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NEWSITEMS



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International Theological
Education Ministries, Inc
P.O. Box 31456
St. Louis, MO 63131
Tel.: (314) 691-0169
Email Dr. Ludwick at
rdludwick@sbcglobal.net
On the Web at www.item.org

HOW LONG, O LORD?

By Dr. R. David Ludwick, ITEM
President

How long, o Lord? Not long! Picture yourself being swept up in activities that might just be of historical significance that will make it into the history books some day. These are some of the feelings that parade before your mind's eye as you travel across the Atlantic on your nine hour trek to Vilnius, Lithuania for the 450th year anniversary of the first synodical meeting in 1557. 450 years!

Picture dignitaries from everywhere some dressed in period type attire, some in Western European style, and some pleasant surprises in ethnic attire, and food everywhere. These are a mixture of images but not the full reality of the event.

The reality was that notables, members of Parliament, governmental representatives, several denominational clergy, the press and media, members of the Reformed congregations, political and religious conservatives were in attendance. Outside for a time there was a picketing opposition (a small group of congregations who have withdrew from Evangelical Reformed Church of Lithuania – Unitas Lithuaniae) seeking recognition as a legitimate and traditional denomination. This was a day that would have blessed the heart of Radvila, the early reformer and patron of the church in Lithuania.

The agenda would read something like this: important officers of the church (several denominations); representatives of the Parliament attending a known religious event in the Constitutional Hall of the Lithuanian Parliament. Consequently, important dignitaries from various political, religious, cultural, economic and social spheres followed with "brief statements" and applause as the Reformed church enters the 21st century.



Lithuanian students are looking at the map of Middle East discussing the class material

The excitement and the tension of the event which were the order of the day resulted from the plaudits lavished on the event.

Demonstrators made an appearance in an attempt to disrupt the meeting but were unsuccessful and were quietly ushered away. It would appear that they were attempting to disparage the event by asserting means contrary to canonical and civil law, but that is another matter.

Weeks and weeks of preparation for the worship services, synodical meetings with subcommittees, then religious, political, and economic issues were the order of the day, only to be outdone by the optimism proclaimed for His future, for His people. A day like all days, but imagine that you and I were there...

From Radvila to Algimantas Kvedaravicius; from those who are included by observation as well as doing - like you and me, like all of history that follows...

By His grace, in His time, for His purposes and all to His glory...

Not long.
From a Servant's Heart

December, 2007

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“LITHUANIAN PROGRAM CONTINUES TO GROW”

By Dr. R. David Ludwick, ITEM President

Last week the Evangelical Reformed Church of Lithuania invited ITEM President, Dr. R. David Ludwick to attend the special anniversary events of the celebration of the Synodical meeting, which took place in Vilnius, Lithuania on December 14th 2007.

450 years ago on December 14th, 1557, the first senate took place... but the Synodical gathering of 2007 was different. For the first time in its history, the Synodical meeting took place in the Constitution Hall of the Lithuanian Parliament. This meeting was followed by an anniversary worship service taking place at the Vilnius Evangelical Reformed Church. That time was followed by a social hour where theologians, politicians and bureaucrats (in the best sense of the word) mixed and mingled. This occasion also celebrated the commencement of the Masters Degree Program (education in Reformed Theology). This fall five classes will be offered toward the commencement of this degree, which will be housed at Vilnius Pedagogical University. The first student has successfully begun studies toward this degree program, another first by ITEM!

Joshua 1:6-9 RDL, December 2007



This Reformist church, built between 1830 and 1835 on the site of an earlier wooden building, is one of the best examples of late classical architecture in the country. The church, however, was closed by the Soviets in 1953 and transformed into an exhibition hall. It later served as a cinema, and, if you take a look inside, you'll see that the original cinema seats have been rather charmingly transformed into pews.



“ANNUAL REPORT FROM RIGA”

By Martins Martinsons, BRTS Academic Assistant

Dear colleagues,

Another academic year has passed and it is always good to evaluate the time in order to grow in the knowledge and practice.

This year we had five courses and five Lithuanians in addition to regular students. It was very encouraging to see these men listening to the professors and devoting their time for the studies.

Unfortunately this coin has also the reverse side. The greatest of the difficulties is the language problem. One of the BRTS prerequisites for people to study is the knowledge of English. Although the program is not accredited yet, still it is a Master's level program.

After reviewing all the information available, I believe that Latvian students, because they come with a greater knowledge of English and are better able to complete their courses such as reading, and answering exam questions, show that the main idea of a course is understood. This is not always the case with the Lithuanian students.

My suggestion would be to offer a preparatory English course for all Lithuanian students (or anyone else with little knowledge of English), with the exception of those who desire to and do test out of taking it. They still could take part in the lectures and do the assignments but they would not receive a BRTS student status before they complete the English prep course. After this year the students would have to take part in an interview to apply for studies at BRTS.

All of this is not intended to exclude anyone from the studies, on the contrary, we want our future leaders, ministers and elders to get as much as possible from the resources that BRTS has.

With regards,

Martins Martinsons, December 2007

Professor Thomas Johnson delivering a message on Sunday morning at Algimantas's Church (to the left); and delivering a speech at the synodical meeting of the ERCL-UL at the Constitutional Hall of the Lithuanian Parliament (below).



“PROFESSORS SAY...”

Thomas K. Johnson, Professor of Ethics and Religion Philosophy, Martin Bucer Seminary, Berlin, Fellow, International Institute for Christian Studies

“There are huge needs in the realms of theological education, general Christian education, and publications across Central and Eastern Europe. The challenge is to communicate the opportunity to a large group of supporters and a team of educators who will carry out the work. Supporters need to hear a combination of vision, need, and stories of individuals.”

“I think that Europe is really the Dark Continent with regard to the gospel, and that the reason for the secularization of Europe which led to the current resistance to the gospel is closely tied to the loss of a historically Protestant academic voice and witness in Europe. The vision has to be more than training a few pastors; it has to be to make classical Protestantism a viable intellectual and spiritual option for millions, which includes a lot of theological education. I am praying for a new Reformation in Europe, and I have already invested a lot of years in working toward that goal.”

USA donations and correspondence:
P.O. Box 31456, St. Louis, MO 63131-0456
Tel.+1.314.691.0169; Fax:+1.314.909.7676
e-mail: Dr. Ludwick: rdludwick@sbcglobal.net
internet: www.item.org

Canadian donations only: c/o Action International Ministries
3015 A 21st St. NE Calgary T2E 7T1 Canada

R. David Ludwick, J.D., M.Div, President

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“450TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF THE UNITAS LITHIANIAE”

Thomas K. Johnson Martin, Professor of Ethics and Religion Philosophy, Martin Bucer Seminary, Berlin

Below is a letter written by Dr. Johnson to his supporters concerning his participation in the recent Lithuanian Synodical meeting in Vilnius.

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

I want to thank all who prayed for my recent trip to Lithuania. I felt carried along by your prayers. I attended the 450th anniversary celebration of the *Unitas Lithuaniae*, the Evangelical and Reformed Church of Lithuania. The conference was held by the church in the very hall where the Parliament meets, many of its members were in attendance as well as government ministers, diplomats, and even one representative from the Vatican. Historically the church has been a State church. Much of its history includes a distinct societal role, including owning old cathedrals together with the traditional right to establish educational programs in universities and schools. There are beginnings of a biblical renewal going on within this church, which is prompting the church to exercise its traditional rights to establish educational programs, while there is also a theologically liberal group which has split off from the synod of the church and has started a legal/political attack to try to get control of church properties. My job was to try to lay the theological background that will help in the coming legal battles, lay out some of the key ideas this church will need for its new educational programs, and also preach the gospel effectively to the many people at the conference who may not otherwise hear the gospel. It was also my privilege to bring greetings to the Lithuanian Church from the World Reformed Fellowship.

My assignment for the conference was to give one lecture and preach two sermons. My conference lecture was on "Triple Knowledge and the Reformation

Faith." This was a commentary on question two from the Heidelberg Catechism. I chose this because the Heidelberg has been historically used in the Lithuanian church and also played a key role in the formation of my faith; this starting point also gives a very effective framework to show how the classical Reformation faith is decisively different from both the theological liberalism and all types of fundamentalism, while clearly explaining the gospel, and also outlining a Reformation approach to learning, politics, and culture. In this cultural context it is equally important to articulate how a classical Protestant approach to theology and church life is substantially different from theological liberalism and from religious fundamentalism, since some have been saying a Reformation church cannot be different from liberalism, while others have been saying that anyone with clear religious beliefs is no different from a dangerous fundamentalist. (In Europe, in a very unfair manner, all types of fundamentalism, whether Christian, Jewish, or Muslim, are sometimes seen as almost the same by the media.)

On Friday evening I preached on "Great Truths of the Reformation that We Need to Recover Today." On Sunday I preached on "Complexity and Balance in Christian Proclamation."



Dr. Ludwick did attend the celebratory meeting and was dually impressed by the quality and quantity of the representatives of government, religious and private sectors at that meeting.

During my time in Vilnius I had an opportunity to participate in several important discussions. I had time to talk with Algimantas, moderator of the Lithuanian Church. I got acquainted with Dr. David Ludwick, who heads ITEM, which has played a very large role in developing theological education in the entire Baltic region. I had a good time consulting with the student who has started our new Master of Education in Evangelical Theology program, which is through the Vilnius Pedagogical University with Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary.

I spent a few moments in fascinating conversation with the papal nuncio (the representative from the Vatican). He was very glad to hear a Protestant quote Augustine, saying that Sola Scriptura does not mean the rejection of reason and/or tradition, and say that the priesthood of all believers does not mean a rejection of an organized church with trained leaders. I also had an important meeting with the university rector; I think there may be a very significant open door for a range of important university educational programs, but I am concerned about the need for a larger and particularly skilled staff. Both an administrative team and a teaching team (of professors) would be needed.

Continue to pray for me and for our Baltic colleagues.

In the Lamb,

Thomas Johnson, December 2007

Rev. Algimantas Kvedaravicius meeting with various dignitaries and denominational representatives at the synodical meeting of the ERCL-UL





This is one of the churches of ERCL which fate is being decided

“HOW LONG? NOW!”

By Dr. R. David Ludwick, ITEM President

For several months we have been working on a project that will join Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary with ITEM in the new work in Vilnius, Lithuania. For the preceding two years in Riga, Latvia, and for the past several months in Vilnius, Lithuania, we have been working to equip our students in both countries. Estonia and hopefully Belarus are soon to follow.

The original program provided Latvia State University a teaching faculty comprised of doctoral professors and the university benefitting from that by opening doors to ITEM students in their Masters Degree program as well as their own students since ITEM provided high caliber professors of Reformed theology.

By a unique action, the European Union did away with the Masters program and for a moment we were out of opportunity: yet in next to no time, discovering that Lithuania was not affected by this change as Latvia has been, we bifurcated the opportunity in two ways: Latvia and Lithuania in the local institute would award diplomas/certificates for non-accredited work - the students coming to be trained as shepherds for their congregations and who had no interest in the academic aspects of Ph.D. programs, etc. On the other hand, Vilnius could still give Masters Degrees accredited by the European Union and that would resolve the loss of the Masters Degree program in Latvia.

Both nationalities are then able to avail themselves of the accredited degrees providing the foundation for academic studies in Reformed theology.

Some changes in the law of the European Union provided an opportunity for us to take the concept being used in Latvia [whereby ITEM provides academics to teach the courses at the State University]. This is now being put in place with administrative expertise coming from Riga joining the administration in Vilnius and peopling the faculty of the Lithuania Pedagogical Institute in Vilnius. This enables Riga to give its students a Masters Degree recognized and accredited in the European Union through the Lithuanian Pedagogical Institute and allows Lithuanians the same opportunity.

To our knowledge such a thing has never been accomplished in any of the Western or Eastern European countries.

Because of the massive amount of administrative detail and the desire to be a “successful first,” we covet your prayers and your support as we will be adding staff there, increasing the number of professors who go and teach and most likely develop an English language theological program, etc. We anticipate our budget, if all is done well, to triple in the next year – but never before has such an opportunity been presented to these countries for the purpose of establishing the Reformed faith again and hopefully for another 450 years or until He comes.

RDL, December 2007

“INJUSTICE OR AN EXCEPTION TO THE RULE?”

By Dr. R. David Ludwick, ITEM President

Are there always two sides? Are there more sides? Isn't there only one valid side if we are dealing with accuracy or truth or precision? Facts by monologue or dialogue present the same validity occasion for discussion and reliability.

At present there are two monologues taking place within the Lithuanian Reformed Church. Evangelical Reformed Church of Lithuania – Unitas Lithuaniae asserts credibility based on factual history, scripturally based orthodoxy and orthopraxy as established by the Reformers, foundational canonical law and documentation formulated and registered as required by the promulgations of the Lithuanian government since 1557.

Au contraire, ERCL-UL Synod formed and registered within the last 15 years asserts its validity through state recognition and registration to be founded on its registration with the Lithuanian government. This group withdrew from ERCL-UL during that 15 year period and claims authenticity by reason of that withdrawal and adherence to the protocols necessary for its existence, e.g. canonical law, etc.

Where the truth is the issue polar positions cannot validly claim the same truth. ITEM works with ERCL-UL because it has established itself to have a legitimate and longstanding governmental recognition (having been in compliance with the government regulations since 1557 from the time of the first Synod), a clear record that states they strive for the purity of the Reformed doctrine and teaching of God's people, and has a clear vision in furtherance of the Great Commission through Reformed theological education by missions. **RDL**

Rev. Algimantas Kvedaravicius, one of ERCL-UL denomination's licentants, Dr. Ludwick and John Lewis discuss the future of theological education in Lithuania in practical terms.

