

LITHUANIA AND THE VATICAN

by Brian J. Ford

A Report Commissioned by Mrs Ines McCormack

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LITHUANIA

Several territories were brought together to form the Lithuanian state. Lithuania proper, or Litva, formed the governments of Wilna and Troki; Russian Lithuania comprised Polesie, Black Russia or Novogrodek; and the duchy of Samogitia completed the country, which covered 135,000 square miles. The earliest records show that Lithuania was subjected to Russia, but threw off that yoke at the end of the twelfth century to become an independent power. The language is, with Latvian, the sole representative of the prehistoric Baltic tongues. The Old Prussian dialects came under pressure from the Teutonic knights in the thirteenth century, and much of the Lithuanian territory was settled by German peasants. One of the few surviving examples of Baltic Prussian is the bilingual edition of Luther's Catechism, an early example of the influence of religious publishing on the historical record.

The roots of the language are Indo-European, and there are some indications of a connection with Sanskrit. Thus *mrtis* 'death' in Sanskrit, *mirtis* in Lithuanian [compare with *murder* in English]; similarly Sanskrit *sanas*, 'old', Lithuanian *senas*, which may be compared with the English *senile* via Latin *senex*. However, the orthodox view first expressed by Latham in the last century – that a Lithuanian peasant could understand simple Sanskrit phrases – is now taken with a pinch of salt.

Lithuania was introduced to Christianity six centuries ago by King Casimir. Though the pagan religions survived in gradually diminishing form over the following centuries, it was this that initiated the later prolonged period of contact with the Vatican.

The strength of the early Lithuania was considerable. Territorial adventures took them to the gates of Moscow, and in 1386 the Grand Duke of Lithuania, Jogaila (Jagellon), was elected King of Poland. In 1569 the two countries were declared one. Parallels continue to exist between Polish and Lithuanian politics.

By the 1930s, Lithuania occupied 21,000 square miles and boasted a population of 2,400,000. It comprised the former Russian province of Kaunas, and parts of the provinces of Gardinas, Suwałki and Courland. The province of Vilna was claimed by Lithuania at that time, having been assigned that territory by Russia in 1920. The area was occupied by the Poles, and remained a disputed territory for many years. The additional population of Vilna was almost one million.

Half of the country was devoted to agriculture, the main crops being rye, oats, barley, wheat, potatoes and flax. Peat was widely gathered. During the thirties there were over 1,000 miles of railway and 10,000 miles of surface roadway, whilst navigable waterways totalled 2,840 miles.

Since its emergence as a sovereign state, Lithuania has endured fluctuating fortunes. The merger with Poland in 1569 lasted a little over two centuries, when partition supervened: Greater Lithuania became a Russian possession, whilst Lithuania Minor fell to the Prussians. Not until 1917 was a modern Lithuanian State Council elected, and in the following year the independence of the country was officially proclaimed. The 1922 Constitution gave the democratic seal to the state. There was to be a President, a Cabinet and a Diet (Seimas). But military intervention was not far away, for in 1926 the army overthrew the civilian government and appointed a new President.

Apart from a traditionally strong Protestant community in Memel (Klaipėda), Roman Catholicism remained the principal religion. Thus an enduring religious belief was maintained in a community riven with political divisions and military adventurism. It is this undercurrent of religious unity and continuity which has continued to provide a backbone in a nation subjected to continuing turmoil.

THE VATICAN

Shortly after the establishment of the peace of the Emperor Constantine, a papal residence was recorded on the site of the Vatican at Rome. The first Pope to construct a residence on the site was Symmachus (498–514), immediately to the north of the cathedral of St Peter's. For much time following, papal residences were in the Lateran, and it was not until the return of the Popes from Avignon that the Vatican became a permanent residence. The present buildings were begun by Pope Nicholas V (1447–1455) and they were embellished and extended by his successors down to Pius IX.

The Vatican library was first constituted by Pope Nicholas V, and was greatly expanded by his successors. A collapse of part of the building in 1931 claimed many thousands of volumes, but the Vatican library remains one of the great collections. Works by Michelangelo, Raphael, and others, together with large holdings of ceremonial precious metals and jewellery, make the Vatican a rich holding. But it is in political terms that it is also peculiarly significant. Though many external matters are mediated by the Italian State, and day-to-day services are indebted to the authorities of Rome, Vatican State remains an independent entity with its own postage stamps and its self-contained governmental structure.

Most important, it maintains an international diplomatic representation. In terms of political power or military might this is, of course, a minor or insignificant player on the diplomatic stage. But the Vatican is enabled to maintain diplomatic contact with church organisations world-wide, even in situations where normal international contact may have been lost. In this sense, one of the greatest influences of this in some ways idiosyncratic organisation remains its perpetual and historic ability to mediate in international relations. The Vatican almost provides a second-level political institution for religious bodies unable to find a satisfactory relationship with state establishments.

SECOND WORLD WAR AND POST-WAR PURGES

The Baltic states became of strategic importance to the Soviet Union in the earliest stages of the Second World War. The principal city and main port in the western region of the country, Leningrad, was clearly susceptible to occupation by a German expeditionary force. The distance from Leningrad to the Estonian border was eighty miles, with the Lithuanian frontier only some 300 miles further down the Baltic coastline. In addition, the 300-mile Gulf of Finland, at the head of which Leningrad lay, was Russia's main link with Britain, France and the Atlantic.

Stalin therefore set out to obtain the guarantee of safety for the Baltic States through negotiations with France and the United Kingdom. The Baltic States, on the other hand, resisted such manoeuvres. It may be said that they recognised that aggression from a 'third party' tacitly excluded the Soviet Union, and it was feared that occupation would rapidly follow the outbreak of war.

After the German attacks against Poland in September 1939, Soviet occupation of the Baltic States rapidly became established. In a brave counter-attack, surviving Polish airmen struck at the German air-base at Poznań, almost completely destroying it. The result was a reprisal raid by the German air force. Eighteen German bombers struck at Vilna and dropped 200 bombs on the mediaeval houses and crooked streets of the old town. Not only was this a centre for the corn and timber trade, and of strategic importance to Poland, but Vilna was the ancient capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Thus were blows struck by both sides. From the Soviets came annexation and the extirpation of Lithuanian independence, whilst from the Germans came one of the first reprisal raids against an ancient and respected seat of Lithuanian culture. In this situation, it was the solidity of the Catholic Church which provided an anchor for the spirit of the Lithuanian people.

The regime of Antanas Smetona in Lithuania responded to the annexation by the Soviet Union by diverting large sums of money to the Catholic Church, a move quickly stopped by the Soviet regime. Shortly afterwards, in July 1940, it was reported that many priests were arrested by the communists in Lithuania, and some priests were expelled. This was the beginning of a long programme of exile imposed on religious leaders who were perceived as a threat to the communist state by the occupying forces.

On 29 July Vatican Radio carried a commentary on the situation: throughout the Baltic states, church land and property was being nationalised, religious faculties at the universities were being closed down, and "exorbitant" levels of taxation were imposed on the clergy. The need for quarters for occupying Soviet troops led to the sequestration of seminaries in Vilkauskis, Telšiai and Vilna; and plans were reported for the confiscation of the Curia's properties in Kaunas. Antireligious propaganda was introduced into the schools, religion was banned from the curriculum, and the only surviving religious events permitted by the new regulations were church services.

In the following month, Lithuanian clerics were restricted to a maximum of nine square metres of dwelling space per person, the remainder being claimed for the billeting of Soviet troops. As the German troops advanced through the Baltic states in 1941, Soviet forces burned a number of churches prior to evacuation. They forcibly expatriated 40,000 educated and professional Lithuanians as the German troops neared, and killed many priests and Catholic laymen.

In a letter on the Bolshevik occupation dated October 1942, the Lithuanian Bishops, as a body, reported that they were not allowed to meet in assembly during the period of occupation, nor to write pastoral circulars to the faithful, not even to give religious instruction. The death of twenty-two priests was recorded, along with the arrest, torture, or deportation of many more. But, reported the Bishops, the Catholic Church had become not only a staunch defender of religion, but had acted as the leader of the Lithuanian nation. Among the signatories were the Archbishop of Kaunas Juozapas Skvireckas, Bishop of Vilkauskis Antanas Karosas, Bishop of Panevėžys Kazimieras Paltarokas, Bishop of Telšiai Justinas Staugaitis, Vicar of Kaišiadorys Juozapas Matulaitis-Labukas, Auxiliary of Vilkauskis Vincentas Padolskis, Auxiliary of Telšiai

Vincentas Borisevičius and the Apostolic Administrator of the Archdiocese of Vilnius, Vincentas Padolskis.

These reports show that, though the Soviet policy was to degrade the position and influence of the Church, and to discourage the promulgation of religious teaching, it did not go so far as to ban Catholicism altogether. Doubtless this was to maintain some credence with the Vatican authorities, as an insurance in the development of future international policies.

This limited tolerance led to the Soviet authorities allowing a few priests to return to the Lithuanian churches in April 1945. The few religious organisations which had been established under the Nazis (including three Baltic seminaries) were not closed down. However, the limited religious teaching which had been permitted under the Nazis was stopped, as was the publishing of religious pamphlets. Significantly, for the first time the Soviet authorities banned contact between the Lithuanian Catholics and the Vatican. But they did not bargain for the underground resistance movement. This had begun during the first Soviet occupation early in the war, fed by the reports of atrocity and suppression. It became a strong anti-Nazi underground, during which time it grew and became increasingly sophisticated. But it came to its height at the end of the war, when resistance to Sovietisation grew to unparalleled heights. None of the Baltic states accepted gladly the concept of annexation by the Soviet state, but Lithuania was the most rebellious of them all. Russia was unable to control Lithuania because of this surge of nationalism. In spite of purges and reprisals, the underground flourished and received growing popular support. Lithuanians wished to have a pro-Western future as an independent sovereign state, and turned increasingly to the Catholic Church for support.

The anti-Soviet resistance lasted from 1944 to 1952, when it was finally suppressed by force. At first the Soviets ignored the Church, hoping that anti-religious communism would supervene. But late in 1945 they recognised that the tide of nationalism was supported by the priests, and a purge was begun. When the bishops hesitated to denounce the partisan movement, the Soviets interned Bishop Pranas Ramanauskas in February 1946, and deported him to Siberia. Later that year, Bishop Teofilius Matulionis and Archbishop Mečislovas Reinys were arrested and put on trial before being sentenced to hard labour in Siberian prison camps. Within a year, only one bishop remained in the whole of Lithuania – Mgr. Kazimieras Paltarokas of Panevėžys, spared because of his advanced years.

Steps were taken to drastically reduce the priesthood. In 1945 it stood at 1,470; within four years that had been cut by the Soviets to 180. Radio Vatican reported in 1948 that Lithuanian priests were now a 'familiar sight' in the Siberian labour camps. The pre-war total of 1,202 churches was reduced to 711 by 1948; in March the following year a survey for the Papacy concluded that there were 400,000 Lithuanians in Soviet concentration camps. At the same time a campaign of anti-Catholic propaganda was launched in Moscow. It was spearheaded by M. M. Sheinman who guided the Kremlin's policies towards the Vatican. In his *Vatikan mezdu dvumia mirovymi vainami* of 1948 he described Pope Pius XII as the protector of Hitler's 'criminal band' and asserted that the Pope's claims of religious persecution under the USSR was a 'fable'. By 1950 he was claiming that the papacy had wished for war and was a natural enemy of all Slavs and went on to claim that the Vatican was the ally of capitalist/imperialist anti-Sovietism, and had closely cooperated with a 'Fascist-Tito clique'.

At about the same time, a document was circulated through the clergy of Lithuania which called on them all to add their signatures to an anti-Vatican statement. In part, it said:

Pope Pius XII issued a Decree on 13 July 1949 through the so-called 'Holy Office' excommunicating all Catholic Communists and their supporters from the Catholic Church. The Decree forbids Catholics from joining the Communist Party or supporting it; forbids them to publish, distribute or read Communist books, newspapers and journals, and also to write for them. The Decree calls for Catholics suspected of these activities to be denied communion or other sacraments. The appearance of this Decree, reminiscent of the Middle Ages, which is now being condemned by a wide selection of Catholics, shows that the Catholic Church is disturbed by the rejection by millions of Catholics of the reactionary course so passionately pursued by the Vatican. They have rejected the reactionary politics of the Vatican, itself an accessory to the plans of aggressive imperialism.

Catholic workers throughout the world are raising their voices ever more loudly in support of peace against war, and this also explains their attraction to and support of progressive organisations which stand for peace and harmony between nations, especially in the case of the Workers' Communist Party, marching in the forefront of the battle for peace and democracy.

The Vatican hopes to strengthen its waning influence on the believing masses by means of threats and repressive measures ... The Decree is a coarse insult to the religious feelings of believers! The decision of the Vatican is directed at those who, in the name of freedom and independence, have taken on their shoulders the whole weight of the great struggle against the Hitlerite barbarians.

That is why this Decree has aroused such deep disapproval amongst believers.

We, the priests of the Lithuanian Socialist Soviet Republic, energetically protest against the Decree of Pope Pius XII, by means of which he has done untold harm to the Catholic Church, and has forever put himself in the position of passionately encouraging a new war ...

It has been recorded that a majority of priests refused to sign this 'open letter' of protest, but it is tacitly admitted that many did so. The parish priest of Rūdiškės, Jonas Skardinskas, wrote that it was a 'rebellious document, directed against ... the Head of the Church and the representative of Christ on earth. Young men, it is in very bad taste. Do not go on [signing] it!' Here is a revelation of the truth of the matter. The Soviet propaganda led to a divided church. On the one hand, led by memories of purge and repression, stood the traditionalists who were firm in their resolve to support the Roman Catholic edifice. On the other were the new generation of socialist party members, fired by a rejection of western values as represented by Nazi invasion and German occupation. The former owed allegiance to Rome and to the Vatican; the latter were loyal to a new machinery appointed by the Soviet state, and formed the nucleus of a church organisation that was dominated – not by the Vatican – but by Russian political power. The Marxist-Leninist theorists had dealt a deeper wound to the Church than by mere purge or exile. By a propagandist campaign to the young, they had subtly replaced the Vatican as a centre of authority and respectability with the Kremlin. The second route of diplomatic activity previously offered by the Vatican had been usurped.

RESISTANCE AND REBUILDING

During the fifties, many hundreds of exiled priests ended their terms of imprisonment and began to return to Lithuania. Those who had died in the camps were hailed as martyrs, and some (such as Fr T. B. Andruška, S.J.) are subject to religious devotion. During the era of Nikita Khrushchev in 1957–1958, some priests were again arrested, including Canon Stanislovas Kiškis, and Fathers Petras Rauda, T. A. Markaitis, Algirdas Mocius, Jonas Balčiūnas, Antanas Jurgaitis, Antanas Bunkus, Alfonsas Svarinskas, Pranas Adomaitis and Petras Jakulevičius. Though Bunkus and Jurgaitis were imprisoned for the first time in their lives, the others were imprisoned for the second time, and Markaitis for the third time. During their time in the camps

each continued religious activity as far as possible, and on return to Lithuania resumed pastoral work.

A two-pronged attack on the establishment of Lithuanian/Vatican relationships continued. One lay in the formation of an Executive Council for Religious Affairs, which promoted priests sympathetic to the Soviet cause, or who were inactive in the pastoral field. The other was rooted in the lack of information available to the Vatican, for channels were used to encourage Vatican authorities to promote candidates who were approved by the communist establishment. There were attempts to establish a national Catholic Church of Lithuania, in direct opposition to Rome. A priest serving a sentence of twenty-five years was reportedly offered a major Pastorate and an inducement of 100,000 roubles to work in the establishment of the new organisation.

The pressures on the priesthood were considerable. One who had been forced to write a 'confession' in 1947 included the words:

'I am guilty of many things with regard to Soviet society. [I now] realise that life continues on the path of progress, and those who do not march in step with life are brushed aside.'

This priest, Auxiliary Bishop Pranas Ramanauskas, spent ten years in Siberian labour camps before returning to Lithuania in 1956. He was a broken man, and died three years later. In his 'confession' we may detect a covert theme that underlies post-war Europe. Many of those who had suffered war against the Germans were satisfied that the Soviets had indeed led to liberation of previously dominated nations. In Russia itself, the liberation of the peasant classes gave considerable impetus to the Marxist-Leninist movement. Though it is tempting to read all the activity of communism as inherently evil, it is necessary to embrace the fact that for many individuals the communist era was viewed as liberation. Doubtless a proportion of the Lithuanian priesthood who showed loyalty to the Soviet system did so from profoundly sincere motivation.

But secret activity continued. On Christmas Day 1957, Bishop Matulionis consecrated Vincentas Sladkevičius of Kaišiadorys at the age of thirty-seven, in defiance of authority, and in conditions of secrecy. The Soviet authorities used the excuse of a consecration without the knowledge of the Lithuanian government as their reason for banning him from exercising his duties for a period of eighteen months. Not until 1977 was Bishop Sladkevičius permitted by the Soviet authorities to celebrate Mass.

Occasional signs of a softening of attitude during the 1950s proved to be ill-founded. As an example we may cite the case of Auxiliary Bishop Liudas Povilonis who was granted permission to build a new church in 1954. It took seven years to complete; but when it was finished, in January 1961, the authorities seized the building, turning it into a concert hall. Povilonis was charged with obtaining building materials in contravention of official rules and regulations, and was sentenced after a trial to eight years' imprisonment. He was granted remission half way through that time, and by 1973 had become such a folk hero that 10,000 people turned up on a single day to see him confirm 2,600 believers in their faith.

THE RECOVERY OF THE SEVENTIES

Throughout the years that followed, Catholic activity carried on in Lithuania as priests juggled with the Soviet authorities to incorporate their work into establishment constraints. Much of the relationship between the Vatican and Lithuania, however, concerned the state-recognised version of Catholicism which one student of the period has dubbed the KGB Catholic Church.

This can be seen as an underlying principle of Vatican external relations policy. Rather than fighting for religious idealism, the Vatican has frequently preferred to adopt a pragmatic line, thus ensuring harmony between the church establishment and the political realities of the time.

In this we may seek parallels from Polish history, from a state that was for a considerable time united with Lithuania (*vide supra*). Poland, a nation frequently occupied and partitioned, received little support from the Vatican during the depressed years. The Vatican, it has been recorded, saw no good reason to incur the ill will of the state by overtly supporting cries for re-emergent Polish nationalism, even when based on religious grounds. Polish Catholics were more often enjoined to turn their thoughts to the eternal truths, rather than encouraged to rebel and to fight for the return of their civil and religious rights. During the periods of Polish partition, for instance, the Roman Catholic Church quickly abolished the position of Polish Primate, delegating the responsibility jointly between the hierarchies of the occupying powers.

Such uncharitable notions were far from the minds of the Lithuanian priests when, in 1970, they resolved to set up formal lines of communication between the Church in their country and the Vatican in Italy. It was felt that a simple lack of factual information had led to the Church adopting what seemed to be ill-considered decisions about the future of the priesthood in Lithuania. Thus in 1972 was established *The Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church* – a forum for the dissemination of news and information on the Catholic Church, and the activities of bishops, priests and the Catholic laymen in Lithuania. The basis for the publication was as a newsletter from Lithuania to the Vatican itself, by-passing the devious political routes through which information was transmuted into propaganda. Though this was a valuable move, its declared aim of a sign of movement from the Vatican was considerably delayed. The first example was the nomination of a Lithuanian cardinal by Pope John Paul II – without permission from the Soviet authorities. It was exactly the kind of gesture which had been awaited; sadly, it did not occur until 1988, almost two decades since the *Chronicle* was first begun.

An astute observer of international affairs would note that the establishment of an anti-State line of communication with an outside body is illegal in Soviet society. To overcome this, the organising committee behind the *Chronicle* merely circulated copies: the original was directed to the Soviet authorities.

The first such document complained politely about the persecution of the followers of Catholicism in Lithuania; the demotion of two leading bishops; the imprisonment of priests; the ban on the religious training of children; state control of appointments within the clergy; the difficulty in rebuilding churches, and other matters. Rather than for 'reassuring words', the writers asked for prompt and decisive action. A large number of public signatures was collected. For a private document, this is unlawful under Soviet regulations. But this one was addressed to Mr Brezhnev, neatly circumventing the problem. Official moves were made against the collecting of names, and reports were received of soldiers commandeering sheets of signatures, notwithstanding that the document was addressed to the State authority. In the end there were 17,054 names appended, but it is claimed that twice as many were gathered.

The State responded quickly. On 30 April 1972, just three weeks after the matter claimed headlines in the international press, priests were ordered to cancel their sermons and instead to read an official proclamation:

Irresponsible individuals have recently appeared in some parishes. In the name of priests and the faithful they gather signatures near or even inside churches, or sometimes by visiting homes. They do this on sheets with, or even without, a text. They request the transfer, appointment or retention of

various parish priests and assistant clergy or that certain churches should not be closed. Those who gather the signatures later change or add to the text and add this to the collected signatures. This is fraudulent. We are very surprised that there are believers who sign without knowing the text and without considering the possible results. We must remember that the signing of irresponsible documents affects relations between the Church and the State and gives rise to misunderstanding. Such activities can bring no good to the Church.

The Soviets tried to find out who had read the full text, and who did not; but the tone of the statement cannot have convinced many that it was the will of the Church authorities that it was presented to the congregation. It was generally regarded as a crude attempt by the regime to intimidate the freedom of activity so urgently desired by the Lithuanian people, and in May of that year there was an outburst of civil disobedience. On 14 May, for example, a young intellectual named Romas Kalanta sacrificed himself in a public park at Kaunas in protest about the restrictions on freedom of speech. Elsewhere there were demonstrations and, though the Church claimed not to have been involved, it was becoming clear that there was a movement for renewed freedom of expression, and the statement delivered to the churches may have been the trigger for the upsurge of public feeling.

Later issues of the *Chronicle* warned the Vatican against the appointment of state-backed clerics who, it was stated, seek to undermine the authority of the Church. Thus there were several lines of dialogue between Lithuania and the Vatican at this time:

a) From the state-backed Church establishment and the Vatican direct; b) Between Moscow and the Vatican authorities, with reference to Lithuanian development in regimented terms; c) The *Chronicle* providing information via the Soviet authorities, but intended to inform world media organisations, and to influence the Vatican through pressure on the public outlets.

It is clear that the Vatican at that time, following its earlier operating pragmatism, was probably content to continue its political activities in the terms operated by the Soviet power which controlled Lithuanian politics. But the new route for information, which short-circuited the propagandist channels categorised as (a) and (b) above, brought about a re-think. No longer could the Vatican remain contented to follow its familiar course. It must now face the realities of repression in the Lithuanian satellite. And, although it was the population in a secular sense who were the victims of the repression, the Church had provided a fulcrum about which the uprising of feeling could turn. Largely because of its previous inertia, the Vatican now became a crucial part of the political activity towards freedom for Lithuania.

Calm was restored as the Soviet authorities revised their policy and allowed the Church to enter a freer phase of development. There were several clear reasons behind this. One was to nip in the bud the seeds of nationalism. Actions against the Church, with its long record of existence in Lithuania, were popularly equated with action against the community. It would be simplistic to assume that this is as far as the argument went, for there were important international repercussions that were taken into account.

One of these was the reputation of the Soviet Union in the course of world events. For example, the European Security Conference at Helsinki promised a long look at civil repression and the vexed question of civil liberties in satellite states. It had been pointed out that the Soviet Union had been the first to sign the much-vaunted Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and yet had been the slowest to put the measure into force. In the United States, several political leaders had called for a complete ban on the export of wheat to the Soviet Union until the matter was satisfactorily finalised, and the Declaration fully implemented. At the time, the Soviet economy

needed American wheat desperately, and the need to pacify the western powers was paramount. Finally, there was the question of the Lithuanian émigré community. Of the three million people who were speaking the Lithuanian language, one-sixth lived in the United States alone. Their support for their homeland, and their love of its Church, were enhanced by the poignancy of distance and time. For that reason too, Russia was interested in maintaining a responsible profile abroad. As a part of the process, communications with the Vatican were kept at a high profile.

Thus, the Pope's envoy visited Moscow in 1973; and on 24 March 1974 the Soviet Foreign Minister Mr Gromyko visited Pope Paul VI. Clearly, the future for the Lithuanian dialogue with the Vatican – the direct dialogue – was a matter of intense diplomatic interest. As the decade neared its end, in 1978, a new body emerged: the Catholic Committee for the Defence of the Rights of Believers. In spite of official displeasure about this new organisation (threats of legal sanctions were made in response to this 'religious radicalism') the Committee went about its work. It rapidly became, not only a forum for the Lithuanian dissenters, but an unofficial channel of protest for Roman Catholic organisations elsewhere in the Soviet empire. The Committee was not the first body to become visibly constituted for the advancement of Lithuanian protest. That was the Lithuanian Monitoring Group which began in 1972, and ran parallel to the *Chronicle* described earlier. Indeed the new Committee drew on the work initiated by the Group as it became established. But it was surely the most effective of the organisations. In the later years of the seventies, several moves had cracked down on political activity. The Presidium of the Lithuanian Socialist Soviet Republic enacted 'Regulations on Religious Associations' in 1976. The new laws were claimed to be, not only repressive of the canon law, but contrary to the laws of the Soviet Union. In spite of this, the Catholic Committee for the Defence of the Rights of Believers continued to campaign, and to grow in strength and influence. Doubtless with outside support (possibly with financial help from Lithuanians in the United States), it gained supporters as the decade ended. Of the original caucus of five who had set up the Committee, only one withdrew by 1980. His name was Juozas Zdebskis who, as a student priest in the 1960s, had protested vigorously against the Soviet restriction of religious freedom. He resigned, not on principle, but because he had been severely wounded by unknown assailants. They had attacked Zdebskis, beaten him, and set him alight. Clearly, as the decade ended, pressures against the expression of religious freedom and the use of a dialogue with the Vatican as an agency of advancement, were as great as ever.

But more *samizdat* publications were being produced per head of population in Lithuania than in any other Soviet republic. As the decade closed, the lengthy list was supplemented by three new newssheets whose titles seem to reflect the mood of the times. They were *Pastogė*, *Vytis*, and *Ateitis*. The titles mean, respectively, *Shelter*, *The Knight on Horseback*, and *The Future*.

No longer could the Vatican be content with lip-service. The Lithuanian movement was clearly gathering momentum.

AN AGE OF INFORMATION

Prior to the Second World War, it would have been rare to meet a Lithuanian whose parents were college educated. But by 1980 the new generation found nothing unusual in having grandparents who were educated in college or university. Whereas most of the Baltic states suffered rule by a bureaucracy that was primarily Russian, in Lithuania there was a considerable influx of nationals into government. Immigration of Russians, which in Latvia was to approach the number of native Latvians by the mid-1980s, was less in Lithuania. Familiarity with the

Russian tongue as a second language was on the increase, as a result of educational and media exposure; but the number of Lithuanian inhabitants who gave Russian as their first language was steadily decreasing.

The Catholic Church in Lithuania had become increasingly allied with the Vatican as its international forum, and the relatively stable existence of the established Church had given it the role of cultural arbiter as much as religious establishment. As we have seen, a fundamental element of the Soviet armoury has long been the concept of 'divide and rule'. And in 1982 appeared several articles which set out to argue against the identification of Church with cultural tradition in Lithuania. In the issues of the pedagogical newspaper *Tarybinis mokytojas* published on 28 and 30 July that year appeared two articles by Antanas Balsys, entitled 'Lietuvių tauta ir katalikybė' [The Lithuanian Nation and Catholicism] in which he sets out to divorce the Church from any role as a protector of cultural tradition. Balsys, Head of Information at the Centre for Social Sciences of the Academy of Sciences of the Lithuanian Socialist Soviet Republic, had been involved in research into the religiousness of Lithuanians. His reports showed that the Church had shown little positive support for Lithuanian national concerns. And he went on to argue that members of the lay Catholic community had never been served well by those who sought to identify the Catholic establishment with nationalist causes. Balsys seemed to echo an earlier view when he claimed that the search for true religious insight is unrelated to the activities of religious extremists who are merely seeking to find a religious cover for anti-Soviet campaigns. Here was a clear attempt to drive a wedge between Lithuania and the Vatican.

Balsys described the roots of Catholicism in the country as a form of tyranny wrought by the Teutonic knights who ravaged Lithuania for two centuries. After the unity with Poland, he argued, the ecclesiastical establishment merely utilised their authority as agents for the Polish rulers, and not for the cultural benefit of Lithuania. Meanwhile, the traditional prehistoric forms of worship practised in the country for millennia were systematically suppressed by the new religious campaigns. Opponents of that viewpoint would say that Roman Catholicism was the 'ultimate enlightenment' and merely replaced ignorance; and even die-hard atheists would recognise parallels between religious fervour and the introduction of any new religion or movement (whether automation in factories or vaccination of children). The fact that there is resistance to a new tenet of belief does not automatically lead us to conclude that it is, in the long term, undesirable.

But he went further, and argued at length that the clergy had been largely indifferent to the partisan movements. In this way he sought to discredit the Church. But it had long been taught by the Soviet establishment that the clergy were intimately involved with the underground. For that reason, so the argument went, they were not to be trusted: they had allied themselves with counter-revolutionary activities, and for that reason were enemies of the people. It was this pair of mutually opposed arguments which served to discredit the thesis.

Similar conclusions were reached in an article by Jonas Aničas, a leading member of the Lithuanian atheist movement, in an article for *Literatūra ir menas* for 1 May 1982. This piece, entitled 'Klerikalinis antikomunizmas ir "Lietuvio Kataliko" koncepcija' [Clerical anti-communism and the "Lithuanian Catholic" concept], claimed that those who sought to establish relationships between the Lithuanian national identity and the Roman Catholic Church were trying to encourage civil unrest. He argues that there is nothing in the beliefs of ordinary Catholics that turns them against Socialism, and therefore it must be religious fanatics

who foment dissatisfaction by 'pouring the poison of bourgeois nationalism' into the minds of believers.

In both articles appeared the seeds of 'divide and rule', for Balsys and Aničas both praise the working-class believers, extolling them as builders of a true Socialist state. The implication is clear: the Catholic establishment and the Vatican itself are to be considered as unconnected with true Lithuanian aspirations. This view is perhaps more subtle than the traditional models utilised by Soviet propaganda: firstly by arguing that any religion is primitive and unworthy of a modern citizen, and secondly by appeals to a claim that religions are the bastion of the ruling classes and ordinarily turn against the peasant class. This argument points to the Lutheran disavowal of peasant unrest; the Catholic Church's support of serfdom and feudalism; the Russian Orthodox Church and its subservience to the Czarist regime. But in Lithuania they were facing a new development – widespread devotion to Catholicism almost as a cultural refuge, and the involvement of the Vatican (along with other forces for international action) outside the country. The theme of the May 1982 articles arose again in 1983 and 1984; a leading scientist Juozas Jurginis suggested that the considerable attainments of leading Lithuanian Catholics was not because of their religion, but almost in spite of it. They were the result of cultural influences deeper by far than religion, he claimed. Thus a famous Catholic priest, who had done much to help found the Lithuanian language as now we know it, was said to have written 'not as a Catholic, nor even as a Protestant', but merely as a humanist whose aims were secular and nationalistic, rather than religious. Many of the great Lithuanian authors of the nineteenth century had been priests (two of the greatest being bishops); but in one single sentence Jurginis sought to explain away that otherwise uncomfortable fact. This campaign was a clear attempt to drive a wedge between the Vatican and the people of Lithuania.

HEIGHTENED REPRESSION AND THE ERA OF GLASNOST

In 1986 the life's work of Bishop Julijonas Steponavičius was marked by lengthy citations in the Catholic press; he celebrated, at the same time, his seventieth birthday, the fiftieth anniversary of his entering the priesthood, and twenty-five years of internal exile. To the indignation of the Lithuanian Commissioner for the Council for Religious Affairs, Petras Anilionis, a large number of congratulatory letters of support were sent by priests and bishops from across Lithuania. All were well publicised, as was the missive from the Vatican. In his letter of 20 May 1986, Pope John Paul II extolled the bishop's 'zeal, courage and fortitude'. This politically contentious gesture was typical of the man. Whereas his predecessor Pope Paul VI had adhered to the traditional approach of the Vatican – rapprochement with the governments, and patient overtures to annexing powers – the new pope launched a campaign for new recruits to the priesthood that was specifically targeted at the young people disillusioned with Soviet ideologies. Some indication of his attitude was given in his sermon in the cathedral of Gniezno, in neighbouring Poland, on 3 June 1979, he described himself not merely as a Pole, but also as 'the first Slav to be Pope in the history of the Church'.

Pope John Paul II seemed to seek some form of contact between Catholic and Orthodox establishments, as though aiming for a religious reunification of Europe in anticipation of what political theorists had debated for years. By 1983 he had named three new cardinals in the Warsaw Pact countries without securing the permission of the Soviet Union. And a report in *Le Monde* claimed that in 1984 the Pope had permitted the Vatican to publish a document referring to Lithuania as: 'un état opprimé par l'étranger,' [a state oppressed by the foreigner]. On the other hand, the Vatican has clearly been aware of the need to avoid undue provocation. In appointing the first Soviet cardinal, he turned not to Lithuania but to neighbouring Latvia for the

candidate. In spite of Lithuania's large Catholic population he had doubtless been guided by the history of spasmodic anti-Soviet protest in the country's recent past. The rise of the Solidarity movement in Poland, more recently dignified by constitutional electoral success, was received calmly in Lithuania. The Soviet authorities, however, rounded up several known Catholic dissidents and held them for trial, as a precautionary measure.

The directness of the Pope's approach led to renewed hostility towards the Vatican by the Soviet press. Some of the criticism has reportedly been 'very sharp'. There was also a reduction in Soviet-Vatican contact at diplomatic level. During Pope Paul VI's fourteen-year papacy, the Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko visited the Vatican six times and the Soviet Head of State Nikolai Podgorny visited on one occasion. In the seven years of John Paul II, Gromyko met with the Pope only twice (in 1979 and 1985). It also seemed that a campaign to discredit the Pope in his homeland was regimented from Moscow.

The Lithuanian Commissioner for the Council of Religious Affairs Anilionis was described as becoming 'increasingly arrogant' by August 1986. In a report for the *Chronicle* – its 71st issue – he was denigrated under the headline 'The Times of Muravev and Stalin are Returning'. The report referred to the minority of priests in Lithuania who advised making concessions to the communist authorities, and argued that a menu of 'fear and concession' had merely made matters worse. In his meeting with Lithuanian bishops and administrators of 27 June 1986, Anilionis had seemed to be partly reproachful, partly threatening, when he addressed them on the 'extremist' priests and their 'improper' sermons; the dangers of circulating 'illegal documents'; all of which had created a 'bad situation' at the Theological Seminary in Kaunas. Several weeks later an unprecedented meeting was organised between the Presidium of the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet and representatives of the Roman Catholic Church in Lithuania. Some indication of the desire to improve relations with the Vatican was clear from the announcement of the return by the State of the confiscated church in Klaipėda.

Not that there had been a complete change of heart. On 30 July 1987 at the last plenum of the Lithuanian Communist Party Central Committee First Secretary Petras Griškevičius had noted 'serious deficiencies' in atheistic education in Lithuania. He took personal responsibility for the maintenance of a high standard of atheistic education, underlining the Party's continued commitment to this tenet of Marxist-Leninist dogma.

The delegation from the Government at the talks was, however, impressive. They included the Chairman of the Presidium of the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet, Ringaudas Songaila; the Lithuanian Communist Party Secretary for Ideology, Lionginas Šepetys; Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Aleksandras Česnavičius; and Religious Commissioner Anilionis. The delegation from the Church included Archbishop Liudvikas Povilonis; Bishop Antanas Vaičius; and the Rector of the Seminary at Kaunas, Viktoras Butkus, among others. The two-hour meeting was attended in all by 58 people and was described as cordial. The communist authorities admitted errors on the part of lower-level bureaucrats, whilst the Church representatives – though polite – reportedly asked a number of pointed questions.

Secretary Šepetys began by asserting that most of the clergy were loyal to the Party, and that a minority engage in any form of anti-Soviet activity. That much was familiar. But he went on to admit that some local officials had been slow to deal with legitimate requests and that some had violated believers' constitutional rights. He also pointed out that there had been an agreement to lower the electricity metering charge for church buildings from 25 to four kopeks per kilowatt-hour and a cut in taxation for the clergy. He criticised religious publishing houses

for failing to meet schedules imposed by the Church – only four out of ten projected volumes of the Missal had appeared on time, he said; and the annual Church Calendar was ‘always late’. Such support for church activities, even when couched in critical terms, is rare enough.

Bishop Vaičius replied with a request for the return of the confiscated Queen of Peace Church, which was agreed and has since taken place. He asked for assistance in speeding the reconstruction of other church buildings, and this too was politely received. The authorities were clearly opposed to giving the Roman Catholic establishment any greater say in public affairs. Thus, a request to start a Temperance Society by the Catholics was rejected. But it was rejected politely, and this was an unfamiliar experience for the clergy. This unwillingness to allow the Vatican to play a greater role in internal Lithuanian affairs can be set alongside the repeated emphasis on the need for strengthened atheistic education. Clearly there was little prospect for a general reform of state attitudes. But the sympathetic consideration of requests can only augur well for the future. And the positive steps taken, symbolised by the return of the Queen of Peace Church, gave a new sense of success to the movement towards a raised profile for the Roman Catholic Church in Lithuania.

During 1987, on the other hand, police searches continued and several individuals involved in the circulation of underground religious newssheets were apprehended. But the celebration of the 600th anniversary of the Church in Lithuania during that year was marked by many gestures of international figures. Several Cardinals joined in sending messages of support, as did a group of sixty-six members of the United States Congress who wrote to Secretary-General Mikhail Gorbachev concerning the release of priests still held as prisoners of conscience.

The Pope was not able to be invited to that celebration. But the Vatican was not to be out-done. After ‘lengthy deliberations’ the beatification was announced of the Lithuanian Archbishop Jurgis Matulaitis. The link between the Vatican and the Lithuanian Church was now looking firmer, and more internationally aware, than ever before.

A DECADE ENDS

It had been in 1969 that Andrei Amalrik had rhetorically posed the question ‘Will the Soviet Union Survive after 1984?’ and used it as the title for his book. It has been said that he concluded that the Soviet Union would end by that date, but the question-mark is noteworthy. In his view it would survive only if saved by the Western powers; if supported by the Vatican; or by sudden [internal] transformation.

His view was sound, and the argument thus expressed elegant. What has happened is in many ways a synthesis of all three. Russia has received ‘support’ from the West in terms of restricted technology sales, so that trade-names familiar in the West are now appearing in the Soviet Union. Exports of foodstuffs from West to East are important, too. There has also been ‘sudden transformation’. The internal restructuring, *perestroika*, has been accompanied by greater openness or *glasnost*, an example close to the concept of linkage politics, in which internal machinations are said to correspond to the external activities of States. And there has been considerable effect from the Vatican. We have not witnessed direct support for the communist edifice in Lithuania, true; but the continued high-level recognition of the Lithuanian Church and the interaction with the Vatican at the highest level has undoubtedly affected the current status of the Party.

The continued activity of the *Chronicle* brought a sudden rebuff from the State early in 1988, when a stinging attack was launched by Arnoldas Čaikovskis on the unofficial magazine’s

activities. He wrote at length of the favourable taxes now available to clerics, the cutting of heating bills, and the other benefits discussed earlier in this report. It must be said that the *Chronicle* began publishing in 1972 as a direct response to continued persecution of Catholic priests and to correct misinformation. However, Čaikovskis was undoubtedly correct in his insistence that foreign money ('overseas radio stations', in his words) was behind the venture.

Less discriminate was the government's reaction to the plans to commemorate 16 February as Independence Day (in memory of the signing of the Act of Independence for Lithuania in 1918). Thousands of police were mobilised to prevent public demonstrations, and in February 1988 the Soviet President Andrei Gromyko – on a visit to Lithuania lasting several days – bluntly insisted that there would be no nationalistic display on that day. The official news agency ELTA confirmed that:

'If [extremists] ignore the public will and try to violate public order, restraining measures will be applied to them in accordance with Soviet laws.'

American President Ronald Reagan responded immediately by stating that the United States would never acknowledge the incorporation into the Soviet Union of any of the Baltic States, and 32 senators wrote personally to Mr Gorbachev asking him not to block celebrations of Independence Day.

In the event, celebrations did go ahead, but without major confrontation. On the morning of the Day (16 February) Messrs Nijolė Sadūnaitė, Vytautas Bogušis, Petras Cidzikas and Antanas Terleckas, all admitted dissidents, were held 'for questioning' until 10.00 p.m., thereby ensuring their removal from the scene of the action. But many thousands of people reportedly gathered for celebratory Mass at major churches scattered across Lithuania. Though some young demonstrators were said to have been arrested and beaten by paramilitary forces, it was also said that some 3,000 persons had marched through Kaunas from the Church of the Assumption to the Cathedral and the Castle. Little was made of the events, though on 16 February the following curious report was released in Moscow by TASS, the official news agency:

'Following religious services in the churches of Vilnius and Kaunas, individual extremist and nationalist-minded elements tried to incite believers to anti-Soviet actions, but failed in the attempt. The militia detained several people for antisocial and hooligan activity.'

But in the national Lithuanian press, no mention was made of the day. One small note in a magazine dated 26 February said that, in response to enquiries about 'historical topics', 'Yes, foreign radio stations and local extremists did not succeed in creating any unrest. Not on 16 February, nor before that date, nor in the days following, did a single anti-Soviet meeting or mass procession occur ...'

The aim in celebrating Independence Day was not to create 'anti-Soviet' demonstrations, of course. It is noteworthy that it was the Catholic Church which provided a means for the peaceful marking of this crucial day in Lithuanian history, a date that has attracted a strange nostalgia for the annexed nation. Here too, it was the influence of the Vatican that led to the peaceful promulgation of an important event. In consequence there was an unprecedented amount of attention paid to Lithuania in the world's press.

It was on 28 June 1988 that Pope John Paul II made his historic proclamation on the appointment of Bishop Vincentas Sladkevičius as a cardinal. The only previous Lithuanian cardinal, Jurgis Radvila, had been proclaimed in 1584 and died in 1600. Bishop Sladkevičius

was noteworthy for another reason, too; as we have noted earlier he had been the victim of a quarter-century of internal exile. Not only was he shown to be steadfast and loyal to his principles; the Vatican, too, was showing itself to be inflexibly supportive of a great churchman – even one who was implacably unmoved by the exigencies of the State. The Bishop's name had first appeared on a list of nominees submitted, correctly, for approval by the then Archbishop of Kaišiadorys, Teofilus Matulionis, in 1957. Approval from the Lithuanian authorities, represented by Religious Commissioner Justinas Rugienis, was not forthcoming though the Vatican intervened directly to give its own approval. That led to the secret consecration of the Bishop. The Soviet authorities had reacted with the internal exile: he was sent to the remote Lithuanian township of Nemunėlio Radviliškis in the Diocese of Panevėžys. It was here he was obliged to stay for the ensuing 25 years.

As the world knows, a new movement towards the rudiments of democracy has begun to become manifest in the Warsaw Pact states, following the Gorbachev policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. Appeals by dissidents and mainstream intellectuals are now gathering respectability, and there are moves to re-establish national rights throughout the Baltic states. On 10 September 1988, for example, TASS announced that:

'It [is] advisable to give the Estonian language the status of a state language throughout Estonian territory with the creation of guarantees for equal use of both Estonian and Russian languages in all state and public organisations.'

The result was a gathering of perhaps a quarter of a million Estonians in the capital city of Tallinn on 11 September 1988. It was the largest such gathering in living memory.

This provided the trigger for Lithuania to press for a similar right for her own native tongue. The Supreme Soviet has received – and is acting upon – a report commissioned by the Lithuanian Deputies. On 3 June 1988, a formal Lithuanian 'restructuring' movement, Sąjūdis, was brought into being. Although it has become a major political force for change, it was incorporated without the Party's approval. Many accusations have been made of its 'nationalistic' and 'anti-social' elements, but Sąjūdis has done much to:

a) Resurrect national pride in Lithuania, b) Reawaken public interest in and awareness of politics, c) Bring open discussion of past problems to bear on the formulation of new political policies.

As has happened elsewhere within the bloc, the movement has produced the contrary reactions of over-enthusiasm from its proponents, countered by anxiety about possible excesses from the traditionalist elements in Lithuanian internal affairs.

Sąjūdis proclaimed at the outset that it was not to be construed as an 'opposition' party. Its intention was to act through the Party in bringing about modernisation for the benefit of all Lithuanians. But it did call for the recognition of the native tongue as the national language, the birth of republican citizenship, and a move for greater economic and political autonomy, combined with cultural freedom. One well-known extremist group had already been operating in the move towards national independence, but this body – the Lithuanian Freedom League – wanted complete independence, and wanted it rapidly. Sąjūdis emphasised it wished to be distanced from any group that might be thought of as politically fundamentalist, preferring to work through the established State machinery.

Where was the influence of the Vatican in all this? We may discern the role of the Church in the events that followed the removal of First Secretary Songaila of the Communist Party and his replacement by the popular choice, Algirdas Brazauskas. Of his inaugural political moves, the most spectacular was an important gesture towards the Vatican: he returned the historic cathedral of Vilnius to the Catholic Church. The congress was shown, live, on Lithuanian television. A mass public meeting in Gediminas Square was preceded by a torchlight procession through the streets. Members of the new movement were allowed to appear on radio and TV. There were moves – at governmental level – to draft new regulations that would make the national tricolour not just the national flag, but also that of the State. There was even talk of declaring the National Anthem to be that of the independent Lithuania.

The honeymoon period did not last for long, however. Sąjūdis launched a petition calling on a limit to the right of the USSR government to affect laws relating to Lithuania. The petition was eventually signed by 1,800,000 citizens. Meanwhile, changes in the laws in Soviet Russia were allowed to lose importance whilst pressure was brought to bear on the Lithuanian party. They were asked to change the constitution, so that any laws passed in the Soviet Union would need ratification by the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet before they became the law of the land. On 18 November 1988, Brazauskas presided over a meeting of the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet, where the requests were firmly put down. The main response was predictable. The access to the media of Sąjūdis was severely curtailed forthwith.

As 1988 drew to a close, the mood of the country was alternating between excitement and disillusionment. The governing body of Sąjūdis proclaimed December to be ‘a month of peace’ and began discussions centering on the need for internal harmony and realistic, forward-looking aims. Too timid a stance, it was realised, would lead to disaffection with the public; too strong a stance would merely cause greater difficulties with the State authorities. In this method of reasoning, pragmatic as it clearly is, we may discern resonances of the policy-making in the Vatican at times of political upheaval.

The word Sąjūdis means ‘movement’ and in no sector of Soviet power is this concept less attractive than in the armed forces. Yet Sąjūdis has launched a pointed attack on conscription. In its demands we can discern religious undertones, almost an echo of the Vatican in its references to ‘personal conviction’:

Sąjūdis is convinced that the current method of performing military conscription in the armed forces of the USSR is out-dated and immoral. For this reason we aim to revise the traditions of Lithuanian military units and institutions for the preparation of a National Officers’ Corps.

The length of compulsory National Service must be reduced.

Citizens of the Lithuanian SSR must not be allowed to take part in military actions condemned by the United Nations.

Sąjūdis considers it possible to introduce compulsory work assignments for young people who cannot serve in the armed forces because of their personal convictions.

Sąjūdis approves of the demilitarisation of public life; the curtailment (if not abandonment) of military training programmes in high schools and colleges of higher education; and the release of women from military training.

Sąjūdis considers the drafting of students from institutes of higher education to be harmful to society.

The reaction of the military was surprisingly uncontroversial. On 3 November 1988, when the spirit of good-will between the Party and the Movement was at its height, the Chief of the political directorate of the Lithuanian Military Commissariat, Konstantin Golubev, merely said that a specifically Lithuanian army should not be formed, since service with the Soviet armed forces strengthened a valuable spirit of internationalism. No matter how debatable that argument, he added that Lithuania could never afford to equip and run a modern army of her own. Golubev added, however, that he had no objection to the forming of a national Lithuanian division that could prepare young men for a military career, and which would be available to take part in 'festivities'.

Strong support for Sąjūdis came from the Afghanistan Veterans' Clubs in Kaunas, Panevėžys, Alytus, Kapsukas, Rokiškis and Kretinga. They published a letter saying that service with the Russian forces in Afghanistan had been 'hell'. It was not 'the fulfilment of our duty, but rather one more sacrifice of the Lithuanian nation to the Stalinist monster.' They said that young Lithuanians be permitted to serve in national territorial units if they wished.

By the middle of November, Lithuanian newspapers were responding with articles on the excitement and challenge of military life. Among these were articles signed by Lithuanian soldiers proudly serving in the Soviet armed forces and encouraging others to do the same. But it became clear that there was a darker side to life in the army. A major TV drama-documentary had been made on the case of Artūras Sakalauskas who was drafted in 1986 and assigned to join troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. He was treated with extreme cruelty. Whilst on a train to Leningrad on 23 February 1987, he had been beaten and tortured before an attempt was made to rape him. But he obtained his notoriety by seizing two pistols from his tormentors and shooting eight of them to death. The matter stimulated publication of an article which mentioned eighteen young Lithuanians who had committed suicide during military service. But were we to believe that they had all raised their hands against themselves, wrote the commentator. As a result, the military now regards the new Movement with considerable suspicion.

But elsewhere there is evidence that the Lithuanian government remains open to persuasion by the Vatican, which retains its capacity to moderate the internal affairs of the country. Consider the case of Bishop Julijonas Steponavičius, born in 1911, consecrated in 1955, and subjected to internal exile to the village of Žagarė on 4 January 1961. There was no trial; he was merely accused of offending some minor statutes in the course of his pastoral activities. The government's willingness to accede to Vatican desires was revealed on 29 December 1988. Not only was the Bishop allowed to leave his place of exile and return home, but he was to be permitted to live in the former residence of the Archbishop of Vilnius, which was to be returned to the Church for that purpose. Significantly for Lithuanian/Vatican relations, this removed the last remaining major impediment to better contact between Church and State in Lithuania. Furthermore, at about the same time the communist authorities gave permission for the publication of a new twice-weekly journal *Katalikų Pasaulis* [Catholic World], the first edition appearing on 5 February 1989. Perhaps significantly, the first appeal over the Bishop had appeared back in 1972, in the very first edition of the *Chronicle* whose history we have now been able to follow. Coincidentally, it was also at the end of 1978 – on 13 November of that year – that the tenth anniversary was marked of the Catholic Committee for the Defence of the Rights of Believers. We have seen that, in previous years, the authorities had reacted to the Committee by imprisoning some of its activists. But the current move to improve relations with the Vatican have led the Lithuanian government to implement some of the Committee's demands.

Sąjūdis, meanwhile, will still have battles to fight. The Seventeenth Plenum of the Lithuanian Communist Party held on 21 February 1989 proclaimed the need for watchfulness over 'political extremism' within the Movement, and called for a close watch on access to radio and television. First Secretary Brazauskas regretted the use of the term 'Independent Lithuania' far more often than 'Socialism'. And he uttered a warning about the displeasure of a central Soviet government: 'Does Lithuania want to suffer the fate of Nagorno-Karabakh?'.

Other speakers meanwhile called for a cut-back on the publications Sąjūdis sponsored, and on its television programme 'Wave of Rebirth', which featured occasional live phone-in sessions. These, it was argued, ought to be pre-recorded for safety. An important change in personnel was greeted with disfavour, too. Secretary Šepetys (born in 1927) was replaced by Valerijonas Baltrūnas (born 1940) who had just been appointed Head of the Department for Organisational Party Work at the previous meeting of the Lithuanian Communist Party plenum on 21 January. The move was regarded by Sąjūdis as a possible move towards a hard-line orthodoxy.

The current President of Sąjūdis is Vytautas Landsbergis, who emphasises – perhaps wisely – that Sąjūdis is not a political party at all, but a broad-front movement of social reform. In putting forward candidates for the new Lithuanian system of elections, he said that – though they expected success for many of their candidates – the aim was not domination, merely influence and advice. Following last year's religious services marking Lithuanian Independence Day, the celebrations this year (held on 16 February, a Thursday) were for the first time granted government approval. The result was a spectacular peaceful demonstration which brought out almost the whole population in a show of national unity without precedent.

Without the existence of the Vatican, the 1988 celebration would not have existed. Because of that example, the 1989 demonstration marked the way ahead. By acting as a second-generation political platform, the Vatican has frequently marked Lithuanian history. Its diplomatic status has given rise to avenues for international influence. As a guardian of cultural traditions it has been seen as a seat of stability in a changing world. And through the recognition of the Vatican of brave and tireless Lithuanian campaigners for freedom and independence of thought great strides have been made towards a more open future. Lastly, by providing a refuge for the peaceful expression of a nation's ideals through religious observance, it has offered an example for the officially-approved celebration of the essential character of the Lithuanian people.

In neighbouring Estonia, Independence Day was marked by the ceremonial hauling down of the Soviet flag in the central square of Tallinn, the capital, and its replacement by the traditional tricolour in blue, black and white. The campaign for this mark of national status had at last succeeded. The question in Lithuania is: 'When can we do the same?' It is a possibility made all the more possible through the drive and perspicacity of the people, potentiated by the actions and words of a Vatican state a thousand miles away to the south. Through this international synergy the day is surely near.

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