

THE INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY INTO LITHUANIA

DR. VIKTORAS GIDŽIŪNAS, O. F. M.

Father V. Gidžiūnas, O.F.M., born in 1912 in Lithuania, has specialized in Church history and received his doctorate in Rome from the Antonianum University. His thesis dealt with Franciscans in Lithuania. Father Gidžiūnas is the author of several books and many articles.

Christianity's path into Lithuania was a long, circuitous and bloody one, barred by dark forests, wide rivers, deep lakes and uncrossable swamps. The apostles who spread the gospel in the early years of the Christian era died from pagan swords, but those who first came to Lithuania, and to the Baltic lands in general, with this gospel of love attempted to introduce it upon the points of Christian swords, to shed the pagans' blood and reduce them to slaves. It is not to be wondered at, then, that the Lithuanians met the swords of the Christian knights with their own, and refused to accept Christianity until they could do so without jeopardizing their independence.¹ This article will deal with that tortuous path by which Christianity made its way into Lithuania.

1. The First Missionaries in the Baltic Lands. As soon as the Poles and the Russians became Christianized, in the 10th century,² Christianity began to penetrate into the pagan Baltic lands. Missions of the Western Church began to visit the southern Baits — the Prussians and the Jotvingians.

The first missionaries to the Prussians and the Jotvingians were Benedictines. Adalbert, Archbishop of Prague, and other brothers of his order made their way to the mouth of Pregel River with the idea of converting the Prussians. Their missionary work in Prussia was a failure. Moreover, the missionaries inadvertently encamped in a sacred grove in which strangers were forbidden to trespass. When the Prussians heard of this — on April 23, 997 — they attacked and martyred Adalbert and two other missionaries. Boleslaus, King of Poland, later ransomed the bodies, and the Church declared Adalbert a saint-martyr.³

The Benedictines did not abandon their Baltic missions upon Adalbert's death. A German, Bruno-Boniface, took over their leadership. Boniface and 18 missionaries of his order, with the support of King Boleslaus, arrived in the territory of the Jotvingians in 1008. His mission also failed, and on February 14, 1009, he and the rest of his missionaries were also martyred, somewhere near the Lithuanian-Prussian border. Once more Boleslaus ransomed the bodies, and the Church declared Boniface, too, a saint-martyr.⁴

After the failure of these first attempts nothing is heard for a whole century of any further efforts to convert the Baits. Not until the close of the 12th century do we find evidence of missionaries who labored at the mouth of the Daugava (Dvina) River. One of them, Meinhard,⁵ achieved some success in the years 1170 to 1196, and in 1180 he was appointed bishop of Livonia. This angered their inhabitants.⁶

At the beginning of the 13th century the reformed Benedictines — Cistercians, of the Pomeranian abbacy of Oliva — became concerned with the Prussian missions. They were able to convert the Prussians on the banks of the Vistula; the principal role in this work was played by a monk named Christian. In 1215, Christian, wishing to demonstrate to the Church hierarchy the fruits of his labors, brought several Prussian princes to Rome and there baptized them. On this occasion the Pope appointed him bishop of Prussia. But on his return from Rome the Prussians attacked the Cistercian missions and destroyed the Christian communities. The bishop was left without shelter and without a flock.⁷

2. The Founding of the Military Orders in the Baltic Lands. The early interference with true missionary activity, the killing of missionaries and converts, encouraged the bishops of Livonia and Prussia to organize armed military orders whose task it was to defend the missions from pagan attacks. It is true, as S. Sužiedėlis reminds us, that when in the Garden of Olives Peter drew his sword to defend Jesus, Jesus ordered him to return his sword to its sheath, and that the acceptance of Christianity is a matter of free choice,⁸ but matters were understood differently at that time, when Christianity predominated in Western Europe. The faithful and the theologians of that day believed that it was necessary not only to defend themselves against but also to enslave the non-Christians, not in order to baptize them by force but in order to ease the work of conversion.⁹

The second bishop of Livonia, Berthold, a Cistercian, began, with German help, to defend himself, and he died in battle in 1198. The third bishop of Livonia, Albert, arrived from Bremen with a retinue of German knights, and with their aid he conquered much Livonian and Latvian territory. In 1202, in order to organize this territory on a more permanent basis and to extend the conquest of pagan lands, he founded a military order that in 1204 received the Rule of the Templars and was recognized by Rome. The order was named the *Fratres Militiae Christi*, but its members were referred to as the Knights of the Sword, from the red sword that was embroidered on their cloaks. This order was to function under the sole jurisdiction and control of the bishop.¹⁰

The same pattern was followed in Prussia. Duke Conrad of Mazovia granted the destitute Bishop Christian the territory of Kulm, bordering on Mazovia, to serve as the mission center. Since the Prussians subjected Kulm and the Mazovians to constant attack, Christian and Conrad founded, in 1228, a military order patterned on that of Albert of Livonia. The new order was called the Order of Dobrzyn,¹¹ after the place in which it was located, and was wholly subordinated to the bishop.

The Order of Dobrzyn was too weak to be capable of subduing the Prussians. Therefore Christian and Conrad decided to invite the members of a German order to establish themselves in Prussia. This order had been founded in Palestine in 1190 to care for the sick and to defend pilgrims to the Holy Land. After the Turkish conquest the brothers of this German order moved to Europe, where they found little with which to occupy themselves. They gladly accepted the invitation from Prussia. By 1230, Duke Conrad had established them in the Castle of Niesava, whence they began their forays into Prussia. Shortly thereafter — in 1235 — they were joined by the Order of Dobrzyn, and in 1237 the Livonian knights followed suit. Consequently, after 1237 a single German military order operated in the Baltic area.¹²

The military orders of monks had been founded to defend missionaries from attack by pagans, but once they had joined the German order the latter decided to set up its own state. It called on the authority of both Pope and emperor in carrying out this aim. At the request of the order the Pope proclaimed crusades to subdue the unruly pagans,¹³ and the knights, their armies augmented by many crusaders, attempted to subjugate more and more pagan territory that was granted them by Emperor Frederick II.¹⁴ In this fashion they quickly conquered the Prussians and the Latvians, but they failed to conquer the Lithuanians.

3. The First Lithuanian Baptism. At the time the military orders were establishing themselves in Prussia and Latvia, the Lithuanians did not yet possess a unified state. But Duke Mindaugas, perceiving that grave danger threatened from without, eliminated a number of petty dukes and unified Lithuania. Mindaugas made many enemies in so doing. His nephews Tautvilas and Erdvilas fled to Daniel, Duke of Volhynia, and with his help organized a confederacy against Mindaugas, which was joined by the Duchy of Volhynia, the Livonian branch of the German order, and the Samogitians and Jotvingians. Mindaugas, besieged in Voruta Castle, repulsed the first onslaught, but at length he felt he could not rely completely upon the strength of his castles or the courage of his men. After considering all the possibilities, he decided to split up the coalition he had formed; during an armistice he sued the German order for peace. Andreas von Stirland, the Livonian Provincial Master, "agreed to a peace if Mindaugas and his subjects would accept Christianity. Mindaugas consented to be baptized.¹⁵

Von Stirland, on receipt of Mindaugas' promise, arrived in Lithuania toward the end of 1250 with a retinue of brothers, priests and missionaries. Franciscan and Dominican priests of the German order prepared Mindaugas and his family and court for baptism. The monks instructed Mindaugas not only in the articles of faith but also in Church administration. This gave him a good grounding later when he created a Lithuanian bishopric.¹⁶ Finally — early in 1251, a papal letter tells us — Mindaugas and many of his followers were baptized.¹⁷ Once the baptism was accomplished, the German order sided with Mindaugas against his enemies, in return for which he granted the order some Lithuanian lands.¹⁸

Mindaugas, an adroit statesman, conjectured that the German order would attempt to subjugate Lithuania and that the archbishop of Riga would attempt to bring the Lithuanian bishoprics within his ecclesiastical province. Mindaugas desired to be an independent ruler and to order the affairs of the Church in such a fashion that the Lithuanian diocese would be directly subordinated to the Holy See. He sent a delegation to Pope Innocent IV; the delegation announced to the Pope the conversion of Lithuania's ruler, pledged fidelity in Mindaugas' name and requested a royal crown. They asked for the protection of St. Peter for Lithuania and her ruler, and for a bishop directly under the Holy See.¹⁹

Pope Innocent IV received the delegation with joy and granted all their requests. He extended Lithuania his protection,²⁰ and on July 17, 1251, he appointed the bishops of Kurzeme and Oesel protectors of Mindaugas.²¹ On the same day he ordered Henry, Bishop of Kulm, to crown Mindaugas king²² and to find a suitable candidate for bishop of Lithuania and consecrate him, accepting his allegiance in the name of the Pope.²³

Intrigues on the part of the German order and the archbishop of Riga delayed the coronation and the establishment of the bishopric. The knights, basing their claims on the emperor's privilege "ad ingredien-dum et obtinendum ... Letoviam,"²⁴ were not satisfied with the land Mindaugas had given them and hoped to conquer all of Lithuania. The archbishop of Riga, for his part, claimed that since the papal legate William of Modena had in 1237 established the boundaries of the Livonian bishoprics, which included Lithuania,²⁵ no Lithuanian diocese was necessary.²⁶ Mindaugas had foreseen all this and had outmaneuvered his opponents with his delegation to the Pope. Lithuania was already under the protection of St. Peter and no one had the right to threaten it. The king's protectors had already been appointed, and only the coronation and the establishment of an ecclesiastical province remained. The knights and the archbishop were aware of all this, and could do nothing about it except advise the bishop of Kulm against crowning Mindaugas and consecrating a bishop.²⁷

Finally, in 1253, Henry crowned Mindaugas, but he would not consecrate a bishop, since he was in sympathy with the archbishop's claims. Mindaugas complained to Pope Innocent IV, who thereupon delegated to Archbishop Albert the task of consecrating a bishop of Lithuania. He, too, was in no hurry to carry out the papal orders, and Mindaugas once more wrote to the Pope suggesting Christian, a priest in the German order, as a suitable candidate. Albert consecrated Christian, but accepted his allegiance in his own name. And again Mindaugas complained to the Pope, who nullified Christian's oath to the archbishop of Riga and ordered the bishop of Neuenburg to accept the oath in the name of the Apostolic See.²⁸

When a new bishopric is created, it is important that it have a cathedral and an endowment sufficient to support bishop and curia. When the Pope established the diocese of Lithuania, he demanded that Mindaugas make the necessary donations to the bishop.²⁹ Mindaugas did not build a cathedral, but in 1254 he did grant the bishop large tracts of land, including half the lands of Raseiniai, Betygala and Laukuva.³⁰ Taking this into consideration, the residence of Bishop Christian should have been on the lands granted him, but it is probable that he lived at Mindaugas' court or in Riga and maintained no permanent residence in pagan lands. For pagans still inhabited the lands of the grant; no one as yet had baptized them. Because of this Christian appealed to the Pope. In 1255 Pope Alexander IV directed Mindaugas to defend the bishop from the pagans.³¹ It would seem that Mindaugas, preoccupied with wars and administrative duties, was unable to defend the bishop's rights fully, and because of this the bishop left Lithuania in 1259.³²

In 1253, at the same time that Mindaugas was endeavoring to have Christian consecrated bishop of Lithuania, Karlove, Archbishop of Gniezno in Mozovia — probably at the instigation of Henry, Bishop of Kulm — consecrated Vitas,³³ a Dominican, bishop of Lithuania. There can be no doubt that this bishop was chosen and consecrated with the consent of Mindaugas, for the Lithuanian king granted him lands, too, and assigned him to the organization of a diocese in southern Lithuania, Jotvingia. Bishop Vitas had the support of no military force, and as a consequence his stay in Lithuania was even briefer than Christian's. It would seem that Vitas did carry out some apostolic work in Lithuania, since he could otherwise hardly have written the Pope a full report on the difficult situation of the Christians in Lithuania.³⁴ After surveying the situation, the bishop was afraid to live in Lithuania and asked the Pope to relieve him of that duty but not to remove him as bishop of Lithuania. Alexander IV agreed to this request in a letter dated March 1, 1255.³⁵ Although Vitas abandoned the diocese, there is evidence that at least up to the time of Mindaugas' death, in 1263, he continued to make use of his grants and that therefore the diocese of Southern Lithuania was at least nominally in existence during this period.

While Bishop Vitas was working in southern Lithuania, Pope Innocent IV had ordered his legate the abbot of Monziano to encourage the bishop of Cracow to work more earnestly in the region of Lukow. If the archbishop refused, the legate was authorized to appoint a capable Franciscan as bishop of the area.³⁶ Alexander IV also speaks about the conversion of the pagans of Lukow. In a letter of July 15, 1256, to the bishop of Breslau, he orders the bishop and Baltramiejus, a Franciscan from Bohemia, to defend the Jotvingian converts.³⁷ Finally, in 1257, at the request of Polish dukes, the Pope ordered the archbishop of Gniezno and the bishop of Cracow to establish a cathedral in Lukow and to consecrate Baltramiejus bishop of the diocese.³⁸ Because of the opposition of the German knights, however, no cathedral was built, and no bishop was consecrated. Thus the success achieved in the area by Franciscan missionaries was nullified by the Teutonic knights' opposition.³⁹

No other ruler throughout Lithuania's history understood Church problems as well as did Mindaugas, the founder of the Lithuanian state, and no other Pope supported Lithuania's rulers as did Innocent IV. Because of their competence and their wholehearted cooperation, Lithuania made advance in the religious as well as the political sphere. Unfortunately, the princes who had lost power as a result of Mindaugas' rise were conspiring for his fall. Their enmity was increased by Mindaugas' baptism and his friendship with the German order. In 1283 two princes, Treniota and Daumantas, assassinated Mindaugas and his sons Ruklys and Rupeikis, and thus nullified Mindaugas' achievements.⁴⁰

The achievements of Mindaugas were destroyed also, because Christianity had not yet had time to take root. It is true that the ruler and his family and court had accepted baptism, but neither he nor the Lithuanian bishops worked for a wider acceptance of Christianity. As soon as the bishops encountered pagan resistance they fled Lithuania, without even beginning to build churches or to spread Christianity.

It is true that during Mindaugas' reign several Dominicans and Franciscans did attempt to Christianize the pagans, but their efforts went unnoticed by Mindaugas and the bishops. It is known that in 1245 a papal legate, the Franciscan monk John of Piano Carpini, crossed Lithuanian territory while on his way to the Tartars.⁴¹ Franciscans and Dominicans instructed Mindaugas while he was preparing for baptism.⁴² Monks of these same orders labored in Jotvingia, as we see from papal documents.⁴³ Mindaugas did not extend invitations to more of these traveling missionaries,⁴⁴ nor did he build churches or monasteries for them.

Since the sources are silent on the subject, it must be concluded that neither Mindaugas nor his bishops tried to Christianize the entire country. This was a grave error, since the pagan reaction engulfed both Mindaugas himself and the bishops.

4. Christianity in Lithuania After the Death of Mindaugas. After the death of Mindaugas the early growths of Christianity became synonymous with "national enemy." When Treniota, Mindaugas' assassin, came to power in Lithuania, he began to persecute the supporters of Mindaugas and the Christians; a conspiracy against him was organized in consequence, and in 1265 he, in turn, was assassinated. Then Mindaugas' son Vaišvilkas returned from an Orthodox monastery to take over the rule of Lithuania, but in 1268 he appointed his brother-in-law Švarnas to rule in his stead, and returned to the monastery. Švarnas ruled only through 1269. In 1270, after Švarnas' death, Traidenis came to power. He was a purely pagan ruler, and during his reign all traces of Lithuanian Christianity disappeared. He was successful in his battles against the knights. Traidenis did, it is true, give his daughter in marriage to Boleslaus II of Moravia, but this had no effect on his attitude toward Christianity. After Traidenis' death, in 1282, the sources mention several Lithuanian rulers, but nothing is known of their reigns or how Christianity fared under them. It is known that the Livonian branch of the military order, which had been weakened at the battle of Durbe in 1260, began to revive in this period and that the Prussian branch, after quelling the Prussian revolt, began to penetrate into the inhabited areas of Lithuania. The knights built castles at Ragaine, Jurbarkas and Skirsnemunė. Nevertheless, the order cared little about conversion, and the status of Christianity was not bettered in the regions occupied by the knights.⁴⁵

Popes Urban IV and Clement IV worked to save the dying Lithuanian Christianity.⁴⁶ The former wrote asking the bishop of Cracow to send missionaries to Lithuania and to build churches there,⁴⁷ but we find no traces of Christianity during the reign of Traidenis. Dusburg writes that a German priest, Conrad, labored in Lithuania in 1285 and was martyred after two years,⁴⁸ but the historian Z. Ivinskis doubts the authenticity of this.⁴⁹

5. Christian Missions in Lithuania During the Reigns of Vytenis and Gediminas. This period is characterized by the fact that while these two brothers, like the earlier rulers, fought against the German knights, they fraternized with Christians. With the archbishop and the inhabitants of Riga they formed an alliance against the knights; they built churches and monasteries; they invited monks and tradesmen to Lithuania and guaranteed freedom of conscience. This rather sudden turn may be explained by the fact that the Lithuanian dukes united with the archbishop in the face of the common enemy, the German knights.

The Rigans had been trading with the Lithuanians long before this, and missionaries occasionally visited Lithuania along with the traders. It is known that in 1282 the archbishop of Riga sent envoys to an unnamed Lithuanian prince urging the prince to accept baptism.⁵⁰ The prince answered that he feared that once he accepted baptism he would be enslaved by the German knights.⁵¹

When the knights, continuing their quarrel with the archbishop, lay claim to the city of Riga, an increase in missionary activity resulted.⁵² The archbishop and the citizens of Riga allied themselves with Lithuania.⁵³ From the Christian point of view, this alliance of Christians with pagans against a Christian military order was unjustifiable, and to lessen the scandal the archbishop worked to convert Lithuania. Through his envoys — who, according to J. Jakštas, were Franciscans and Dominicans⁵⁴ — the archbishop encouraged the Lithuania to accept baptism. This time the Lithuanians agreed. On March 30, 1298, their envoys in Riga promised to live in peace and to accept Christianity.⁵⁵

With the growth of close contact between the Rigans and the Lithuanians, Franciscans and Dominicans traveled to Lithuania. Here they ministered to the traders and spread the gospel among the pagans. This was not in conformity with the policy of the German knights, and they tried to prevent missionary activity in Lithuania.⁵⁶

When the Franciscan Frederick of Perstein became archbishop of Riga (1304—1340), the importance of the monks at the Lithuanian court increased. At first Frederick tried to establish friendly relations with the knights. He even visited the master of the order,⁵⁷ but he alone could not bring about peace. When, in 1305, he arrived in Riga, the order bought an island at the mouth of the Daugava, where a Cistercian monastery was located. From this island the knights began to disturb the

traders' communications and the monks' missionary activity. In the face of this the archbishop renewed his alliance with Lithuania⁵⁸ and complained to the Pope.⁵⁹ In 1312 the papal legate Francis of Moliano investigated the situation. He excommunicated the guilty brothers of the order and placed their land under an interdict.⁶⁰

This situation enabled the archbishop to found Franciscan and Dominican monasteries in the larger cities, and he received papal permission to do so in 1311.⁶¹ In the meantime Vytenis built a church in Novgorodok and asked for two monks to serve it. The German knights, displeased with this project, burned down the church.⁶²

Gediminas continued the alliance with Riga. He even sent gifts to the archbishop.⁶³ Franciscans and Dominicans worked in the court itself. Gediminas built a church in Vilnius for the Dominicans and churches in Vilnius and Novgorodok for the Franciscans.⁶⁴ These monks, probably at the archbishops' advise, urged Gediminas to accept baptism without the mediacy of the knights. In 1322 the duke, because of their urging and political pressures, wrote to the Pope⁶⁵ complaining about the knights' activities, submitting himself to papal care and promising to accept Christianity.⁶⁶ Furthermore, early in 1323 Gediminas in letters to cities and orders of monks invited craftsmen and missionaries to Lithuania, promising them full freedom and explaining that there were already monks working in Lithuania.⁶⁷

Gediminas' letters damaged the good name of the knights, and they retaliated with all their resources. At their request the Prussian bishops appealed to the Livonian Christians not to associate with Lithuanians.⁶⁸ The Franciscan custodian in Prussia published an appeal to the faithful claiming that Gediminas had slandered the knights and lied about his willingness to be baptized.⁶⁹ Two Cistercian abbots even wrote to Pope John XXII in defense of the knights.⁷⁰ The knights themselves urged a Samogithian and Russian revolt in the event of Gediminas' conversion.⁷¹

The Pope was influenced by none of this. In 1324 he wrote to Gediminas commending him for his desire to accept Christianity and promising to send legates.⁷² The legates arrived in Riga in the autumn of the same year and sent messengers to Gediminas, but by the time the messengers arrived circumstances had changed, and Gediminas claimed to know nothing about the proposed baptism.⁷³ The desire for baptism had been expressed in his letter to the Pope, but he blamed this on a Franciscan scribe.⁷⁴ The scribe might have made an error, of course, but in all probability this was just an excuse.

Although the baptism did not take place, the alliance between Lithuania and Riga remained intact until the knights defeated the Rigans.⁷⁵ Nor did Gediminas become intolerant of Christianity. He gave his daughter to the Polish heir, Casimir, and she was baptized, receiving the baptismal name of Ann.⁷⁶ The monks continued working quietly but freely.⁷⁷ Certain Franciscan sources mention two monks from the province of Bohemia who were martyred in Vilnius between 1338 and 1341, but it seems that they died at the hands of mobs and not on Gediminas' orders.⁷⁸

6. Attempts to Convert Algirdas and Kęstutis. At Gediminas' death, in 1341, his son Jaunutis succeeded to the throne and reigned until 1345. But Jaunutis was incapable of enforcing his rule against his older brothers, Algirdas and Kęstutis, who removed him from the throne and divided Lithuania between them. Kęstutis took the western territories and continued the conflict with the knights, while Algirdas ruled in the east and widened Lithuania's boundaries at the expense of Russia. Kęstutis fought against the Christians of the Western Church while Algirdas was ruling over members of the Orthodox Church. Despite all the efforts of Christians, both of them died in the religion of their fathers, although they did not oppose Christianity.⁷⁹

In his youth, in 1318, Algirdas had married the daughter of the duke of Vitebsk, and on the duke's death in 1320 he had inherited his domains. Since Algirdas was now ruling over Christian territory, all his sons by his first wife were baptized in the Orthodox Church in order that Algirdas might gain his subjects' confidence. When Algirdas acceded to the throne, however, he began to conceal his favorable attitude toward Christianity. Although his second wife was also a Christian, he reared his children in the pagan traditions. Some of his sons accepted Christianity on becoming the rulers of Russian territories, and some of his daughters on marrying Christian princes. Algirdas established an Orthodox province in Russia, and with the help of the Patriarch of Constantinople he set up a metropolitan in Kiev, replacing one who had fled to Moscow.⁸⁰

Algirdas' brother Kęstutis is considered a defender of paganism, but even in his family there were conversions. His daughter married a Mozovian prince and accepted baptism. Two of his sons fled Lithuanian and became converts.⁸¹ The Popes, the kings of Poland and Hungary and the German emperor urged Kęstutis to accept baptism.

Casimir, King of Poland, was the first to urge Kęstutis' conversion, and — possibly on receipt of a promise to that effect — he notified the Roman curia that Kęstutis desired to be baptized. In 1349 Pope Clement VI wrote to Casimir, to the archbishop of Gniezno and to Kęstutis himself expressing his joy at the proposed conversion. He ordered the archbishop of Gniezno to send missionaries to instruct Kęstutis and his brothers in the truths of the faith, and he promised Kęstutis aid and a royal crown.⁸² The sources are silent as to Kęstutis' reaction to these promises, but the circumstances seem to

show that he was unable to pay attention to the problem of conversion. Any promise he may have made to Casimir was no longer valid, since Casimir had nullified it by attacking Volhynia.⁸³

A second attempt to bring about the conversion of Kęstutis was made in 1351, at the time of the invasion by Louis of Hungary. Louis had been invited by Casimir to aid him against Lithuania, but Casimir fell ill, and Louis alone met Kęstutis in a conference. During the course of their talk Louis suggested that Kęstutis allow himself to be baptized. The latter promised to do so on condition that Louis procure for him a royal crown and, together with Casimir, return to him the Lithuanian territory held by the German knights. Both sides reinforced the treaty with oaths, and Kęstutis began his journey to Hungary to be baptized. Three days later, however, he changed his mind and started back; once more the conversion attempt had failed.⁸⁴

Emperor Charles IV initiated the next attempt, in 1358. He urged Lithuania's rulers, in a letter, to accept baptism, and promised his help. The princes agreed, and the emperor dispatched envoys. Algirdas and Kęstutis repeated their promise, stipulating as conditions the return of the Lithuanian territory held by the knights and the knights' transfer to Russia to fight the Tartars.⁸⁵ These conditions were not fulfilled, and once again the baptism did not take place.

Even Pope Gregory XI tried his hand. In 1373 he wrote to Algirdas, Kęstutis and Liubartas urging them to become converts and thus end the wars with the knights. If the Lithuanians accepted the plea, the Pope would send missionaries to carry out the work of instruction.⁸⁶ The sources are silent on what answer this letter received.

Every attempt to convert Kęstutis and Algirdas failed. Nevertheless, the Christians in Lithuania were free and had their own churches. The Franciscans in Vilnius quietly continued their work.⁸⁷ Christianity slowly spread in Lithuania.

7. Lithuania's Second Baptism. On the death of Algirdas, in 1377, his son Jogaila succeeded to the throne. He and his cousin Vytautas, out of both political necessity and conviction, slowly turned to Christianity. Finally they were baptized, and they Christianized Lithuania.⁸⁸

At first Jogaila bargained with the knights on the question of baptism. During the period of civil war the knights aided Jogaila in defeating Kęstutis, who died August 15, 1382; once the war ended, Jogaila had to fulfill his promise. On October 31, 1382, Jogaila met with envoys of the order. He granted the knights part of Samogithia and promised to Christianize his followers within four years.⁸⁹ Since the grand master of the order did not participate in the conference, it was agreed that a meeting would be held the following summer to ratify the treaty. This meeting did not take place, however; the grand master, travelling up the Nemunas River, reached Skirsnemunė but refused to go any further, claiming that the river was too shallow. Jogaila, for his part, refused to leave the meeting place, an island at the mouth of the Dubysa River. The treaty remained unratified and the order declared war.⁹⁰ Because of the order's aggressive policies, Lithuania remained un-Christianized.

These were the circumstances when Poland offered Jogaila the hand of Jadwiga and the Polish throne. Jogaila gave his acceptance in 1385, in the Castle of Krėva, and promised to Christianize Lithuania. On February 14, 1386, Jogaila and many Lithuanian princes were baptized in Cracow Cathedral; four days later, Jogaila married Jadwiga, and on March 4 he was crowned king of Poland.⁹¹ In 1387 he returned to Lithuania, and with the help of Vytautas and other princes proceeded with the work of Christianization.

This work required a Church hierarchy and missionaries, and with the returning Jogaila came Andrew Jastrzebiec, the Franciscan bishop of Sezeto, and a group of priests. They were joined by the monks already at Vilnius, who, since they knew the language, could work more easily with the Lithuanians.⁹² A huge crowd had gathered for the ceremonies at Vilnius, and there were not enough priests with a knowledge of the language, so Jogaila himself, according to Dlugosz, taught the people the truths of the faith and even translated the Pater Noster and the Credo.⁹³

Jogaila was not satisfied with the Vilnius ceremonies. He made several expeditions into surrounding areas; before long seven parishes had been established and the Cathedral of St. Stanislaus had been built, and in 1388 the diocese of Vilnius was established. The first bishop (1388—1398)⁹⁴ was Andrew Jastrzebiec, the same monk who had officiated at the Vilnius ceremonies. The work of conversion advanced, the number of Christians grew. Lithuania's rulers built new churches and monasteries for Franciscans⁹⁵ and Benedictines.⁹⁶ The first Lithuanian schools were opened at the cathedral in Vilnius and at several monasteries.⁹⁵

Paganism held out somewhat longer in Samogithia, since the German knights still occupied the area. Not until after the battle of Grunewald, in 1410, did Vytautas gain control of the region and begin Christianizing it. In 1413 Lithuania's rulers came there with a retinue of priests for baptismal ceremonies. This was only a brief missionary trip, and only some of the inhabitants were baptized. Not until 1417 was all of Samogithia baptized. Then a Samogithian bishopric was established and the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity was built at Varniai.⁹⁷

So, at the end of the 14th century, after a long period of warfare, Lithuania finally accepted Christianity. When the problem had matured and the circumstances were favorable, Lithuania's rulers, without using force, established Christianity throughout the country. But Christianity came to Lithuania some two centuries late, and this was not without its consequences. It was the expansionist policies followed by the German Knights of the Sword that were primarily responsible for this.

Notes:

1. V. Gidžiūnas. **De Missionibus Fratrum Minorum in Lituania** Firenze (Florence) 1950 p. 3 ff.
2. H. Paszkiewicz. *The Origin of russ:a*, London. 1954 p. 85; K. Volker, **Kirkensgeschichte Polens**, Berlin and Leipzig. 1930. pp. 8-11.
3. H. G. Voigt. **Adalbert von Prag**, Westland-Berlin, 1898.
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