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## Between the Vatican and Moscow: The Lithuanian Imprint on the Death Throes of the Soviet Union (1979–1989)

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### Abstract

By introducing different types of sources—published documents on Vatican’s Eastern policy, archival material of the Soviet governmental agencies, egodocuments of local ecclesiastical leaders—this article tries to identify the role Lithuanian subjects have played in the field of Vatican-USSR relations during the first half of Pope John Paul II’s pontificate. The research reveals that, since the end of 1970s, issues pertaining to the Lithuanian Catholic Church were considered priority agenda items—both within the halls of the Vatican and in the central government offices of the Soviet regime. An analysis of available sources illustrates also that interrelated issues of the boundaries of the Vilnius Archdiocese and the question of its further administration constituted the most acute node of issues during the period under review. The Soviet regime was the most interested in focusing on these issues, as it hoped thereby to dispel any mutual sympathies between Lithuanian Catholics and the Polish pope, put a stop to the emerging cooperation between Catholics in Lithuania and Poland, and bring an end to the politically costly case of Bishop Steponavičius, who by then had become a symbol of the Lithuanian Catholic Church’s resistance. Suppressing of any attempts of the Holy See to be represented at commemoration of important events in Lithuania’s history was yet another highly complicated task for the Soviet authorities.

**Keywords:** Soviet Union; late socialism; the Catholic Church in Lithuania; the Holy See

Many authors who have written about the collapse of the communist system in Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe have emphasized the role played in this process by the Holy See and Pope John Paul II, often pointing out the pontiff’s contribution to the awakening of political activism among Poland’s Catholics and in Polish society as a whole, as well as John Paul II’s pursuit of an Eastern policy meant to broaden religious freedoms in communist-controlled Europe.<sup>1</sup> And while not all agree that the Polish pope and the Polish Catholic Church were the most important actors in the dramatic

<sup>1</sup>George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005); Jonathan Luxmoore and Jolanta Babiuch, *The Vatican and the Red Flag: The Struggle for the Soul of Eastern Europe* (London: G. Chapman, 2000).

collapse of the European communist system,<sup>2</sup> few doubt that their actions did hasten that system's final unravelling. Much less is known about the role played by the Church in this history in other countries in the region which have traditionally been considered Catholic.<sup>3</sup> As soon as researchers gained access to official Soviet government archives in the late twentieth century, however, it soon became clear to them that actions taken by John Paul II and the Vatican were viewed in Moscow as a particularly serious threat to the regime's stability and that the increasingly strong Catholic opposition in Lithuania was perceived as the most serious destabilizing factor on the western edge of the USSR.<sup>4</sup>

These circumstances notwithstanding, within the overall field of Vatican *Ostpolitik* historiography, relations between the Vatican and the Kremlin have remained the least studied to date.<sup>5</sup> This lack of research is largely due to the considerably more limited access to Russian state archives compared to other Central and Eastern European countries, particularly to materials dealing with the final decades of the USSR's existence. Vatican archives pertaining to the period under consideration here have also remained closed to researchers. Within this historiographical context, there is also a great lack of research which could help link two centers of power in the 1980s—the Vatican, the heart of Catholicism, and Moscow, the capital of the international communist movement—whose tense relationship helped drive the course of world history as the century came to a close. An analysis of the case of the Lithuanian Catholic Church could serve as a convenient portal through which we might gain entry into the tunnel of Soviet-Vatican relations, since issues pertaining to Lithuania (such as the Vatican's policy of not recognizing Lithuania's annexation and raising concerns over the state of the Catholic Church in Soviet-occupied Lithuania) unquestionably constituted one of the central problematic knots in the complicated history of this relationship.

The relevance of such an analysis is underscored by the fact that clergy of Lithuanian descent assumed fairly influential posts in the Roman Curia during the first half of John Paul II's papacy. At that time, Prelate Audrys Juozas Bačkis served as Vice-Secretary of the Council for the Public Affairs of the Church (hereafter CPAC), while Archbishop Paulius Marcinkus, despite his involvement in a financial scandal in 1982 associated with the bankruptcy of the Banco Ambrosiano, held on to his position as director of

<sup>2</sup>For example, American historian Bernd Schäfer has attempted to show that the Vatican's capacity to change the rules of the political process in Poland and within the socialist bloc overall was limited and that only changes within the Soviet Union itself opened the way for a greater role of Vatican diplomacy. See Schäfer, "The Catholic Church and the Cold War's end in Europe: Vatican *Ostpolitik* and Pope John Paul II, 1985–1989," in *Europe and the End of the Cold War: A Reappraisal*, ed. Frederic Bozo et al. (Oxford: Routledge 2008), 64–77.

<sup>3</sup>Within this context, one of the few mentionable exceptions is the case study of Slovakia: Emilia Hrabowec, "L'Ostpolitik di Giovanni Paolo II e la Slovacchia (1978–1989)," in *Incorrupta monumenta Ecclesiam defendunt: studi offerti a mons. Sergio Pagano, prefetto dell' Archivio Segreto Vaticano*, ed. Andreas Gottsmann, Pierantonio Piatti, Andreas E. Rehberg (Citta del Vaticano: Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, 2018), 267–290.

<sup>4</sup>Felix Corley, "Soviet Reaction to the Election of Pope John Paul II," *Religion, State and Society* 22, no. 1 (1994): 37–64; John Anderson, *Religion, state and politics in the Soviet Union and successor states* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>5</sup>Some of the more authoritative reviews published after the collapse of the USSR include: Andrea Riccardi, *Il Vaticano e Mosca (1940–1990)* (Roma: Laterza 1992); and Dennis J. Dunn, *The Catholic Church and Russia: Popes, patriarchs, Tsars and Commissars* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

the Institute for the Works of Religion, the manager of the Vatican's finances. Both were part of the Pope's inner circle and could act as influencers for Lithuanian issues within the Roman Curia, ensuring John Paul II's personal favor toward Lithuania.

A multifaceted analysis of the Lithuanian case study is facilitated by a fairly broad spectrum of available sources. Although this research did not utilize documents from still restricted archives of the highest Soviet governing bodies, including the Soviet Communist Party, the Council of Religious Affairs (hereafter CRA) under the Soviet Council of Ministers, and the former Soviet KGB,<sup>6</sup> this gap has been partially compensated for by an extensive collection of documents produced by local branches of Soviet-ruling institutions and now held in Lithuanian archives. Without a doubt, the most significant part of these sources is the archival collection of the former CRA representative in Soviet Lithuania, which includes reports prepared by the representative regarding conversations with Lithuanian diocesan leaders returning from visits to Rome, the representative's correspondence with the CRA leadership in Moscow regarding specific proposals conveyed from the Vatican via Lithuanian bishops, and CRA instructions, which shed light on its position vis-à-vis the Vatican. The archival legacy left by Soviet Lithuanian governing institutions, beneficial in any effort to reconstruct their participation in relations with the Vatican, is further enriched by the archives of the former local KGB office. Documents pertaining to the work of the Soviet Lithuanian KGB and its "Vatican and Émigré Clerical Policy" in the 1980s were held in a special file under the name "Kapella."

Although the Vatican archives associated with the period in question remain closed to researchers, the content of certain official and informal contacts between the Holy See and Soviet representatives can be reconstructed based on the personal documents left by Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, the principal coordinator of the Vatican's *Ostpolitik*. Digital copies of these documents are available to researchers in the historical archives of the Vatican's Secretariat of State. Several of the files within this collection are dedicated exclusively to documents pertaining to relations with the USSR, consisting mostly of different types of information and analytical material, which reached Casaroli's office by various means and which was later used by the cardinal as he prepared for meetings with Soviet representatives. A large portion of those documents was published in a dossier one decade ago.<sup>7</sup> In his own memoirs,<sup>8</sup> Casaroli devotes little attention to negotiations with the USSR, so there is virtually no mention of Lithuanian issues. In this regard, the absence of direct memoir testimony is offset by an interview conducted by the author with Cardinal Bačkis, who witnessed the inner workings of the Vatican's Eastern policy first-hand. Perhaps the most difficult thing for any researcher to reconstruct are the positions assumed by Lithuanian clergy leaders within the context of overall Vatican-Soviet relations, since the fear instilled by unrelenting official surveillance compelled most of them to refrain from keeping any written record of the content of conversations or meetings. The situation is somewhat mitigated by the existence of a particularly detailed and as yet unpublished diary by Bishop

<sup>6</sup>Many details about the Soviet KGB's operations against the Vatican have been presented in Vasili Mitrokhin's study *КГБ против Ватикана* (The KGB vs. Vatican City), available in the Wilson Center Digital Archive at <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110705>.

<sup>7</sup>La politica del dialogo: le Carte Casaroli sull'Ostpolitik vaticana, ed. Giovanni Barberini (Bologna: Il Mulino 2008). Hereafter cited as *La politica del dialogo*.

<sup>8</sup>Agostino Casaroli, *Il martirio della pazienza. La Santa Sede e i paesi comunisti (1963–1989)* (Torino: Einaudi, 2000).

Liudvikas Povilonis, held in the archives of the Kaunas Archdiocese Curia. The diary contains a record of events in the life of the Catholic Church in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as impressions of its author from meetings with Soviet government officials and visits to Rome.

Based on an analysis of the aforementioned sources, this article attempts to answer such questions as the following: What were the problematic issues associated with the state of the Catholic Church in Soviet-controlled Lithuania that impacted overall Vatican-Soviet relations, and why were these issues of such importance? Why, during the period under review here, did the Holy See devote such attention to the commemoration of events in Lithuania, which were significant to the history of Christianity overall, and why did the Soviet regime attempt to minimize the Vatican's visibility at such commemorative events? Why did the Soviet regime have fewer opportunities in the 1980s to direct its informal dialogue with the Vatican in a more favorable direction?

### I. The Problem of Vilnius and its Spiritual Pastor: A Proving Ground for Lithuanian's Trust in the Pope's Goodwill

The news of the selection of Karol Wojtyła, Archbishop of Kraków, as pope on October 16, 1978, was received with considerable unease by the Soviet regime. There were already those within Soviet-ruling circles who had expressed their concern that any thaw in relations with the Vatican would allow the Catholic Church to strengthen its position in the communist bloc countries, thereby undermining the stability of the system overall. One such individual was the chairman of the Soviet KGB, Yuri Andropov, who, in the last years of Leonid Brezhnev's rule, had amassed considerable influence over strategic decision-making. The agency he oversaw also dispatched particularly grave messages about the first steps taken by the new pope. Barely a few weeks after the conclave, the Soviet KGB's First (Intelligence) Directorate (hereafter the PGU) prepared a special informational notice for internal circulation only, entitled "On the Occasion of the Election of the New Pope, John Paul II," in which the authors predicted the following: "Espousing extreme anti-communist beliefs, the new pope will attempt to toughen the Vatican's Eastern policy, specifically by more actively promoting a campaign 'to defend human rights and religious freedoms in the socialist countries,' thereby associating himself with the line adopted by the Vatican's most reactionary elements."<sup>9</sup> Communist Party ruling bodies were being fed an abundance of similarly alarming signals.

In truth, from the first days of his pontificate, John Paul II did display a special favor toward Catholics who were not afraid to challenge the antireligious policies promoted by communist regimes. It can be asserted that, in addition to affairs in his native Poland, the most important aspects of the pope's Eastern policy program involved support for embattled Catholic Churches in neighboring Slovakia,<sup>10</sup> Ukraine, and Lithuania. The three countries had many similarities. First, all had been deprived of their nominal independence and were the unequal subjects in communist-ruled federations, so that in their cases the Catholic Church performed the function of generating both religious and political protest. Secondly, due to the extreme restrictions placed on official activities in Lithuania, Ukraine, and Slovakia—unlike in Poland, Hungary, or

<sup>9</sup>Col. A. Kireyev, Chief of the USSR KGB PGU Unit 12, to Division 1st of the LSSR KGB, with attachment, November 10, 1978, LYA, K-35, 2/298: 219. LYA refers to the Lietuvos ypatingasis archyvas [Lithuanian Special Archives].

<sup>10</sup>Hrabowec, "L'Ostpolitik," 272.

East Germany—there were active underground Church structures publishing illegal *samizdat* literature, alternative networks for the training of clergy, and secret monasteries.

Initially, the new pope demonstrated his special attention to Lithuania through symbolic gestures. After the conclave, he sent his Cardinal's zucchetto as a gift to the Chapel of the Mother of Mercy in the Gate of Dawn in Vilnius, paid a visit to the Pontifical Lithuanian College of St. Casimir (hereafter PCSC) on May 6, 1979, and, several days later, elevated Prelate Bačkis to the post of Undersecretary of the CPAC, which essentially meant his promotion to one of the highest diplomatic posts in the Holy See. That same year, the talented émigré Slovak priest Jozef Tomko was elevated in rank in a similar fashion. Tomko was made a bishop and appointed Undersecretary of the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops. The Holy See's support for the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was made evident in a letter to Cardinal Josyf Slipyj sent ahead of millennial celebrations of the baptism of the Kievan Rus', in which the pope emphasized the right of every believer to freely choose his or her religious affiliation. John Paul II also agreed to convene an extraordinary synod of Ukrainian bishops in Rome in March 1980. One of the meeting's most important agenda items was the selection of the coadjutor (with the right to succession) to the Archbishop of Lviv. The synod's decision to appoint Archbishop Myroslav Ivan Lubachivsky to this position was affirmed by the pope several days later.

The pope's gestures did not go unnoticed in Lithuania. Once they sensed that the Chair of St. Peter had been assumed by a pastor very familiar with their situation, the more active members of the Lithuanian Church reacted with new manifestations of protest. The creation of the Catholic Committee for the Defense of Rights of the Faithful was announced on November 13, 1978, and, in early 1979, 550 Lithuanian priests signed protests against new provisions of the Soviet law on religious associations. The pope's triumphant visit to his homeland in June 1979 was a clear signal to both Poles and Lithuanians that the emperor—the local communist government—had no clothes. The visit had a profound emotional effect, exposing the regime's lack of legitimacy in full view of the Holy Father's enormous personal authority. Hoping to limit the full impact of the pope's visit on Lithuania's Catholics, the Soviet regime barred Lithuanian clergy from traveling to Poland, but people in southern Lithuania were nevertheless able to watch the visit as it was broadcast over Polish state television. A record number of participants who joined an unsanctioned religious procession from Tytuvėnai to Šiluva in September of that same year can also be treated as an echo of pope's visit.

Moscow clearly understood the historic importance of the pope's visit. In late June 1979, foreign press reports referenced comments by Soviet Foreign Minister Andrey Gromyko who compared the pope's visit to the return of Ayatollah Khomeini to Tehran four months before, marking the culmination of Iran's Islamic revolution.<sup>11</sup> The Soviet government probably had reason to fear that these two events could promote undesirable religious enthusiasm and an eruption of dangerous anti-imperial sentiment in the Catholic western and Islamic southern republics of the USSR. Soviet officials in Vilnius and Moscow perceived the increased Catholic activism in Lithuania as having been inspired in Rome, so they began to urgently plan countermeasures to control the situation. On November 13, 1979, the Soviet Communist Party's Central

<sup>11</sup>Corley, "Soviet Reaction," 43.

Committee (hereafter CPSU CC) issued a resolution regarding countermeasures against Vatican policy toward the socialist countries' which called for, among other things, a warning that religious or anti-Soviet actions undertaken or supported by the Vatican might result in new restrictions in Soviet policy toward the Catholic Church.<sup>12</sup>

Such warnings clearly amounted to a bluff, since the increase of any new pressure was prevented by the growing strength of public Catholic resistance, which the Soviet regime hoped to silence by avoiding the imposition of new restrictions and by agreeing to certain limited concessions. A much more effective approach may have been the focus on dividing the forces deemed dangerous to the system. The KGB had already been engaged in an effort to drive a wedge between loyalist and nonconformist local Catholic Church camps, pit Lithuanian and diaspora clergy against one another, and foment Lithuanian mistrust in the polices of the Holy See. In addition, by the 1980s, it became even more critical to prevent increasing cooperation between Catholics in Poland and Lithuania—a process considerably accelerated by the support of John Paul II. The local arm of the KGB, carefully monitoring visits to Lithuania by real and purported foreign “emissaries of anti-Soviet operational centers,” began to focus its attention on the Polish Catholic Church which, in its assertion, had begun to act as a tool of the Vatican beginning in the early part of the decade.<sup>13</sup>

An approach was also quickly devised to undermine Lithuanians' trust in the Polish pope and in the good will of the clergy in Poland. The resolution of the issue of the Archdiocese of Vilnius, splintered by the geopolitical realities of the mid-twentieth century<sup>14</sup> and still formally part of the Polish ecclesiastical province, was a sensitive quandary in which the interests and expectations of different actors had become entangled in the 1980s. Paradoxically, the Soviet government was perhaps the most interested in raising the issue. On the one hand, the realignment of the boundaries of the Vilnius Archdiocese to match existing national borders could be interpreted in the international context as the effective recognition of Lithuania's annexation by the Soviet Union. At the same time, it was not difficult to imagine that, once the question had been raised, any delay in its resolution would provoke the dissatisfaction of many Lithuanians perceiving the imagined hand of Polish interests at work.

Local government officials began calling for the resolution of the Vilnius Archdiocese jurisdiction as early as the start of the 1970s as a purported means to neutralize interference in its affairs by Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński,<sup>15</sup> but the initiative only peaked Moscow's interest after the start of John Paul II's pontificate. It is very likely that the issue of aligning church administrative boundaries with the western border of the USSR was raised at Foreign Minister Gromyko's very first meeting with the new pope in Rome on January 24, 1979. Although there was very little public news about the content of that discussion, some Italian newspapers (first among them, the communist-oriented *Unità*) reported that the question of the Vilnius Archdiocese

<sup>12</sup>LCVA, R-181, 3/105:15. LCVA refers to the Lietuvos centrinis valstybės archyvas [Lithuanian Central State Archives].

<sup>13</sup>LSSR KGB 5th Directorate report “On the state of the campaign against enemy emissary activities under contemporary circumstances and measures to strengthen that effort,” June 24, 1981, LYA, K-1, 49/301: 279.

<sup>14</sup>After a territorial dispute that lasted several years, the Vilnius region was annexed by Poland in 1920. After the outbreak of World War II, the area was occupied by the Soviet Union and later transferred to Lithuanian control.

<sup>15</sup>J. Ruginis, CRA Representative in the Lithuanian SSR, to CRA Deputy Chairman A. Barmenkov, February 23, 1972, LCVA, R-181, 1/186: 89.

had also been raised.<sup>16</sup> An effort was also made to utilize church channels to support diplomatic pressure. As Bishop Liudvikas Povilonis, Apostolic Administrator for the Kaunas Archdiocese and the Vilkaviškis Diocese, prepared for a visit to Rome in the spring of 1980, he was “permitted to take steps toward the inclusion of the Vilnius Archdiocese into the ecclesiastical province of Lithuania.”<sup>17</sup> Although the first such step proved unsuccessful (Bishop Povilonis was told over lunch that “nothing will come [of the issue] for the moment”), a basic minimum had been achieved, since the reaction of the Povilonis proved to be as expected: “In other words, the Poles consider Vilnius to be their own and want to do nothing about it.”<sup>18</sup>

The prevailing reaction within the Lithuanian diaspora to the Vatican’s delay in redrawing the boundaries of the Vilnius Archdiocese was similar. Nationalist emotions overshadowed both the ability to perceive the possible consequences of such a decision for Lithuania’s international status and impeded the readiness to believe that the Holy See generally approached such sensitive issues with great caution, paying the most consideration to tradition and pastoral needs. According to Cardinal Bačkis, the CPAC’s position at the time on the status of the Vilnius Archdiocese was not to pursue the issue due to its potential implications for Lithuania’s international situation and because the existing state of affairs did not impede church administration (a new Code of Canon Law adopted in 1983 allowed national bishops’ conferences to be established along territorial principles—and not based on church provincial boundaries).<sup>19</sup> We also know that, prior to Bishop Povilonis’ arrival at the Vatican, the CPAC asked Prelate Bačkis to ascertain the views of the exiled Lithuanian diplomatic corps on the matter. This was not difficult, since Stasys Bačkis, the father of the CPAC Undersecretary, was then serving as Lithuania’s Charge d’affaires in the United States and the deputy chief of the Lithuanian diplomatic corps. It is likely that the advice of the senior Bačkis to postpone the issue for a few more years if there were no opportunity to resolve it without damaging Lithuania’s legal status, contributed considerably to the shaping of the Holy See’s position.<sup>20</sup>

Viewed from Vatican Hill, a much more acute problem than the formal jurisdiction of the Vilnius Archdiocese was the fact that the part of the archdiocese within Soviet territory had no proper head. The apostolic administrator appointed by the Holy See, Bishop Julijonas Steponavičius, had been prevented by the Soviet government from assuming his duties since 1961. This part of the diocese was administered by vicars selected by the capitula, who were required to obtain jurisdiction for the management of the diocese from Bishop Steponavičius, living in exile in the remote Lithuanian village of Žagarė. Because Bishop Steponavičius was the spiritual leader of the rebellious part of the Church, Vilnius Archdiocese administrators loyal to the Soviet government never had a completely free hand because, even living far from his own diocese, the bishop did his best to observe what happened there and, when

<sup>16</sup>Pro memoria note by Stasys Lozoraitis, Secretary of the Lithuanian Legation to the Holy See, January 24, 1980, LCVA, 2/673, 80: 7.

<sup>17</sup>Diary of bishop L. Povilonis, entry dated March 24, 1980, KAKA. It refers to the Kauno arkivyskupijos kurijos archyvas [Kaunas Archdiocese Curia Archives].

<sup>18</sup>Povilonis, May 17, 1980.

<sup>19</sup>Interview with Cardinal A. J. Bačkis, October 29, 2018, author’s personal archives.

<sup>20</sup>Letter of S.A. Bačkis to his son A.J. Bačkis, May 2, 1980, cited from: Arūnas Streikus, *Diplomatas Stasys Antanas Bačkis (Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimų centras, 2007)*, 262–264.

necessary, to intervene. Under such circumstances, the regime's representatives had an interest in resolving the issue of Bishop Steponavičius as quickly as possible.

In the early 1980s, the Vatican was inclined, albeit reluctantly, to accept a resolution proposed by the Soviet government: In exchange for allowing Bishop Steponavičius to perform the apostolic administrator's duties for the small Kaišiadorys Archdiocese, Father Algirdas Gutauskas, appointed vicar capitular for the Archdiocese of Vilnius in 1979, would be ordained as bishop.<sup>21</sup> The pope's initial inclination to pursue this option was apparently driven not just by a desire to resolve the issue of exiled bishops, consolidate the leadership of the Lithuanian Church, and bring order to the semi-paralysed administration of the Vilnius Archdiocese, but also by very favorable impressions about Father Gutauskas conveyed to the Vatican by Polish bishops.<sup>22</sup> In addition, because of the threat of a Soviet invasion of Poland in 1980–1981 in the wake of the Solidarity-inspired revolution and given the readiness signaled by the Soviets to address certain practical issues,<sup>23</sup> the Vatican had no desire to burn any bridges. When Bishop Steponavičius refused to accept the new duties offered to him, threatening to undo the proposed arrangement, John Paul II demonstrated a degree of fatherly patience and attempted to explain his motives in the autumn of 1981 in a personal letter addressed to Bishop Steponavičius.<sup>24</sup>

But the changed inner workings of the Vatican's Eastern policy meant that solutions proposed to deal with the internal exile of such figures as Prague Archbishop Josef Beran in 1965 and Cardinal József Mindszenty of Esztergom in 1971 would not be repeated. As Bishop Steponavičius continued to adhere firmly to his position, the pope refrained from imposing any unilateral decision. On the one hand, John Paul II chose not to rely solely on the positive assessment coming from Polish sources about the possible replacement for Bishop Steponavičius in Vilnius, but he also took heed of the completely opposite opinion received via Lithuanian channels. At the same time, his decision was also facilitated by the fairly unanimous opinion, conveyed by Bačkis, of active priests in Lithuania and in the diaspora—namely that Bishop Steponavičius had become a symbol of the Catholic resistance and therefore his appointment as a simple administrator of a small diocese would quickly undermine his authority and weaken the faith of the fighting Lithuanian Catholic Church in the Holy See. Finally, after surviving an attempt on his own life, the pope's own personal view of the prospects for any agreements with the Soviets had begun to change.

Bishop Steponavičius "stubbornness" angered the Soviet government and irritated Catholic clergy loyal to the regime but had no negative impact on his reputation in the Vatican. The Soviet government's displeasure was so great that it even failed to take advantage of the chance to rid itself of the intractable bishop by sending him

<sup>21</sup>This was part of a broader plan for the reorganization of the Lithuanian church hierarchy by which, in exchange for the ordination as bishops of two additional clergymen loyal to the Soviet regime, another former deportee, Bishop Sladkevičius, would be given a post.

<sup>22</sup>Interview with Cardinal A. J. Bačkis, October 29, 2018, author's personal archives.

<sup>23</sup>In 1980, efforts succeeded not only regarding the opening of a Catholic chapel for athletes competing in the Olympic Games in Moscow, but also for the import of forty-five tons of high-quality paper for the printing of new missals in the Lithuanian language. At a meeting with the CPAC Secretary in Rome on September 4, 1980, the director of the Soviet Foreign Ministry's First Section, Anatoly Adamishin, expressed his satisfaction with the state of unofficial contacts, which facilitated the discussion and resolution of issues. See meeting minutes prepared by Mons. Sainz, September 4, 1980, in *La politica del dialogo*, 832.

<sup>24</sup>For more, see Arūnas Streikus, "Bažnyčia tremtyje: vyskupas Julijonas Steponavičius," *LKMA Metraštis*, 35 (2011): 22.



on a one-way journey to Rome. When Steponavičius received an invitation to attend a synod of bishops in the summer of 1983, the CRA refused to process his travel documents.<sup>25</sup> Such a decision is difficult to understand, given that the Soviet regime had sent a proposal to the Vatican through Bishop Povilonis just one year before, suggesting exile in Rome for the three most active leaders of the religious opposition—the priests Sigitas Tamkevičius, Alfonsas Svarinskas, and Jonas Kauneckas. To this proposal the pope responded: “It is not appropriate to remove hard-working priests from their pastoral duties. If they violate the laws of their country, let the government impose a punishment, and then the Pope will attempt to aid them.”<sup>26</sup>

By the 1980s, the Vatican was also reacting more calmly to the continued Soviet pressure expressed over Lithuanian language broadcasts on Vatican Radio. For example, the Vatican Radio’s director of international broadcasting, Pasquale Borgomeo, after listening to the usual Soviet complaints delivered to him on June 4, 1982, by Valentin Bogomazov, a counsellor at the Soviet Embassy, regarding supposedly “provocative and incendiary” Lithuanian language broadcasts, explained that controlling the content of the programs was quite difficult since they were directly overseen by CPAC Undersecretary Bačkis, but he assured the diplomat formally that he took note of the report and would convey it to the proper official.<sup>27</sup> The Vatican was also no longer much concerned by complaints coming from regime-controlled clergy about “extremist” priests undermining Church unity with the help of Vatican Radio. When Bishop Povilonis delivered such a complaint to the pope in May 1980, the pontiff simply responded by encouraging the bishop to make greater efforts in the pursuit of unity.<sup>28</sup> According to Cardinal Bačkis, the Lithuanian language division of Vatican Radio was sometimes warned not to publicize certain information that might be detrimental for the Church concerning situations that were impossible to change, such as the state of affairs at the Priest Seminary in Kaunas. But there was no systematic control over content largely due to the lack of resources that such oversight would require, and routine responses were issued only after complaints were received from the Soviet Embassy.<sup>29</sup>

The Holy See’s stricter position regarding the defense of religious freedom and its growing trust in the voice of the fighting Church in the region led to a decline in the authority of Lithuania’s bishops, who had until then performed the role of intermediaries on the playing field of the Vatican’s Eastern policy. Rome had also become convinced that none of the officially active Lithuanian bishops had the personal qualities needed by a pastoral leader working under such complicated circumstances. In April 1983, the pope was compelled to release Bishop Krikščiūnas from his duties as the apostolic administrator of the Panevėžys Diocese due to his progressively deteriorating alcoholism. According to Cardinal Bačkis, Bishop Povilonis also failed to live up to the hopes initially placed in him, because it soon became clear that he lacked any independent vision for the management of Church affairs or any perspective broader than that of a simple rural pastor. Meanwhile, Bishop Antanas Vaičius, ordained in 1982, was

<sup>25</sup>Povilonis, August 1, 1983.

<sup>26</sup>Povilonis, April 21, 1982.

<sup>27</sup>Copy of excerpt from the diary of V. Bogomazov, Counsellor at the Soviet Embassy in Rome, June 15, 1982, LYA, 1771, 260/183: 128.

<sup>28</sup>Report by E. Juozėnas, Deputy CRA Representative in the Lithuanian SSR, on his conversation with Bishop L. Povilonis, May 29, 1980, LCVA, R-181, 3/105: 225.

<sup>29</sup>Interview with Cardinal A. J. Bačkis.

distrusted because of his excessive concern for his own image and his embrace of strange ideas.<sup>30</sup> And, after Bishop Sladkevičius began hinting about resignation almost immediately after assuming leadership over the diocese of Kaišiadorys, his capacity to lead the Lithuanian Church also came into doubt. Given such a context, it is fairly easy to understand the absence of any Lithuanian names among the list of eighteen new cardinals announced on January 5, 1983, but it is more difficult to explain the inclusion into the College of Cardinals of the 87-year-old Bishop of Riga, Julijans Vaivods, notorious for his loyalty to the Soviet government.

First of all, it was easy to predict that such a message would be a painful one for Lithuanians. Although more sober-minded observers clearly understood Vaivods' ordination as a purely symbolic gesture, which conferred no actual additional authority on the nominee, Lithuanian Catholics felt forgotten and unappreciated. The very fact that the honor of a cardinal's title had been extended to the Latvian Catholics, who had quietly suffered under the Soviet pressure, and that the clamorous Lithuanians had been left out, was interpreted as a message of approval of the Latvian approach. According to Bishop Povilonis, "people in government" also tried to promote the idea that this had happened precisely because of the absence of an underground church in Latvia.<sup>31</sup> Worst of all, the decision undermined the pope's authority among Lithuanians, and, as a result, confidence in the good will of the Holy See once again declined considerably. Upon closer examination of the list of cardinals appointed in the consistory in 1983, it is clear that it included the metropolitan bishops of cities in Central and Eastern Europe—Berlin, Warsaw, Zagreb, and Riga—where relations between the Catholic Church and the political government were more or less stable and where the authority of the highest Church official was not being challenged. At the time, Lithuania had no clergyman who could meet such conditions. It should also be noted that, for some of the newly appointed cardinals, their new title closed the door to any further travel to restless Lithuania. Archbishop Joachim Meisner of Berlin, for example, visited Lithuania in the summer of 1981, but, after becoming cardinal, he was refused permission to visit in August 1983 and again in March 1984, apparently in part because Moscow had learned of his close ties to the pope.

## II. Christian Sites of Memory—A New Aspect of the Vatican's Eastern Policy

As a "memory boom"<sup>32</sup> swept the Western world, Pope John Paul II also devoted considerable attention to the importance of sites commemorating the Christianization of Europe, particularly its eastern half. In his 1980 apostolic letter *Egregiae Virtutis*, the pope proclaimed the Slavic apostles and brothers Saints Cyril and Methodius Co-Patrons of Europe and, in 1985, on the 1,100th anniversary of Methodius' death, he issued a special encyclical, *Slavorum Apostoli*, to commemorate his mission. To be sure, the former Bishop of Kraków was equally concerned with the commemoration of the approaching 500th anniversary of the death of St. Casimir, the patron saint of Lithuania and a native son of Kraków. The marking of such important historical events not only provided an opportunity to awaken the Christian awareness of the people of the region but also to fortify them in their struggle for greater religious freedom in

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Povilonis, February 5, 1983.

<sup>32</sup>Nikolay Koposov, *Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018): 25–59.

communist-controlled countries. In addition, efforts were made to ensure that the Holy See was represented at such commemorative events, thereby raising the spirits of Catholics isolated in Eastern Europe and giving them a sense of unity with the universal Catholic Church.

Despite such efforts, however, when the 500th anniversary of the death of St. Casimir was commemorated in 1984, the Lithuanian Catholic Church was at its most isolated from the outside world. The participation by papal delegates in the anniversary celebrations was particularly feared. From available sources we can discern that unofficial talks with Soviet representatives took place in early 1984 regarding a possible visit to Lithuania by the pope's representative, the Secretary of State himself, Archbishop Casaroli, or the Archbishop of Warsaw, Cardinal Józef Glemp.<sup>33</sup> The Vatican's Secretary of State had apparently been preparing in earnest for such a visit, since his personal archives contain a handwritten draft of remarks to be delivered at the commemoration.<sup>34</sup> In the end, none of the delegates were given permission to enter the Lithuanian SSR to participate in the commemorative events. Lithuania's bishops were also prohibited from issuing any invitations to Vatican representatives to attend the final ceremony marking the end of the commemoration. It was feared that their participation might energize Catholics in the republic, restore the pope's shaky authority, and lay the groundwork for his own visit in the future. Lithuanian representatives were also prevented from traveling to Rome for the main St. Casimir jubilee ceremony and for some time thereafter. According to Bishop Povilonis, the reason for the prohibition was explained thus: "Someone from the Vatican might wish to come to Lithuania to attend the closing ceremony of the St. Casimir commemorative year and ask for an invitation from me. I would not be allowed to invite them because the government would not permit anyone to enter. We couldn't tell them this and refusing to issue an invitation was awkward, so it was better not to go."<sup>35</sup>

The commemorative year for St. Casimir coincided with perhaps the greatest crisis in Soviet-Vatican relations,<sup>36</sup> thus on the one hand the Soviet Lithuanian press contained a particularly large number of crude attacks on the pope and the Holy See, even as all measures were taken to suppress information about any special attention devoted by the Vatican to the anniversary.<sup>37</sup> The pope's congratulatory telegram for the St. Casimir jubilee arrived late, probably in some part due to efforts by Soviet security forces, and was thus not read aloud during the Mass celebrated at the Church of SS Peter and Paul in Vilnius on March 3, 1984. On his journey home from the Vatican

<sup>33</sup>Paweł Kowal, "Papież, czyli zagrożenie dla komunizmu. Polityka wschodnia Stolicy Apostolskiej w latach 1978–1985 w dokumentach służb specjalnych PRL," *Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej* 5 (2016): 354.

<sup>34</sup>Citta del Vaticano, Segreteria di Stato, S.RR.SS., *Archivio storico*, Fondo Spogli, Card. Agostino Casaroli, 82: 943–954.

<sup>35</sup>Povilonis, April 6, 1984. Bishop Povilonis was also not allowed to travel to the synod of bishops in Rome in the autumn of 1983. It may be that one of the reasons for such a prohibition was also the desire to avoid any expected official invitation to the pope.

<sup>36</sup>Made all the more acute by the announcement in early 1984 of the establishing of official diplomatic ties between the United States and the Holy See, clearly signalling the close cooperation developing between Washington and Rome.

<sup>37</sup>The greatest number of such articles was authored by Ivan Tikhonovich (later also known as Jan Chiechanowicz, a Polish-speaking politician of questionable reputation), then the director of the Division for Vatican Eastern Policy, Clerical Anti-Communism and Counterpropaganda of the Institute of Scientific Atheism's Vilnius Branch.

in the autumn of 1984, Soviet customs officials confiscated four video tapes from Bishop Povilonis with the recordings of the pope's celebratory mass at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, and a shipment of commemorative postage stamps issued by the Vatican to honor St. Casimir was also returned to the sender.

Despite Soviet efforts, however, the pope's considerable interest in the anniversary did not go unnoticed in Lithuania or in the Lithuanian diaspora. The decision, announced in 1984, to nominate Father Paulius Baltakis OFM as bishop for diaspora Lithuanians helped to further dispel any bitter feelings arising from the omission of Lithuanian names from the list of new cardinals in 1983. An important nuance of this appointment was the fact that the new pastoral leader of the Lithuanian diaspora was also a full-fledged member of the US Conference of Bishops with the right to participate in all its meetings. This fact, and the interest expressed by the administration of President Ronald Reagan to closely cooperate with the Vatican in the struggle against the "evil empire,"<sup>38</sup> facilitated the effective organization of moral and material support from the American episcopate to the Lithuanian Catholic Church.<sup>39</sup>

Bishop Baltakis' appointment was very timely because of preparations for the celebration, in 1987, of the 600th anniversary of Lithuania's conversion to Christianity. Overseeing the preparatory work for this anniversary became the new bishop's first great challenge, both because of the necessary managerial skills and because of the particularly complicated circumstances of the final phase of the Cold War. Despite the systemic reforms initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev and associated adjustments in the foreign policy realm, the Soviet government was still far from inclined to allow an unfettered celebration of the anniversary in Lithuania,<sup>40</sup> much less tolerate any influence on the event by the Lithuanian diaspora or the Holy See.

Just over one year before the main jubilee celebrations planned for June 1987, a tense diplomatic game ensued between Rome, Vilnius, and Moscow. During a visit to Rome in April 1986, Bishop Povilonis was asked to inquire how the Soviet government might view the participation of a representative from the Holy See in commemorative events in Lithuania and whether a delegation of Lithuanian clergymen might be allowed to attend similar celebrations in Rome. Perhaps in a desire to renew a dialogue with Soviet leaders, Vatican representatives gave the understanding that there would be serious consideration of the matter of a successor for Bishop Steponavičius once they received his resignation request upon reaching the age of 75, as required under ecclesiastical law, and they also expressed the readiness to confer the status of ordinary to Lithuanian bishops ruling dioceses as apostolic administrators.<sup>41</sup> In an apparent effort to create more opportunities for Lithuania's bishops to communicate directly with Rome, as many as three bishops—Vaičius, Sladkevičius, and Povilonis—were appointed members of various Holy See congregations in the summer of 1986.

<sup>38</sup>Marie Gayte, "The Vatican and the Reagan administration: a Cold War alliance?," *The Catholic Historical Review* 97, no. 4 (2011): 713–736; Paul Kengor, *A Pope and a President. John Paul II, Ronald Reagan, and the Extraordinary Untold Story of the 20th Century* (Wilmington: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2017).

<sup>39</sup>For more see: Artūras Gricevičius, *Užsienio lietuvių vyskupas Paulius Antanas Baltakis OFM: tarnystės Bažnyčiai ir Tėvynei kelias* (Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas, 2018).

<sup>40</sup>For more, see Arūnas Streikus, "Sovietų režimo pastangos sužlugdyti Lietuvos krikšto jubiliejaus minėjimą," *Bažnyčios Istorijos Studijos* 1 (2007): 63–75.

<sup>41</sup>Information provided by CRA Representative in the Lithuanian SSR P. Anilionis regarding a conversation with Bishop Povilonis, April 29, 1986, LCVA, R-181, 3/12:19–20.

We also know that a special meeting of the CPAC and the pontifical *Pro Russia* commission took place on May 15, 1986, chaired by the pope himself. It has been said that the most important point of this meeting was to prepare for Gorbachev's planned visit to Italy and his eventual meeting with the pope.<sup>42</sup> After the meeting, John Paul II asked that a letter be drafted to the General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, reiterating the Catholic Church's concerns in the Soviet Union and the Vatican's desire to renew a dialogue to address those issues. Acknowledging Soviet sensitivities for any possible political implications, the pope also instructed that the date of the main celebrations of Lithuania's conversion to Christianity in Rome be rescheduled from June 14 to June 28,<sup>43</sup> and Bačkis was requested to ensure that there be no blatant anti-Soviet declarations during the event.<sup>44</sup>

Such goodwill gestures notwithstanding, the Vatican's hopes to reach a breakthrough on the diplomatic front proved to be premature. Until mid-1987, all of the Holy See's moves continued to be perceived in Moscow as efforts to increase the Vatican's political influence by serving the plans undertaken by "imperialist forces." Indeed, two delegates of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, Pierre Duprey and Salvatore Scribano, attending a conference organized by the Patriarch of Moscow in March 1987, were told by CRA officials that the time was not yet right for any official dialogue. The officials also mentioned the obstacles preventing such a dialogue: the anti-Soviet position of Vatican Radio, the unresolved issue of diocesan borders, first and foremost the Vilnius archdiocese, and the continued existence of a Lithuanian Legation accredited to the Holy See. Thus, the commemoration in the summer of 1987 of the jubilee of Lithuania's baptism was still celebrated within an essentially unchanged context of Vatican-Soviet relations. While authorities in the republic-level and central government allowed a delegation of Lithuanian clergy led by Bishop Vaičius to attend initial ceremonies celebrating the anniversary in Rome, neither papal representatives, nor the President of the European Bishops' Conference, Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, nor bishops from West Germany who had expressed interest in attending were permitted to travel to Vilnius to participate in any events held there on the same day.<sup>45</sup>

A breakthrough in Vatican-Soviet relations came only in the spring of 1988 and was achieved not through diplomatic means but by strengthening ecumenical contacts with the Russian Orthodox Church. It is likely that the foundations for this shift were laid in March 1988 by the publication of the papal Apostolic Letter *Euntes in Mundum*, signed on January 25 of that year on the occasion of the Millennium of the Baptism of the Kievan Rus'. The text of the letter was full of good will, not just in a religious sense, but also in its deliberate avoidance of critical allusions to existing political and ideological circumstances. After the same delegates of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity delivered a copy of the letter to representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church in Moscow on March 20, 1988, the Patriarch of Moscow had no choice but to invite the Holy See to send an official delegation to the June 1988 commemoration of the Millennium. To be sure, such a step could not have been taken without the blessing

<sup>42</sup>Tadeusz Kopyś, "Polityka Jana Pawła II wobec Kościołów za żelazną kurtyną w drugiej połowie lat osiemdziesiątych XX wieku," *Folia Historica Cracoviensia* 18 (2012): 279.

<sup>43</sup>On that day, the anniversary of the first mass deportations of Lithuanians to Siberia on June 14, 1941, was commemorated.

<sup>44</sup>LSSR KGB Division I to the USSR KGB PGU RT office, January 4, 1987, LYA, K-35, 2/232: 107–108.

<sup>45</sup>Only Philippine Cardinal Jaime Sin and a group of Liberation Theology proponents from Brazil were allowed to travel to Lithuania to attend jubilee celebrations.

of the highest Soviet authorities—further evidence of changing tactics within domestic and foreign Soviet policy. Many analysts believe that the reset of relations with religious organizations that occurred in 1988–1989 was one of the tactical moves initiated by Gorbachev’s team in an effort to broaden support, both domestically and on the international stage, for its program of reforms. An equally important factor driving this review of religious policy was the disappointment of the Soviet political elite in the results of previously undertaken measures to promote atheism. A more honest analysis of the situation showed that, rather than progressing, society was in fact regressing in terms of secularization and the religious factor was, in fact, increasing in importance.<sup>46</sup>

Sensing a change in the prevailing circumstances, the Holy See also decided to deal more boldly with the problems of the Church’s administration in Lithuania. During an *ad limina* visit to Rome by the Lithuanian episcopate in April 1988, the leadership of the Lithuanian Conference of Bishops was reorganized without any prior consultation with the Soviet government. At the Holy See’s insistence, Bishop Sladkevičius was appointed Chairman of the Bishops’ Conference, replacing the resigning Bishop Povilonis. And while the CRA chairman, Konstantin Kharchev, harshly rebuked the bishops’ delegation in Moscow, promising to revisit the administrative changes with the Vatican’s State Secretary during his visit in June, Kharchev’s tone—and that of local officials—quickly changed after they apparently received instructions from their superiors.<sup>47</sup> When he arrived in Moscow in June 1988 as part of an official delegation from the Holy See, Cardinal Casaroli also had a much easier time communicating with Soviet government officials than he did seventeen years before, during his first visit to the USSR. By June 12, during a meeting with CPAC representatives (including Cardinal Casaroli, Bačkis, Faustino Sainz, and Stanisław Szłowiec SJ), CRA Chairman Kharchev acknowledged existing problems pertaining to the situation of Catholic believers in the USSR and conceded that their resolution had been impeded in the past by the lack of direct contact.<sup>48</sup> He also took note, without much argument, of the cardinal’s explanations regarding the supposedly unfriendly actions of the Vatican vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, including the elevation of Sladkevičius to cardinal, which took place just two weeks before the arrival of Vatican’s delegation, broadcasts by Vatican Radio, and the continued existence of the Lithuanian Legation at the Holy See. Regarding the latter issue, Kharchev was compelled to acknowledge that “historically, we are only now officially raising this issue.”<sup>49</sup>

This time, the Vatican’s Secretary of State was also received by the Soviet leader. During the meeting, Casaroli presented Gorbachev with a personally addressed letter from John Paul II, in which the pope welcomed Gorbachev’s efforts in the name of peace and democratization of the Soviet system but also reminded him about the issues impeding further improvement in bilateral relations—that is, legalization of the Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine and the need to improve conditions for the Latin Catholicism in the Soviet Union. Although Gorbachev promised to carefully study

<sup>46</sup>Trina Maslova, “Gosudarstvenno-konfessionalnaja politika v SSSR: povорот kursa v 1985–1988 gg.,” *Izvestija vysshichykh ucebnykh zavedenij. Povolzkij region* 36, no. 4 (2015): 52; Victoria Smolkin, *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

<sup>47</sup>Report by CPAC Undersecretary Bačkis regarding the bishops’ meetings with government officials, June 6, 1988, Citta del Vaticano, Segreteria di Stato, S.RR.SS., Archivio storico, Fondo Spogli, Card. Agostino Casaroli, Pos. 80: 736.

<sup>48</sup>Draft meeting minutes prepared by F. Sainz regarding the meeting between Cardinal Casaroli and CRA Chairman K. Kharchev, June 15, 1988, in *La politica del dialogo*, 841.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 847.

the issues raised in the pope's letter, the Soviet regime was in no hurry to take the Vatican's suggestions into consideration. In a set of instructions regarding the Vatican prepared in late 1988 for the Soviet KGB's intelligence divisions abroad, the Holy See was still assessed as a strong and well-organized ideological and political enemy, which, without succumbing to any pressure from the Vatican, must first be compelled to remove any obstacles to improved bilateral relations. As for active measures, officials were instructed to continue efforts to "expose the political essence of reactionary right-wing Catholic forces, their adherence to the policy of the American administration, and their relations with Western intelligence services; encourage the Vatican to take steps benefitting peace and the cause of socialism, and support realistic forces within the Roman Curia; and strengthen opposition to Vatican efforts to energize Church activities in the USSR and socialist countries."<sup>50</sup> Surviving documents show that, in late 1988 and early 1989, Moscow was still attempting to utilize the presumably still available operational capabilities of the local Lithuanian KGB to exert pressure on the Vatican so that it might support Soviet initiatives on an international scale and limit the Church's support for the national liberation movement in Lithuania.

Such efforts proved to be completely ineffective, however, against the backdrop of growing civic activism. Facing increasing public pressure, the local Communist Party leadership was forced to address long-standing problems impacting the Church's activity in Lithuania, regardless of any position taken by the Holy See on any matter of concern to the USSR. When hopes that Bishop Steponavičius might resign (or be removed) were lost after he was finally permitted to visit Rome in autumn of 1988, there was a retreat on this symbolically important issue as well: In a telegram sent on December 29, the bishop was informed about the removal of all obstacles to his return to Vilnius. On February 5, 1989, a solemn ceremony was held to celebrate Bishop Steponavičius' formal return to the restored Vilnius Cathedral, signaling a breakthrough in the half-century-long conflict between the Church and the atheistic Soviet occupying regime.

### III. Conclusions

During the first half of Pope John Paul II's pontificate, issues pertaining to the Lithuanian Catholic Church were considered priority agenda items—both within the halls of the Vatican and in the central government offices of the Soviet regime. An analysis of available sources illustrates that the most important set of issues during the period under review consisted of the interrelated issues of the boundaries of the Vilnius Archdiocese and the question of its further administration. The Soviet regime was the most interested in focusing on these issues, as it hoped thereby to dispel any mutual sympathies between Lithuanian Catholics and the Polish pope, put a stop to the emerging cooperation between Catholics in Lithuania and Poland, and bring an end to the politically costly case of Bishop Steponavičius, who by then had become a symbol of the Lithuanian Catholic Church's resistance. The changing constellation of the Lithuanian dimension in the Vatican's Eastern policy—represented by the presence of Lithuanian clergy in influential posts in the Roman Curia, increasing trust in the voices speaking for the fighting Catholic Church, as well as the overall Cold War situation—resulted in the above issues not being resolved in the manner desired by Moscow.

<sup>50</sup>USSR KGB PGU assignment "Regarding activities concerning the Vatican," November 2, 1988, LYA, K-35, 2/233: 35.

It would be incorrect to assume that a more flexible conduct by the Holy See regarding Steponavičius and the boundaries of the Vilnius Archdiocese would have opened the door to Lithuania for the Vatican's representatives during celebrations commemorating St. Casimir and the anniversary of Lithuania's conversion to Christianity. Having seen during the Pope's visits to Poland the enormous potential for mobilization created by the presence of the Apostolic See on their side of the Iron Curtain, the Soviet regime was determined to bar both the Pope and any of his representatives from entering the USSR at any cost (not even, apparently, in exchange for the recognition of Lithuania's Soviet annexation). Representatives of the Holy See only became desirable guests in the summer of 1988, when it was decided to exploit the millennium of the baptism of the Kievan Rus' to help prop up a crumbling political system. This sudden breakthrough in the field of memory politics, which contributed to the liberation of public expectations, made it possible to resolve the quandary of Bishop Steponavičius and solve other long-standing problems associated with the state of the Catholic Church in Lithuania.

This study has confirmed two broader assertions. First, Lithuanian Catholic Church affairs were not just an isolated cluster of specific issues but had become an intrinsic part of the complex field of the Vatican's relations with communist regimes, and thus their analysis is essential to better understand the impact of this field on the collapse of the communist system. Second, the religious factor was an important catalyst for resistance against the communist dictatorship not only in Poland but also in neighboring Catholic countries. While the conferring of the title of cardinal to Bishop Vincentas Sladkevičius did in fact coincide with the founding of the Sąjūdis national reform movement in Lithuania, this event, like the celebration of the anniversary of Lithuania's baptism in 1987, undoubtedly provided an emotional stimulus to the growing civic awareness of Lithuanian society.

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