THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN LITHUANIA DURING THE SOVIET PERIOD

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ABSTRACT *The present article deals with the history of the Orthodox Church in Lithuania between 1944 and 1990, focusing mainly on the exceptional situation of Orthodoxy conditioned by the Soviet attempts to exploit it via internal policy in the republic.*

Consolidating the Stalinist regime in occupied Lithuania in 1944–1948, the government demanded Orthodox archbishops start ‘the struggle against reactionary Catholicism’, i.e., start a critique of its dogmas, to bring the whole faith into disrespect, etc. Nevertheless, even though it enjoyed state support the Orthodox Church was too weak to compete successfully with Catholicism which remained dominant in the country. Small in number; Russian-speaking, alien to Lithuanian society and culture and lacking intellectual potential, the Orthodox Church failed to cope with the task. Besides, strengthening the position of Orthodoxy was not acceptable to the leadership of Soviet Lithuania.

Though subsequently not directly protected, but having already strengthened its structures, the Orthodox Church continued to enjoy its favourable political image as a religion ‘less harmful’ to the interests of the state than Catholicism. Accordingly, the consequences of the anti-religious campaign, conducted in the entire Soviet Union from 1958 to 1964, were minimal in the Lithuanian eparchy. Some of the reforms were not implemented here altogether.

In Lithuania the attention of the Soviet regime was concentrated mainly on the struggle against Catholicism, and Orthodoxy for a long time remained outside the sphere of atheistic propaganda. As time went by the Orthodox eparchy was put into the shade entirely by the concern of the KGB and the commissioners about the growing underground of the Catholic Church in Lithuania. Meanwhile the structure of the Orthodox Church in Lithuania suffered comparatively insignificantly (only four parish churches were closed). The Orthodox communities shrank mainly as a result of the rising secularization and urbanization of society. Only communities in the major towns retained their former vitality.

During the entrenchment of Soviet rule in Lithuania after the Second World War, the believers of all religions and all Churches had the most evil forebodings. The Orthodox Church could also expect

only fatal consequences. The inter-war Lithuanian press, including the Orthodox periodical *Golos Litovskoi Pravoslavnoi Eparkhii*, had written much about religious persecution in the USSR. In the 1920s and 1930s the Russian Orthodox Church was ruined almost totally and split into hostile branches.

The extent of the damage, done to the Church, was simply unbelievable. In 1941 there were only four metropolitans, one of them being the head of the Patriarchate, Sergii (Stragorodskii). Ten more bishops, who managed to survive, worked as parish pastors. In the USSR the Orthodox were deprived of both seminaries and monasteries, and no less than 140,000 clergymen were repressed.¹ All Church leaders had spent some time in prisons or labour camps, and only those who publicly declared their loyalty to the Soviet regime retained their posts. According to the Canadian sovietologist Dmitrii Pospelovskii, 'the terror years took the lives of the majority of the staunchest leaders of the Church; at the same time many of those who survived were intimidated and forced to submit'.²

The situation of the Orthodox Church changed radically during the Second World War. Its patriotism and influence induced Stalin to treat the national Russian Church as a kind of political partner. In the autumn of 1943 the Church was granted *de facto* legal rights, its canonical government was re-established (the patriarch was elected), several seminaries were opened, and the recovery of the parish life began.

The new religious policy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union did not cover other religions, predominating in the countries which were occupied or belonged to the sphere of Soviet influence. There attempts were made, first and foremost, to eliminate the influence of the Vatican, which was irreconcilable to the expansion of Bolshevism. There were endeavours to instigate denominational changes by the Churches themselves. In these processes a significant role was played by the Russian Orthodox Church whose leaders undertook to serve in the interests of the state in the spheres of foreign policy and propaganda in exchange for the relative freedom of liturgy.³

¹ G. Shtrikker, 'Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' v Sovetskom gosudarstve', *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' v sovetskoe vremia*, 1 (Moscow, 1995), pp. 44, 65; M. Shkarovskii, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' pri Staline i Khrushcheve (Gosudarstvenno-tserkovnye otnoshenia v SSSR v 1939–1964 godakh)* (Moscow, 2000), pp. 93, 99, 117; D. Pospelovskii, *Russkaia pravoslavnaia tserkov' v XX veke* (Moscow, 1995), p. 168 ff.

² Ibid., p. 118.

³ Ibid., p. 257.

The aim of this study is to investigate the differences of the policy of the Soviet government in the treatment of the Orthodox and the Catholics in Lithuania, and also to review the development of the Lithuanian Orthodox diocese in the Soviet period and the impact of local and central institutions and of the Moscow Patriarchate on its activity. As regards the situation of the Orthodox Church in Lithuania, several stages could be distinguished in the entire period. Researchers are interested primarily in political and social processes, revealing the role of the Churches and the radical changes affecting them. This study covers mainly the period between 1944 and 1948 – the time of the protection and increase of the influence of the Orthodox Church in Lithuania – and the aftermath of the anti-religious campaign, conducted in the USSR between 1958 and 1964.

In Lithuania the Orthodox Diocese adapted to the new political system quite rapidly and relatively painlessly. Despite its hierarchy's clearly pro-German orientation during the Nazi occupation, Orthodoxy quickly occupied a privileged position in comparison with other Churches. Given that situation, the Soviet authorities had no doubts that the Patriarchate would easily cope with problem of directing the attitudes and activity of the Orthodox clergy in the desirable way.

In the 1940s and 1950s there were double regulations and double standards in the policy towards Orthodox and other Churches in Lithuania. Orthodoxy was protected by favourable governmental decrees, while the organizational structures of other Churches were destroyed, their property was confiscated and their clergy were repressed.⁴ At the same time Orthodox believers were treated completely differently. Their activities were supervised by their 'own' commissioner for the Lithuanian SSR at the Council on the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church (henceforth CAROC) within the Council of Ministers of the USSR. All the persons in this post were Russian. The affairs of the adherents of all other creeds, including those of the Russian Old Believers, were controlled by the Lithuanian commissioners for the Lithuanian SSR of the Council on the Affairs of Religious Cults (henceforth CARC) within the Council of Ministers of the USSR.

It is understandable that the commissioners of both Councils were not independent in their decisions; their attitudes to the leaders

⁴ In greater detail, see R. Laukaitytė, 'Attempts to Sovietize the Catholic Church in Lithuania, 1944–49', *Lithuanian Historical Studies*, 3 (1998), pp. 110–135.

of the Churches differed radically, in particular in the fifth and sixth decades. Catholicism was treated as one of the most dangerous and formidable ideological enemies, while the Orthodox Church (its Lithuanian-speaking clergy) was engaged in sovietizing Lithuania.

Therefore it is small wonder that CARC and CAROC issued quite different instructions for their commissioners in the LSSR. The latter Council sought to protect the Orthodox Church and its clergy because the local authorities often acted against their interests, failing to understand the new policy of the Communist Party towards religion. Promptly responding to the complaints, the commissioner interceded with various Lithuanian national and local institutions in reducing the taxes imposed on the Orthodox priests, returning their confiscated dwelling-places, punishing teenagers for breaking Orthodox church windows, and even in employing the discriminated children of priests. The gap between the CAROC commissioner and the leaders of the diocese or some clergymen was narrowed by means of the system of bribery with expensive gifts and unofficial get-togethers, practised throughout the USSR. Thus, CAROC twice recommended the LSSR Council of Ministers dismiss commissioner Vasilii Gushchin since he was known to have feasted often with the Archbishop Kornilii (Popov). The commissioner retained his post; he was merely disciplined by the Council of Ministers.⁵

The Political Engagement of the Orthodox Church In the period between 1944 and 1990 the Orthodox Diocese of Vilnius was presided over by more than ten bishops and archbishops sent from other parts of the USSR. Only two of them remained in post for more than three or four years. Neither the leadership of the Lithuanian Communist Party nor the republic's KGB had any say in their appointments – nearly all of them were unknown in Lithuania. Their activities were closely followed by the CAROC commissioner. The bishops submitted yearly accounts on the situation in the diocese, its incomes and expenses, copies of their correspondence with the Patriarchate, of the directives to the parish priests, etc., including copies of purely religious documents, such as pastoral letters and sermons.

⁵ CAROC Deputy Chairman S. Belyshev to the cadre secretary of the CC of the LC(B)P, D. Shupikov, letter of 15 March 1948, and the latter's answer of 7 June, the Department of the LCP Documents of the LYA (hereafter LYA, LKP DS), f. 1771, ap. 11, b. 280, ff. 1, 2.

The life of the small Lithuanian diocese was quite transparent, and the infiltration unbelievably overt.⁶ Later on, in the mid-seventies, direct supervision of the ecclesiastical leadership weakened. Greater confidence was placed in it, because the career of the majority of the bishops of the younger generation was associated closely with service in the Patriarchate's Department of Foreign Relations which was considered nothing short of a subdivision of the KGB.⁷ They were fully acquainted with the rules of action, enforced on the Church by the Soviet regime, they knew how to accept foreign journalists and delegations, the number of which was increasing.

Neither in the period of the entrenchment of Soviet rule in Lithuania nor later did the authorities have any difficulties with the loyalty of the Orthodox clergy. The heads of the diocese did not shrink from declaring their faithfulness and were ready to pursue the state policy which the Catholic Church fiercely resisted. Thus, the Catholic bishops refused to agree to the Soviet demand to condemn the armed resistance to the occupiers in their pastoral letters; and even those that were written did not please the officials. Meanwhile a letter of the Archbishop Kornilii was read in the Orthodox churches as early as the autumn of 1945. In it the Archbishop wrote: 'And you, dear citizens of the land of Lithuania, hiding in the forests and preventing the peaceful reconstruction and renovation of the badly suffering Fatherland, admit to making a mistake and trespassing against the Fatherland and *the power*

⁶ In one of his accounts a commissioner described the procedure of the appointment of the secretary of a diocese board. Having consulted with the KGB, he did not approve of the candidate proposed by the archbishop. Then the archbishop submitted a list of four persons, from whom the commissioner selected one and 'recommended' him for the post of secretary a couple of days later. Subsequently that person successfully collaborated with the commissioner, informed him about the talks and guests in the board of the diocese, and he often acquainted him with some documents even before showing them to the archbishop. This episode is characteristic of the system: exerting pressure on the leaders of the diocese, the commissioner shaped the entourage of the diocesan management by appointing the people he could rely on. It would be wrong to assume that the Church failed to perceive the essence of such measures. (Gushchin's account for the first quarter of 1951, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 2, b. 9, 1, ff. 10–11; see also CAROC Commissioner Aleksandr Efremov's account for 1959, *ibid.*, ap. 1, b. 24, ff. 36 ff.

⁷ *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' v sovetskoe vremia. 1917–1991. Materialy i dokumenty po istorii otnoshenii mezhdu gosudarstvom i Tserkov'iu*, II (Moscow, 1995), p. 422.

granted directly by God (my emphasis), come back to a peaceful life and help reconstruct your Fatherland from war ruins'.⁸

In contrast to the leaders of the Catholic Church, the Orthodox registered their clergy and churches without any confrontation in 1946–1948. The Vilnius monastery and nunnery were registered, too. Their regulations contained an article to the effect that 'in their services [the monks] pray for the Patriarch and the Archbishop, and for the Soviet authorities as well'.⁹

The contents of the Orthodox sermons, reflecting the approval of the contemporary social and political changes, satisfied the authorities.¹⁰ During state holidays solemn services had been held in the Orthodox churches right until the time of *Sąjūdis*, in the late '80s. On those occasions the commissioner used to receive telegrams of congratulations from the leaders of the diocese and monasteries, and even from more zealous priests.

All the Churches in the USSR were turning into pawns of the Communist Party. That became particularly obvious in 'the peace movement'. From Lithuania, only Catholic and Orthodox representatives (specially chosen bishops and one or two priests) participated in various 'peace movement actions'. The entire scenario, including the texts of the speeches, the behaviour and even the details of the dress of the clergymen, was prepared and regulated by the Council.¹¹ The people all over the world, unaware of these censorial backstage activities, had to get an impression of the freedom and social influence of the clergy in the USSR.

With the exception of the Old Believers, such submissiveness to the regime and even its liturgical apologetics were an unusual phenomenon in the religious life of Lithuania. This situation was conditioned by the attempts of the Moscow Patriarchate for the survival in the Soviet state. Given the harrowing experience of the pre-war decades, it attempted to exploit the unexpected amiability of the Communist Party and to create an image of a 'national'

⁸ Archbishop Kornilii's pastoral letter of 16 Oct. 1945, LYA, LKP DS, f. 1771, ap. 9, b. 278, fo. 178.

⁹ The regulations of the Vilnius Monastery of the Holy Spirit, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 3, b. 4, ff. 29, 31.

¹⁰ The report of CAROC Commissioner Gushchin at the conference of the commissioners in Riga on 8–9 Sept. 1952, LYA, LKP DS, f. 1771, ap. 133, b. 14, fo. 271.

¹¹ CAROC Chairman Georgii Karpov to Gushchin, a secret letter of 1 Sept. 1951, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 1, b. 2, fo. 16 ff.

religion, serving the interests of the state. Subsequently, however, after the change of the policy, this conformist behaviour resulted in extremely painful consequences by enabling the Soviet authorities to conduct a destructive policy on the initiative of the Church itself.

Therefore it is understandable that the policy of the Communist Party (and the line of the loyalty and submission of the Patriarchate) led to the opposition from a significant part of the Orthodox clergy and believers with their underground *samizdat*, dissident religious organizations, etc. Did the Lithuanian Orthodox participate in the movement for the rights of the believers?

The leadership of the Diocese, like the Patriarchate, did not tolerate any religious underground since this could have had dangerous consequences for the whole Church. As a rule, the clergymen themselves informed the commissioner about ‘incidents’, since in a small diocese it was hardly possible to conceal them. The diocesan leadership tried to avoid misunderstandings with regard both to ‘politics’ and religion. To the commissioner’s knowledge, forbidden ‘religious propaganda’ was not conducted among the children and young people in the Orthodox Diocese, and they were not enlisted as servers to assist the celebrant at a service. In their sermons the priests spoke only on religious topics, only occasionally touching on the issue of peace.¹²

Nevertheless, similar processes were taking place in both the Orthodox and Catholic Churches. Despite the attempts of the leadership to avoid confrontation, there were priests, who provoked incidents. The available sources indicate that Lithuanian Orthodox dared to protest against the licences of the authorities – they collected signatures airing their grievances against the closure of the convent, some churches and against the suspension of priests, etc. There were critical remarks with regard to the Soviet regime in the sermons. True, the scope of the Orthodox resistance was rather narrow due to small numbers of the believers and a comparatively freer situation of the Orthodox Church – it had its press, monasteries, and it could ordain priests without their studies at the seminary. Therefore, the movement did not develop into underground structures.

The Mission in the Struggle Against Catholicism The Orthodox Church in Lithuania did not experience any significant persecution

¹² CARC Commissioner Petras Anilionis’ account for 1986, LCVA, f. R 181, ap. 3, b. 122, fo. 14.

until the late fifties, when Khrushchev started his anti-religious campaign. On the contrary, exploiting the favourable decrees of the national government and the material support of the Patriarchate, it considerably strengthened its structure. One Orthodox holy place was revived when the relics of the saint martyrs Antonii, Ioann and Eustafii were returned to Vilnius, a theological seminary started functioning, churches and monasteries were restored after the war (a nunnery and its church were rebuilt anew from ruins), and there was no shortage of priests even for churches, attended only by several scores of believers, etc.¹³ All that proceeded against the background of the destruction of other Churches, in particular of Catholicism, dominating in the country.

The fulcrum of the religious policy of the Communist Party was the Patriarchate of Moscow. The repressive measures of several decades and the technique for selecting bishops were tested effectively in the dealings with the Patriarchate. It acknowledged loyalty to the political system, shaped a favourable opinion of the Christian world about the Soviet regime and the freedom of conscience in the USSR. Nevertheless, the implementation of a number of requirements and projects of the Communist Party surpassed the real possibilities of the Patriarchate. One of them was the task of rallying the Christians of the world against the Vatican. CAROC drew up and developed several programmes directed against the Vatican and the Catholic Church in particular countries. The principal target in the struggle against Catholicism in the USSR became the Eastern rite (Uniate) Church in Western Ukraine. For some time Lithuania was also a region of a similar policy as the only Soviet republic, in which the Catholic Church was overwhelmingly dominant. What role was the Orthodox Church to play in this policy?

In one of his first directives (8 May 1945) the CARC chairman encouraged the development of Orthodox fraternities, treating their activity as the main means of weakening the Catholic Church.¹⁴ Shortly afterwards, the leadership of the council informed the commissioner Andrei Linev that 'the Lithuanian diocese is authorized

¹³ Information about the functioning churches and clergymen in Vilnius and Lithuania in 1945, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 3, b. 7, fo. 9.

¹⁴ CARC Commissioner A. Gailevičius to CARC Chairman Igor Polianskii, letter of June 1945 (day not indicated), LCVA, f. R 181, ap. 3, b. 4, fo. 23.

to set up a brotherhood for missionary work', and that he was charged to render any necessary help for the Archbishop in its establishment, and also to regularly inform the Council about its organization, activities, leaders and members.¹⁵

CAROC planned to establish Orthodox brotherhoods in several cities of Lithuania, Latvia, Ukraine and Belorussia and create facilities for their missionary and charitable activities. Presenting this project to Stalin, the chairman of the Council, Georgii Karpov wrote: 'The aim of the brotherhood is to strengthen Orthodoxy and to oppose it to Catholicism'.¹⁶ Stalin approved the project, and in August 1945 the Council approved the standard regulations of the spiritual Orthodox brotherhoods which were submitted by the Patriarch. They permitted the publication of leaflets, brochures and prayer books as well as the organization of charitable activity. The fraternities were especially vigorous in Western Ukraine, but they were short-lived – they were closed after the dissolution of the Uniate Church.¹⁷

The idea of the brotherhood was conceived in Moscow, bypassing the Central Committee of the LC(B)P, the Council of People's Commissars of the LSSR and possibly without a proper prior assessment of the situation – the specifics of the situation of the Orthodox in the country under occupation in the first post-war years. Both CARC Commissioner Alfonsas Gailevičius and the recently appointed CAROC commissioner in Vilnius, A. Linev, were against this scheme. They argued that the propaganda of the brotherhoods could not be effective in Lithuania due to the language barrier and that their activity could be understood as the Russification of Lithuanians.¹⁸ The commissioner, Gailevičius, recommended breaking up the Catholic Church from within, while his colleague Linev did not reject the idea of fraternities and he only projected specific phases in its implementation: to rally

¹⁵ CAROC member I. Ivanov to the commissioner of this Council for the LSSR, A. Linev, letter of 2 June 1945, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 2, b. 2, fo. 10.

¹⁶ CAROC Chairman Karpov to the chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR Stalin, letter of 15 March 1945, cited in M. Odintsov, *Religioznye organizatsii v SSSR nakanune i v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny 1941–1945 gg.* (Moscow, 1995), p. 164.

¹⁷ Shkarovskii, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov'*, pp. 299, 346.

¹⁸ Gailevičius to Polianskii, letter of June 1945 (day not indicated), LCVA, f. R 181, ap. 3, b. 4, fo. 23; Linev to Karpov, letter of 17 July 1945, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 2, b. 3, fo. 5.

Lithuanian Orthodox, to enhance their standing, and to prepare cadres for the missions among the Catholics.¹⁹

Archbishop Kornilii endeavoured to take full advantage of the favourable situation. In the summer of 1945 he prepared and dispatched to Moscow 'The Regulations of the Vilnius Orthodox', Fraternity of the Holy Spirit in which intense activity was envisaged: to set up spiritual courses for the missionaries, to attend to the repairs and opening of Orthodox churches, to organize homes for the needy, to disseminate religious literature, etc.²⁰ CAROC did not adopt such regulations and only urged the archbishop to start 'the work',²¹ i.e. the propaganda of the criticism of Catholic dogmas, throwing discredit on Catholicism, etc.

A missionary brotherhood was not established in Lithuania, the idea itself, however, was not dismissed entirely. At the same time, in order to increase the influence of Orthodoxy and to make its missionary activity more effective, two projects had to be implemented by the joint efforts of CAROC and Archbishop Kornilii: first, the return of the relics of the saints to Vilnius and, second, the re-establishment of the theological seminary.

The remains of the Martyrs, Sts Antonii, Ioann and Eustafii, had been taken to Moscow in the summer of 1915, when the front was approaching Vilnius. There they were housed in the Donskoy Monastery and venerated by the believers. However, after the October upheaval they shared the fate of all the relics in Russia in the campaign of their destruction and defamation of religion in 1918–1920. At one time all the relics, including those of Vilnius, were 'researched' and displayed publicly in the Central Museum of Sanitation and Hygiene.

In the post-war years the relics of some saints were returned to the Orthodox Church, and the corresponding transfer to Vilnius was treated as an exceptional case.²² On 26 July 1946 the relics

¹⁹ Linev to Karpov, letter of 17 July 1945, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 2, b. 3, fo. 6.

²⁰ 'The Regulations of the Vilnius' Orthodox Fraternity of the Holy Spirit Vilnius', LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 2, b. 3, ff. 7–8.

²¹ Senior CAROC inspector V. Spiridonov to Karpov, letter of 10 Aug. 1945, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 2, b. 3, fo. 30.

²² It seems that at that time the Church recovered only the relics of the martyrs of Vilnius and those of St Sergius of Radonezh (the latter were taken to a Moscow monastery). The rumours about the return of the remains encouraged the Orthodox clergymen and believers to search for their own relics in the museums in the hope of recovering them in that way. In order to stop the flood of requests, the CAROC

were solemnly brought back to the church of the Holy Spirit. With the revival of the veneration of the relics, the monastery activities revived, and pilgrims used to come to Vilnius from the entire Soviet Union. The monastery's income grew every year – people started sending remittances and parcels (tons of foodstuffs and clothes) in return for the prayers of the monks.

The increasing popularity of the Orthodox monastery and the holy place irritated the authorities of the city of Vilnius and of Lithuania. The monastery survived even during the anti-religious campaign started by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR in the autumn of 1958 aimed at the destruction of the holy places in the Soviet Union. After the devastation of the Lithuanian Catholic holy places a scheme was laid to close the Orthodox monastery of the Holy Spirit and to remove the relics after the transfer of the church to the parish. As the plan to close the monastery failed, this holy place did not suffer damages.

In 1945 CAROC set about organizing the activity of the theological seminary in Vilnius.²³ After an assessment of the premises in August of that year, a Council inspector allowed Archbishop Kornilii to set up 'pastoral missionary courses' for 25 to 40 persons. The commissioner Linev was charged 'to regularly supervise the organization of the courses, and provide economic support without interfering in the matters of teaching'.²⁴

The persistence of CAROC, displayed in the opening of the seminary, reveals the importance it attached to this institution. In 1945 this project failed. In the face of the resistance of Lithuanian authorities, the vice-chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR, Viacheslav Molotov, advised against doing anything in a hurry.²⁵ The following year CAROC decided to open

chairman circulated a letter to all commissioners informing them that the return of the relics was 'an exceptional case' and 'there can be no' total return (Cf. Karpov's letter of 6 July 1946, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 2, b. 1, fo. 25). Several more exceptions were made; however, it was only after 1989 that the Orthodox Church recovered the relics.

²³ The Orthodox seminary had functioned in Vilnius between 1845 and 1939. True, there were intervals in its work, in the 1920s it was reorganized into a state grammar school with private two-year courses on religion. It trained Orthodox clergymen for the dioceses of Vilnius and for those of Grodno and Polesie as well. Between January 1943 and March 1945 the theological courses at the monastery of the Holy Spirit educated clergymen for the parishes in the Nazi-occupied territories of the USSR.

²⁴ Senior CAROC Inspector Spiridonov to Karpov, letter of 10 Aug. 1945, LVCA, f. R 238, ap. 2, b. 3, ff. 31, 34.

²⁵ Cf. Shkarovskii, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov'*, p. 333.

the seminary without a preliminary approval of the government of the LSSR. On 4 October 1946 twenty seminarians and five unofficial students were enrolled from Lithuania, Latvia and Belorussia.²⁶

At that time three of the four Catholic theological seminaries were closed in Lithuania, which sparked a wave of protests of the bishops and believers. Given only one seminary for several millions of Catholics, the resuscitation of an Orthodox seminary was unacceptable to Lithuanian authorities. They requested the closure of the seminary. When the scandal reached the Council of Ministers of the USSR, CAROC denied being involved in giving permission to open the institution.²⁷ Commissioner Linev was made a scapegoat and dismissed from his job.

The CAROC projects at that time were directly related to the Seminary: it had to prepare staff for the struggle against 'reactionary Catholicism' in Lithuania. Therefore its closure was delayed. CAROC Chairman Karpov himself applied to the All-Union government to obtain the necessary permission for the Orthodox Seminary in Vilnius (for forty seminarians). The issue was not discussed, because the LSSR Council of Ministers again gave a negative reply, when the Managing Department of the Council of Ministers of the USSR enquired about its opinion.²⁸

The correspondence between the upper echelons on the future of the Seminary did not proceed smoothly, therefore it continued to function and after the first academic year, without delay, it enrolled a new student body.²⁹

Notwithstanding, the Seminary was closed by a decree of the LSSR Council of Ministers in August 1947. The seminarians were allowed to continue their studies in the Theological Seminary of the Minsk diocese.³⁰ It is understandable that the closure of the

²⁶ Rector Archpriest Iosif Dzichkovskii's account of 10 Oct. 1946 on the Vilnius Orthodox Theological Seminary, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 3, b. 10, fo. 1; the rector's account of 18 March 1947, *ibid.*, b. 19, fo. 7.

²⁷ Karpov to Linev, letter of 18 Jan. 1947, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 2, b. 2, fo. 57. According to the official version, the sanction was issued by Linev after an arrangement with the vice-chairman of the Council of Ministers of the LSSR, Vladas Niunka.

²⁸ Karpov to the secretary of the CC of the LC(B)P, Antanas Sniečkus, the chairman of the Council of Ministers, Mečislovas Gedvilas, and V. Gushchin, letter of 11 Aug. 1947, LCVA, R 238, ap. 2, b. 2, fo. 65.

²⁹ Archbishop Kornilii to Karpov, telegram of 11 Aug. 1947, LCVA, R 238, ap. 2, b. 2, fo. 66.

³⁰ Archbishop Kornilii to Gushchin, account of 15 Sept. 1947, LCVA, R 238, ap. 3, b. 19, fo. 15.

Seminary was a sad loss to the Church. Having suffered severe repression in the twenties and thirties, the Patriarchate was too weak to re-establish its seminaries and academies, and it had to confine itself only to theological courses. The exceptional situation of the Lithuanian diocese was very important for the Patriarchate – here teaching traditions were still alive, there was no lack of clergymen holding academic degrees, there was a library, teaching premises, a hostel and so on. A couple of years later, the new head of the diocese, Archbishop Fotii (Topiro), again sounded out the possibilities of re-opening the seminary in the Patriarchate and in CAROC; the latter, however, had already discarded that idea.³¹

Eventually, formerly cherished plans could not be implemented. Even enjoying the support in the corridors of power, the Orthodox Church could not compete with the dominating Catholicism in Lithuania. A Church, small in number, Russian-speaking, alien to Lithuanian society and culture and lacking intellectual potential, was not capable of undertaking that mission.

The leaders of the Church did not aim at rivalry with the Catholic Church (e.g., Lithuanian was not taught at the Seminary, the Archbishop understood at long last the necessity of teaching a course with a critique of Catholicism and Protestantism for seminarians in their second year, etc.). CAROC required that sort of criticism, and the only practical way of realizing that could be sermons in churches. It was not by accident that Archbishop Kornilii remained in the memory of his contemporaries as the only leader of the Lithuanian diocese who preached ‘denunciatory’ sermons.³² He attempted to introduce such sermons into the provincial churches as well. All the priests of the diocese were obliged to explain to their parishioners the damnation to which the Pope was leading Catholics, etc. In specific post-war tensions such zeal on the part of the Orthodox could have had disastrous consequences, and many priests possibly avoided that.

In the absence of special popular publications, church sermons could not reach wider circles of the Lithuanian population. That situation prompted one more project. Under a joint agreement

³¹ Senior CAROC Inspector Spiridonov to Gushchin, letter of 15 June 1949, LCVA, R 238, ap. 2, b. 2, fo. 105.

³² L. Savitskii, *Letopis' tserkovnoi zhizni Litovskoi eparkhii* (a manuscript, kept in the library of the Holy Spirit Monastery), fo. 77.

between the archbishop and the commissioner, Orthodox divine service was to be held in Lithuanian in one of the churches of Vilnius as of autumn 1946. The Orthodox liturgy was translated specially into Lithuanian, and attempts were made to find a priest who could deliver sermons in Lithuanian.³³ However, possibly due to the scandal related to the opening of the seminary and the appointment of a new commissioner, that project was not implemented.

At the same time there was a discussion about the possibilities of recovering the former Orthodox churches, which had passed into the hands of the Catholics in the twenties and thirties. This idea could hardly have originated in the ecclesiastical circles. It probably came from CAROC with KGB approval. In planning the growth of the Orthodox Church, a search was made for corresponding propaganda arguments, historically justifying ‘the pushing aside’ of Catholicism.

The heads of the Lithuanian diocese found this idea acceptable. Available sources show that they laid claims to several churches in Vilnius, Kaunas and other places. However, despite the endeavours of the commissioner Linev, the LSSR authorities did not endorse these projects from Soviet central government.³⁴ Conducting a drastic policy to destroy of Catholic Church between 1944 and 1949, the leadership of the LSSR was not going to make concessions to any creed, and it actually blocked any attempts by central authorities to strengthen Orthodoxy – in its policy towards religion the LCP was guided by the attitudes of the CPSU of the twenties and thirties rather than by those of the post-war period. The aim of the authorities of Soviet Lithuania was to reduce the influence of Catholicism to a minimum and to bring discredit on it. Meanwhile the protection of Orthodoxy did not raise any political dividends; on the contrary it caused the society’s dissatisfaction and implied propaganda controversies.

By the autumn of 1948 the LSSR authorities managed at last to persuade central government not to base its struggle against Catholicism on the potential of the Orthodox Church. Archbishop Fotii, having replaced Metropolitan Kornilii, immediately warned

³³ Linev’s account for the third and fourth quarters of 1946, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 2, b. 4, fo. 25.

³⁴ Gushchin to Karpov, account for the second quarter of 1947, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 2, b. 5, fo. 17; Gushchin to Sniečkus, account for the first half of 1954, LYA, LKP DS, f. 1771, ap. 192, b. 22, ff. 106–107 ff.

deans 'not to speak against the representatives of other religions in sermons'.³⁵

Although the Orthodox Church did not become a serious rival to Catholicism in Lithuania, it did benefit from the 'pilot' period between 1944 and 1948. At that time it felt comparatively safe and, in comparison to other creeds, it rose in status. Possibly the most significant result was the consolidation of its favourable political image. Throughout the entire Soviet era, high officials made no secret of their opinion that the Orthodox Church was 'less detrimental' to the interests of the state than Catholicism.

Parishes and Priests Between 1944 and 1958 When Moscow abandoned its plans to set the Lithuanian Orthodox against the Catholics, the situation of the Orthodox Church was defined by the same CPSU policy, applied to all religions. It was a fluctuating policy, in which liberalization was followed by radicalization. When the pressure weakened, the statistics started to indicate the vitality of 'the relics of the past': greater numbers of churches, seminarians, and more systematic religious services.

Orthodox parishes, never numerous in Lithuania, experienced a significant decline after the Second World War. The tenfold increase of the Russian population in Lithuania did not lead to any growth in the number of the Orthodox believers. The Russian newcomers were a secularized generation and they had little to do with religion.

During the Soviet period the network of Orthodox churches remained rather stable in Lithuania. All of them were registered between 1946 and 1948. In many districts the registration procedures were delayed, and the commissioner registered some churches merely on the basis of the lists, presented by the archbishop. That could account for the resulting confusion: some registered churches had ceased functioning long ago, six communities had registered two churches each (parish churches and cemetery chapels).

By 1949 there were sixty churches in Lithuania – of that number forty-four were parish churches, fourteen chapels of ease and two prayer houses; they were serviced by forty-eight Orthodox priests,

³⁵ Archbishop Fotii to the dean of Panevėžys, a copy of the letter of 27 Jan. 1949, LYA, f. K 1, ap. 58, b. P-12021-LI, ff. 23-13.

six deacons and fifteen acolytes.³⁶ To the Bishop's knowledge, the number of believers was around 12,500.³⁷ Besides, in Vilnius there was the monastery of the Holy Spirit and the nunnery of St Mary Magdalene, each with its own church.

Small Orthodox parishes were soon impoverished by Soviet reforms and taxes, and the problem of their survival was permanent. In the post-war period the official tendency was their preservation,³⁸ and in cases of danger resolute measures were taken to protect them. Thus, in 1948, during the most intensive campaign of the closure of Catholic churches, the local authorities also closed six Orthodox churches. Liturgical articles were rapidly removed, and corn was stored there. CAROC strongly denounced such 'unlawful actions, insulting the religious feelings of the believers, qualified these cases as 'a massive phenomenon' and authorized its commissioner to appeal to the Council of Ministers without delay.³⁹ The Council secured its ends and (as parishioners lodged complaints) services were restored in three Orthodox churches.

CAROC also severely criticized the attempts of the authorities of Vilnius to reduce the number of Orthodox churches. Having closed three quarters of the city's Catholic churches, the leaders of the municipality asked the commissioner to close at least some Orthodox churches and to transfer the two monasteries. The commissioner, citing 'the instruction, the decree of the All-Union government and the opinion of CAROC at the Council of Ministers of the USSR',⁴⁰ categorically rejected the requests of local officials, and thus all the Orthodox churches and monasteries were saved.

Between 1944 and 1958 only three Orthodox churches were closed in Lithuania. Two of them – in Alytus and Merkinė – belonged to very small communities. An exception was St Andrew's Orthodox church in Kaunas – it was demolished during the

³⁶ Gushchin's account for the third and fourth quarters of 1949, LYA, LKP DS, f. 1771, ap. 92, b. 21, ff. 20, 51.

³⁷ Archbishop Kornilii to the commissioner of the CAROC, account for 1946, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 3, b. 15, fo. 6.

³⁸ Senior CAROC Inspector Spiridonov to Karpov, information of 10 Aug. 1945, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 2, b. 3, fo. 32; Efremov's account for 1960, LYA, LKP, DS, f. 1771, ap. 208, b. 16, fo. 94 ff.

³⁹ Karpov to Gushchin, letter of 21 Oct. 1948, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 2, b. 2, fo. 98.

⁴⁰ Gushchin's account for the second and third quarters of 1948, LYA, LKP DS, f. 1771, ap. 11, b. 280, ff. 65–66.

construction of the radio equipment factory in 1954. Although believers were assured that their church would be re-built on another site, the CAROC commissioner had intended to eliminate that parish altogether at the outset.⁴¹ He delayed the talks for a long time hoping that the parishioners would get used to going to some other church and would be unwilling to take the trouble of building. The parish, however, had a strong backing in the Patriarchate. Metropolitan Nikolai (Iarushevich), second in seniority in the Russian Orthodox Church after the Patriarch, born in Kaunas, was a godson of the parish priest. He procured the means from the Patriarchate for the construction of a new church, and, possibly, encouraged the parishioners to defend their rights. None the less, the believers failed to defeat CAROC, and the Kaunas authorities were categorically against the opening of a new church or prayer house in the city. In the spring of 1960 the registration of the parish was annulled 'as the community had no church'.⁴²

In accordance with standard Soviet practice, the LSSR Council of Ministers adopted a secret decree on 8 July 1948 to nationalize all churches. By an analogous decree of 13 September churches and presbyteries were handed over gratis and indefinitely to the communities of the believers, represented by the so-called 'councils of twenty' and parish boards of three persons. However, disregarding the decrees, local officials accommodated outsiders in the rectories or imposed enormous taxes on the former inhabitants.⁴³

After the war all religious communities were heavily taxed on buildings, land holding, insurance and income. When it became obvious that those taxes were unbearable, complaints were filed with the authorities. The headship of the Orthodox Church pointed out that such taxes would lead to the closure of their churches and the Orthodox would start going to Catholic churches. Then CAROC recommended the LSSR Council of Ministers to abolish taxes on buildings and land held at the disposal of the Orthodox parishes.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Gushchin's account for the first half of 1954, LYA, LKP DS, f. 1771, ap. 192, b. 22, fo. 98.

⁴² A minutes copy of the protocol no. 4 of the CAROC sitting of 16 May 1960, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 3, b. 20, fo. 201.

⁴³ Cf. Gushchin's account for the first quarter of 1949, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 2, b. 7, fo. 9. In the USSR the clergymen of all creeds paid taxes for their lodgings two to four times higher than the workers or employees.

⁴⁴ Karpov to Gedvilas, letter of 7 May 1947, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 3, b. 126, fo. 12.

The government did not resolve to privilege only the Orthodox Church, therefore the Ministry of Finance reduced taxes for all 'cult structures' in 1947.⁴⁵ However, that was short-lived, because taxes again were raised in 1952 and 1961.

Before the collectivization of agriculture the believers had supported the rural churches and priests by raising a certain agreed sum of money and foodstuffs; on becoming collective farmers were they no more able to do that duty. Deprived of the church land and paying high taxes for their nationalized houses, the priests of small parishes could hardly make both ends meet, they lived at the expense of the other members of the family, they were engaged in farming or handicrafts, later a couple of priests even worked on collective farms.

Subsidies from the Patriarchate supported the diocese appreciably, but nevertheless a great difference in the life of the urban and rural priests caused tensions and discontent in Lithuania. The leadership of the diocese endeavoured to solve that problem time and again.

After the war there were attempts to unite the dioceses of Vilnius and Riga, as until 1955 the archbishop of Riga was head of the Lithuanian Orthodox Diocese. Historically the diocese of Vilnius had included several gubernias in Belorussia, and so there were plans to turn it into a vicariate of the Minsk diocese or to combine it with the diocese of Molodechno.⁴⁶ In 1956 Archbishop Aleksii (Dekhterev) recommended the Patriarchate to extend the diocese of Vilnius to the Kaliningrad Oblast where there was not a single Orthodox church and the believers used to go to the nearest churches in Lithuania.⁴⁷ None of these projects was implemented. The Patriarchate did not take steps to change the boundaries of the Lithuanian diocese, because throughout the whole Soviet Union ecclesiastical boundaries coincided with the boundaries of the administrative division of regions and republics.

Due to difficult conditions rather many priests tried to leave Lithuania. Their places were occupied either by brighter deacons or acolytes, ordained by the archbishop. Practically none of them

⁴⁵ Minister A. Drobnys to Gushchin, letter of 24 June 1947, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 3, b. 127, fo. 42; Gushchin's top secret account for the second quarter of 1947, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 2, b. 5, fo. 22.

⁴⁶ Karpov to Gushchin, letter of 13 Nov. 1947, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 2, b. 2, fo. 74.

⁴⁷ Archbishop Aleksii to Patriarch Aleksii, letter of 14 Jan. 1956, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 3, b. 69, ff. 11-13.

were from Lithuania, but from other dioceses of the USSR.⁴⁸ After half a year of training and examinations at the monastery of the Holy Spirit, they were ordained as deacons and shortly afterwards as priests (*ierei*). This process was controlled by the CAROC commissioner, who collected information about the candidates through his own channels and 'did not recommend' the archbishop to ordain those who had been convicted or found 'untrustworthy' in some other way. The archbishop could not but obey the suggestion, since without a certificate of a cult worker such a priest would not have been able to work legally in a parish.

In the forties and fifties the numbers of the Orthodox clergy decreased in Lithuania from forty-eight priests and six deacons in 1949 to thirty and three respectively in 1965.⁴⁹ In the late forties several priests were repressed by the MGB. Like the clergymen of any other religions, they were not tried for any specific crimes but in order to create the atmosphere of fear, distrust and suspicion. They could be accused of anti-Soviet activity or agitation due to a careless hint about life's growing difficulties, the shortage of goods, hunger as an aftermath of collectivization, etc.

Between the sixties and the eighties statistics dealing with the Orthodox Church in Lithuania became rather stable – about thirty to thirty-three priests and one to three deacons in forty-one churches (others were shut down, and some priests worked in more than one church), and the approximate number of believers was 12,000.

The Situation of the Church Between 1958 and 1990 The most unfavourable period for the Orthodox Church in Lithuania and throughout the Soviet Union was the years between 1958 and 1964. That was the time when the shift in the policy of the Communist Party towards religion revived the spirit of the laws and decrees of the twenties and thirties, the abandonment of which came to be treated as a deliberate deviation on Stalin's part. In this new campaign against religion, churches, theological seminaries and monasteries were closed, and religious convictions were labelled as political disloyalty.

⁴⁸ In 1949 there were 41 Russians, 28 Belorussians and 1 Ukrainian of the total number of 70 priests, deacons and acolytes in the Orthodox diocese of Lithuania (cf. Archbishop Fotii to Efremov, account for 1948, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 3, b. 32, fo. 130).

⁴⁹ Archbishop Antonii to Efremov, account for 1965, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 3, b. 121, fo. 2.

The new course of Communist-Party policy did not take long to reach Lithuania. Its first sign was the replacement in the spring of 1958 of the moderate commissioner Gushchin, who, during his decade in office, managed to come to an understanding with the leaders of the diocese and some clergymen. The new commissioner, Aleksandr Efremov, was a member of the Khrushchev team, earnestly attending to the Communist Party's task of eliminating religious 'superstitions' in some twelve to seventeen years.⁵⁰

Understandably, the commissioner's concern was to translate Khrushchev's ideas into actions as soon as possible. However, in the Lithuanian diocese the situation was rather delicate, since at that time its head was Archbishop Aleksii (Dekhterev), who had returned from emigration and was sent to the diocese of Vilnius in 1955. In the USSR there were some more former émigré bishops, and taking into account their foreign contacts the Soviet officials communicated with them more carefully and more respectfully.

Seizing on the opportunity of the 'thaw', Archbishop Aleksii consolidated the administration of the diocese and made its religious life more dynamic. The churches of Vilnius saw more solemn services, and choirs began giving concerts in them. The library of the Holy Spirit Monastery became accessible to the outsiders to some degree. However, the Khrushchev regime did not tolerate any stimulation of religious activity, and, acting in accordance with CAROC's instructions, the commissioner 'politely asked' the archbishop to close the library, stop organizing concerts, refrain from 'excessive' services, and so forth.⁵¹

Pressure increased in 1958. Archbishop Aleksii unwillingly complied with the commissioner's instructions, but religious life in the USSR became constrained by the directives of the Patriarchate. The archbishop was obliged to prohibit people under 18 from acting as servers, or taking part in church choirs; priests were forbidden to hold services (except baptismal and funerary ones) in private homes and apartments. Four prayer houses, which had been functioning since the post-war years, were also attributed to the same category and their informal communities were dissolved.⁵²

⁵⁰ Efremov's account for 1962, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 1, b. 33, fo. 30.

⁵¹ Gushchin's account for 1957 on the activity of the monasteries, LYA, LKD DS, f. 1771, ap. 194, b. 9, fo. 109 ff.

⁵² Archbishop Aleksii to the deacons, circular of 25 Aug. 1958, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 3, b. 89, fo. 43; Efremov's account for the second half of 1958, LYA, LKP DS, f. 1771, ap. 205, b. 13, fo. 104.

CAROC had been aware about the existence of those unlisted prayer houses and had tolerated them for a long time.

Following Aleksii's death, Roman (Tang) was appointed archbishop of Vilnius and was forced to restrain religious life further. In January 1960 priests could no longer follow the old custom of visiting believer families and blessing water.⁵³ On the 'recommendation' of the CAROC commissioner, the archbishop banned the baptism of children outside the church in 1963. Similarly a ban was imposed on confessing and administering communion to children not under the guidance of parents or relatives. In Lithuania the commissioner promptly informed the local authorities in the districts about those prohibitions obliging them to control their observance and inform about the violations.⁵⁴

Attention was drawn to the contents of sermons. Special commissions, consisting of Party activists and teachers, were set up in all districts to hear the sermons of the clergymen of all creeds and inform the commissioners about their contents. Previously having treated purely religious sermons positively, since the early sixties the commissioner characterized them as 'harmful', implanting the religious world-view and 'superstitions'.⁵⁵ Formerly dissatisfied by the fact that archbishops did not visit parishes, the commissioner then tried to restrict their trips.⁵⁶ He also treated as an advantage the fact that during their visits the archbishops did not hold services (i.e., they 'did not stimulate devotion'). Even regular solemn celebrations of Soviet holidays were estimated as wiliness - the Church's attempt to conformity.⁵⁷

Under the pressure of the Soviet authorities in the spring of 1961, the Patriarchate started 'a Church reform': all financial and economic issues were relegated to the executive bodies of the parish. They consisted of three persons, elected by 'the committee of twenty'. They had the right to engage and dismiss the pastor - 'a cult employee'. The reform had to be implemented in Lithuania, too. The commissioner incited the local officials to ignore the pastors

⁵³ Efremov's account for 1960, LYA, LKP DS, f. 1771, ap. 208, b. 16, fo. 114.

⁵⁴ Efremov's circular of 21 May 1963 to the chairmen of the executive committees of all districts, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 3, b. 114, fo. 78.

⁵⁵ Efremov's account for 1962, LCVA, f. R, 238, ap. 1, b. 33, f. 27; Efremov's account for 1963, *ibid.*, b. 37, fo. 7.

⁵⁶ LSSR CARC Commissioner Justas Rugienis' account for 1967, LCVA, f. R 181, ap. 3, b. 74, fo. 40.

⁵⁷ Efremov's account for 1963, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 1, b. 37, fo. 11.

and deal directly with the representatives of the aforementioned bodies. Eventually the loyalty of the members of the committees had to be taken into account and 'fanatical ones' dismissed.⁵⁸

This system was operational in the Orthodox parishes of the USSR until 1988. The local authorities manipulated the church 'bodies' by selecting their members and on their behalf deposing untrustworthy clergymen. Nevertheless, this system did not operate smoothly in the Lithuanian diocese. Several years later a commissioner maintained that 'the bodies' did not manage the financial affairs of the parish and 'the priest ran the community'.⁵⁹ The commissioner was discontented with the officials of the district who merely approved the composition of the executive bodies of the Orthodox parishes and lacked initiative in selecting their members.⁶⁰ At that time the main attention of the local authorities was focused on Catholic parishes and the activity of their priests.

Under the pressure of Soviet rule, the Patriarchate introduced wages for the clergy. The procedure was as follows: persons wishing to have their child baptized, or to have a church wedding, and so on, had to apply to the executive body of the parish, indicate their name and address, pay the necessary sum of money to the cashier and take the receipt to the priest. That meant the implementation of control over religious practice in an atheistic state.

In implementing the Patriarchate's instruction, wages were paid to the priests of three parishes in Lithuania.⁶¹ The desired result was achieved: the number of services decreased. However, in contrast to other dioceses in the USSR, where the passport data were recorded until 1987, this practice was not introduced in Lithuania because the authorities failed to enforce the new order in the administration of the Catholic Church.

In the period between 1958 and 1964 the most painful restriction of the religious life of the Lithuanian diocese was the loss of the financial support of the Moscow Patriarchate. 'The Lithuanian diocese is too small to be able to cope with its problems on its own. Our possibilities are unduly inadequate. The diocese can live

⁵⁸ Efremov to Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the LSSR Leokadija Diržinskaitė, letter of 23 May 1963, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 3, b. 114, fo. 86.

⁵⁹ Rugienis' account for 1969, LCVA, f. R 181, ap. 3, b. 78, fo. 49.

⁶⁰ Efremov to I. Brazhnik, a secret message of 29 May 1962, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 1, b. 33, fo. 8.

⁶¹ Efremov's account for 1964, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 1, b. 40, fo. 18.

a normal religious life only enjoying permanent and regular support of the Patriarchate every year',⁶² Archbishop Filaret wrote. About a half of Lithuanian parishes used to receive such backing. The diocese itself was in the Patriarchate's debt, and it did not pay its dues to theological seminaries and did not make insurance contributions.

The Lithuanian authorities had long been aware of that most sore point of the Orthodox diocese and required the closure of the empty churches. The council resisted sternly even when the Central Committee of the CPSU adopted a special directive of 16 March 1961, forbidding the Patriarchate 'to render financial assistance to parishes and monasteries which are not maintained by the local population'.⁶³ It was only in the summer of 1962 that the Patriarchate was banned emphatically from financing Lithuanian parishes. Taking into consideration fatal consequences of the ensuing situation, Archbishop Roman personally applied to CAROC and Patriarch Aleksii (Simanskii). None the less, no exception was made for the Lithuanian diocese.⁶⁴

Unable to maintain a priest and pay taxes, small Orthodox communities had to forsake their churches. And yet, from 1959 to 1965 only one Orthodox parish church (that of St Parasceve in Vilnius with around 100 faithful) was closed.

The church of the nunnery and six filial churches were closed, too. Their communities numbered fifteen to thirty believers⁶⁵ and they existed only on the subsidies of the Patriarchate. Simultaneously the registration of all cemetery chapels was annulled, since CAROC could not tolerate a parish with two prayer houses. In spite of that, nearly all chapels remained at the disposal of the communities for laying out the dead.

The majority of the Catholic churches, in particular those in larger towns, had been closed in 1948. That campaign, however, practically did not affect the Orthodox churches. The contrast between the two Churches became glaringly obvious. Thus, in Vilnius as a result of the closure of the Catholic churches and the

⁶² Archbishop Filaret's account for 1953, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 3, b. 59, fo. 9.

⁶³ Pospelovskii, *Russkaia pravoslavnaia tserkov'*, p. 294.

⁶⁴ Archbishop Antonii's account for 1964 to the Patriarch, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 2, b. 119, ff. 9–10.

⁶⁵ Archbishop Aleksii information on the approximate number of believers in the diocese of Lithuania on 1 Jan. 1958, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 3, b. 81, ff. 43–45.

protection of the Orthodox ones, there remained only eleven churches for each creed despite the fact that the Russians constituted only ten to twelve per cent of the city's population, and the number of the Orthodox among them was still smaller.⁶⁶ The two Orthodox monasteries continued functioning, while all Catholic ones were dissolved in Lithuania, and the persecution of dispersed monks was unrelenting.

The Vilnius leadership again failed to solve the problem of the disproportion between the Orthodox and the Catholic churches. The commissioner sort of approved the intention of reducing the number of Orthodox churches (in the capital's Old Town four of them stood at a distance of several hundred yards from one another), but he did not want to eliminate the parishes.⁶⁷ In Lithuania the moderate course of CAROC policy was conditioned possibly by the reluctance to weaken the Orthodox Church to a certain degree. The easily attainable narrowing of the network of Orthodox churches would have led to the undesirable improvement of the situation of the Catholic Church. The reduction of the numbers of Orthodox priests and parishes would have strengthened the influence of Catholicism. The indecisiveness, reinforced by the strategic task of preserving the historical centres of Russian culture, created exceptional conditions for Orthodoxy in comparison to its status in the USSR and to other religions in Lithuania. The contrast was particularly obvious in the Khrushchev anti-religious campaign, in which almost a half of the Orthodox parishes in the whole USSR (and a still greater percentage of them in Belorussia, Moldavia and Ukraine) were dissolved.⁶⁸

The Orthodox parishes continued their activity after the closure of the filial churches. However, the less dense network of the churches did not contribute to the continuation of the religious life. Their liturgical articles were usually handed over to other parishes or to the museum of atheism.

Believers helped the Orthodox Church in Lithuania to survive in this difficult period. Shortly afterwards the officials were astonished by an unexpected rise in church revenues: from 70,000 roubles in 1962 to as much as 114,000 roubles in 1969.⁶⁹ A similar

⁶⁶ Efremov's report of 1960 (no exact date) to the secretary of the Central Committee of the LCP, V. Niunka, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 3, b. 46, fo. 164.

⁶⁷ Secret letters of the chairman of the executive committee of Vilnius, J. Vildžiūnas, (of 11 Apr. 1962) and Efremov (of 23 Apr.) to the Council of Ministers of the LSSR, LCVA, f. R 238, ap. 1, b. 35, ff. 3, 7 ff.

⁶⁸ V. Tsypin, *Istoria Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi. 1917–1990*. (Moscow, 1994), p. 160.

increase was observed in the finances of the monastery of the Holy Spirit: 98,500 roubles in 1975, 267,800 in 1979, and nearly 388,000 in 1984 in the form of donations from various parts of the Soviet Union.⁷⁰ In due course the monastery could compensate the loss of the Patriarchate's support and could earmark resources for the renovation of churches and for the diocesan board.

A sensitive issue of the Orthodox Church was the training of priests. In the USSR they were generally ordained without seminary education. The enrolment of young men in theological seminaries and academies was strictly controlled by CAROC and the KGB. A slightly easier way to higher education was the studies by correspondence for the ordained priests working in the parishes.

Gaps in the knowledge of the Orthodox priests damaged their prestige in the environment of Catholic culture, where ordination was possible only after theological studies. In Lithuania, however, the educational average was not bad compared to other Orthodox dioceses of the USSR, where between the two world wars there were no seminaries and only a half of the priests had acquired theological education; the other half had not always finished secondary schools.⁷¹ Meanwhile in 1966 and 1985 in the Lithuanian diocese 72 per cent of the Orthodox priests were graduates of theological institutions of education and quite a number of them were studying at seminaries and academies.⁷²

The subsequent existence of the Lithuanian Orthodox diocese in the Brezhnev era up to 1990 could be described as a period of stagnation. Small communities continued to decrease as a result of the increasing secularization of society and the migration of the population to towns. The situation was better in larger towns, where troops were based (there were Russian families of the officers there), as well as in the parishes adjacent to the Kaliningrad Oblast. In 1969 as many as 72 per cent of baptisms, 90 per cent of marriages and 52 per cent of funerary services in the diocese took place in the Orthodox churches of Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Šiauliai, Tauragė and Kybartai.⁷³

⁶⁹ J. Rugienis' account for 1969, LCVA, f. R 181, ap. 3, b. 78, fo. 48.

⁷⁰ Anilionis' accounts for 1979 and 1984, LCVA, f. R 181, ap. 3, b. 102, f. 41, b. 113, fo. 16.

⁷¹ Tsypin, *Istoria*, pp. 182, 187. The data presented refer to the mid-seventies.

⁷² Rugienis' account for 1966, LCVA, f. R 181, ap. 3, b. 72, fo. 7; Anilionis' account for 1985, LYA, LKP DS, f. 1771, ap. 268, b. 202, fo. 10.

⁷³ Rugienis' account for 1970, LCVA, f. R 181, ap. 3, b. 78, fo. 48.

As a result of the decrease in the numbers of believers, churches were downgraded into chapels of ease, and the priests had to serve two or more churches. The situation remained stable only in the parishes of Vilnius – all of them had their own priests.

In Lithuania the Soviet regime confined its attention mainly to the struggle against the Catholic religion and Church, therefore Orthodoxy for a long time remained outside the sphere of atheistic propaganda and all kinds of related campaigns. Orthodox holidays were not disturbed by alternative festive rallies, their holy places were tolerated, and so on. Nevertheless, the Russian-language daily *Sovetskaja Litva* occasionally published articles discrediting the Holy Spirit monastery and its monks. In fact, in the latter decades of Soviet rule the Orthodox diocese was put into the shade by the interest of the KGB and the commissioners in the growing underground of the Catholic Church.

Conclusions Engaged in extreme atheism from the very beginning, the Soviet regime manipulated the Churches in its domestic and foreign policy. After the Second World War, Orthodoxy had to become a sort of ‘state’ religion of the USSR, and the Patriarchate turned into a partner of major projects (as in the case of the Ukrainian Uniates) and opened ecclesiastical channels for pro-Soviet propaganda.

In the consolidation of the new regime in occupied Lithuania the Moscow Patriarchate was assigned the role surpassing its possibilities. Between 1944 and 1948 the Council on the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church at the Council of Ministers of the USSR requested the Orthodox bishops to start ‘the struggle’ against Catholicism, i.e., to take up the criticism and discredit of its dogmas. In consolidating the prestige and structure of the Orthodox Church, the holy place was re-established in Vilnius, the theological seminary was re-opened, the churches, damaged during the war, were reconstructed or renovated, there were plans to establish an Orthodox missionary fraternity, to conduct services in Lithuanian, to hand over some Catholic churches to the Orthodox, and so forth.

Nevertheless, even enjoying the support of central government, the Orthodox Church could not afford to compete with dominant Catholicism. Small in number, Russian-speaking, alien to Lithuanian society and culture and lacking intellectual potential, the Orthodox Church failed to cope with the task. Besides, the strengthening of the positions of Orthodoxy was not acceptable to the leadership of Soviet Lithuania.

Between 1944 and 1949 as it conducted a drastic policy of the destruction of the Catholic Church, the leadership of the LSSR was not going to make concessions to any creed, and it actually blocked any attempts by the central authorities to strengthen Orthodoxy. In its policy towards religion the LCP was guided by the attitudes of the CPSU of the twenties and thirties rather than by those of the post-war period. By the autumn of 1948 the authorities of the LSSR managed at last to persuade the All-Union government not to base its struggle against Catholicism on the potential of the Orthodox Church.

Though subsequently not openly protected, the Orthodox Church consolidated its structure in the post-war period (in contrast to the total weakening of all other creeds). It also acquired a positive political image: the Orthodox Church came to be treated as less 'harmful' to the interests of the state than the Catholic Church.

The majority of Lithuanian Orthodox parishes were small, and they were easily impoverished by Soviet reforms and taxes. Therefore the problem of their survival was permanent. In the post-war period CAROC managed to protect almost all churches, even those attended by several scores of believers. The Patriarchate provided about a half of Lithuanian parishes with subsidies for the wages, pensions, taxes and renovation of the churches.

The anti-religious campaign of 1958–1964 proceeded more moderately in Lithuania than in the Orthodox dioceses in the USSR. Some of the reforms were not implemented at all (e.g., the removal of pastors from church administration, paying them wages, recording those requesting church services, etc.). The Soviet authorities did not resolve to disperse Orthodox parishes for fear of the growth of Catholicism. Such indecisiveness, reinforced by the strategic task of preserving the historical centres of Russian culture, created exceptional conditions for Orthodoxy in comparison to its status in the USSR and to other religions in Lithuania.

The Orthodox Church began to decline when the Communist Party of the USSR relinquished its patronage policy. The Orthodox communities increasingly weakened despite comparatively insignificant structural losses (the closure of four parish churches in 1944–1990, an alleged dissolution of the nunnery which was practically transferred to the territory of the monastery and continued functioning there, etc.). The communities continued to decrease as a result of the rising secularization and urbanization of society. Due to the reduction of the numbers of believers, many churches turned into chapels of

ease, and one priest had to serve between two and six churches. Only the communities of the major towns retained their former vitality.

In Lithuania the Soviet regime confined its attention mainly to the struggle against the Catholic religion and Church, therefore Orthodoxy for a long time remained outside the sphere of atheistic propaganda and all kinds of related campaigns. In due course the Orthodox diocese was entirely put into the shade by the concern of the KGB and the commissioners about the growing underground of the Catholic Church in Lithuania.

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STAČIATIKIŲ BAŽNYČIA LIETUVOJE SOVIETINIŲ LAIKOTARPIU

Santrauka

REGINA LAUKAITYTĖ

Straipsnyje analizuojama Lietuvos stačiatikių vyskupijos istorija 1944–1990 m. Išryškinamas stačiatikybės padėtis Lietuvoje išskirtinumas, kurį nulėmė sovietų valdžios mėginimai panaudoti Bažnyčias savo vidaus politikoje.

Ištvirtinant sovietinį režimą okupuotoje Lietuvoje 1944–1948 m., valdžia reikalavo, kad stačiatikių vyskupai pradėtų „kovą su reakcine katalikybe“, t. y. jos dogminės kritikos, diskreditavimo ir pan. propagandą. Tačiau net turėdama sąjunginės valdžios užnugarį, Stačiatikių Bažnyčia nepajėgė varžytis su vyraujančia katalikybe. Negausi, rusakalbė, lietuvių visuomenei bei kultūrai svetima, intelektualinių pajėgų stokojanti Bažnyčia neįstengė tokios misijos atlikti. Be to, stačiatikybės pozicijų stiprėjimas nebuvo priimtinas sovietinės Lietuvos vadovams.

Vėliau Stačiatikių Bažnyčia Lietuvoje tiesiogiai neproteguota, tačiau spėjo sustiprinti savo struktūrą, naudodamasi palankiu politiniu įvaizdžiu (ji traktuota kaip esanti „mažiau kenksminga“ valstybės interesams, nei Katalikų). Todėl 1958–1965 m. visoje SSRS vykdytos antibažnytinės kampanijos padariniai Lietuvos vyskupijoje buvo minimalūs. Kai kurių reformų čia apskritai nepavyko įgyvendinti.

Pagrindinis režimo dėmesys Lietuvoje sovietiniu laikotarpiu buvo skirtas kovai su dominuojančia katalikų religija ir Bažnyčia, todėl stačiatikybė liko ateistinės propagandos, įvairių kampanijų nuošalyje. Ilgainiui įgaliojinių, KGB susidomėjimą ja visai užgožė kova su augančiu Katalikų Bažnyčios pogrindžiu. Stačiatikių Bažnyčios struktūra Lietuvoje 1944–1990 m. nukentėjo nežymiai (uždarytos tik 4 parapijų cerkvės), tačiau stačiatikių bendruomenės tolygiai nyko. Jas negailestingai naikino visuomenės sekuliarėjimas, urbanizacija. Gyvybingumą išsaugojo tik didžiųjų miestų bendruomenės.