their Polish neighbours. In 1944, people fleeing from Warsaw in need of assistance after the defeat of the Warsaw Uprising found shelter in the Evangelical parish in Piotrków. Shortly afterwards the helpers needed help themselves.

In 1950, only 100 parishioners belonged to the church at Rwańska Street.



The Evangelical church organs

During the almost two hundred years of its existence, the Evangelical parish in Piotrków was led by many great pastors, such as: Leopold Otto, Ludwik Juliusz Daniel Müller, Woldemar Gatspary, Jerzy Gryniakow or Sławomir Sikora.

DICTIONARY

ARIANISM - a religious concept created by Arius, a Christian philosopher from Alexandria, at the turn of the 3rd - 4th century. The main ideas of Arianism are: the rejection of the doctrine of Trinity, religious toleration, the prohibition of participating in wars and using weapons, condemnation of feudal service and serfdom, considering all people equal. In Poland, the Arian community was created in 1562-1565 as the most radical movement of the Reformation. Its members were called the Polish Brethren (also the Socinians, Unitarians, Antitrinitarians). Their schools and printing houses contributed to the progress of education and culture in

Poland. The parliament act from 1658 forced the Arians, by threat of death, to leave the country within 3 years or convert to Catholicism. The revival of the movement came in the 30-ties of the 20th century.

CALVINISM – a religious doctrine developed by John Calvin in 1636, very similar to Lutheranism. Calvinism rejects the traditional religion and the authority of Rome, emphasizes the importance of following strict moral rules, leading a simple and virtuous life, giving up all the pleasures which could make us distant from God, a strict censorship of faith and customs, the duty of carrying out the tasks that God assigns to a particular person, the belief that only some people have been elected to salvation thanks to which they are rich and happy. Calvinism spread mostly in Switzerland, but also in France, the Netherlands, England and Scotland.

CANTOR (lat. cantare – to sing) – a liturgical function involving leading songs and teaching singing; in the Protestant Church: a bandmaster and organist (J.S. Bach was a famous cantor in Lipsk); in the Catholic Church: a choir leader, a person singing solo psalm verses.



The Wünsch family grave

CONSISTORY (lat. constistorium – assembly) – in the Evangelical Church the highest juridical - administrative authority and the executive of the Synod consisting of: the bishop, the vice-president, three spiritual advisors and three secular advisors. The Consistory is in charge of supervising dioceses and parishes, accepting candidates for the clergy, appointing vicars, parsons and local pastors, managing the Church's assets, adjudicating on disciplinary causes and passing the budget of the Church.

CONGREGATION (lat. congregatio – assembly, society, association) – a religious society of laypeople; a religious order, whose members take only simple vows; a department of the Roman curia; an assembly of the clergy.

EVANGELICAL - AUGSBURG CHURCH – a term used in reference to the believers of Lutheranism, doctrinally connected with the Reformation initiated by Martin Luther, who after posting his Ninety-Five Theses against the Catholic teachings on indulgences presented his ideas, together with Philip Melancthon, at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530 (known as the Augsburg Confession). Its main aim was to return to the primal tradition of Christianity, with the Bible as the only source of revelation. Any external forms and institutions do not matter; what matters is the act of faith in the meaning of accepting Godly salvation. The doctrine accepts two sacraments (Baptism and Eucharist), rejects Individual Confession, the worship of the Mother of Jesus and the Saints. The national language of a given community becomes their liturgical language.

LUTHERANISM – a Reform movement initiated by Martin Luther in 1517. Luther was against the sale of indulgences; he believed that our salvation depends solely on God, not on clergymen. Questioning the papal primacy and infallibility, the celibate and ceremonious services, Luther's doctrine proclaimed that faith in God is most important for our salvation and that the personal interpretation of the Holy Scripture or reading the Bible out loud and singing Psalms are the basis of religion. It called for universality of the Church and emphasized the need for national language in the liturgy, so that everyone could understand it, as well as the communion under both kinds.

After Luther had written his Ninety-five Theses against the selling of indulgences, he continued to propagate his ideas and finally he presented, along with Melancthon, his Augsburg Confession in Augsburg in 1530.

The Pope Leon X condemned Luther's views in 1521 in the papal edict Docet pontificem Romanum. Lutherans are called Protestants or Evangelicals.

PASTOR (lat. pastor – shepherd) – a priest in Protestant churches, appointed by Church authorities (for example synod) or selected by a congregational vote.

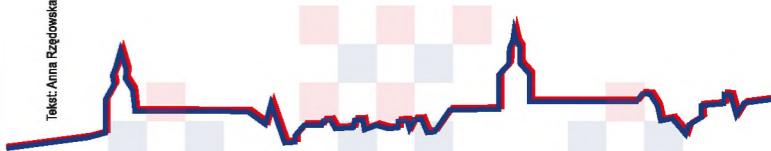
REFORMATION – a religious, cultural, political and social movement started in 1517 by Martin Luther. The main causes of the Reformation were: the corruption in the life of the Church (debauchery, materialism, numerous privileges, secularization), dogmatism, the sale of indulgences, obligatory taxes paid to the church (tithes). The Diet of Spires (1529) started the process of founding Protestant Churches, which rejected the primacy of the Pope and based on individual interpretation of the Bible as the only source of revelation. The Reform movement spread from Germany to France, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, the Netherlands, England, Switzerland and the Scandinavian countries, tearing off from the Catholic Church about 1/3 of Europe at that time.



The Tribunal Market Square, about 1915

SECULARISATION – laicisation; the removal of a monk from the monastery, the expropriation of church property and transferring it to civil possession; freeing various branches of social life from ecclesiastical control; passing of ecclesiastical assets, public offices or rights to secular authority.

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