

# The Confrontation Between the Lithuanian Catholic Church and the Soviet Regime<sup>1</sup>

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During the inter-bellum, in 1918-1940, Lithuania was an independent republic. During those two decades of independence, the Catholic Church in Lithuania became a well-organised strong and active body and, therefore, very influential in the life of the republic. The situation of the Lithuanian Church and religion changed radically after the introduction of the Soviet regime.

## I. World War II: the First Soviet Occupation (1940-1941)

During the first Soviet occupation and during the entire World War II the situation of Lithuania was quite similar to the state of affairs in the two other Baltic states: Latvia and Estonia. For this reason, the study will often focus on Lithuania, as part of this greater unit. The occupation of the Baltic states was prepared by the so-called Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between the German Reich and the Soviet Union (August 23, 1939) as well as by the secret protocol of the Hitler-Stalin Common Border and Friendship Treaty (September 28, 1939) that assigned Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> Shortly after the Nazis had invaded Poland, the Soviet Union launched efforts to take its part of the Baltic states in seemingly more diplomatic but nonetheless oppressive way. The scenario of the occupation and the later incorporation in the Soviet Union followed the same pattern in all the three states. The actual process of occupation lasted from the autumn 1939 until June 1940, with Soviet Army troops marching into the territories of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Subsequently, the Soviet government launched organised and intensive efforts to incorporate the three Baltic states into the Soviet Union next to the other twelve Soviet republics, which was achieved in August 1940.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Blackwell/New Blackfriars Prize essay 2006

<sup>2</sup> See Vilius Kavaliauskas, *Suokalbis [Plot]* (Vilnius: Lituanius, 1989), p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Romuald J. Misiunas, Rein Taagepera, eds., *The Baltic States. Years of Dependence 1940–1980. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1983), p. 29. Since 1940 the USSR encompassed Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Moldavia, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, plus the newest members, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

The incorporation of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia brought the adoption of the Legal Code of Soviet Russia and the acceptance of the Soviet Constitution, formed according to the Soviet Constitution of the USSR. In all the Baltic states, as in the entire Soviet Union, the Communist Party became the main body of power. In addition to the administrative changes, other features of the newly imposed Soviet regime were introduced, such as the Russification and the destruction of the national culture.<sup>4</sup>

The authorities of the Soviet Union tried to weave very rapidly all spheres of life of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia into the Soviet system. One of these spheres – and a very important one – was religion. In a religious sense the three Baltic states were different from the other Soviet republics. Russian Orthodoxy and Islam were the most widespread religions among the rest of the believers in the Soviet Union. The majority religion in Latvia and Estonia was Lutheran. Lithuania, on the other hand, was the only Soviet republic with a predominantly Roman Catholic population. Besides being the majority religion in Lithuania, Catholic minorities existed in Estonia (about 2.000), Latvia (about 500.000), Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Ukraine, and the German settlements (in Siberia and the Central Asian part of the USSR).<sup>5</sup> The Baltic states had their papal nuncios: nuncio Luigi Centoz was residing in Lithuania and the nuncio of Latvia and Estonia, Antonino Arata, was residing in Latvia. In July 1940, the nuncios were ordered to leave Lithuania and Latvia on Soviet initiative. After the formal incorporation of the three Baltic states into the USSR, in August 1940, all diplomatic representatives in the Baltic capitals were asked to depart within two weeks. The common pattern of Soviet anti-religious activity in the Baltic states included the closing of most theological institutions, the abolishment of church holidays, the disruption of church worship services and the harassment of the faithful. Clergymen were excluded from the army, the educational system and other governmental institutions, and they were deprived of their pensions. Extra taxes, rents and utility fees were imposed on the clergy and their congregations. Generally, after

<sup>4</sup> See Misiunas, Taagepera, eds., *The Baltic States*, pp. 24, 29–30; Vytautas Tininis, *Sovietinė Lietuva ir jos veikėjai* [Soviet Lithuania and Its Statesmen] (Vilnius: Enciklopedija, 1994), pp. 16–18.

<sup>5</sup> See Trevor Beeson, *Discretion and Valour. Religious Conditions in Russia and Eastern Europe* (Glasgow: Collins, Fontana Books 27, 1975), p. 114; Walter Kolarz, *Religion in the Soviet Union* (London: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1961), p. 206; Albert Kalme, *Total Terror* (New York: Appleton-Century, Inc., 1951), p. 179; Jean Chélini, *L'Église sous Pie XII. La tourmente (1939–1945)* (Paris: Fayard, 1983), pp. 47–48.

the start of the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states, the situation of believers changed noticeably for the worse.<sup>6</sup>

### *1. Soviet Policy towards Religion in Lithuania and the Reaction of the Church*

Among the first anti-religious undertakings of the Soviet government were the cutting off of the concordat between the Vatican and Lithuania, and the introduction of the new Soviet constitution. The Soviet government unilaterally denounced the concordat that also had defined relations between the Lithuanian Catholic Church and the Lithuanian state, thus opening the door to the self-will of the Soviet regime. The 96th article of the newly-introduced Lithuanian Soviet Constitution separated church and state, and school from church. It also acknowledged freedom for all citizens to perform religious rites or to spread atheistic propaganda. Nothing was said about the possibility of religious propaganda, thus, this constitution acknowledged the spreading only of anti-religious convictions. The believers were given the right only to perform religious practices but not to propagate their belief.<sup>7</sup> Even these constitutional rights were not realised in practice. Instead, the active anti-religious activity and propaganda began.

The Soviet anti-religious undertakings directly affected the clergy and the hierarchy. All the bishops and a great number of priests were driven out of their residences, without having the possibility of finding decent accommodation elsewhere. The clergy's salaries were cut off and money in the banks was confiscated. Priests were required to pay three times higher rent for apartments than other people. Pastoral work was hindered: chaplains were removed from schools, hospitals, prisons and the army, and the clergy was forbidden to visit their parishioners or give religious instruction. Moreover, according to the secret order given to the heads of the National Commissariat of the Internal Affairs on October 2, 1940, by Piotr Gladkov, Vice Commissar of Internal Affairs, the activity of the Catholic Church in Lithuania was to be fought against, and all clergymen were to be placed under

<sup>6</sup> See Chélini, *L'Église*, p. 125; Bronis Kaslas, *La Lithuanie et la Seconde Guerre Mondiale. Recueil des documents* (Paris: G. P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1981), p. 205. Hansjakob Stehle, *Eastern Politics of the Vatican, 1917–1979*, trans. S. Smith (Athens, Ohio, London: Ohio University Press, 1981), p. 202; Misiunas, Taagepera, eds., *The Baltic States*, pp. 37–38.

<sup>7</sup> See Arūnas Streikus, *Sovietų valdžios antibažnytinė politika Lietuvoje (1944–1990)* [The Anti-Church Policy of the Soviet Government in Lithuania, 1944–1990] (Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras, 2002), p. 47; Kaslas, *La Lithuanie*, p. 205; 'Communism's Struggle with Religion in Lithuania', *Lituanus*, 9 no. 1 (1963) 2–17, p. 4; Chélini, *L'Église*, p. 158.

control. In other words, they had to be spied upon by agents who were to be enlisted by force even from among the religious people and the clergy itself. A file was then kept for each cleric. Besides any anti-government statements made by the clergyman, these files were to contain information about his character, private life, family and other relatives. These files were to be used in the case of indictment and trial. Already during the first half of the first Soviet occupation approximately 150 Catholic priests were arrested.<sup>8</sup>

The anti-religious policy also affected the immovable property of the church, religious media and education. The goods and the land of the parishes, monasteries and seminaries were confiscated. The parishes were left with only 7.5 acres of land including the space under the church buildings and cemeteries. Church buildings and chapels became considered as the property of the government. Therefore, some of them were taken for army affairs, some were to be transformed for various purposes, such as museum of revolution, theatres and cinemas, or used for economic purposes. All Catholic organisations, associations and confraternities were closed, and their properties were confiscated. The Catholic press was suppressed, the publication of religious books and magazines was interdicted, Catholic printing houses and bookstores were nationalised. All religious books found in the nationalised bookshops or libraries were destroyed. The teaching of catechism and religion was prohibited, thus the theology-philosophy faculty at Kaunas' University and three out of four theological seminaries were seized.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the Soviet occupation, neither the Catholic hierarchy nor the clergy or the laity stopped their activities. In July 1940, the Bishops' Conference discussed the maintenance of the priestly seminaries and the encouragement of priests to serve their flock even if the ministry of the chaplains was abolished. This included the task of taking care of the provision of religious instruction and the preparation of lay catechists for the assistance of priests. The bishops in the Conference also addressed pope Pius XII, expressing their loyalty to him and asking him to remember Lithuania in its hardships. Lay Catholics and members of the clergy and the hierarchy actively protested in response to the repressive actions of the Soviet government. Some members of religious organisations protested to

<sup>8</sup> See Boris Iwanow, ed., *Religion in the USSR* (Munich: Institute for the Study of the USSR, Series I, 59, 1960), p. 107; Chélini, *L'Église*, p. 158; Kaslas, *La Lithuanie*, pp. 151, 208.

<sup>9</sup> See Juozas Vaišnora, 'Nepriklausomybės ir okupaciniais laikais [The Time of Independence and Occupation]', in *Lietuvių enciklopedija* [The Lithuanian Encyclopedia] (Vilnius: Lietuvos Enciklopedijų Redakcija, 15 (1990)) 146–151, pp. 146–148; Arvydas Bružas, '1940-ieji metai [The 1940s]', *Katalikų Pasaulis* [The Catholic World] 22 (1991) 20–21, p. 21; Iwanow, ed., *Religion*, pp. 105–106; Chélini, *L'Église*, p. 158; Kaslas, *La Lithuanie*, p. 208.

the Council of Peoples Commissars against the suspension of purely religious organisations that were accused of being dangerous for the security of the state. Parents asked to restore religious instruction in schools at their own expense. Archbishop Juozapas Skvireckas addressed the president of the Lithuanian puppet government, Justas Paleckis, and the First Secretary of the Lithuanian Communist Party, Antanas Sniečkus, protesting against their repressive decrees and requesting freedom for political prisoners. However, these protests resulted in new anti-religious decrees.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the Soviet interference, the Vatican attempted to preserve Lithuanian Church hierarchy and the mutual diplomatic representatives. Even before the formal incorporation of Lithuania into the USSR the Vatican tried to appoint and consecrate new bishops. Being aware that relations with the Lithuanian Church hierarchy could be cut off at any moment, and that the archbishop of Vilnius, Romuald Jalbrzykowski, was old and in bad health, the Vatican had asked the nuncio to find a Lithuanian candidate to assist and later to succeed the archbishop. In July 1940 the Vatican appointed bishop Mečislovas Reinys as assistant and later successor to archbishop R. Jalbrzykowski. Cardinal Luigi Maglione asked nuncio L. Centoz to try to stay in the country as long as possible, and consecrate priest Vincentas Padolskis suffragan bishop of Vilkaviškis, without waiting for the papal bull of appointment. In protest against the occupation of Lithuania, in July 1940, the Lithuanian minister residing in the Vatican, Stasys Girdvainis, sent a letter to cardinal L. Maglione. The reaction was positive: the Vatican was one of the states which refused to recognise the incorporation of Lithuania in the USSR either *de jure* or *de facto*. Instead, the Lithuanian legation in the Vatican was to continue its work and minister S. Girdvainis had to remain in his post. The other – Soviet – side wanted to cancel the contacts, however. Following the Soviet order, nuncio L. Centoz left Lithuania after exhorting the bishops to exercise great caution.<sup>11</sup>

The departure of the nuncio did not obstruct communication between the Lithuanian Church hierarchy and the Vatican. On the Lithuanian side it was carried on mostly by Vincentas Brizgys, the

<sup>10</sup> See Vincentas Brizgys, *Katalikų Bažnyčia Lietuvoje. Pirmoje rusų okupacijoje 1940–1941 M. Vokiečių okupacijoje 1941–1944 M.* [The Catholic Church in Lithuania. The First Russian Occupation 1940–1941. The German Occupation 1941–1944] (Chicago: Draugo, 1977), pp. 15–37; excerpts from the letter in ‘Selected Documentary Material on the Lithuanian Resistance Movement against Totalitarianism 1940–1960’, *Lituanus*, 8, no. 1–2 (1962), 41–60, p. 57; Iwanow, ed., *Religion*, pp. 106–107.

<sup>11</sup> See Kaslas, *La Lithuanie*, pp. 133, 143; Stehle, *Eastern Politics*, pp. 201–202; Mireille Maqua, *Rome – Moscou. L’ostpolitik du Vatican* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Cabay, 1984), p. 56; Vaišnora, ‘Nepriklausomybės’, p. 148.

suffragan bishop of Kaunas, who started sending news to the nuncio via some confidential paths or via detour through the Vatican's nunciature in Berlin. Pius XII on his part tried to keep up to date with the situation in the country. In seeking to keep contacts, the pope wrote *In Baltica Regione*, a letter of encouragement to all bishops of the Baltic states. Pius XII's fears seemed justified as the letter reached Lithuania only one year later, during the Nazi occupation. One could see the Soviet regime's attempt to control information flowing from the USSR to Rome, to keep Lithuanian Catholic Church contacts with the external world under control, and to manipulate information in the interests of Soviet foreign policy. In the presence of military conflict this attempt served the Soviet wish to ensure a positive or at least a neutral attitude of the Vatican which was considered as one of the centres of anti-Soviet activity.<sup>12</sup>

Due to Soviet hindrances of contact between Lithuania and the external world, especially the Vatican, radio broadcasting appeared to be the most accessible way to transmit information and make the Lithuanian situation public. With the main initiative of bishop Petras Būčys, minister S. Girdvainis presented the Vatican with an official request for permission to start transmitting Vatican radio programs in Lithuanian. The transmission started immediately after receiving the permission, in November 1940, making the Lithuanian programme the eleventh language programme of the Vatican radio. The Lithuanian programme was edited by bishop P. Būčys, and assisted by several Marian and Jesuit priests, and the Lithuanian minister in Italy, Stasys Lazoraitis.<sup>13</sup>

Besides the clergy's and the hierarchy's persistence in their pastoral activity, protests and efforts to surpass Soviet hindrances, we can notice their attempt to find a mutually acceptable solution. In the hope to preserve at least the minimum possibility for Church activity and pastoral work, Catholic hierarchs and some clerics started looking for a compromise with the occupation regime. In October 1940 the former chief of the Christian Democrat Party, priest Mykolas Krupavičius, prepared a memorandum about the co-operation of Catholics with communists, addressed to the members of the Presidium of the Lithuanian Supreme Council, the Council of Peoples' Commissars and to the Central Committee of the Communist Party. It seems that M. Krupavičius prepared the memorandum after having consulted the Lithuanian bishops and the papal nuncio. Having admitted that believers and communists have different views

<sup>12</sup> See Streikus, *Sovietų valdžios*, pp. 54–55.

<sup>13</sup> See Jolanta Kažemėkaitytė, 'Lietuviškajam Vatikanu radijui – 60 metų [The Lithuanian Vatican Radio at 60 Years Old]', *Ūkininko patarėjas* [Farmer's Guide], no. 140 (November 30, 2000) 5, p. 5; 'Vatikanu radijo kelionė per dešimtmečius [Vatican Radio through Decades]', *Tėviškės žinios* [News of the Fatherland], no. 226, 20, p. 20.

concerning religion, the document stated that cooperation between the Church and the Soviet regime was possible, since they had a common aim: social justice. The fight between religion and communism was to be limited to the ideological sphere, with the opponents having equal possibilities. The memorandum raised a condition for possible cooperation: the removal of restrictions imposed on Church activity. In spite of an air of concession to the Soviet regime, nothing in this memorandum contradicted Church doctrine or expressed the Church's unconditional agreement with the regime. Therefore, the memorandum can not be considered as a sign of the Church's readiness to collaborate with the Soviet regime. This is also confirmed by the Soviet government's reaction to the document. The requested relaxation of anti-religious policy was not brought about. Instead, at the beginning of 1941 there came new proposals for the destruction of the Church.<sup>14</sup>

Shortly before the end of the first Soviet occupation, there was an outbreak of deportations and violence. According to the instruction of Ivan Serov, the Soviet Vice-Commissar of Public Security, an anti-Soviet contingent from among the inhabitants of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania was to be deported to Siberia. The anti-Soviet contingent included approximately 700,000 Lithuanians, almost all priests, directors and members of all Catholic organisations, as well as active lay Catholics. Most arrests and deportations took place in June. Just in one week, between June 14 and 21, there were 34,620 people deported from Lithuania. The execution of the entire plan of arrests and deportations was obstructed, the activity of the Soviet occupation government was interrupted and an approaching wave of the persecution of believers was prevented by the beginning of the Nazi-Soviet war on June 22, 1941, and the subsequent Nazi occupation. The Soviet troops, present in Lithuania, were forced to retreat hastily. While the clergy had been repressed during the entire period of the first Soviet occupation, the Soviet regime did not go so far as to openly persecute and kill its members. However, as the Soviet army left, there was a noticeable outbreak of violence against the Catholic clergy by the retreating troops: after the start of the war with the Nazi army the Soviet authorities became confused, they no longer cared about the reaction of the population and revealed the real dimension of their intense hatred towards the Church. Another explanation of the outbreak of violence may be the fact that priests seemed the most potential collaborators with the approaching enemy. Thus, from June 22, 1941, until the last unit of the Soviet armed forces left Lithuania, about fifteen priests were murdered and twelve priests were arrested

<sup>14</sup> See Streikus, *Sovietų valdžios*, pp. 50–54.

and deported to the USSR.<sup>15</sup> Eventually, the single year of the first Soviet occupation ruined political, social, economical, cultural and religious life in Lithuania.

The losses inflicted on all three Baltic states were significant despite the short duration of the first Soviet occupation. The general estimates of population losses (from different causes: mobilisations, deportations, massacres, disappearances) hovered around 60.000 for Estonia (about 4% of its pre-war population), 35.000 for Latvia and 34.000 for Lithuania (about 1.5–2% of their populations).<sup>16</sup>

The first Soviet occupation was followed by three years of Nazi occupation during which in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania the Nazis installed their own political administration to use the countries economically and militarily. They also strictly supervised religious affairs, and so at the final stage of the occupation such supervision even reached the level of violent repression. Just as the first Soviet occupation had been stopped by the war-events, so was the Nazi occupation: the Soviet army gradually pushed out the Nazis and reoccupied the countries.

## II. The Post-War Years: the Early Years of the Second Soviet Occupation (1945–1950)

By the end of World War II, with the help of the Soviet Army the USSR markedly extended its sphere of influence: it had occupied and started to control most European countries east of Germany – comprising almost half of Europe. These moves of the Soviet Union received the approval of Western states which – intending to avoid conflict with the USSR as the greatest military power in Europe – left those countries to Joseph Stalin and recognised them, although reluctantly, as Soviet spheres of influence which became separated from the rest of Europe by the so-called Iron Curtain. The new Soviet states – Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Eastern Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia had fallen to the rule of communist dictatorships. In 1948, to prevent the states from escaping Moscow's control, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), as the highest authority, showed its power by a series of purges and show trials in the leadership of fraternal parties. By the end of the

<sup>15</sup> See Streikus, *Sovietų valdžios*, pp. 59–60; Vaišnora, 'Nepriklausomybės', p. 149; Iwanow, ed., *Religion*, p. 108; Edvardas Tuškenis, 'Critical Dates and Events', *Lituanus* 32, no. 4 (1986) 5–9, p. 6; Gediminas Rudis, ed., *Lietuvos gyventojų trėmimai 1941, 1945–1952 m.* [The Deportation of Lithuanian Inhabitants 1941, 1945–1952] (Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidykla, 1994), pp. 14–20; Chélini, *L'Église*, p. 158; Kolarz, *Religion*, pp. 206–207.

<sup>16</sup> See Misiunas, Taagepera, eds., *The Baltic States*, p. 41.



year, the new Soviet states were in the so-called Soviet block, where the maintenance of hold on all aspects of life was supposed to be helped by the CPSU imposition of a general system and of a similar treatment. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, after having been annexed to the USSR in 1940 for the first time, were taken over in 1944 for the second time. By the end of World War II they were re-incorporated into the Soviet Union.

### 1. General Soviet Policy towards Religion in the Satellite States

Among all aspects of life in the Soviet satellites the Communist Party attempted to control religious life in particular. The typical interventions in Church affairs and attempts to restrict Church activity were the confiscation of Church property, the removal of religion from schools, the suppression of Catholic organisations, the strict control and suppression of religious literature, the dissolution of religious orders, the closing of religious houses, the imprisonment or deportation of religious persons, attempts to recruit agents by bribery, to divide and eliminate clergy and hierarchy and to isolate it from the people. In the meanwhile the regime tried to create the impression of full religious freedom.<sup>17</sup>

The relationship between the local Catholic Churches and their centre in Rome hindered Soviet efforts to restrict their activity and, therefore, provoked reaction of the Soviet authorities. During wartime the official policy of the Soviet regime had been relatively more moderate and determined to demonstrate its good-will towards the Catholic Church in order not to harm the Soviet relations with the Western Allies and the Vatican. The Yalta Conference of February 1945, with its decisions that strengthened USSR positions in Central and Eastern Europe, however, brought a change in the Soviet attitude towards the Catholic Church and the Vatican. Seeking to establish themselves in Central and Eastern Europe and being aware of the Vatican's concern about the spread of communism, the Soviets had to diminish the Vatican's influence in this region. Therefore, in January 1950, the *Cominform* (Communist Information Bureau) meeting in Budapest decided to intensify anti-religious repression in the communist states and to establish the so-called 'national' Churches, which were to be independent of the Vatican and have government agents or collaborating priests as their clergy. To implant this idea, a specialised organisation, *Orginform*, with its Russian chief and centre in Warsaw, was founded. In its four special schools *Orginform* was to

<sup>17</sup> See James D. Holmes, Bernard W. Bickers, *A Short History of the Catholic Church* (Kent: Burns and Oates, 1992), p. 280; Oscar Halecki, *Pius XII* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1954), pp. 252, 259.

train militant leaders for communist anti-Church actions. The Soviets also trained communist agents to pose as Catholic priests or monks in the Soviet satellite states. The agents attended special courses in order to learn the performance of religious ceremonies and the organisation of religious activity in conformity with the Soviet regime.<sup>18</sup> The communist authorities also attempted to bribe members of the clergy in the Soviet states. They offered high salaries to the priests who rebelled against their superiors and against the Vatican, and who agreed to collaborate. The Soviet attempts to establish 'national' Churches partly overlapped with the establishment of the national movements of the so-called 'progressive' priests in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Yugoslavia. As a rule, those pro-governmental movements were, on the one hand, inspired and supported by the communist authorities of national governments; on the other hand, the movements existed against the will of local bishops and the Vatican.<sup>19</sup> Later, in the late 1950s and the 1960s, the national movements of the so-called 'progressive' priests would receive a sort of international version – the so-called international peace movement.

Generally speaking, the communist-controlled Central and Eastern European countries had a varying percentage of Catholics, and experienced varying effects of the Soviet policy directed against the Catholic Church. From all states behind the Iron Curtain, Poland was the one with the largest Catholic population – about 22,000,000 or 95% – and the strongest Catholic tradition. The awareness of the strength of Polish Catholicism was a restricting factor for the pro-Soviet government of Poland. The government, nevertheless, in the Polish case too managed to apply the usual Soviet 'scenario' for the newly-acquired territories. Despite all anti-religious activity, the largest Catholic population among the Soviet satellite states and the strength of Polish Catholicism resulted in strong, non-submissive Catholic resistance to the communist government and Soviet domination. Therefore, during the entire time of communist control, the Polish Catholic Church remained an organised body, a centre of opposition against the regime and a rival focus of loyalty for the Polish people. The Catholic Church, in fact, was only one of the churches in the religiously non-monolithic Soviet satellites. Besides Roman Catholicity, predominant in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, there were two other majority religious traditions: Orthodoxy (predominant in Bulgaria, Romania

<sup>18</sup> See Streikus, *Sovietų valdžios*, pp. 71–73; Halecki, *Pius XII*, pp. 266–267, 276, 335, 384; V. Vaitiekūnas, 'Antrikristo šėlsmas okupuotoje Lietuvoje. Dialektinio materializmo kova su Dievu [The Riot of the Antichrist in Occupied Lithuania. The Fight of Dialectical Materialism with God]', *Aidai* [Echoes] 5 (1956) 211–219, p. 212.

<sup>19</sup> See József G. Orbán, *Friedensbewegung Katholischer Priester in Ungarn, 1950–1956* (Budapest: METEM-Bücher, 12, 1996), pp. 40–41, 234–239, 242–243; Adam Michnik, *L'Église et la gauche. Le Dialogue Polonais*, trans. Agnès Slonimski, Constantin Jelenski (Paris: Seuil, 1979), pp. 215, 220, 224.

and Serbia) and Islam (predominant in Albania), both affected by the Soviet regime.<sup>20</sup>

## 2. General Soviet Policy towards Religion in the USSR Republics

With the USSR encompassing a much larger territory than its Satellite states, it was only natural that the republics of the Soviet Union varied not only in their climatic conditions, economic orientations and culture but also in their religious traditions. The most numerous religious traditions were Russian Orthodoxy and Islam (in Central Asia and Tatarstan, an autonomous republic in the European part of Russia). Since the Constitution of the Soviet Union was valid in all USSR republics, anti-religious repression followed a general pattern and kept all religious traditions in a vulnerable state, with the Russian Orthodox Church playing a specific role. Having its centre in the USSR, the Russian Orthodox Church was subjugated by the state: the Moscow Patriarchate was allowed to exist only in subservience to the Soviet regime. Therefore, its patriarch Alexius co-operated with J. Stalin, the hierarchy was supervised by the KGB, and the clerics were state pensioners. Besides that, the Russian Orthodox Church and the Soviet government constituted a common anti-Catholic and anti-Protestant front. In the entire Soviet Union the Soviet authorities organised their anti-religious policy by creating specialised Soviet structures. Thus, even before the end of the war, the activity of the non-Russian-Orthodox denominations in the USSR was placed under the authority of the Council of Religious Cult Affairs (CRCA), led by Igor Polianskij. Soon followed the creation of an entire system: the individual Soviet republics and districts received representatives of the CRCA, who had to coordinate policy of the Soviet government towards religious organisations locally.<sup>21</sup>

Although the situation of all USSR believers became increasingly precarious, one of the minority traditions – Roman Catholicism – professed in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Ukraine, in the German settlements in Siberia, and in the Central Asian part of the USSR, experienced marked hostility on the part of the Communist Party. On the one hand, such hostility corresponded to the anti-communist position of the centre of the Catholic Church. On the other hand, the fact that it had a centralised structure, with

<sup>20</sup> See Halecki, *Pius XII*, pp. 243–245, 247, 262; Holmes, Bickers, *A Short History*, p. 279; James Joll, *Europe since 1870. An International History* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), pp. 440, 482.

<sup>21</sup> See Halecki, *Pius XII*, pp. 251, 269–270; Beeson, *Discretion and Valour*, p. 114; Norman Davies, *Europe. A History* (London: Pimlico, 1997), p. 1098; Streikus, *Sovietų valdžios*, p. 75.

the leadership located in the Vatican – outside of the Soviet sphere of influence and out of Moscow's reach – made USSR Catholics less controllable and more difficult to subject than other confessions.<sup>22</sup>

Among the Catholics, it was the Eastern Catholics – sometimes called Uniates – mainly living in Western Ukraine and Belarus, who were affected most by Soviet anti-religious repressions. Since the reunion of the Ruthenian (Ukrainian) Church with the Vatican, concluded at Brest-Litovsk in 1596, the members of the Ruthenian Church had been considered as traitors to the Russian Orthodox Church. As such, they were subjected to very strict repression in an attempt to make them join Russian Orthodoxy. During World War II the Soviets had decided to destroy the Eastern Catholic union with Rome, in Galicia and Carpatho-Ukraine completely. In 1945, after the death of the Eastern Catholic metropolitan Andrej Sheptytskyj, the Soviets arrested his successor Joseph Slipyj, all bishops, ordinaries and auxiliaries. Later, in March 1946, they were sentenced to life imprisonment, supposedly for traitorous activity and for giving assistance to the German occupants. The primary reason of their arrest, however, was the wish to speed up the process of Eastern Catholics joining the pro-Soviet oriented Russian Orthodox Church. The clerics, refusing to accept Orthodoxy, were arrested and deported or shot down. The Soviets also attempted to 'undo' the union. In March 1946, in Lvov, they convoked a non-canonical mock synod that was attended by priests who had been won over or terrorised by the communists. The synod proclaimed the Brest-Litovsk Union null and void. In a similar way the Soviets destroyed the Eastern Catholic Church in Carpatho-Ukraine. The Orthodoxy imposed on the Ukrainians in Galicia and Carpatho-Ukraine was Russian Orthodoxy, a body sharing no communion with the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. The Ukrainians – with none of their Catholic bishops passing over to Orthodoxy – were placed under the Patriarchate of Moscow that was restored by the atheistic Soviet regime to serve as a tool of the government, as it had been at the time of tsarist autocracy.<sup>23</sup>

Soviet repression also affected religious life in the Baltic region, where predominantly Lutheran Estonians and Latvians, and Catholic Lithuanians belonged to the Soviet Union's minority religious traditions. The Soviet state's treatment of the Baltic Churches had common features: the government attempted to reduce the domestic influence of the Churches through atheistic lectures as well as through control, infiltration, imprisonment, deportation or even killing members of the clergy and hierarchy. The degree of the success of Soviet policy varied. Probably due to its long association with the Baltic German oppression – before the 20th Century – the prevalent Lutheran Church

<sup>22</sup> See Streikus, *Sovietų valdžios*, p. 73.

<sup>23</sup> See Streikus, *Sovietų valdžios*, pp. 74–75; Halecki, *Pius XII*, pp. 250–251.

in Latvia and Estonia had never become very popular. Even during the time of independence (1918–1940), in Estonia the percentage of baptised children was undergoing a drop of almost 2% per year. Given the relatively mild further decrease – which comprised less than 1% per year – it seems that the Soviet persecution of the Church slowed down rather than speeded up secularisation. However, the persecution worsened the general situation of the Lutheran Church considerably. An important way Soviet occupation harmed the Lutheran Church – enabling the government to impose control – was the successful infiltration of its hierarchy with Soviet agents. Thus, since 1948, Latvia had a Soviet-sponsored new archbishop, Gustavs Tūrs. In 1949 a Soviet agent was given the post of chief Secretary of the Church Consistory in Estonia.<sup>24</sup>

### 3. *Soviet Policy towards Religion in Lithuania and the Reaction of the Church*

From the beginning of the second Soviet occupation, the reintroduction of the Lithuanian Soviet Constitution of 1940 legalised the treatment of religion that was in a way similar to the first Soviet occupation. Although the Constitution contained an article on the separation of Church and state, and education and Church, as well as guaranteed the freedom of religious worship and freedom to disseminate anti-religious propaganda, the state actively interfered in Church life and violated the constitutional freedom of religious worship. The Soviet Penal Code legalised some restrictions and, thus, limited the freedom of believers and the Constitution-guaranteed modest freedom of religious worship to an ever-greater degree. The Soviet state also provided for specialised structures to regulate religious life and anti-religious propaganda and actions: the office of a commissioner for Lithuania of a Union-wide Council of Religious Cult Affairs (CRCA) and especially the CRCA of the USSR, the KGB and the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party.<sup>25</sup>

During the post-war years a development, a growing confrontation between the Soviet authorities and the Church in Lithuania, can be noticed. This phenomenon came to the fore after some important requests of the Lithuanian Church hierarchy were disregarded by the Lithuanian Council of the People's Commissars. The incompatibility of the intentions of the Catholic Church and the Soviet authorities destroyed the initial attempts of a mutual satisfaction of interests. The intended negotiation failed and the confrontation between the

<sup>24</sup> See Misiunas, Taagepera, eds., *The Baltic States*, p. 121.

<sup>25</sup> See Tininis, *Sovietinė Lietuva*, pp. 68–69; Iwanow, ed., *Religion*, p. 110.

Soviet government and the Catholic Church became more strained and more open. The year 1945 introduced the period of the intensification of political and anti-religious pressure and national resistance. This period lasted until the late 1940s, throughout the time of Dmitrij Jefimov at the head of the State Security organs.<sup>26</sup>

One of the main targets of the intensified Soviet anti-religious policy was the seminarians. Besides the imposition of the problematic entrance procedure in the single open seminary, in Kaunas, the limitation of the number of seminarians, regulation of daily life and acts of terror, the Soviet government attempted to infiltrate the seminary through own agents and recruit seminarians to become agents of the KGB.<sup>27</sup> Although submission and collaboration was the minority attitude, it corrupted the work of the seminary and greatly helped the anti-religious policy of the Soviet regime.

Another target of the intensified repression was the Catholic clergy, disobedient to the Soviet government's directions, supportive of the national resistance and surviving only thanks to the material aid coming from the believers. Besides arresting members of the clergy, the Soviet authorities intensified their efforts to control the clergy. One way of control was the demand of the mandatory registration of all religious communities-parishes, their priests and the parish committees that is, groups of lay people responsible for their parish. The intensification of the repressive demands by the Soviet authorities provoked the opposition and resistance of the clergy.<sup>28</sup> Until the late 1940s, priests were firm in their boycott of registration.

The clergy was pressured so that it compromised, as was evident from the attempt of the Soviet government to disconnect the Lithuanian Catholic Church from the Vatican and to establish the 'national' church. The Lithuanian KGB, however, failed in finding a sufficient number of authoritative clerics who would agree to express their disobedience to the pope. Although the KGB succeeded in compelling several Catholic activists and priests to take preparatory steps, their initiative did not find the necessary support and, despite all efforts, by 1949 the Soviet government's plans to create the 'national' church failed.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> See Tininis, *Sovietinė Lietuva*, pp. 69–72.

<sup>27</sup> See Tininis, *Sovietinė Lietuva*, p. 71; Vaišnora, 'Nepriklausomybės', p. 149; 'Communism's Struggle with Religion in Lithuania', p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> See Regina Laukaitytė, 'Lietuvos vienuolijos XX amžiuje [Lithuanian Monastic Orders in the 20th Century]', Lietuvos Istorijos Institutas [Lithuanian Historical Institute] (2002). <http://vienuolijos.iwebland.com> (access June 25, 2004); Tininis, *Sovietinė Lietuva*, pp. 71–72.

<sup>29</sup> See Arūnas Streikus, 'Lietuvos Katalikų Bažnyčia 1940–1990 [The Lithuanian Catholic Church in 1940–1990]', in *Metraštinis, Lietuvos Katalikų Mokslo Akademija* [Annals of the Lithuanian Catholic Science Academy], Vol. XII (Vilnius: Katalikų Akademija, 1998), 39–65, pp. 46–47; Streikus, *Sovietų valdžios*, pp. 84, 88.

Since it was not possible to keep official contacts with the Vatican and with the universal Church, more active clerics were looking for non-official ways to start communication. Perhaps the most outstanding attempt was performed by Father P. Račiūnas, a member of the Order of Mary's Immaculate Conception. At the end of 1947, he succeeded in establishing contacts with the French priest Antoine Laberger – the Catholic parish priest in Moscow – and through him started transmitting news to the Vatican about the situation of the Lithuanian Catholic Church. It did not take long for the Soviet security organs to detect and break off this channel of communication as well as to sentence Father P. Račiūnas to 25 years in camp.<sup>30</sup>

The third target of the intensified Church repression was the Catholic hierarchy. There were some members of the Soviet government who were convinced that instead of intensifying the repression of the Catholic Church, it would be better to use the Church to help fight national resistance. To achieve this goal, efforts were launched to recruit members of the hierarchy who would be willing to compromise. The National Commissariat of Internal Affairs demanded that the bishops condemn national resistance and encourage partisans to surrender. The demand met the open opposition of the majority of the hierarchy. The bishop of Vilnius, Mečislovas Reinys, the bishop of Kaišiadorys, Teofilus Matulionis, and the bishop of Telšiai, Vincentas Borisevičius, were especially firm in their convictions. They prohibited the carrying out of any demands of the communist authority. Likewise, in February 1946, the Lithuanian Bishops' Conference prohibited the Church's involvement in politics in general.<sup>31</sup> Although the Soviet government did not succeed in making the majority of the hierarchy compromise, it was sometimes successful in making individual Church hierarchs oppose the national resistance that resulted in disagreement and a split within the hierarchy on the issue.

The disobedience of bishops usually resulted in actions brought against them, incrimination for anti-Soviet activity and even in imprisonment by the KGB. Bishop T. Matulionis was sentenced to seven years imprisonment and taken to a prison of special regime in Vladimir, approximately 200 km east of Moscow. A sentence to the Vladimir prison was also given to the bishop M. Reinys. At the end of 1947 the bishop was sentenced to eight years imprisonment and taken to the prison in Vladimir where he died in 1953. Bishop V. Borisevičius was imprisoned by the KGB and sentenced to death in 1946. His assistant bishop Pranciškus Ramanauskas was arrested at the end of 1946, sentenced and transported to a concentration camp in Siberia. Finally, in 1947, the punitive actions against the bishops'

<sup>30</sup> See Streikus, 'Lietuvos Katalikų', p. 47.

<sup>31</sup> See Tininis, *Sovietinė Lietuva*, pp. 70–72, 169, 183; 'Communism's Struggle with Religion in Lithuania', pp. 4–5.

disobedience to the Soviet authorities led to the single Catholic bishop, Kazimieras Paltarokas, left in freedom. He was spared because of his old age and because of the fact that he was the only bishop to be coerced to tell the Lithuanian partisans to stop their resistance. Vicar-generals took over the administration of the dioceses without bishops. Soon afterwards, however, some of them were imprisoned or deported to Siberia as well.<sup>32</sup>

The fourth target of intensified Soviet repression – after the seminarians, the clergy and the hierarchy – were the monastic communities that were disliked by the government due to their active influence on society, especially on young people. The monastic communities were liquidated in two steps. First, in 1944–1948 cloisters were subjected to unbearable taxes and the nationalisation of their property. Second, as it will be explained later in the same paragraph, in 1948–1949 monastic communities were dispersed in the aftermath of their registration campaign. Having lost their material basis, members of monastic communities started searching for means of subsistence by doing pastoral work in parishes, becoming organists or sacristans, or taking on jobs in various secular institutions: factories, hospitals, kindergartens, asylums, and farmers' households. On top of the unbearable taxes and nationalisation, the KGB tried to infiltrate cloisters with own agents and informers, and to replace their superiors by KGB people. Despite all the efforts of the Soviet authorities, monastic communities and their novitiates survived the first step of liquidation, although they were weakened, lost a part of their members and most of them could accept no new candidates.<sup>33</sup>

The new phase in the post-war repression of the Catholic Church started in 1948, after the commissioner of the CRCA, Alfonsas Gailevičius, was replaced by Bronius Pušinis. B. Pušinis' leadership brought more restrictions and the closing of numerous churches: his demand for priestly registration was so strict that disobedient priests were forbidden to continue their work, and their churches were closed. It was the new chief of the CRCA who was behind the last outstanding attempt of the Stalin-period to disconnect the Lithuanian Catholic Church from the Vatican at the second half of 1949. In that year, on B. Pušinis' initiative, there was a letter prepared against Pius XII as war-monger. This happened after Pius XII had announced the Vatican's Decree of July 1949, prohibiting collaboration with communists.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> See Vaišnora, 'Nepriklausomybės', p. 149; Owen Chadwick, *The Christian Church in the Cold War* (London: Penguin Books, 7, 1993), p. 107; Kolarz, *Religion*, p. 207; 'Communism's Struggle with Religion in Lithuania', p. 5; Tininis, *Sovietinė Lietuva*, pp. 70–71; Vidas Spengla, 'Nesiderina su vyskupo sąžine ir luomu [It is not in Conformity with the Bishop's Clerical Conscience]', *Katalikų pasaulis* [The Catholic World] 4 (1997) 10–12, pp. 10–12; Streikus, *Sovietų valdžios*, p. 64.

<sup>33</sup> See Laukaitytė, 'Lietuvos'.

<sup>34</sup> See Laukaitytė, 'Lietuvos'; Streikus, 'Lietuvos Katalikų', pp. 46–47.



In 1948 the liquidation of the monastic communities took the second step – the wave of registration – which resulted in their dispersal. Although the campaign for the registration of monastic communities had started in 1944, due to the resistance of the Church it was not yet finished by 1948. During the wave of registration only four male cloisters (the Franciscans in Kretinga and Kaunas, the Marians in Vilnius, the Jesuits and Capuchins in Šiauliai) and one female cloister in Juodšiliai (Vilnius district) – for nuns of four congregations, with Benedictine, Dominican and Bernardine Sisters among them – were registered and thus made official. Other, unregistered, cloisters became illegal and thus deserved to be liquidated. Soon, in 1949 a liquidation-campaign was launched against the registered cloisters. Work in the parish churches was allowed only for those priest-monks who would declare their decision to abandon their monastic rank. In an attempt to preserve the parishes, numerous priest-monks declared their abandonment of the monastic rank and stayed diocesan priests instead. By 1950 monastic institutions had lost their structure, their members were dispersed, relations of individuals with their superiors were broken off and most orders and congregations in Lithuania had lost contact with their headquarters in Rome. The former cloisters were transformed into schools, museums, apartments or adapted to other secular functions. In the meanwhile, the official Soviet propaganda maintained that the decrease of the number of cloisters was the result of changed political and social conditions, a natural decay or ‘self-liquidation’, following the term of B. Pušinis.<sup>35</sup>

Like the cloisters, approximately 130 churches were closed and adapted for secular use by being converted into storage houses, sports halls, cinemas, museums, art galleries, sanatoria, hospitals, archives, libraries, or simply abandoned during the post-war time. Just as during the first Soviet occupation, also in the second one all church buildings and chapels, even those which were left operating, were considered state property.<sup>36</sup>

By the end of the 1940s, due to all the aforementioned means of repression, the growth of confrontation between the Soviet government and the Lithuanian Catholic Church ended in the break-down of the open resistance of the Catholic Church as well as of the armed nationalist fighters. This break-down was indicated by the change of the tactics of the clergy and hierarchy: they became more reserved. Instead of open opposition to the Soviet authorities, the tendency or switch towards making compromises, and, at least outwardly,

<sup>35</sup> See Laukaitytė, ‘Lietuvos’.

<sup>36</sup> See Vaišnora, ‘Nepriklausomybės’, p. 150; Vygintas B. Pšibilskis, ‘“Byla” dėl Vilniaus arkikatedros: 1949–1956 [The Case of Vilnius’ Arch-cathedral: 1949–1956]’, *Kultūros Barai* [Cultural Fields] 5 (1995) 66–72, pp. 66–72; Tininis, *Sovietinė Lietuva*, p. 72; ‘Communism’s Struggle with Religion in Lithuania’, pp. 5–6.

proving the loyalty to the Soviet government became more popular. The restrained activity or even conformism of some clerics and hierarchs was necessary to mitigate Soviet anti-religious policy and to help the Catholic Church survive the repression. Conformism was not chosen by all Lithuanian priests, however: conformism was generally considered a negative tendency.<sup>37</sup>

Monastic communities responded to the intensified Soviet repression in their own way: in the mid 1950s they entered a new stage of their existence by going underground. From then on, the leadership of monastic institutions operated in secret. Monks and nuns, living not in communities but individually or in very small groups, gathered together for monthly days of recollection and annual retreats. The novices usually lodged with their families and, few times per month or more seldom, gathered together for secret instructions, the place and time being continuously changed in avoidance to be detected. Usually, those – dispersed – monastic communities destroyed their documents and collected no archives that could serve as potential convicting evidence in KGB hands.<sup>38</sup>

The increased reservation and eventual conformism of the clerics and hierarchs at the end of the 1940s, and the ‘disappearance’ of the monastic communities did not reflect their real standpoint but showed rather the break-down of the open resistance of the Lithuanian Catholic Church, not its destruction.

During the period that has been discussed in this article and during the four remaining decades of the Soviet occupation, the Lithuanian Catholic Church was coping with the Soviet repression better than other Baltic Churches and the minority traditions like the Catholic Churches of Estonia and Latvia. What was it that played an important role in the relationship between the Lithuanian Catholic Church and the Soviet state, thus helping the Lithuanian Catholic Church to survive?

### III. Concluding Reflections on Catholicism and Lithuanian Nationalism

Lithuania, being the only predominantly Catholic republic in the USSR, had a specific characteristic: the close link between Roman Catholicism and Lithuanian nationalism. This close link mainly developed after World War II but had its beginnings in the 19th century. By the end of the 18th century, Lithuania had become part of tsarist Russia. The tsarist regime’s imposed Russification and efforts to convert the population of Lithuania to the Russian Orthodox faith

<sup>37</sup> See Tininis, *Sovietinė Lietuva*, pp. 72–73.

<sup>38</sup> See Laukaitytė, ‘Lietuvos’.

were opposed by the different Lithuanian faith tradition. Thus, Lithuanian language, culture and the dominant faith tradition, Catholicism, were counter-posed to the Russian language and culture as well as Russian Orthodoxy. But even from then on, the Catholic Church was not always the unifying factor in Lithuanian life. At some periods from the 19th century till the end of World War II, its relations with nationalism were quite ambiguous. Despite some Lithuanian Catholic priests who were strongly against Russification and even themselves actively participated in the national fights of the 19th century, other members of the clergy and the Church hierarchy were either pro-Polish – ‘noble’ trend of the time – or sceptical about the national movement out of fear for its possible harm to Catholicism.<sup>39</sup>

During the post-war time of the second Soviet occupation, there was a change in the assessment of the role of the Catholic Church: it became recognised mainly as the protector of Lithuanian affairs. It can be said that the opposition of the unpopular Communist Party towards nationalism and Catholicism was in a way responsible for the rapprochement of both. There were two early manifestations of the close link between Lithuanian nationalism and Catholicism. On the one hand, there was the widespread involvement of Lithuanian priests in the guerrilla struggle for national independence, despite the absence of an official association of the Lithuanian Catholic Church with the guerrillas. On the other hand, there was the non-submission of most bishops and priests to Soviet pressure to condemn Catholic participation in the struggle. As a result, Catholic priests as well as the laity played a prominent role in the resistance movement. Later on, the link was expressed less tangibly, mostly in the efforts of the Church to combine religion and nationalism in its services of worship. Thus, the liturgy was adapted to the national peculiarities: traditional costumes were used during Church processions, old religious traditions and holidays were presented as Lithuanian custom and many priests tried to convince believers that to be a good Lithuanian meant to be a good Catholic. Those efforts developed a strong sense of solidarity among the Catholic clergy, hierarchy and laity. The Catholic Church also provided a strong link with the independent Lithuania of 1918–1940 when the Church was in a better situation. This set of circumstances led towards the consideration of Catholicism as the norm for Lithuania and as the focus of national aspirations and sentiments. To become a member of the Lithuanian Catholic Church expressed both religious and national commitment, and sometimes merely the latter. Catholicism was a very important feature in differentiating anything Lithuanian from anything Soviet and

<sup>39</sup> See Kęstutis K. Gimius, ‘Apie Katalikybės ir tautiškumo ryšius Lietuvoje [Relations between Catholicism and Nationalism in Lithuania]’, *Aidai* [Echoes] 3 (1983) 161–172, p. 164.

pan-Russian. Thus, despite being part of a supra-national religious organisation, the Lithuanian Catholic Church became very much a national Church. It set itself in opposition to the Soviet state almost by definition, thus approximating to the notion of the Church of the entire nation.<sup>40</sup>

The fact that the Catholic Church in Lithuania was the only one of this kind in the Soviet Union was sufficient ground for the special attention of Soviet authorities. There could, in fact, be little use in fighting Lithuanian nationalism alone. The Soviet government was aware of that, and consequently, was eager to fight Catholicism as well. Thus, the fact that Catholicism had its centre in the Vatican, outside the Soviet sphere of influence, and the fact that there was a close association of Catholicism and nationalism explains why Lithuania was in a way a special target of the Soviet political regime. Being a special target was a disadvantage for the survival of the Lithuanian Catholic Church. However, there was also an advantage for the survival of the Church brought about by the same phenomenon. The Catholic and national allegiance in Lithuania played a moderating role for the USSR political authority. It provoked some cautious restraint in launching repression since too much interference could arouse nationalist feelings. The Soviet government avoided antagonising believers by direct interference through overly extensive anti-religious measures. Instead, and especially after J. Stalin, during the years that followed the period examined in this article, the Soviet government attempted to destroy the Church with less provocative, although no less undermining means.<sup>41</sup>

Our reflection yields the conclusion that the close association between Catholicism and nationalism proved to be a double-edged sword: it had both advantages and disadvantages for the Catholic Church in Lithuania as it struggled for survival during the difficult period of Soviet anti-religious repression. Such a close interrelationship was both the cause of destructive Soviet attention as well as important support for the endeavour of holding in check the Soviet onslaught with considerable success.

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<sup>40</sup> See Christel Lane, *Christian Religion in the Soviet Union* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1978), pp. 208, 215–216; Girmius, 'Apie Katalikybės', pp. 161–162; John Hiden, Patrick Salmon, *The Baltic Nations and Europe. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the Twentieth Century* (London, New York: Longman, 1994), p. 135; Tininis, *Sovietinė Lietuva*, p. 68.

<sup>41</sup> See Lane, *Christian Religion*, p. 208.