ATTEMPTS TO SOVIETIZE THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN LITHUANIA, 1944 - 49

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After the occupation of Lithuania by the Soviet Union on 15 June 1940, confrontation between the Soviet authorities and the Catholic Church was inevitable. It meant a clash of opposing ideologies and political systems. For several decades both doctrines had regarded one another as a dangerous evil and enemy number one. The Lithuanian public was fully aware that prior to the Second World War the structure of the Catholic Church had been destroyed almost completely in the Soviet Union: bishops were either forced to leave for Poland or undergo repression, and the majority of priests (quite a number of them, who worked in Russian dioceses at that time, were of Lithuanian descent) were imprisoned in concentration camps or exiled.

The totalitarian Soviet system could not tolerate the influential independent Lithuanian Catholic Church: before the Second World War the Catholics made up 80 per cent of the inhabitants of the country, and their political and social organizations were the most active and the most numerous.¹ In order to force Soviet ideology on the population of Lithuania as quickly as possible, attempts were made to destroy any obstacles that could prevent the introduction of the beliefs of new social values. The Communist Party and state security institutions painstakingly sought ways of weakening the influence of the Church and creating an effective control over it.

The state of the Lithuanian Catholic Church during the Soviet occupation of the country has not yet been investigated in great detail. Several more extensive works were published abroad in the 1970s after the appearance of the *Lietuvos Katalikų Bažnyčios Kronika* (The Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church), which served as a research source. However, writing

¹ *Lietuvių enciklopedija*, t. XV. Boston, Mass., 1968, 58.

about the period between the 1940s and 1960s those authors based themselves mainly on reminiscences and individual documents, thus endeavouring to protect the Church from the attacks of the Lithuanian atheistic literature and reveal the scope of its persecution.² Today the field of research has been broadened by access to the documents, kept in the Lietuvos Ypatingasis Archyvas (Lithuanian Extraordinary Archive, hereafter referred to as LYA) and Lietuvos Centrinis Valstybinis Archyvas (the Lithuanian Central State Archive, henceforth LCVA).³

'The Church actually exists *in the world*, therefore in its appearance it is like the world',⁴ wrote the Lithuanian philosopher Antanas Maceina, taking into account the importance of culture in the manifestation of religion in various epochs. In the totalitarian system the Church belonged to the 'Sovietized world', and consequently attempts were made to reform it according to that system.

The aim of the present paper is to review the main stages of the 1944-49 campaign, which the Soviet authorities and their security institutions carried out against the Lithuanian Catholic Church, and to examine their strategy, methods and results (issues relating to the closures of churches and monasteries and lawsuits against the bishops are excluded, since they have been dealt with in previous studies). This analysis is expected to reveal the formation of a controlled and loyal ecclesiastical structure and the chances of the Church to preserve its sovereignty.

² J. Savasis [Vaišnora, J., M.I.C.]. *Kova prieš Dievą Lietuvoje*. Putnam, Con., 1963; M. Raišupis. *Dabarties kankiniai. Lietuvos vyskupų, kunigų ir tikinčiųjų kryžiaus kelias pirmojoje ir antrojoje sovietų okupacijoje*. Putnam, Con., 1972; A. Baltinis. *Vyskupo Vincento Borisevičiaus gyvenimas ir darbai*. Roma, 1975; *Arkivyskupas Mečislovas Reinys*. Chicago, Ill., 1977; V. S. Vardys. *The Catholic Church, dissent and nationality in Soviet Lithuania*. New York, 1978; P. Gaida. *Nemarus mirtingasis. Arkivyskupas Teofilius Matulionis*. Roma, 1981, et al.

³ A. Streikus. Sovietų valdžios antibažnytinė politika (1953-1967). *Genocidas ir rezistencija. nr. 1, 1997, 123-159*; A. Streikus. Lietuvos Katalikų Bažnyčia ir ginkluotasis pasipriešinimas Lietuvoje. *Ibid.*, nr. 2, 1997, 32-37; S. Tamkevičius. Tarpdiecezinė Kauno kunigų seminarija. *Lietuvių katalikų mokslo akademijos suvažiavimo darbai*, t. 15, Vilnius, 1995, 84-89; V. Spengla. *Atlikę pareigą: vyskupai KGB (NKGB, MGB) kalėjimuose*. Vilnius, 1997; K. Misius. Bažnyčių uždarymai Lietuvoje pokario metais. *XXI amžius*, nr. 36, 1997, 10-11, et al.

⁴ A. Maceina. *Bažnyčia ir pasaulis*. Chicago, Ill., 1970, 46.

Attention will mainly be focused on the years 1948-49 - the period when the Lithuanian Catholic Church experienced the most severe and painful blows. At that time, the repression of the most disobedient ordinary bishops and priests, the registration of churches, clergymen and parishes, the nationalization of church property, the dissolution of monasteries, the reorganization of the theological seminary, etc., introduced cardinal changes in the structure of the Church, impaired the functions of the ordinary bishops and suppressed their autonomy.

The official organizer and even the initiator of the campaigns directed against the Catholic Church, was the Council for Religious Cults at the LSSR Council of Ministers (*Religinių kultų reikalų taryba prie Lietuvos SSR Ministrų Tarybos* (henceforth the CRC of the LSSR)).⁵ It pursued the policy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the general principles of which were quite evident in all East-Central European countries, occupied by the Red Army. In many respects, the methods of this policy were first tested in all their brutality in Lithuania. Everywhere attempts were made to break up and obliterate institutional confessional structures; however in contrast to other Catholic countries, where confessional activity and the press were specially adapted and controlled by the official pro-Communist institutions and forced upon believers, in Lithuania religion was virtually ousted from public life.

Attempts to Create a National Church

The Soviet authorities did not draw up a detailed plan for weakening the Catholic Church in Lithuania at once. One of the first directives of Igor Polianskii - a secret letter of 8 May 1945 - surprised even the leaders of Soviet Lithuania and Alfonsas Gailevičius, the Commissioner of the Council for Religious Cults, since it contained a proposal to establish and patronize Orthodox

⁵ During the entire Soviet period relations between state and Church were regulated by this special institution, directly subordinated to the analogous Council for Religious Cults at the USSR Council of Ministers (henceforth the CRC of the USSR), which at that time was headed by Commissioner Igor Polianskii. In the LSSR the Commissioner of the CRC was Alfonsas Gailevičius between 1944 and 1948, and later (1948-1957) Bronius Pušinis served in that post. The institution was quite small - in 1946 it consisted of the commissioner, an inspector and a secretary. The CRC of the LSSR closely cooperated with the KGB, its chiefs and employees were also engaged in the KGB structures.

fraternities.⁶ Gailevičius asked the CRC of the USSR to revise that directive because in Lithuania the Orthodox were only Russian, and the two ethnic groups were divided by the language barrier. Therefore, in Gailevičius' words, Orthodox statements hostile to Catholicism could be interpreted by priests and 'other nationalistic elements' as proof that the Soviet authorities were forcing Catholics to become Orthodox and Russianize them. Therefore, Gailevičius proposed to analyse without delay the attitudes of those members of the curias, who were influential among the clergy in order, after a proper preparation, to be able 'to raise the issue of organizing an autocephalous Catholic Church in the Lithuanian SSR'.⁷ That meant an idea of a Church structure independent of the Vatican.

The Moscow institutions endorsed these amendments made by the Lithuanian government and in their subsequent instructions developed the idea of 'an autocephalous church'. Thus, in 1947 the Vice-Commissioner of the CRC of the USSR Y. Sadovskii wrote to Gailevičius: 'Judging from your information, the Catholic Church in Lithuania is a single entity (*predstavliaet soboi edinoe tseloe*). It is very important to investigate any possible cracks in this seemingly solid monolith, any disagreements between the dioceses and inside them, any dissension between the higher and lower clergy and the believers. If such dissension and weak links are detected, it is necessary to discover less hostile elements among the clergy, to draw them closer and thus stimulate the opposition to the Vatican, bearing in mind the perspective of creating an autocephalous Lithuanian Catholic Church'.⁸

What measures were planned for the establishment of such a church in Lithuania? What was the reaction of the clergy and the hierarchs of the Church?

The most drastic measures to organize a national church were taken by the Soviet state security institutions and the CRC between 1946 and 1950. A special comprehensive programme was adopted with a view to creating the necessary ideological

⁶ Orthodox fraternities functioned in Lithuania from the late sixteenth century. They set up schools, published books, and were very active in the struggle against the Uniates.

⁷ A top secret letter of Gailevičius to Polianskii of June 1945 (no exact date). LCVA, f. R 181, ap., 3, b. 4, l. 23-24.

⁸ A secret letter of Vice-Commissioner of the CRC of the USSR Sadovskii to Gailevičius of 30 Jan. 1947. Ibid., b. 10, l. 5.

prerequisites, preparing both clergy and society and finding suitable people to carry out that programme. The extant documents vividly disclose some episodes in the implementation of that programme.

The formation of the centre of 'The Movement for the Catholic Church without the Vatican' began in 1946 in Kaunas, where the local security department started work with the agent 'Šimkus'.⁹ He was commissioned to write an 'academic' brochure,¹⁰ accusing the Vatican of its activities running counter to national Lithuanian interests, beginning with the crusades against pagan Lithuania, breaking off diplomatic relations after the inclusion of Vilnius into the Polish Ecclesiastical Province, etc.

'The movement' had to be presented to the public and even to the clergy as an initiative of the priests and former personalities of Christian Democrats. The brochure had to look like an underground publication, and there were intentions to mimeograph and spread it among the clergy. The agent 'Šimkus' also had to find two or three influential priests, who would support 'the movement'. The search for potential critics of the Vatican was first conducted among the politicians of the 1920s and 1930s, who had expressed their dissatisfaction with the concordat with Poland in the press of that time. Acting under instructions, 'Šimkus' met several priests and the former Prime Minister and leader of the Christian Democrats Leonas Bistras. However, none of them supported the idea of a national church and considered that it would not find adherents either among the clergy or the believers.¹¹

Nevertheless, the brochure project was adopted by the security organs. Late in 1946 it was finished and the manuscript was sent to the head of the MGB of the LSSR.¹²

The fate of the brochure is not known - it is probable that the producers were not found or that its content did not meet the

⁹ He was an academic, a well-known political figure among the pre-war Christian Democrats.

¹⁰ It is noteworthy that even the KGB worker put the word *academic* inside the quotation marks in his account.

¹¹ Top secret accounts of the head of the MGB department of Kaunas of September and October 1946 to the vice minister of State Security of the LSSR L. Martavičius. LYA, f. K 1, ap. 15, b. 326 VS, l. 29-31, 47.

¹² Top secret account of the head of the MGB department of Kaunas of November 1946 to the head of the 'O' department of the LSSR MGB. Ibid., l. 68.

requirements of the security forces, and it was not published. The task of propagating the national church, however, remained a topical issue. Two years later, in October 1948, KGB documents again contained an information about a brochure, entitled *Lietuvių tauta ir bažnyčia* (The Lithuanian Nation and the Church). Dr Antanas Devintėnas was indicated as its author. That time the manuscript reached Moscow: it was sent to the Commissioner of the CRC of the USSR Polianskii, who first enquired about the opinion of the leaders of the Lithuanian Communist Party. Their response, however, was vague. The first secretary of the Central Committee of the Lithuanian CP, Antanas Sniečkus, had not read it. The chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the LSSR, Justas Paleckis, considered that the brochure had been written in an overly 'religious spirit', and he did not read it to the end. The chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, Mečislovas Gedvilas, was the only to acknowledge that it was 'a substantial work and rich in content', although not without shortcomings. Bronius Pušinis, the then Commissioner of the CRC, did not have any opinion about the brochure.¹³ Approximately a month later he informed Polianskii that the plan to publish the brochure crumbled, because the agent 'Kardas', a Franciscan friar - its publisher - had committed suicide.¹⁴

Thus, the most complicated part of the plan for the creation of a national church was the recruitment of priests on whose behalf the activity could be started. Pušinis, having been assigned to the post of the commissioner in January 1948, turned all his energies immediately into solving that problem and pledged himself in the course of several months to set up even two national churches by June 30 (this may be it is an erratum).¹⁵

Pušinis' plan was very simple: to establish 'a national church bridgehead' in Vilnius and Kaunas (and later in the counties of Alytus, Kalvarija, Kretinga and Lazdijai), i.e., to gather there 'progressive'¹⁶ priests, who would declare their parishes as

¹³ A secret letter of Polianskii to Pušinis and his answer. 18 Nov. 1948. LCVA, f. R 181, ap. 3, b. 14, l. 92, 97.

¹⁴ Pušinis' account of the fourth quarter of 1948. LCVA, f. R 181, ap. 3, b. 17, l. 6.

¹⁵ Pušinis' plan of work for the second quarter of 1948. Ibid., b. 13, l. 8.

¹⁶ In Soviet terminology priests, who were loyal to the regime, were 'progressive'; those who dared to criticize the Soviet system were 'reactionaries', 'extremists', and if they were active in their parishes, were termed 'fanatics'.

members of the national church.¹⁷ The search for 'progressive' priests was conducted in various ways: with the help of agents, patronizing those, who as a result of various conflicts with their spiritual superiors, were dissatisfied with their situation and could hope to begin their career in the new church structure. The denunciation of the Vatican's activities throughout Lithuania also produced certain results.

A result of the work of secret services undoubtedly was the letter of Juozas Pilypaitis, parish rector of Sudargas, published in the *Šakiai* newspaper in 1948, in which he denounced the hierarchs of the Catholic Church of Lithuania, who 'blindly follow the instructions of the Roman Pope and according to his indications exploit Catholic priests and believers in an attempt to stimulate the opposition against the Soviet power'.¹⁸ The letter ended with the author's open address to other priests 'to change their work radically, to relinquish their former anti-Soviet activities and to embark among the believers upon pure religious work with the purpose of supporting the correct organs of the Soviet power' and that other priests 'would do their best to lead their parishioners along the just and free way, which is accurately and clearly elucidated in the Stalinist Constitution.'

With this letter of Pilypaitis the CRC of the LSSR set in motion its national church programme, which was approved by the secretary of the Central Committee of the LKP(b) Kazys Preikšas on October 4, 1948. It had been sanctioned earlier by the KGB. According to that programme other 'progressive' priests would support Pilypaitis. Afterwards, 'a meeting of such priests should be convened, at which they would decide to publish a magazine or their calendar, and then it would be possible to hold a congress'.¹⁹

However, this long letter of Pilypaitis, badly translated from Russian, failed to obtain its desired effect. Therefore, a year later one more campaign was organized with the aim of making the clergy declare their loyalty to the Soviet authorities and to seek out 'progressive' priests. In September - November 1949 every priest was asked to sign a protest letter entitled *'We Emphatically*

¹⁷ Pušinis' accounts of the fourth quarter of 1948 and the third quarter of 1949. LCVA, f. R 181, ap. 3, b. 17, l. 10, b. 22, l. 53.

¹⁸ J. Pilypaitis. Lietuvos reakcinės dvasininkijos vedamoji politika. *Tikruoju keliu*. *Šakiai*, nr. 90, 1948, 1.

¹⁹ A secret letter of Pušinis to Polianskii. 6 Oct. 1948. LCVA, f. R 181, ap. 3, b. 17, l. 23.

Condemn and Protest, directed against the decree of Pope Pius XII of July 13, 1949 on the excommunication of all Catholics, collaborating with Communists and their sympathizers.²⁰

Signatures of loyal priests were to be collected by the chairmen of the executive committees of towns and counties with the help of local party committees and security officials. The first instructions that the chairmen of the committees received from the CRC of the LSSR were rather moderate: to talk to priests individually and to patronize those who signed the protest letter. The action, however, was carried out hurriedly. Pušinis was eager to see the results - he was going to call the congress of the 'progressive' priests in November. He twice urged the chairmen of the executive committees to send him the collected signatures and afterwards instructed them to resort to sanctions: to withdraw the certificates of 'ministers of religion' from three priests of the richest parishes, to strike them off the register of local residents and prohibit their residence in the county. True, the latter indication of Pušinis was soon revoked by a cablegram of the vice chairman of the Council of Ministers of the LSSR Preikšas.²¹

Pressure on priests depended on the zealotry of local officials. Some of them hastily deprived of their rights those priests who refused to sign and expelled them from their parishes; others only tried to explain to them the 'reactionary policy' of the Vatican and talk them into signing. The overwhelming majority of clergymen did not sign the protest letter. Not a single priest in the city and county of Kaunas, in the counties of Kėdainiai, Kupiškis, Kuršėnai, Lazdijai, Mažeikiai and Pagėgiai, in the city of Panevėžys, in the counties of Plungė, Radviliškis, Raseiniai, Rokiškis, Šakiai, Šiauliai, Šilutė, Širvintos, Švenčionys (and possibly of Prienai, Vilkija and Zarasai) signed the letter, motivating their refusal by the absence of instructions from the diocesan administration or their disagreement with the content of the letter, etc. Nevertheless, the CRC of the USSR was informed that 108 priests (of the total number of 933) signed the

²⁰ In Lithuania the faithful and the leaders of the Church (by that time already disorganized) could hardly carry out that decree. In other occupied countries democratic parties still functioned at that time, they had their press and participated in the elections, while in Lithuania political and social life had already been Sovietized.

²¹ Vice chairman of the Executive Committee of Kupiškis county Kastanauskas' letter to Pušinis. 20 Oct. 1949. LCVA, f. R 181, ap. 3, b. 21, l. 68.

protest letter in Lithuania.²² The reliability of this figure is difficult to determine. Pušinis had been criticized more than once for his overzealousness, so he could have hardly dared to greatly exaggerate the results. According to archival data, the number of the signatures collected must have been not less than 33.

The Lithuanian Church authorities pretended to take no notice of the several-month-long campaign of signature collection. The Soviet government would not have tolerated any open disapproval. It seems that better results were reached by diplomatic methods. The administrator of the Kaunas archdiocese, Canon Juozapas Stankevičius, failed to come to terms with Pušinis, but tried to settle some problems directly with the officials of the RKRT of the USSR in Moscow. In late September before going on a two-month holiday in the Caucasus (the trip was officially offered by the CRC of the USSR) he had obtained a promise from the leaders of that institution 'not to interfere with ecclesiastical life in Lithuania and to allay Pušinis' violence.'²³ It is quite probable that Canon Stankevičius' contacts with the CRC of the USSR and the conduct of other administrators of the dioceses may have contributed to the outcome of the campaign. In contrast with priests in other East-Central European countries, the Lithuanian clergymen, who had declared their disloyalty to the Pope, were not excommunicated. In essence, that sort of passivity on the part of Church leaders produced positive results, because aggravating the conflict would have played into the hands of the KGB by drawing the clergy into internal strife and encouraging the conformists.

Meanwhile Commissioner Pušinis was sure of the success of his campaign and planned further actions. At the end of August he applied to the Central Committee of the LKP (b) for permission to broadcast the protest letter over the radio and to publish it together with the information about the priests of the Alytus county (the majority of them had signed the protest).²⁴ On 13 September he sent letters to Sniečkus and Polianskii, asking them to approve the following programme: (1) to set up 'the organizational committee of progressive Lithuanian priests' (he indicated seven priests from various parishes as its members);

²² Pušinis' letter to the CRC of the USSR. 11 May 1951. *Ibid.*, b. 29, l. 37.

²³ J Stankevičius. *Mano gyvenimo kryžkelės* (Diary MS), t. II, l. 13.

²⁴ A secret letter of Pušinis to the secretary of the Central Committee of the LKP(b) A. Sniečkus. 31 Aug. 1949. LCVA, f. R 181, ap. 3, b. 21, l. 16.

(2) to convene a 'congress of progressive priests' in Kaunas in November. The 'congress' would be attended by 100 participants and three papers would be delivered: 'Reactionary clergy as the worst enemy of our fatherland, church and progress', 'The struggle against the adherents of the new warmongers' and 'The Soviet power and our tasks'; it would elect a permanent committee of progressive Catholic priests of the LSSR; (3) in 1950 to issue a calendar and a magazine, in which 'progressive' priests could fight against the 'reactionaries'; (4) to allot resources for the implementation of the programme.²⁵ However, Pušinis could not put these long-cherished plans into practice - they were not endorsed by the Minister of State Security of the LSSR, P. Kapralov, who considered them hasty and even 'politically incorrect'.²⁶

Efforts to organize a national church were put into abeyance and not renewed further for several reasons. No authoritative leaders for the national church were found among the heads of the dioceses and seminary professors. Some of the previously 'progressive' priests were later arrested, e.g., the aforementioned priest Pilypaitis was arrested in 1950 for anti-Soviet agitation and imprisoned for ten years in a corrective labour camp. Besides, the political orientation of the CPSU with regard to religion was now established. Consequently, national churches and organizations of 'progressive' priests, supported by the government, were set up in the people's democracies of East-Central Europe. In the countries occupied by the Soviet Union even that model of church functioning was too liberal and differed greatly from the situation in the rest of the country. The national church experiment, requiring great efforts and large expenses, would mean a step back in the atheisticalization of the population (establishing a religious press, governmental support of church structures, etc.). The talks with Canon Stankevičius possibly persuaded the CRC of the republic to give priority to another campaign as a result of which (it was hoped) the leadership of the Catholic Church in Lithuania could be replaced by loyal persons - in 1949 the dioceses were being united.

²⁵ Pušinis' letter to Secretary Sniečkus and Commissioner Polianskii. 13 Sept. 1949. Ibid., I. 39.

²⁶ A top secret letter of the minister of State Security of the LSSR Kapralov to the minister of State Security of the USSR V. Abakumov. 17 Nov. 1949. LYA, f. K 1, ap. 10, b. 73, l. 231.

Registration of Clergymen and Churches (the Campaign of 1944-48) According to Soviet law, clergymen of all confessions could work in their parishes only when they received a certificate of registration from the CRC; religious communities (parishes) could function (and corresponding buildings could be used for cult purposes) when the local executive committee registered the so-called twenty-parishioner board with its executive and inspection committees. The executive committee of the parish had to conclude a contract with local authorities to have at its disposal the nationalized (i.e., belonging to the state) property of the church, to pay taxes for its use, to carry out the repairs, etc.

The registration radically changed the legal status of the Catholic Church in Lithuania, because government institutions took over the control of its lowest structures - the parishes. That meant interference in a very important sphere of diocesan jurisdiction - the appointment and transfer of priests. These questions became the competence of the CRC, which solved them in coordination with the KGB and local authorities.

By refusing to issue 'a registration certificate of a priest' or afterwards revoking it, the Soviet authorities could dismiss or send to remote parishes those priests who were known as former political or social figures, 'fanatics' and 'extremists'. The registration campaign led to the closure of monasteries, convents and a number of churches.

The status of the Catholic Church, defined by the registration, was in contradiction to Canon Law, according to which the head of the parish is its rector, answerable to the local bishop. Canon law sanctioned the activity of the parish councils, whose members were approved by the bishop. They were elected for a period of three years, and their functions were merely consultative and auxiliary, e.g., in repairing the church or other parish buildings. In the course of the Soviet registration attempts were made to transfer the management of church and parish matters to a group of laymen. In 1947 Moscow officials instructed their subordinates in Lithuania: 'Efforts should be made for them [the most active members of the church] to increase their influence in the management of the parish and to minimize the autocracy of the priest, to direct their activity towards decreasing the influence of the priest among the believers and to seek the internal management of the church, making it 'more democratic'. In future the parish council must consider itself to be the 'boss' of the church and to treat the priest as their employee. Therefore,

you must know the most active members and come nearer to the most loyal elements'.²⁷

The registration of parishes and clergymen was initiated by the CRC of the USSR, which intended to put it into practice soon after the occupation of the country in the summer of 1944. However, at that time the main attention of the occupation forces had to be focused on the suppression of armed resistance throughout the country. The CRC of the USSR several times urged the Lithuanian leadership to start the registration, which the latter delayed. It was postponed temporarily by the letter of 16 December 1944. Soon after that, in a secret instruction of 16 February 1945 the CRC of the USSR demanded the registration of all religious communities and clergymen within six months. However, by a secret letter of 15 December 1945 Moscow again put off until further notice that action, which actually had not been begun.

That directive was again given in 1946 when Polianskii, when came to Vilnius and requested that the registration of all religious communities should begin.²⁸ The implementation of that directive, however, was hampered by the vagueness of the very procedure, and it served as a pretext for Lithuanian bishops to protest against state interference in the internal affairs of the Church and ignore registration until the relevant laws and written instructions could be presented.²⁹

Written instructions were prepared by Gailevičius and dispatched to the heads of the dioceses in March 1947, while at the same time the prime minister Gedvilas urged the chairmen of the executive committees of towns and counties in a top secret letter to begin the registration of parishes, prayer houses, executive committees and clergymen of all confessions. Lists of the twenty-member church councils had also to be sent urgently to the commissioner by the chairmen of the executive committees.³⁰

However this time the authorities again did not act resolutely. On 19 March that issue was debated at the Central Committee of the LKP(b). Sniečkus expressed his doubts about

²⁷ A letter of Vice-Commissioner Sadovskskii of the CRC of the USSR to Gailevičius. 30 Jan. 1947. LCVA, f. R 181, ap. 3, b. 10, l. 5.

²⁸ Gailevičius account of the first quarter of 1946. Ibid., b. 9, l. 17.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ A top secret letter of prime minister Gedvilas to the chairmen of the executive committees of all towns and counties. 7 March 1947. Ibid., b. 11, l. 26.

the possible success of registration - if the bishops resisted, it would not be possible to lock the doors of the churches. Registration was retarded by Gailevičius himself - he asked the CRC of the USSR for permission to postpone registration until the beginning of May in order to clarify the position of the bishops. He personally had met with the heads of all the dioceses and hoped he had managed to talk some of them (the Bishop of Vilkaviškis Antanas Karosas and the head of the archdiocese of Kaunas Canon Stankevičius) into beginning the registration. Meanwhile, the Archbishop of Vilnius Mečislovas Reinys and the head of Kaišiadorys diocese Prelate Bernardas Sužiedėlis categorically condemned state interference in the matters of the Church and disagreed with the non-canonical registration of parishes and clergymen. The Bishop of Panevėžys Kazimieras Paltarokas offered a compromise solution: the right of the commissioner to issue the required registration certificates to priests, churches and parish councils on the recommendation of the curias.³¹

No headway in the solution of these problems was made until 1948, when Bronius Pušinis was appointed to the post of the commissioner of the CRC. He managed to carry out the registration in six months. After having accused the clergy of violating Soviet law and adopting sabotage tactics, in the summer of 1948 he inspired economic sanctions against the Catholic Church - the nationalization of Church property (the lands and buildings of churches, monasteries, etc.).³² Besides, there started closures of monasteries and of bigger churches of Vilnius, the curia of Vilnius and the head of the Telšiai diocese were removed from their premises within 24 hours. The curiae of Vilkaviškis and Kaišiadorys had been deprived of their buildings earlier. About half of the priests were forced to leave their presbyteries,

³¹ Gailevičius' account of the first quarter of 1947. LVOA, f. 1771, ap. 10, b. 335, l. 15-37.

³² The nationalization of the property of separate churches, monasteries had been conducted on the initiative of local authorities since 1944, appropriate laws, however, were adopted by the Council of Ministers of the LSSR only in the summer of 1948. Their projects were prepared by the CRC of the LSSR, because that institution was interested in speeding up their adoption in order to boost the nationalization of the buildings of churches and monasteries and to intensify the registration campaign. See Pušinis' letter to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the LSSR. 23 June 1948. LCVA, f. R 181, ap. 1, b. 26, l. 173.

and they, like the ordinary bishops, were not given anywhere else to live.³³ The churches lost the most elementary conditions of normal functioning. For example, in the summer of 1948 electricity was cut off in all the churches of Kaunas, in the seminary, in the curia and in the apartment of the head of the archdiocese for a month and a half on Pušinis' orders. Only after registration started did he give permission to restore electricity to the above-mentioned institutions and only in registered churches.³⁴

The heads of the dioceses started registration under pressure from the CRC of the LSSR, because failure to comply threatened the existence of the Church as a whole. The registration was conducted in 1948 - by the end of the year of 711 churches 677 were registered and 34 closed. Contracts were concluded with the executive committees of 622 parishes.³⁵ However, priests were not registered even in 129 churches,³⁶ and thus only 542 churches were allowed to function. That situation continued until 1951, when, under the pressure of the deputies of the Supreme Soviet of the LSSR and believers, Pušinis allowed the priests of the nearest registered parishes to hold the service every first Sunday in such unregistered churches. This permission contradicted the ban of the CRC of the USSR for the priests to go to other churches. Therefore, Pušinis had to register 70 more priests in those churches and to treat the rest as subsidiaries of the neighbouring parishes.³⁷

Church councils and their executive committees did not become the real managers of the parishes. In contrast to the Orthodox Church of the USSR, their leaders were the parish rectors, while the councils acted mainly as supervisors. Their members were often recruited by the KGB, and local authorities used them as tools to curb 'fanatical' and 'reactionary' priests.

³³ A top secret report of Pušinis at the sitting of the CRC of the USSR. 24 Aug. 1948. LCVA, f. R 181, ap. 3, b. 14, l. 4.

³⁴ A letter from the head of the Kaunas Archdiocese to Pušinis and the latter's letter to the chairman of the Kaunas Executive Committee. 9 and 17 July 1948. Ibid., ap. 1, b. 27, l. 12, 26.

³⁵ Pušinis' account of the fourth quarter. LCVA, f. R 745, ap. 13, b. 208, l. 21.

³⁶ Pušinis' account of the second quarter of 1952. LCVA, f. R 181, ap. 3, b. 32, l. 51.

³⁷ Ibid., l. 51-52.

Elimination of Lithuanian Ordinary Bishops

Government institutions were particularly interested in the loyalty of the leaders of the Lithuanian Catholic Church to the Soviet authorities. Therefore, from the very beginning attempts were made to determine their political outlooks, to make them carry out the directions of the administration and to remove disobedient heads of the dioceses from office. The Lithuanian Ecclesiastical Province was reorganized.³⁸

Although the Vatican foresaw the menace to the Church of Lithuania as early as 1940 and appointed young auxiliaries to help the bishop of Vilkauskis and the archbishops of Kaunas and Vilnius, the leadership of the Catholic Church in Lithuania was in a grave situation. Archbishop of Kaunas Juozapas Skvireckas, his Auxiliary Bishop Vincentas Brizgys and Auxiliary Bishop of Vilkauskis Vincentas Podolskis emigrated to the West in 1944. The two auxiliaries had been hastily nominated as bishops in the spring of 1940 to strengthen the diocesan administration in those difficult times.³⁹ Following the repression of bishops remaining in the country after the war, the leadership of the dioceses was almost completely destroyed in the course of several years.

As soon as Lithuania was occupied, the bishops had to defend the Church and the believers from incursions into their basic rights. By one of its first decrees in the summer of 1944, the Soviet government forbade religious instruction in schools. Later (in 1947) religious classes were forbidden in churches as well. In Lithuania the Catholic Church was ousted from public life, its educational and social care institutions were nationalized, religious societies and publishing were banned. Instead, the shelves of the bookshops were filled with booklets of anti-religious propaganda. Bishops and priests, accused of destructive activities, were not given any chance to defend themselves publicly.

Between 1944 and 1947 the bishops still used to apply by common efforts to the supreme institutions of the LSSR, USSR, CPSU; they ignored the requirements of local authorities to

³⁸ The Lithuanian Ecclesiastical Province, set up in 1926, consisted of the archdiocese of Kaunas and of the dioceses of Telšiai, Panevėžys, Vilkauskis and Kaišiadorys. After the return of Vilnius and the region of Vilnius (formerly occupied by Poland) to Lithuania in 1939, a part of the diocese of Vilnius *de facto* belonged to the Lithuanian Ecclesiastical Province. This issue was solved juridically by the Vatican in 1992.

³⁹ V. Brizgys. *Gyvenimo keliai*. Vilnius, 1993, 100.

register churches, to condemn the armed resistance movement in pastoral letters, etc. There were hopes of stabilizing the worsening situation by proposing to the CRC 'A Statute of the Functioning of the Roman Catholic Church on the territory of the LSSR', but the Soviets ignored the compromise proposals and the protests, and adopted only a policy of attack.

Accused of anti-Soviet attitudes and support for the underground movement, four of the five Lithuanian bishops were arrested and imprisoned in 1946-47. After the arrest and deportation of the bishops, all Lithuanian dioceses, except that of Panevėžys, were controlled by administrators.⁴⁰ That was a favourable situation for the Soviets, since it meant weakening the administration of the Church and creating conditions for further plans to appoint loyal persons or at least those liable to make compromises to ecclesiastical posts. To simplify the achievement of that aim, in 1948 Commissioner Pušinis declared that it would be reasonable to reduce the number of Lithuanian dioceses to three, because six was too many.⁴¹

In order to unite the dioceses, the Soviet authorities had to remove their legitimate administrators from office. These had been elected by diocesan chapters or appointed by the bishops according to Church canons. That action had to be performed during several months. Officially it was led by Pušinis, and in general the situation was controlled by the security organs (they arrested clergymen, who obstructed the campaign, and they pressurized the members of the chapters through their agents⁴²). The whole procedure was as follows.

After the arrests of the administrator of the Vilkaiviškis diocese Canon Vincentas Vizgirda and Chancellor Stanislovas

⁴⁰ In 1946 Canon Justinas Juodaitis became the administrator of the Telšiai diocese, when Bishop Vincentas Borisevičius was imprisoned (and soon executed) and Bishop Pranciškus Ramanauskas was in exile until 1955. Late in 1946 after the imprisonment and exile (till 1956) of Bishop Teofilius Matulionis the Kaišiadorys diocese was administered by Prelate Bernardas Sužiedėlis. In the summer of 1947 two more ordinaries were lost. After the death of Bishop of Vilkaiviškis Antanas Karosas the chapter elected Canon Vincentas Vizgirda as the diocesan administrator. After the imprisonment of the apostolic administrator of the Vilnius archdiocese Bishop Mečislovas Reinys (died in prison in 1953) Fr. Edmundas Basys became administrator.

⁴¹ A secret letter of Pušinis to Polianskii. 24 Sept. 1948. LCVA, f. R 181, ap. 3, b. 14, l. 37.

⁴² An extra top secret report of the minister of security of the LSSR Kapralov. 24 Sept. 1949. LYA, f. K 1, ap. 10, b. 73, l. 104.

Mikelkevičius in the spring of 1949, Pušinis forbade the chapter (there were only three members left at large) to elect a new administrator. On 10 May he personally attended the chapter session and announced the decision of the Council of Ministers to annex the diocese to the archdiocese of Kaunas and categorically stressed that it was 'necessary that the chapter of the Vilkaviškis diocese elect an administrator, who could also be administrator of the Kaunas archdiocese'. In such a situation the chapter had no other choice but 'to elect' the administrator of the Kaunas archdiocese Canon Stankevičius. Thus, on 11 May 1949 the two dioceses were united.⁴³

Subsequently, the diocese of Panevėžys was joined to the archdiocese of Vilnius. In July after three days of negotiations' with Pušinis, Bishop Paltarokas of Panevėžys agreed to administrate the archdiocese of Vilnius without the approval of the Vatican. In Pušinis' words, 'the chapter of Vilnius unanimously elected him [Bishop Paltarokas] the administrator of the Vilnius archdiocese'.⁴⁴ It is understandable that the members of that chapter also had to yield to brute force. Otherwise they would have been arrested or would have to resign themselves to the fate of the archdiocesan administrator Canon Basys and Chancellor Juozas Poškus - on Pušinis' orders the officials of the Executive Committee deprived them of their certificates as ministers of religion, struck their names off the list of Vilnius residents and ordered them to leave the city immediately.⁴⁵

Shortly afterwards the diocese of Kaišiadorys was annexed to the archdiocese of Kaunas. Although before his arrest Bishop Teofilus Matulionis authorized as many as three of his priests (Prelate Sužiedėlis, Canon Matas Cijūnaitis and Canon Alfonsas Varnas) to administer the diocese, Pušinis managed to dismiss all of them. When the administrator Sužiedėlis refused to carry on any talks concerning the amalgamation of the dioceses, Pušinis accused him of lacking the ability to manage the affairs of the diocese and transferred him to another diocese. Soon afterwards he was arrested and imprisoned for ten years. The diocesan chapter was 'recommended' by Pušinis to join the archdiocese of Kaunas, i.e., to elect Canon Stankevičius as the new

⁴³ Pušinis' account of the second quarter of 1949. LCVA, f. R 181, ap. 3, b. 22, l. 23.

⁴⁴ Pušinis' account of the third quarter of 1949. Ibid., l. 44-45.

⁴⁵ A secret letter of Pušinis to the vice chairman of the Executive Committee of the city of Vilnius Naumov. 12 July 1949. Ibid., b. 21, l. 9.

administrator.⁴⁶ The chapter could not nominate the two other canons, authorized by Bishop Matulionis - Varnas was critically ill, and Cijūnaitis had just returned from three years' imprisonment for his 'counter-revolutionary' activity. Nevertheless, the members of the chapter decided to act their own way - they elected Bishop Paltarokas, i.e., they joined the archdiocese of Vilnius. That decision was not tolerated by the CRC. Pušinis talked Bishop Paltarokas into declining the offer to administrate the diocese of Kaišiadorys, and the chapter was compelled to elect Canon Stankevičius.⁴⁷ Revenging himself on the disobedient clergymen, Pušinis instructed the chairman of the Executive Committee of the county to de-register Canon Cijūnaitis from his place of residence and 'to offer him to get out of the county in 24 hours.' Afterwards he was not registered in any parish for quite a long time. Pušinis also demanded the immediate nationalization of the presbytery in Kaišiadorys.⁴⁸

It is difficult to believe that after the above-described events Pušinis wrote to his superiors: 'This reduction in the number of dioceses and their amalgamation were initiated by the chapters, and the elections of the administrators were carried out in the most democratic way. We also consider it necessary to emphasize that the chapter sessions were attended by none other but their members'.⁴⁹

Thus, in the autumn of 1949 of six Lithuanian dioceses there remained only three: the archdiocese of Kaunas (with the dioceses of Vilkaviškis and Kaišiadorys), the administration of which was entrusted by the Soviet authorities to Canon Stankevičius; the archdiocese of Vilnius (with the diocese of Panevėžys), led by Bishop Paltarokas, and the diocese of Telšiai, the administrator of which, Canon Justinas Juodaitis, was arrested in December 1949, having still managed to appoint his diocesan chancellor Canon Petras Maželis as his successor. Since that appointment was not preliminarily approved by the CRC, the chapter was given Pušinis' permission to elect Canon Maželis administrator only when 'the comrades from the organs' [i.e., the KGB] assured that it was necessary to agree to that nomination.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ A secret letter of Pušinis to the chairman of the Executive Committee of Kaišiadorys county. 26 July 1949. Ibid., I.4.

⁴⁷ Pušinis' account of the third quarter of 1949. Ibid., b. 22, l. 46-47.

⁴⁸ A secret letter of Pušinis to the chairman of the Executive Committee of Kaišiadorys county. 13 Sept. 1949. Ibid., b. 21, l. 53.

⁴⁹ Pušinis' account of the third quarter of 1949. Ibid., b. 22, l. 47.

⁵⁰ Pušinis' account of the fourth quarter of 1949. VCVA, f. R 181, ap. 3, b. 22, l. 62.

Canon Stankevičius, after becoming practically the administrator of three dioceses, could not automatically take over the canonical jurisdiction of the dioceses of Vilkaviškis and Kaišiadorys. The solution of that problem was difficult. The administrator of the Vilkaviškis diocese Canon Vizgirda officially resigned from his post only after his return from imprisonment in the autumn of 1954.⁵¹ That diocese was administered from Kaunas until 1989. Canon Stankevičius managed the diocese of Kaišiadorys with a temporary verbal agreement of Canon Cijūnaitis.⁵² Bishop Matulionis returned from exile in 1956 and appointed him vicar-general, and a year later relieved him and took over the administration of the diocese himself. Despite the obstacles of the Soviet authorities (they did not allow the bishop to reside in his diocese, did not register the priests appointed by him, did not recognize the consecration (approved by the Vatican) of his Auxiliary Bishop Vincentas Sladkevičius, etc.), the diocese of Kaišiadorys eventually separated from Kaunas.

'I doubt whether those historians who will write about us, will be fully aware of our situation. There are things which one can only experience, but which are impossible to write about',⁵³ wrote Canon Stankevičius in his diary. Actually, it is very difficult to give an evaluation to the actions of those Church hierarchs. Now the easiest way would be to accuse them of collaboration. However, they hardly had any choice. To avoid greater evils the Church had to comply with lesser ones. Compromise and concession could also be treated as resourcefulness in expecting to ease the situation of the Church and the believers, to find a *modus vivendi* in the Soviet regime, to absorb the shock in collision with the aggressive state and its security apparatus. Otherwise, the fate of the Catholics in Lithuania might have been similar to that of Western Belorussia and Ukraine, where the Catholic Church practically disappeared - the believers were treated as politically unreliable.

After the changes in the structure and leadership of the Catholic Church in Lithuania in 1946-49, the Soviet authorities imposed their control on the highest institutions. The independence of the latter was greatly restricted (in the formation of chapters, holding conferences, etc.); untrustworthy persons (Bishop Sladkevičius, formerly exiled Bishops Matulionis and

⁵¹ J. Stankevičius. *Mano gyvenimo kryžkelės*, t. II, l. 5.

⁵² P. Gaida. *Nemarus mirtingasis*. p. 141.

⁵³ J. Stankevičius. *Mano gyvenimo kryžkelės*, t. I, l. 90.

Ramanauskas, afterwards Bishop Julijonas Steponavičius, Prelate Povilas Šidlauskas, Canon Juozapas Meidus, et al.) were removed from office. That policy destroyed the leadership of the dioceses. Thus the KGB of the LSSR could send the administrators of Lithuanian dioceses, their agents 'Kalnėnas', 'Ažuolas', 'Gediminas' and 'Putinas' to the Second Vatican Council in 1962.⁵⁴ The Church in Lithuania became double-sided.

Changes in the Theological Seminary

'If we are to train the successors to the clergy, then we must prepare them to serve the needs of our Socialist society and not those of the Vatican, which is hostile to us', wrote Pušinis in 1952.⁵⁵ The first decisive step in the direction of imposing stricter control on the education of the young clergy had already been taken: the number of seminaries had been reduced from the former four to only one, and in it in the course of several years the number of students was reduced nearly seven times. On the initiative of the CRC and KGB some of its principals and teachers were replaced.

After the war only the seminary of Vilkauskis did not function in Lithuania - its buildings were destroyed. The premises of other seminaries were occupied by the Red Army troops, and the hierarchy organized the tuition and residence of the seminarians in monasteries and private apartments. The number of students was great, many of them entered the seminaries in order to avoid the draft legally.

In 1945 there were 711 churches in Lithuania, and 1232 priests worked in them.⁵⁶ In the eyes of the officials of the CRC of the USSR those figures seemed impressive and made them look for ways to change the situation approaching the average of the USSR. The alleged redundancy of priests was the reason for the closure of the seminary of Vilnius in February and that of Telšiai in September of 1945.

The Theological Seminary of Kaunas was the only one left in the country, and it could not function as an autonomous

⁵⁴ A top secret letter of the chairman of the Lithuanian KGB Col. Alfonsas Randakevičius 'Proposals for the further use of the agent 'Saulė' and his information'. 21 Sept. 1962. LYA, f. K 1, ap. 3, b. 534, t. 3, l. 210.

⁵⁵ Pušinis' account of the third quarter of 1952. LCVA, f. R 181, ap. 3, b. 32, l. 114.

⁵⁶ Gailevičius' letter to Sniečkus and Gedvilas (1945, no exact date). Ibid., b. 2, l. 3.

institution, led by the hierarchy of the Church. The CRC and the security organs started to penetrate its internal affairs, to control the management of the seminary and the enrolment of students. The seminarians and their teachers were summoned to the military registration and enlistment office, where the officers of the security organs questioned them about the seminary and its personnel. Attempts were made to recruit as informers those who could be compromised. The leaders of the seminary, who tried to prevent that practice, lost their posts. In the summer of 1946 the security organs succeeded in dismissing the Principal of the seminary Fr. Stasys Gruodis, S.J., and the Vice-Principal Canon Petras Rauda was arrested, having been in hiding for nearly a year in order to avoid contact with the recruiting security agents.⁵⁷

In the autumn of 1946 the Council of Ministers of the LSSR made a decision to reduce the number of seminarians from 350 to 150. The CRC informed the Principal of the seminary Canon Venckus only orally,⁵⁸ requiring to carry out that reform in two weeks.

Lithuanian bishops applied to various Soviet institutions, their letters were sent to the Council of Ministers of the LSSR, later to Stalin, the chairmen of the Council of Ministers and of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. 'The Theological Seminary of Kaunas is the only religious institution, training clergymen for six dioceses. The number of 150 students is absolutely insufficient for the whole of the LSSR. Besides, the indicated term in the middle of the academic year is very short and inconvenient. Therefore, we ask you to fix the number of 300 students - much smaller than usual - and to revoke the orders of the local authorities',⁵⁹ the Lithuanian bishops wrote to the leaders of the Communist Party and government of the USSR. All these requests, however, were ignored. At the end of 1946 the bishops had to prepare a list of 150 students and to present it to the CRC of the LSSR.

Shortly afterwards one more action was launched against the seminary. Its professors, the Jesuits Stasys Gruodis and

⁵⁷ The account of the head of the Kaunas department of the MGB of the LSSR Rudyk of Aug. 1946 to the Vice Minister of state security of the LSSR Martavičius. LYA, f. K 1, ap. 15, b. 326 VS, l. 9.

⁵⁸ *Arkivyskupas Mečislovas Reinys*, p. 204.

⁵⁹ The telegram of Lithuanian bishops to Stalin, the chairmen of the Council of Ministers and the Supreme Soviet. 6 Dec. 1946. LCVA, f. R 181, ap. 17, l. 61.

Stasys Rimkevičius, were dismissed, and eleven seminarians were arrested.⁶⁰

In the summer of 1949 the number of students was again reduced. In contrast to the previous reform the latter was effected more speedily and more smoothly. This time the list of the 90 dismissed students was compiled by the commissioner of the CRC himself in collaboration with the security officials.⁶¹ The list was presented not to the hierarchs of the Church, but to the chief of the Kaunas militia with the request to strike the names of those 90 students off the list of the residents of Kaunas immediately and then inform the leaders of the seminary about it.⁶² The hierarchs had no chance to take any countermeasures, and the seminarians hurriedly had to leave the city.

Thus, the Soviet regime mastered the methods of controlling the theological seminary: the KGB filtered out the entrants, recruited agents there and with their help supervised the life of the seminary. The ecclesiastical hierarchy was helpless to resist the growing impudence of the authorities or protect the professors and seminarians.

The Treatment of Disloyal Priests

In Soviet times there was hardly any priest who could have escaped the attention of the security organs or local authorities. The district departments of the KGB had personal files on clergymen with information about their political views, their former activity in the Republic of Lithuania and during the Nazi occupation. The priests were not only permanently spied on (their private talks and no doubt their sermons were overheard), but also were provoked into expressing their opinion about the current affairs, e.g., the armed resistance, the collectivization of agriculture, state loans, elections to the Supreme Soviets of the LSSR and the USSR, etc. A well developed secret-service network was created for that purpose. It functioned not only within the Church - scores of people watched the behaviour of the clergymen in everyday life, in the church and in the parish.

⁶⁰ S. Tamkevičius. Tarpdiecezinė Kauno kunigų seminarija. *Lietuvos katalikų mokslų akademijos suvažiavimo darbai*, t. XV, Vilnius, 1995, 85.

⁶¹ A top secret letter of the minister of state security of the LSSR Kapralov. 29 Sept. 1949. LYA, f. K 1, ap. 10, b. 73, l. 189.

⁶² Ibid.; a secret letter of Pušinis to the Chairman of the Executive Committee of Kaunas Juozas Maniušis. 18 July 1949. LCVA, f. R 181, ap. 3, b. 21, l. 14.

All that led to the introduction of tight control of the internal life of the Church, of the activities of the clergymen, and, most importantly, enabled the authorities to conduct large-scale operations.

Possessing some discrediting material the security officials usually tried to recruit priests. If that attempt failed, proceedings were instituted against them. If clergymen felt that they were being shadowed, many of them used to go to other parishes. Their files, however, were quickly sent to the KGB department of that particular locality. Information about their new place of residence was provided by the agents at the archdiocese of Kaunas, and after registration, that information was available at the CRC and the executive committees. Therefore, one could hope to disappear from the sphere of action of the KGB only as long as new agents were looked for.

Many of the formerly recruited priests stopped presenting information and refused to collaborate any more or informed about insignificant matters. Dissatisfied security officials eliminated them from their network, and many of them were accused of anti-Soviet activity and exiled. The KGB, however, had managed to find extremely useful agents, who in the post-war years helped it to arrest priests in hiding, to unite dioceses, etc.

The KGB did much to breed strife among the clergymen and also to sow their discord with the hierarchy, and destroy their reputation. In the post-war period it was common practice to take care of morally degraded clergymen and especially to involve ex-priests and ex-monks in atheistic propaganda. Pušinis considered that approach particularly perspective. He did not comply with the requests of local believers and Church leadership to dismiss drunkards or those in conflict with the spiritual leadership. On the contrary, he urged local authorities to support such clergymen: '... if we are for partition, then it is essential to help ordinary clergymen denouncing their spiritual hierarchy, it is obligatory to endorse them and to give them a chance to rise...'⁶³ he explained his policy to Sniečkus, Gedvilas and Polianskii, who about 1950 did not approve of such a policy any more and advised the Commissioner to behave in a more neutral way.

The supervision of the activity of the Lithuanian KGB and CRC was most probably caused by their intrigues involving the

⁶³ A secret letter of Pušinis to Polianskii. 15 July 1950. *Ibid.*, b. 23, l. 31.

suspended priests (Jeronimas Matulis, Vladas Simaška, among others). However, only overt patronizing of demoralized priests was relinquished; the appointment of priests has always been one of the significant spheres of ecclesiastical policy. 'We always try to appoint to leading posts non-fanatical priests, loyal to the Soviet power, to give them good parishes, and we try to push to outlying parishes reactionary and fanatical ones, to lower them in rank, in such a way restricting their activity',⁶⁴ wrote Commissioner Justas Rugienis.

In historical studies opinions about the participation of the clergy in the armed post-war resistance vary. Some researchers maintain that the Church significantly influenced the political life of the country, and many priests participated in the resistance movement.⁶⁵ Others assert that only about 20 priests were active as liaison men, suppliers of food and medication, and only several fought with arms in their hands,⁶⁶ and under the pressure of the Soviet regime the administrators of the dioceses (except Canon Vizgirda) publicly dissociated themselves from the partisan movement.⁶⁷ Nonetheless it must be stressed that the most important charges against the Catholic Church involved support for the partisan struggle, and the majority of the sentences passed in the lawsuits against bishops and other clergymen were based on those accusations. However, a closer acquaintance with those cases shows that other serious grounds for prosecution were religious books, published in independent Lithuania before the war, diaries written at that time, participation in the contemporary organizations and societies (and in particular participation in their governing bodies), editing Catholic periodicals, etc. Teaching catechism to children and closer church contacts with the youth in general, religious service at the request of underground activists, sermons unfavourable to the regime, listening to foreign radio stations, and so forth,

⁶⁴ Rugienis' letter to the Commissioner of the CRC of the USSR V. Kuroedov 'The composition, disposition and influence of the clergy on the population of the LSSR'. 20 Nov. 1968. Ibid., b. 77, l. 190.

⁶⁵ V. Tininis. *Sovietinė Lietuva ir jos veikėjai*. Vilnius, 1994, 68; T. Remeikis. *Opposition to Soviet rule in Lithuania. 1945-1980*. Chicago, Ill. 1980, 105.

⁶⁶ V. Vardys. *The Catholic Church, dissent and nationality in Soviet Lithuania*. p. 70.

⁶⁷ A. Streikus. Lietuvos Katalikų Bažnyčia ir ginkluotas pasipriešinimas Lietuvoje. *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, nr. 2, 1997, 36.

meant violating Soviet law. Thus, the aim of the majority of the proceedings instituted against the clergymen was to weaken and compromise the Church and the clergy in general, rather than to punish them for their involvement in the underground movement. On the other hand, repression was expected to make the Catholic hierarchy reconcile themselves to the status of the Orthodox Church and declare their loyalty to the regime.

The majority of arrests (ca. 80 per cent) were effected in the period between 1946 and 1950, when the Church was being most intensively reorganized according to Soviet law. The bishops were the first to experience the violence of the regime, then followed the social and political figures of the former independent Lithuania, and monks. They could obtain their personal freedom in exchange for the loyalty to the regime.

Taking into account the fact that 257 priests or monks emigrated to the West,⁶⁸ and 362 were arrested and imprisoned or deported in the period between 1944 and 1953,⁶⁹ it can be said that Lithuania lost nearly half its clergy. These physical losses and the above-mentioned actions of the regime weakened the Church for several decades, destabilized its administration and bred distrust. Its real work - teaching (children) religion, issuing religious publications, patronizing studies of theology, the monastic life - could be revitalized and carried out only as an underground activity.

Conclusions

In the history of the Sovietization of the Catholic Church in Lithuania the years between 1944 and 1949 should be treated as a special period. By the end of that period a new ecclesiastical structure had evolved, and its social and legal status had changed radically. In those five post-war years the basis was laid for the campaign to construct a loyal, controllable Church in the following decades.

The concessions in the search of a *modus vivendi* for the Church in Soviet Lithuania were made unilaterally. The Church's attempts to resist the tyranny of the regime were thwarted by swift reprisals in the course of several years. Only one bishop evaded arrest, the country lost almost half its clergy, monks and

⁶⁸ M. Raišupis. *Dabarties kankiniai*. Chicago, Ill., 1972, 15.

⁶⁹ V. Tininis. *Sovietinė Lietuva ir jos veikėjai*, p. 72.

nuns were dispersed and the property of the Church was confiscated or nationalized. Therefore, in order to preserve its most vital functions, the hierarchy was forced to obey the laws and decrees, regulating religious activity in the USSR. The diocesan administrators had to act against Canon law and historic tradition (to register churches, parishes and clergymen, to take over the administration of the dioceses without the approval of the Holy See), to publicize statements, issued by the state, and so on. The Soviet regime quickly managed to neutralize the Church as its main political opponent and tolerated only a controllable ideological opposition.

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The article examines the attempts of the Soviet regime to Sovietize the Catholic Church in Lithuania, 1944–49. It focuses on the role of the hierarchy and the state in the process of Sovietization. The article shows that the Soviet regime tried to control the Church by forcing it to obey the laws and decrees, regulating religious activity in the USSR. The diocesan administrators had to act against Canon law and historic tradition (to register churches, parishes and clergymen, to take over the administration of the dioceses without the approval of the Holy See), to publicize statements, issued by the state, and so on. The Soviet regime quickly managed to neutralize the Church as its main political opponent and tolerated only a controllable ideological opposition.

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