

ALGIMANTAS KATILIUS *

Justinas Staugaitis – Bishop and Politician

In the Catholic Church of Lithuania and in the country's public and political life, Justinas Staugaitis distinguished himself in several aspects. He pursued priestly studies at the Seinai Theological Seminary, but circumstances prevented him from receiving higher education. However, right from his early days at the seminary, he tried to further his education independently. He did pastoral work in parishes in Lithuania and Poland. He lived and worked in Warsaw for about ten years, and he even served as a chaplain in a gymnasium there. While working in the parishes, first as a vicar and later as a parish priest, he diligently fulfilled his pastoral duties, found a common language with the parishioners, and took care of their cultural needs. Justinas Staugaitis moved up the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Initially he was a prelate of the cathedral of the diocese of Seinai, and when the diocese of Telšiai was founded, he became its first bishop ordinary. As a pastor of the newly established diocese, Staugaitis had to organise and set up the diocesan institutions such as the cathedral chapter and the theological seminary, to attend to pastoral care, and the like. When favourable conditions for social and cultural activities arose in Lithuania, Justinas Staugaitis became fully committed to this work from the very beginning. One of the first examples of his public work was the founding of a kindergarten in Marijampolė and the establishment of the educational and charitable society 'Žiburys' (Light) in the same town. This society was active in the then Lithuanian part of the Suvalkai governorate and made a significant contribution to raising Lithuanian national and cultural awareness. Staugaitis distinguished himself as a contributor to and editor of the Lithuanian press. He edited *Vadovas* (The Guide), a magazine for priests published in Seinai, and published several books. During the First World War, Justinas Staugaitis became involved in the political life of the reviving Lithuania: he was elected to the Council of Lithuania, which proclaimed the restoration of independent Lithua-

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nia. He was one of the twenty signatories of the Act of Independence. Staugaitis took an active part in the work of the Constituent Assembly and the two subsequent Seimas and was the speaker of the Seimas for a while. Thus, Staugaitis's contribution to the establishment of the legal and political foundations of independent Lithuania is significant.

The aim of this article is to take a closer look at three important stages in the life and work of Bishop Justinas Staugaitis: to give an overview of his education, to delve into his pastoral, social, cultural, and political activities, and, finally, to introduce him as the first bishop ordinary of the diocese of Telšiai.

Years of Education

The future Bishop Justinas Staugaitis was born in the village of Tupikai in the parish of Vladislavov (Naumiestis, now Šakiai district) on 14 November 1866, to the family of Mykolas Staugaitis and Marijona Gustaitė, who were farmers. His childhood was spent in his native village. Schooling began at home, where his father and mother taught him, and later there was a *daraktorius*'s¹ school. Having studied at a gymnasium and a theological seminary, and even having visited Rome, *daraktorius* Antanas Totoraitis, known as Rugienius, was quite an enlightened person. Lithuanian and Russian were taught in that *daraktorius*'s school, with no attention paid to Polish. Staugaitis's education was not limited to the *daraktorius*'s school, and he started attending the Russian primary school in Naumiestis (Vladislavov). Education at that school took five years. Among other things, Staugaitis learned Polish in Naumiestis, because he lived in a Polish-speaking family. This is what Staugaitis wrote about his education at the Naumiestis (Vladislavov) school in his memoirs:

Of course, the education at the Naumiestis school was different from that at the *daraktorius* Rugienis's school. Here, there was no reading in syllables: children were taught to read in the natural, oral method. Writing here, too, started with hooks and commas. Since I could read and write, it was easy for me. Except, of course, other subjects were also taught here, as the curriculum of a primary school usually requires. We were immediately spoken to in Russian, of course. Only when a child did not understand at all, the teacher would say a word in Lithuanian².

¹ *Daraktorius*, derived from the Polish *dyrektor*, is the title of a teacher at a secret school in Russian times. After 1863, the parish schools (founded in large numbers by Bishop Valančius) were closed, and the newly founded schools were governed exclusively by Russian laws. To avoid these schools, Lithuanians began to establish secret schools, which were practised almost until the restoration of independent Lithuania. The most important task of a *daraktorius* was to teach children to read printed texts. For more, see: <https://lituapedija.net/wiki/Puslapis:LE04.djvu/304> (accessed: October 8, 2023).

² J. Staugaitis, *Mano atsiminimai*, eds. J. Boruta, R. Laukaitytė, A. Katilius, 2nd expanded edition, Vilnius 2006, p. 63.

At the time, Naumiestis was already a Lithuanian town. Staugaitis remembers:

In Naumiestis, even in those days, Polish was spoken only by county officials and some townspeople. At that time, the majority of the Catholic population there already spoke Lithuanian. Only the Gospel was read and May services were held in Polish in the church. Otherwise, everything was in Lithuanian. When praying in church, I only saw gentlemen with Polish books: I never saw a villager with Polish books in the church in Naumiestis. In short, Naumiestis was almost Lithuanian at the time³.

Justinas Staugaitis's enrolment in the Marijampolė gymnasium was complicated because the first grade of the gymnasium was open to children under the age of twelve, while Justinas was already fifteen. That was why he enrolled in the gymnasium after submitting the birth certificate of his relative Julijonas Staugaitis. From 1881 to 1885, Staugaitis went to the gymnasium of Marijampolė and finished four grades there. At that time, this gymnasium was in its heyday. Little by little, the Lithuanian national revival began to manifest itself there. The teacher Petras Kriaučiūnas, who not only taught the Lithuanian language but also encouraged the students' love for Lithuania, stood out among others. This is what Staugaitis wrote about Kriaučiūnas:

Kriaučiūnas was not the best educator, but he was the best awakener of Lithuanian national awareness. He loved everything Lithuanian with all his ardent heart and knew how to instil this love in others. Kriaučiūnas lived for Lithuanian-ness, devoted his career to it, and, one could say, his whole self. In the Marijampolė gymnasium, Kriaučiūnas was preceded by the teacher Staniškis, but he was not able to awaken the pupils' Lithuanian awareness. Kriaučiūnas started a new era in Marijampolė. Since his time, probably not a single Lithuanian left the Marijampolė gymnasium without knowing who they are. This is a great credit to Kriaučiūnas⁴.

However, Justinas Staugaitis noted that Marijampolė was much more Polish than Naumiestis. He writes in his memoir:

All the gentlemen (very often with purely Lithuanian surnames), all the craftsmen, and even the maids spoke exclusively Polish. What kind of Polish it was is another question, but it was Polish. Apart from their own jargon, the Jews all knew and spoke only Polish. To cut the long story short, Marijampolė was almost a Polish city, it was only during my time at the gymnasium that the Lithuanian current began to bubble timidly⁵.

³ Ibid., p. 83.

⁴ Ibid., p. 99.

⁵ Ibid., p. 83-84.

Staugaitis was a good pupil and, on the advice of his teacher Petras Kriaučiūnas, several weaker students took him on as a tutor from the second grade onwards. In this way, he contributed to his own sustenance. From Marijampolė, Justinas Stanaitis went to the Seinai Theological Seminary where he studied from 1885 to 1890⁶. The issue of vocation was very important before entering the seminary. From his memoirs, it is evident that Staugaitis felt a vocation to the priesthood. However, he was worried about financing his education at the seminary. His father was not able to shoulder such a burden, and he earned his own living while at the gymnasium. There were no such opportunities once he became a student of the seminary. Assistance arrived unexpectedly, though. The parish priest of Naumiestis, canon Saliamonas Oleka, called Staugaitis and told him that Juozapas Šipaila, the late parish priest of Keturvalakiai, had left money for a scholarship for a seminarian from the Šipaila family. Staugaitis was related to this family through grandmaternal lineage. This provided the material basis for his studies at the seminary of Seinai. In his memoir, Staugaitis describes his trip to Seinai, his first impression of Seinai with the cathedral and the palace of the seminary, and the rector, Prelate Paweł Krajewski. He also writes about the entrance examination, which was attended by Bishop Piotr Paweł Wierzbowski himself, prelates and canons of the Chapter, and seminary professors. Canon Saliamonas Oleka, Staugaitis's parish priest, was also among the examiners. Staugaitis wrote: 'I was pleased, because not all candidates had their parish priest, even a canon, among their examiners'⁷. Forty-six candidates took the examination and fourteen passed. The biggest problem was poor command of Polish. Staugaitis's knowledge of Polish was good. In terms of the surnames and places of origin, the majority of those enrolled were Lithuanians, although, as Staugaitis wrote, the percentage of Masurians was quite high at six out of fourteen. There were no sharp clashes on ethnic grounds, but there were minor ones, because Lithuanians were already nationally self-aware. Justinas Staugaitis spent five years in the Seinai Theological Seminary. He thus describes the general picture of the seminary:

In those days, the Seinai seminary was an overly Polish institution. It is true that Latin was used for theological and philosophical disciplines, but otherwise everything was in Polish: all the so-called auxiliary subjects were taught in Polish, conferences were given to us in Polish, and all the teachers spoke to us only in Polish⁸.

Yet later he continues:

⁶ A. Katilius, *Lithuanian Activities of the Students of Seinai Theological Seminary*, „Studia Ełckie” 23(2021), nr 2, p. 201.

⁷ J. Staugaitis, *Mano atsiminimai*, p. 116.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

I must admit, though, that nobody persecuted us for the Lithuanian language. If anyone made fun of us, it was our Polish friends, the so-called Masurians. The superiors did not reproach us for our Lithuanian-ness. We used to sing during recreation, and we sang mostly in Lithuanian. The superiors of the seminary heard us but would not say even half a word⁹.

The seminary students used to read the prohibited Lithuanian newspapers *Aušra* and *Šviesa*. In his memoirs, Staugaitis also described seminary professors: rector Paweł Krajewski, professors Eliziejus and Matas Strimavičius, Martynas Čepulevičius, Pranciškus Augustaitis, Antanas Radžiūnas, and the Russian language teacher Juozapas Kairiūkštis. His attitude to the studies in the seminary was rather critical:

Apologetics as a separate necessary subject was completely absent. Philosophy, theology, and history were taught to us as if we were living in the fourteenth century, as if there were no questions today. In short, the old routine prevailed in the seminary. We ourselves looked in books for answers to the relevant questions of life that did not give us peace of mind. But we were not given any instructions on reading lists either¹⁰.

Staugaitis also engaged in self-education, especially by reading the newspaper *Przełqd Katolicki*. Despite this, the seminary of Seinai prepared future priests well for pastoral work in the parishes, but, to Staugaitis's regret, it did not provide much training for research work. On 24 June 1890, Bishop P. P. Wierzbowski of Seinai ordained Justinas Staugaitis a priest. He graduated from the seminary with the best grades and was to enter the Roman Catholic Spiritual Academy in St Petersburg, but that year Seinai could not send its graduates to the academy in St Peterburg, and Staugaitis had to serve in a parish.

Pastoral and Public-Political Work

His first appointment was to Alytus, but he served as a vicar of the Alytus parish for only three months. Early in 1891, he was appointed vicar of the parish of Śniadowo in the Polish part of the diocese, where he spent a little over two years. From Śniadowo, he was again transferred to a Lithuanian parish, this time to Balbieriškis on the Nemunas River. Due to circumstances, he moved, of his own free will, from the parish of Balbieriškis to the Archdiocese of Warsaw. His move to the Archdiocese of Warsaw was also motivated by his desire to pursue higher education. He was hoping to go abroad to study, to have more opportunities for self-education, and to be able to offer more material assistance to his younger brothers and sisters. He did not manage to study abroad, but his time in Poland was extremely useful for independent studies.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 129.

Staugaitis lived in Poland for ten years, from 1895 to 1905. After a short time as vicar of Blendow, he was transferred to Lodz, also as vicar. A year later, he became a vicar of St Alexander's Church in Warsaw. Four years later, he was appointed chaplain of a boys' gymnasium. Staugaitis stayed in this position right until 1905.

In his memoirs, Staugaitis described the various strata of Polish society. He also described Polish priests:

In the big cities (Warsaw, Lodz), priests are very well provided for. And they are right at the source of culture. To cities, considering the conditions, the clerical hierarchy appoints priests who are as intelligent and virtuous as possible. While living in the city, they are becoming more cultured and leave their rural colleagues far behind. The honour of a member of the Chapter and other promotions are also given primarily to the urban priests. In this way, urban priests form a priestly aristocracy, so to speak, and rural priests form a democracy. This is a necessity created by conditions, but an unhealthy phenomenon, because the aristocratic priests look at the democrats with a certain disdain, and the democrats, again, envy the aristocrats¹¹.

This is how Justinas Staugaitis described his stay in Poland:

Still, this exodus of mine to Warsaw gave me something. In my youth, when all impressions have a profound effect on a person, I was able to live in an environment of the intelligentsia and to draw spiritual nourishment from it. To carry out my tasks properly, I had to work a lot, which was to my advantage.

However, I have to admit that my ties with Lithuania had weakened. However, I never stopped loving it and visiting it, and I also kept receiving Lithuanian newspapers from Tilžė. But I did not have time to work for Lithuania with my pen, because all of my time was taken away from me by my direct duties. Since the Lithuanians regained the press, life in Poland had been absolutely unbearable¹².

Priest Justinas Staugaitis joined the Lithuanian life in 1905, immediately upon his return from Warsaw. On his return, he was appointed a parish priest of the newly established parish of Lekėčiai. However, the permission of the tsarist authorities to establish the parish of Lekėčiai had not yet been obtained. For this reason priest Justinas Staugaitis settled in Marijampolė, where he spent a year and manifested himself as a talented organiser of social work. While living in Poland, he had studied the social teaching of the Church and was familiar with its practical implementation. That is why he acted at once. First of all, Staugaitis started organising a kindergarten in Marijampolė. The kindergarten he had set up was the first of its kind in Lithuania. However, due to unfavourable circumstances, the kindergarten did not last long. Among Staugaitis's

¹¹ Ibid., p. 179.

¹² Ibid., p. 189.

most significant countrywide activities is the founding of the educational and charitable society 'Žiburys' (Light). The merits of Rev. Justinas Staugaitis in the process of the establishment of the 'Žiburys' society are very clearly visible from the founding meeting of the society, which took place in Marijampolė on 6 January 1906. The minutes of the constituent assembly explicitly state that Rev. Staugaitis conceived of the idea, convened the meeting, and established a society in Marijampolė with the aim of educating people. Staugaitis wrote the statute of the society, which was given the following name: Lithuanian Christian Society 'Žiburys'. He read the statute at the meeting, and it was unanimously adopted. In Marijampolė, Staugaitis also founded a primary school, undertook the organisation of a girls' progymnasium, and established an almshouse for the elderly.

On 4 October 1906, he left for Lekėčiai to organise the parish and stayed there until April 1909. In Lekėčiai, Staugaitis shouldered the burden of organising the new parish: he built the church and supervised the construction of the parish house. From Lekėčiai, he moved to Seinai to edit the magazine *Vadovas* (The Guide), which was intended for priests. Justinas Staugaitis not only edited the magazine but also wrote much himself. He would fill more than a quarter of pages of *Vadovas* with his own texts. He also published a number of books: *Katalikų tikėjimas ir jo priešai* (1908; The Catholic Faith and Its Enemies), *Ar gi kalta čia Bažnyčia: kelių istorijos klausimų aiškinimas* (1910; Is it the Fault of the Church: Clarification of Some Historical Issues), *Bažnyčios istorija* (1911; The History of the Church; the second edition of this book appeared in 1922), *Darbininkų klausimas* (1912; The Question of Workers), *Jaunimo idealas arba pamokslai mokiniams* (1912; The Ideal of the Young or Sermons to Pupils), *Viešosios lietuvių kataliko priedermės* (1912; Public Duties of a Lithuanian Catholic). Having settled in Seinai, Rev. Staugaitis became actively involved in the activities of the 'Žiburys' society and on 28 November 1909 was elected the chair of the Seinai branch; he was re-elected in 1910 and 1911. During the years of his leadership, the number of members in the Seinai branch grew to one hundred.

In 1912, Rev. Staugaitis left Seinai for Pakuonis (close to Prienai) where he was a parish priest; in 1916, he was appointed a parish priest of the Aukštoji Panemunė parish in Kaunas and served there until his appointment as the bishop of Telšiai. While in Aukštoji Panemunė, he was promoted within the hierarchy: he became a canon in 1922 and a prelate in 1924.

During the First World War, Justinas Staugaitis became involved in the political life of Lithuania. His first important step was participation in the conference of the Lithuanians of Vilnius on 18-22 September 1917 and in its organising committee before the conference. Rev. Staugaitis was elected to the presidium of the conference, the meetings of which were held behind closed doors and several resolutions were passed. According to historiography, 'the key objective of the Vilnius conference was to define Lithuania's future politi-

cal aspirations. All participants were determined to strive for an independent, democratic, parliament-governed Lithuania¹³. But most importantly, twenty members of the Council of Lithuania were elected at the conference, and Staugaitis was among them. His activity in the Council was visible, he was even the vice-chair of the Council. The most important document passed by the Council was the Act of Independence of Lithuania, adopted on 16 February 1918. Justinas Staugaitis was one of its signatories. Staugaitis's foreign visits can be mentioned among his more important activities in the Council. First of all, he took part in the so-called conference of Lithuanians in Bern, which actually took place in Lausanne from 2 to 10 November 1917. On 20 March 1918, a delegation of the Council of Lithuania – Justinas Staugaitis, Dr Jurgis Šaulys, and Jonas Vileišis – went to Berlin to present the Act of February 16 to the chancellor and to request for the recognition of Lithuania's independence. Germany recognised Lithuania's independence on 23 March, on the basis of the act of 11 December 1917. In addition, Staugaitis had to undertake diplomatic missions. In the summer of 1919, he went to Paris where the peace conference was on the way. He attended the meeting of the Baltic Commission chaired by Lord Howard of England and together with other members of the Lithuanian delegation answered the questions of the Commission. He also met Lord Howard on two occasions and answered his questions about the situation in Lithuania. From Paris, Rev. Staugaitis and Rev. Dr Aleksandras Grigaitis travelled to Rome to obtain the recognition of Lithuania's independence and the establishment of a church province from the Apostolic See. In his conversation with Pietro Gasparri, secretary of state, no agreement was reached on the recognition of Lithuania's independence and the establishment of an ecclesiastical province, but the secretary agreed that Lithuania's delegate to the Holy See could be authorised by the bishops. Advised by Staugaitis, the Lithuanian government did it. On 17 September 1919, bishops of Žemaitija (Samogitia) and Seinai appointed Rev. Dr Jurgis Narjauskas such a delegate. Both Lithuanian representatives, Justinas Staugaitis and Aleksandras Grigaitis, were received by Pope Benedict XV. Continuing the story of diplomatic travels, it should be noted that in 1920, the Constituent Assembly sent a delegation headed by Justinas Staugaitis to the European capitals London, Paris, and Rome. The purpose of this trip was to obtain *de jure* recognition of Lithuania. Members of the delegation facilitated the recognition of Lithuania by meeting both government officials and members of the public. In 1921, Staugaitis visited Finland.

Staugaitis continued his political career during the times of the Seimas. He was a member of the Constituent Assembly and also of the First and the Second Seimas. He served as vice-chair and chair of the Seimas, and sometimes

¹³ P. Čepėnas, *Naujųjų laikų Lietuvos istorija*, vol. 2, Čikaga 1968, p. 188.

even as a substitute for the President of the Republic. Summarising the political work of Justinas Staugaitis, Regina Laukaitytė wrote:

He did not join the central governing bodies of any political organisation, i.e., as a clergyman he kept a certain distance from “pure” politics. He was a constructive politician inclined to compromises, a realist who sought consensus among the various political forces amidst crucial events in the life of the country¹⁴.

Bishop of Telšiai

On 4 April 1926, Pope Pius XI issued the Bull ‘Lituanorum gente’, which established the ecclesiastical province of Lithuania with five dioceses. One of them was the diocese of Telšiai with the prelature of Klaipėda. Justinas Staugaitis became bishop ordinary of the newly established diocese of Telšiai. He was consecrated bishop on 25 April at Kaunas Cathedral by Bishop Antanas Karosas, with Juozapas Skvireckas and Pranciškus Karevičius. His ingress to the cathedral of the Telšiai diocese took place on 24 May. In Telšiai, Bishop Staugaitis had to start everything from scratch. The beginning was far from easy:

What my surprise was when I realised that the renovation of my apartment was only well underway: it needed at least another month to be finished. If that were enough, we could wait. I already had a shelter in the vicarage, but my people had nowhere to stay and nothing to eat. They stayed at a hotel. The belongings were thrown into a damp shed and started growing mould. I could not access my clothes or my books. And it the beginning of my new life and work. The parish priest, who gave me the vicarage (two rooms) and one room to my secretary, Rev. Borisevičius, fed us during that month. Had I known that I would be in such an unfortunate situation, I would have either postponed the ingress or at least would not have moved my belongings and people out of Panemunė until the apartment was ready. But I did not know a thing¹⁵.

As soon as he became bishop, he had to put in order the administration of the diocese. Therefore, Staugaitis started to choose his closest associates. The cathedral chapter consisted of four prelates and four canons. He appointed Prelate Pranciškus Urbanavičius, a parish priest of Salantai, as vicar general, and Dr Jurgis Narjauskas, a prelate priest of the diocese of Seinai, as diocesan official. Two priests of the diocese of Seinai, Vincentas Borisevičius and his sister’s son Justinas Juodaitis, also became close associates of the bishop. In addition to the above-mentioned persons, prelate Rapolas Kuodis (chancellor), prelate Jurgis Galdikas, prelate Pranciškus Ramanauskas (later bishop), and Rev. Petras Maželis (later bishop) also became close associates of Bishop Staugaitis. Having put the administration of the diocese in order and chosen his

¹⁴ R. Laukaitytė, *Justinas Staugaitis politikas*, “Lietuvių katalikų mokslo akademijos metraštis” 31(2008), p. 47-48.

¹⁵ J. Staugaitis, *Mano atsiminimai*, p. 327.

closest colleagues, Justinas Staugaitis began to deal with the most sensitive issues of the establishment of the diocese: the founding of a theological seminary and the construction of the diocesan curia building were urgent. The newly established seminary needed premises. A decision was made to build a new seminary building, and funds for that were also raised in America (400,000 litas were collected). The construction of the Bishop's Palace required no less energy. New churches were also built. Bishop Justinas Staugaitis consecrated the churches in Mažeikiai, Plungė, Renavas, Tirkšliai, and in other towns. Bishop Staugaitis took care of the believers of the diocese. He did this mostly during parish visits; he wrote pastoral letters, which were published in a separate edition in 1940. He did not forget about cultural, educational and charitable matters, used the numerous Catholic organisations and monasteries for that purpose, and sometimes inspired their establishment. Bishop Staugaitis encouraged the activities of all Catholic societies and organisations, both spiritually and materially. He was a frequent guest at their meetings and celebrations. He was also concerned about monasteries. In 1940, there were five active male monasteries and eleven convents. Religious congresses were important in the life of the Telšiai diocese. On 11-13 June 1931, the eucharistic congress of the diocese of Telšiai was convened in Telšiai, which was attended by a representative of the Holy Father, all the bishops of Lithuania, representatives of the dioceses of Lithuania, over a hundred priests, and tens of thousands of pilgrims from all over Žemaitija. A similar congress was held in Kretinga in 1936, and a male eucharistic congress in Telšiai in 1939. Under the pseudonym of Gintautas, Bishop Staugaitis published the novel *Tiesiu keliu* (1934-1935)¹⁶. The novel's value was more ideological than literary as it was an antithesis of Vincas Mykolaitis-Putinas's novel *Altorių šešėly* (In the Shadow of the Altars). Bishop Justinas Staugaitis died on 8 July 1943 and was buried in the Cathedral of St Anthony of Padua in Telšiai.

Conclusions

Based on the aims of the article outlined in the introduction, a number of conclusions can be drawn. Bishop Justinas Staugaitis received his secondary education at the gymnasium of Marijampolė and, after completing four grades, he entered the Seinai Theological Seminary. At this seminary, he not only completed the studies necessary for ordination to the priesthood but also formed strong nationalist views to which he remained faithful throughout his whole life. Whether a vicar or a parish priest, he did all he could to be a good pastor of the believers entrusted to him. Rev. Staugaitis was close to the con-

¹⁶ The novel *Tiesiu keliu* (On a Straight Path) was written after the publication of Vincas Mykolaitis-Putinas's novel, which depicts the path of a priest's departure from priesthood. Justinas Staugaitis portrayed an active priest, faithful to his vocation, as the opposite of the hero described by Mykolaitis-Putinas.

cerns of his parishioners and made efforts to raise their national and cultural awareness. Like many Lithuanian clergymen of the early twentieth century, he became involved in public and cultural life. This activity manifested itself through the creation of cultural societies and participation in their work. He also had a stint as an editor. He wrote much in the Lithuanian press and published several books. Bishop Staugaitis was one of the most prominent politicians of the newly independent Lithuania: he was a member of the Council of Lithuania, one of the twenty signatories of the Act of Independence, and a member of several Seimas. His political work did not prevent him from advancing in his ecclesiastical career. After the establishment of the Lithuanian ecclesiastical province, Justinas Staugaitis became bishop ordinary of the diocese of Telšiai, where all the concerns of the new diocese fell on his shoulders.

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Justinas Staugaitis – biskup i polityk

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest przybliżenie trzech ważnych etapów życia i pracy biskupa Justinasa Staugaitisa: 1) edukacji, 2) działalności duszpasterskiej, społecznej, kulturalnej i politycznej, 3) sprawowania urzędu biskupa diecezji Telšiai. Bp Staugaitis był uczniem Gimnazjum w Mariampolu i Seminarium Teologicznego w Sejnach, w którym brał udział w tajnej działalności seminarzystów litewskich i kształtował w sobie silne postawy narodowe. Najważniejszym wkładem, jaki wniósł w litewską kulturę i edukację było założenie Towarzystwa Dobroczynno-Oświatowego „Žiburys”, które działało w ówczesnym województwie suwalskim i przyczyniało się do podniesienia poziomu kultury społeczeństwa. Redagował także czasopismo „Vadovas” adresowane do księży. Podczas I wojny światowej bp Staugaitis zaangażował się w życie polityczne Litwy i został wybrany na członka Rady Litewskiej. Wtedy też podpisał Akt Niepodległości Litwy. Został wybrany do Litewskiego Zgromadzenia Ustawodawczego (Sejmu) pierwszej i drugiej kadencji, w którym pełnił funkcję przewodniczącego. Po utworzeniu Prowincji Kościelnej Litwy J. Staugaitis został mianowany biskupem ordynariuszem diecezji Telšiai.

Słowa kluczowe: bp Justinas Staugaitis, Seminarium Duchowne w Sejnach, stowarzyszenie „Žiburys”, przewodniczący Sejmu, biskup Telšiai.

Summary

The aim of the article is to present three important stages of the life and work of Bishop Justinas Staugaitis: 1) education, 2) pastoral, social, cultural and political activity, 3) holding the office of bishop of the Telšiai diocese.

Bishop Staugaitis was a student of the Junior High School in Marijampolė and the Theological Seminary in Sejny, where he took part in the secret activities of Lithuanian seminarians and developed strong national attitudes. The most important contribution he made to Lithuanian culture and education was the founding of the “Žiburys” Benevolent and Educational Society, which operated in the then Suwałki Voivodeship and contributed to raising the level of culture in society. He also edited the magazine “Vadovas” addressed to priests. During World War I, Bishop Staugaitis became involved in the political life of Lithuania and was elected a member of the Lithuanian Council. It was then that he signed the Act of Independence of Lithuania. He was elected to the Lithuanian Constituent Assembly of the first and second terms, in which he served as chairman. After the establishment of the Ecclesiastical Province of Lithuania, J. Staugaitis was appointed ordinary bishop of the Telšiai diocese.

Keywords: Bishop Justinas Staugaitis, Seinai Theological Seminary, society “Žiburys”, chair of the Seimas, bishop of Telšiai.

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