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The summary of PhD thesis

“Changes in the functioning of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession after 1918, in the area of the present Lodz province, in the light of geo-political conditions”

Within the territory of the Republic of Poland, besides the dominant Roman Catholic Church, there are nearly 140 registered religious associations with regulated legal status. In the Lodz province, whose area is the research space of this work, many representatives of minority religious associations reside. The most numerous of them include members of the Orthodox Church, the Lutheran Church, Jewish Religion and Jehovah's Witnesses. Their presence in our region was politically or historically conditioned through warfare, migration or border changes. The rich history of our province is interwoven with the history and heritage of these denominations.

Particular attention in this regard should be paid to the ng of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (KEA), the most numerous in Poland and in the Lodz Province. This double name of the Church: Evangelical and Augsburg refers to its main doctrinal assumptions, and especially to the strict reference to the Gospel or, more widely, to the Bible, and to the Augsburg Confession, which is an interpretation of the new doctrine of faith.

In conclusion, the subject and object of the research should be presented. The members of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession residing in Lodz province will be the subject. The geographical and political determinants of the functioning of this Church in the indicated area will be the object.

The purpose of research should also be presented. The aim of the study is to analyse the changes in the functioning of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession within the modern administrative boundaries of the Lodz province, after 1918, related to the subsequent systemic changes, as well as to the variability of state policies towards minority denominations, especially Evangelicals.

The author established the following as the main goals of the work:
- examining changes in spatial distribution, social structure and organisation of the KEA
- conducting an analysis of the forms of activity (religious, cultural, educational, charitable) of Augsburg Evangelicals in Lodz,
- making an inventory and assessment of the cultural heritage of this denomination within the province,
- conducting an analysis of the functioning of the KEA within the changing conditions of civil liberties, especially in the period of socialist Poland

In order to attain these, the detailed goals have to be reached:
- identification of factors influencing the variability in the number of followers of the KEA
- analysing the distribution of Lutheran churches in the discussed space, in subsequent periods, as well as spatial variability of special Polish divisions connected with the functioning of the KEA
- determining the character of religious, social and cultural-educational activity of the Lutheran Church in the area

Based on these research objectives, the following hypotheses were adopted:

- it was assumed that the event, which initiated most changes in the distribution and socio-organisational structures of the KEA, was the outbreak of World War II. This was also the main reason for the sudden disappearance of most of the activities of members of this Church, as well as the great devastation of its property.

- it was also assumed that the breakthrough in the situation of the Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession in Lodz came with the liquidation of the socialist system in Poland and the introduction of a democratic system in 1989. This allowed the rebuilding of the property and the reactivation of many Institutions of the Church, as well as the restoration of full freedom of its activities.

The main methods employed in the work were historical methods (mainly retrospective method), which was used to determine the location and forms of activity of this religious minority in Central Poland. In view of the almost complete lack of statistical data from censuses that incidentally dealt with religious issues, the work was based on the author's own collection of material from individual parishes. The second important source of information is the author's own inventory of objects in the cultural heritage of the Church, its mapping and assessment of state of preservation, as well as iconographic documentation. The third group of methods are sociological methods, primarily questionnaires, surveys and in-depth interviews conducted personally by the author in all currently existing parishes of the KEA in the province, with increasingly less numerous and mostly elderly members, as well as with priests and ecclesiastical administrations at all levels.

The conducted studies allow the presentation of the following conclusions.

The number of Lutherans in the research area does not exceed 1300 people, most of them over 60, with the majority of women. The smallest group consists of children and young people, which does not bode well for the future of this denomination in the region. In most parishes, their members come mostly from surrounding towns around the parish seat and not from the town itself. The Evangelical families of the Lodz region are dominated by religiously mixed families, mostly Evangelical and Catholic.

Over the past 15 years, conversions to the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession have become more frequent, with occasional reverse conversions. Small parishes, with no more than 50 members, dominate the area of the Lodz province. Only the parish in Lodz has over 500 people. As a result, only 40% of parishes have the opportunity to undertake parish initiatives that go beyond their religious functions, but even the performance of these is faced with the problems of a lack of adequate number of pastors. Only half of the parishes mass is celebrated once a week, in the others – 1-2 per month. Mass attendance in most parishes (except Lodz) does not exceed a dozen people. Most of the priests in parishes of the Lodz province come from the regions of Cieszyn Silesia or Upper Silesia. The Evangelical Association is only present in Lodz.
The biggest problems facing the Lutheran parishes are:
- very small number of parishes, which makes it impossible to take external initiatives.
- significant loss of members (each year the number of funerals in parishes exceeds the number of baptisms several-fold).
- financial difficulties, e.g. with repair works, or lack of funds for restoring cemeteries to their proper condition.
- insufficient number of pastors in the Lodz province. One pastor has 2-3 parishes on average. The large distances to the parishes priests are overlooking make administration difficult.
- still prevalent stereotypes about origin or nationality.
- the life in diaspora may also be difficult. Some people have relatives and friends in Cieszyn Silesia, or in other parts of the country. Some of the respondents are considering migrating to a different region of the country.

The most common forms of preserved material heritage include: churches and parish cemeteries, townhouses or other real estate, or parcels where real estate used to be.

Recent years have seen a renewed interest in the issue of religious and national minorities. The subjects of their distribution, culture, tradition and diverse material heritage were re-examined by researchers representing many disciplines, including anthropologists, sociologists and social geographers. The level of religious and socio-cultural activity undertaken by religious minorities has also changed. Over the last 20 years, there has been more and more talk about various kinds of initiatives undertaken by minority churches, concerts, exhibitions and numerous examples of charitable and ecumenical activities. This activity has also become a subject of scientific interest in recent years.