Tumas-Vaižgantas, the Priests, and the Church

Until his death on April 29, 1933, Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas was probably Smetona's strongest intellectual support. Having spent the entire war in Russia Tumas returned to his beloved Vilnius on May 8, 1918. He met with Smetona and began to work in the Lithuanian Taryba, but he did not become a member. There were already too many priests in the Taryba, and Tumas was after all a freelance journalist. After a bit he became the editor of Lietuvos aidas. When the Red divisions flooded Vilnius and the Lithuanian Taryba withdrew to Kaunas, Tumas remained in Vilnius. At a Lithuanian meeting on January 4, 1919, he urged Lithuanians to maintain their common goals. The Bolsheviks were invading Lithuania; Polish occupiers thought Lithuania did not exist. The Polish legionnaires were defending the interests of the nobility. Tumas declared that the Poles should join the Lithuanian Taryba and organize together with the Lithuanians. But they had not done this, so shame on them. But most important for him at the moment was what the Bolsheviks might do.

Long acquainted with the leader of the Bolshevik government, Vincas Mickevičius-Kapsukas, Tumas, upset by the news that the Bolsheviks had invaded the hall of the Lithuanian State Taryba and broken a sculpture of the Lithuanian Knight, organized a delegation of Lithuanian intellectuals and on January 9 visited Kapsukas in Vilnius. He inquired about the Bolsheviks’ intentions – Do they guarantee national rights to the Lithuanians? Especially Lithuanian as the state language? Will Lithuania be called a separate political unit? The Lithuanians were concerned because they did not see their language and especially the Lithuanian Knight in the public announcements. How will the people be provided with food?

Kapsukas explained that this would be an independent revolutionary, Lithuanian state, joined with the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic, RSFSR, if a congress of workers and peasants so decided. The national symbols would not be recognized, nor would Lithuanian be the state language: The Russian language “which everyone understands” would be used. The government would in fact use five languages; the revolutionary committee would work with all who did not support the Lithuanian Taryba and did not sabotage work. The Lithuanians resolved to work with the Bolsheviks only in cultural matters, so that this period of their administration would not remain a barren field, especially since the commissar of education, Vaidas Biržiška (Mykolas’s brother), was sympathetic to them and had assigned considerable funds to translations into
the Lithuanian language. Tumas paid more visits to Kapsukas and kept reporting new infringements by the Bolshevik government on Lithuanian national aspirations. He himself became a translator, working mostly on pedagogical literature, including *Popular Education and Democracy*, written by V.I. Lenin's wife Nadia Krupskaia. Much of Tumas's work, however, remained in manuscript.609

At the beginning of 1920, with Vilnius now under Polish occupation, Smetona invited Tumas to come to Kaunas to edit the newspaper *Tauta* (Nation), which continued the old line of the *Viltis* group. Tumas, obviously, could not sit quietly in Kaunas. He joined the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union, edited its organ *Trimitas*, and dove into the quagmire of the election campaign for the Constituent Assembly. Watching the battles, he fiercely and mercilessly criticized the elections, for which the ruling Christian Democratic Party in turn criticized him, and the conflict between Tumas and the Christian Democratic leadership intensified.

Then came an honor. On April 22, 1921, Bishop Pranciškus Karevičius raised him to canon. Tumas did not immediately realize how that title restrained him. At a celebratory dinner the honored canon honored others too and downed a few glasses. The bishop was upset and sent Tumas a letter accusing him of not having maintained “a priestly style”: “Having intensely urged the guests ‘to raise

**FIGURE 37**
*Writer Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas.*