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THE INTEREST OF LITHUANIA'S CHURCH  
IN THE APOSTOLIC ACTIVITY IN RUSSIA  
AND AMONG RUSSIANS

The past 20th century, witnesses of which all of us still are, was filled with important events and even more important ideas. One of them was to convert Orthodox Russia to the Catholic faith. The idea had a sufficient theoretical basis – for a Catholic the events in Russia in the first half of the 20th c. were prophetic. Looking from the West, a secular society at that time appeared to be a total anomaly. Thus, after the Bolsheviks had defeated the Orthodox Church (that in essence had been done in the 1920s, by breaking it apart, closing all the spiritual seminaries, monasteries), it appeared to more than one Catholic that it was worth gathering forces and waiting for the favorable moment to prepare missionaries for the apostolic activity in Russia. The prophecies of the Virgin Mary made in Fatima provided invaluable moral support for this idea. Having declared to the little shepherds about the possible future conversion of Russia, she emboldened the Vatican to prepare for these great events and to discuss concrete plans of action.

The period after 1917 was the time of the most intensive efforts of the Vatican to unite Russian Orthodox and Old Believers with the Catholic Church\*. Particularly great hopes were placed in the propagation of

\* In 1917 Pope Benedict XV established the Congregation of Eastern Churches (which he himself headed), opened the Institute for Eastern Studies in Rome. In 1925 the Papal Commission Pro Russia (Pontificia commissione Pro Russia) founded by Pope Pius XI began its activities. The Jesuits began to play the most important role in this area of Vatican policies: the mentioned institute and Commission Pro Russia were entrusted to them, an Eastern rite branch was established in the order and the Jesuits also headed the college Russicum founded in 1929 in which Orthodox students also studied. Cardinal Luigi Sincero and Bishop Michel d'Herbigny SJ headed the

Catholic Eastern Rites, i.e. while instilling Catholic dogma there was an effort to provide the possibility for Russian converts to continue to hold their traditional rites in the Old Slavic language. This method of evangelization was encouraged by the conviction that the faithful were mostly attached to their rites and appropriate respect for them would banish obstacles for millions of Russians to become Catholics.

Lithuania, a Catholic neighbour of Russia, did not remain aloof from the implementation of this important idea for the conversion of the Orthodox East to the Catholic faith. Both local dedicated clergymen and the Vatican urged Lithuania's Church for this action. Lithuanian priests were well acquainted with church life in Russia. Many of them had worked there in both the periods of the tsarist and Soviet empires and were interested in Orthodox doctrine (many doctoral dissertations were devoted to these problems). The conviction dominated that namely a favorable perspective for apostolic activity is opening for Lithuanian priests and monks as they were not tied with the cultural image of Catholicism propagated by Polish missionaries that was not acceptable to most Russians.

Depending on the changing political circumstances in Lithuania several projects tied with the missions gained a broader range: 1) the Mission of Eastern rite, active in Kaunas before World War II, which tried to unite Lithuania's Orthodox and Old Believers to the Catholic Church; 2) the attempt to send priests to the Nazi occupied areas of the USSR in 1941–1944; 3) the apostolic activity by priests and monks in various regions of the USSR when Lithuania was one of the Soviet republics. Relying on data from Lithuanian archives, published documents and historiography, we will here discuss the circumstances of the appearance of these three projects, their initiatives, and most important, their results.

For the recent historical past, the long time dominating suspicious attitude of Catholics, Russian Orthodox, and Old Believers to one another is still reflected in the complicated mutual relations of the

Commission Pro Russia. The latter traveled to the USSR several times in 1925–1926 and secretly ordained four Catholic priests as bishops, appointed ordinaries. The NKVD quickly discovered and repressed all the clergymen he had appointed.

Churches. We can observe the polite, but cold ecumenical meetings as well as the inert efforts to “experiment” with alternative ceremonies. The reasons for such a situation could become the object of broader discussions.

THE MISSION OF EASTERN RITE BISHOP PETRAS BŪČYS  
IN KAUNAS

The community of Russian Old Believers and Orthodox in the independent Republic of Lithuania was quite small, contrary as it was in Latvia and Estonia. There used to live only about 55 thousand of Russians. Their few parishes, scattered through the state, were quite closed, especially those of the Old Believers. They probably would not have attracted the special attention of Lithuania's Catholic Church if it had not been for the idea of church unity propagated by the Vatican. Persons converting to the Catholic faith in Lithuania as in other European states would simply become Catholics because the possibility to create the conditions for them to continue to practice their rites would have required large investments: one had to have Eastern rite Catholic priests and separate churches. The search for such investments began in 1927. With the encouragement of the Vatican there was an attempt to establish the structure of an Eastern rite Church. Essentially, this was a project aimed at the future. It was intended to help determine the means able to encourage not so much the union of Lithuania's but of Russia's Orthodox and Old Believers to the Catholic Church.

However, the greatest input for the introduction of Lithuania's Church into the projects for evangelization in Russia was provided by one of its most known participants Archbishop Jurgis Matulaitis MIC (the renewer of the Marian congregation, former Bishop of Vilnius, now Blessed). In reestablishing the Marian congregation of monks he held one of its most primary tasks to be the areas of Russia and Siberia “where so many souls are wandering without leaders”.<sup>1</sup> As Bishop of Vilnius he cooperated with the ordinaries of Poland and the Vatican in organizing

<sup>1</sup> T. Górski MIC, *Palaimintasis Jurgis Matulaitis*, Kaunas, 2009, p. 294.

evangelization among the Orthodox Belarusians (established a Marian monastery in Druja, and founded a separate women's congregation – the Handmaids of Jesus in the Eucharist). In 1926 in the Vatican (in the *Commission Pro Russia*) he was recognized as the most acceptable candidate for the post of the bishop for the Russian emigrants living in Europe<sup>2</sup>. He himself had plans to travel to Russia as well as to encourage missions among Lithuania's "schismatics".<sup>3</sup> But the unexpected death of Matulaitis (in the beginning of 1927) ended such plans. His predecessor became Petras Būčys MIC, the new elected Superior General of the Marian congregation. He continued the works of in the area of missions: the Eastern Rite Ordinate in Harbin (China)<sup>4</sup> was assigned to the Marians and Būčys himself was appointed as an advisor to the Eastern Churches Congregation and the *Commission Pro Russia*. We do not have too many priests having had such careers in the Vatican.

At the end of the 1920s officials of the Vatican embassy in Kaunas began unofficial negotiations with the leaders of the state – Lithuania's Prime Minister and President – seeking to include them in the preparations for missions in Russia. Initially, they had a favorable attitude to the project, they promised to finance part of it, but the government changed in 1929 and the state authorities withdrew from the project.<sup>5</sup> They did not react to the Vatican's urging to restrict the communities of Orthodox and Old Believers of Lithuania (e.g. ending the spiritual courses for preparing a new generation of clergymen).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295-305.

<sup>3</sup> J. Bukowicz MIC, T. Górski MIC, *Błogosławiony Jerzy Matulewicz, Puszcza Mariańska*, 2003, p. 29. A report of J. Matulaitis on May 26, 1926 to Cardinal P. Gasparri is cited.

<sup>4</sup> See also: Placówka wschodnia w Harbinie, *Marianie. 1673–1973*, Rzym, 1975, p. 244-268; M. Š., Rusų katalikų misija ir jos veikimas Charbine, *Tiesos kelias*, 1934, no. 9, p. 495–507.

<sup>5</sup> Apostolic delegation secretary's Luigi Faiduttio reports of August 24 and September 14, 1927 to Pietro Cardinal Gasparri; nuncio's Riccardo Bartoloni's note of February 22, 1929 to Cardinal L. Sincero, *Lietuva ir Šventasis Sostas (1922–1938): Slaptojo Vatikano archyvo dokumentai*, Vilnius, 2010, p. 192, 197, 265.

<sup>6</sup> Cardinal P. Gasparri's report on February 8, 1930 to nuncio R. Bartoloni, *Ibid.*, p. 292. The Vatican feared that while the courses were being held, the Orthodox

Thus, the mission for evangelization among Lithuania's Russians was solely a church matter.

The burden of the mission fell to Būčys who in 1930 was ordained as an Eastern rite bishop and later spent several years in Western Europe, the Balkan countries, and the USA, visiting the Russian emigrant colonies living there, informing the Congregation of Eastern Churches about the activities of the Eastern rite parishes. However, in 1934 after changes in the *Commission Pro Russia* (when Bishop M. d'Herbigny was fired from the post of the Commission's head) Bishop Būčys lost his duties in the Vatican and was forced to return to Lithuania. Following the instructions from the Vatican, he propagated the Eastern rite Catholic faith among the Russians living in Lithuania: conducted Eastern rite Masses, wrote articles, gave lectures, and looked for missionaries among Catholic priests as well as from the Orthodox and Old Believers.

The problem was that Būčys arrived in Lithuania not by his own choice. Sensing that he was in the Vatican's bad graces as a co-worker of d'Herbigny, Būčys sought to escape from the jurisdiction of the Eastern Churches Congregation and to join the province of the Lithuanian Marians in America.<sup>7</sup> However, despite the stubborn efforts of Būčys and Marian Superior General Andriejus Cikota (their requests even reached Pope Pius XI), he was not released from his duties. The categorical reply of the Eastern Churches Congregation was that "the request can not be accepted for the prestige of the Bishop and the very matter".<sup>8</sup> At the beginning of 1937 a papal *Mission for Spiritual Assistance to Lithuania's Russians* was established in Kaunas and Būčys was appointed as its head.

propaganda, which "could be the cause of disastrous religious disturbances, bringing great harm to Lithuania, would increase".

<sup>7</sup> Report of Bishop P. Būčys on August 20, 1936 to Marian congregation general A. Cikota, Lithuanian central state archives (LCVA), f. 1674, a. 1, b. 51, leaf 27; "Memorijalas" of the priests of the American Province of the Marian congregation on January 18, 1936 to the Marian congregation general council, *Ibid.*, l. 18. In America the post of the head of the Marian spiritual seminary near Chicago was foreseen for Bishop P. Būčys.

<sup>8</sup> Letter of Marian congregation general A. Cikota on November 30, 1936 to Bishop P. Būčys, *Ibid.*, l. 30.

He received several assistants and was forced to continue the mission among Lithuania's Russians.

Bishop P. Būčys and his assistants made many attempts to form ties with Orthodox scholars, priests, for they most likely agreed with the opinion of Kaunas metropolitan Juozapas Skriveckas: "I see the only possibility of missions among the Orthodox schismatics to be Russian nationality priest converts, well known to the peasants",<sup>9</sup> – he wrote to the nuncio still in 1930. And both the bishops and the pastors of Catholic parish, in which there was a Russian community, willingly assisted Būčys – they sought out the moods of Old Believers and Orthodox priests, gave them apologetics literature, organized Eastern rite Masses. Būčys would often be informed that one or another Orthodox parish priest expressed an interest in Eastern rite Catholicism, wanted „to go into a union”, but not one of them became a Catholic. In the 1930's the tendency of the decrease in the number of conversions of Russian Old Believers and Orthodox to Catholicism became clearer. The activities of the missions encouraged the Orthodox and Old Believers' communities to take countermeasures, come together, develop their priests.<sup>10</sup>

Bishop P. Būčys had to be disappointed with his activities. He did not succeed in converting any influential Russian intellectual or clergyman to the Catholic faith, to establish even one parish. Many of the potential converts hardly hid (or even did not hide) their selfish calculations. Activities in Latvia were also not optimistic. In December 1937 Būčys was appointed to head the pastoral care for the Eastern rite in Latvia. However, a year later the numerous and influential Russian minority succeeded in blocking this invasion into their religious life – the Latvian authorities did not allow Būčys to enter their country.<sup>11</sup>

It is difficult to say what hopes Būčys fostered in January 1938 when he invited the leader of Lithuania's Orthodox Diocese Metropolitan Eleutherius (Bogojavlenskii)\* to a meeting. He wrote that he wanted

<sup>9</sup> Report of Metropolitan J. Skvireckas on February 24, 1930 to nuncio R. Bartoloni, Lithuanian state historical archives (LVIA), f. 1671, a. 5, b. 91, l. 155.

<sup>10</sup> R. Laukaitytė, *Staciatikių Bažnyčia Lietuvoje XX amžiuje*, Vilnius, 2003, p. 72-77.

<sup>11</sup> De Pontificio Opere ad Succurrendum Spiritualiter Russis in Lithuania. Relatio 1938 annua, LCVA, f. 1674, a. 5, b. 29, l. 39.

to learn directly how the metropolitan looks at “the never so relevant necessity of the believers in God and His Only Son Jesus Christ to unite”.<sup>12</sup> On January 27 this meeting took place. The press of Latvia, France, and America wrote quite a lot about it. After listening to the rather long speech of Būčys about the Pope’s good-will toward Orthodoxy, Eastern rite services, Metropolitan Eleutherius told him that as long as the Popes ruling the Church of Rome seek absolute rule the union of the Churches is impossible. He also rejected the invitation to cooperate fighting the bellicose attack of atheism, doubting that they would be able to make an agreement on this question.<sup>13</sup>

It might be that after many years of apostolic work in asking for this meeting Būčys sought to demonstrate to the Eastern Church Congregation officials the real possibilities of his mission. “[...] the Orthodox do not look at the outstretched hand of Lithuania’s Catholics and firmly reply: “No!” to the invitation for Christians to unite, after coordinating both of their forces for a fight with threatening atheism”,<sup>14</sup> – he observed in the press. It is difficult to say that whether due to this step or due to changes in the Vatican’s political line after the death of Pope Pius XI, Būčys finally succeeded in escaping from Lithuania. In July 1939 after being elected general of the Marian congregation he departed for Rome. The soon afterwards newly appointed leader of the mission in Kaunas did not last for a long time – the activities of the mission were ended by the first Soviet occupation begun in June 1940.

Why did the quite intensive apostolic activity among Lithuania’s

\* Metropolitan Eleutherius (Bogojavlenskii) ruled Lithuania’s Orthodox Diocese in 1923–1940. Besides that he was appointed exarch in Western Europe by the Moscow Patriarchate. Unlike the heads of the Orthodox Church in the neighbouring countries, he remained in the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate. When it declared its loyalty to the Bolshevik regime, metropolitan Eleutherius could not avoid a conflict with the Russian political and social activists, bishops living as émigrés.

<sup>12</sup> Report of Bishop P. Būčys on January 19, 1938 to Metropolitan Eleutherius, LCVA, f. 1674, a. 1, b. 194, l. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Митр. Елевферий отклонил предложение об унии с католической церковью, *Сегодня*, 1938 03 13, no. 73, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> P. Būčys, Rusijos krikšto jubiliejus, *Draugija*, 1938, no. 23, p. 836.

Russians seeking to join them to the Catholic Church not result in any concrete results? Probably the most important reason was that the organizers of the mission did not take into account the resistance of Lithuania's Orthodox and Old Believers to Catholic proselytizing. Moreover, the analogy with the Union of Brest immediately discredited the new Vatican inspired goals of Church unity in the eyes of Russians. The passivity of both the state authorities and bishops of Lithuania limited the effectiveness of the mission for evangelization among the Russians. It received far fewer workers than expected. The priests returning from Russia's prisons did not participate in the mission, which was also not supported by the Marian congregation (in which P. Būčys without doubt had strong influence). Except for submission to the Vatican, Lithuania's bishops did not have any motives to advocate Eastern rites in their own land; the necessity of which was not easy to explain to Catholic Lithuanians.

#### EFFORT TO SEND CATHOLIC PRIESTS TO NAZI OCCUPIED REGIONS OF THE USSR IN 1941–1944

As the German army swiftly advanced into the depths of the USSR, projects for the evangelization of Russia were again begun to be created both in the Vatican and in Lithuania. First, they were tied with the possibilities for Catholic priests to return to the parishes from which they had been forced to withdraw due to the repressions of the Bolshevik regime. Because the Germans began to rebuild the destroyed Russian Orthodox Church, it was hoped that the Catholic parishes would also be restored. However, one must note that the occupying German authorities tolerated only Orthodox missions, Catholic priests were not allowed to return.

During the twenty years of Soviet rule the Catholic Church of the USSR was almost totally destroyed.\* Many priests and bishops of Polish, German, and Lithuanian nationalities already in the 1920's departed the

\* After World War I about 1,6 million Catholics were living in the USSR. The majority – about 80 percent – were Poles. The Mogilev archdiocese, 5 dioceses, two

country fearing the started repressions. Those remaining (also including the secretly ordained and appointed bishops by Bishop M. d'Herbigny who Pope Pius XI had delegated) were soon imprisoned or punished with the death penalty. In the USSR there did not remain any freely living Catholic bishops and priests, operating churches and monasteries, but there were still Catholic believers. The Russian Orthodox Church endured even greater repressions by the Bolshevik regime, thus the young generation growing up in the Soviet system did not have any experience of religious life. As understood at that time it was open for religious searches. The broken up by the Bolsheviks, compromised by cooperation with the regime Orthodox Church seemed to lack the spiritual forces to be born anew.

The leaders of Lithuania's Church at the beginning of the war did not have apparently any wide scale plans to organize missions to Russia. Nevertheless, one bishop, Teofilus Matulionis, on August 21, 1941 wrote a letter to the Pope, asking for permission to return to his former duties in Russia. This, without doubt, was not done without the support of the Church authorities. The biography of Matulionis is directly tied with Russia's Catholics. After his ordination he worked for three decades in various parishes of the Mogilev Archdiocese and was imprisoned several times by the Soviet regime. As the Vatican tried to restore the ordinaries of Russia's Catholic Church underground, he was secretly consecrated as a bishop and was the nominal apostolic administrator of the Leningrad District.

“But now, as hope is already lit, the gates from Bolshevism have been shut and hammered up, with the help of God, when the new desire to spread, to evangelize Christ's teachings, handed over in the name of the Holy See, grows in my heart and the hearts of priests from Russia living in Lithuania”,<sup>15</sup> – Bishop T. Matulionis wrote to the Pope. In this

apostolic vicariates were alive; about 620 parishes and twice as many non-parish churches, chapels were active in which about 400 priests worked. Until 1940 90% of the Catholic churches in the USSR were closed. In 1942 there remained only two (in Moscow and Leningrad), left to serve the personnel of the diplomatic embassies.

<sup>15</sup> Report of Bishop T. Matulionis on August 21, 1941 to Pope Pius XII, *Arkivyskupas Teofilus Matulionis laiškuose ir dokumentuose*, Vilnius, 2002, p. 69-70. In

letter Matulionis provided a list of 23 Lithuanian priests who had earlier worked in Russia. They were about 50–60 years old, but according to the bishop “all of them were in part suitable for shepherding souls in Russia”<sup>16</sup>. The bishop was sure that the spiritual seminaries of Lithuania would actively contribute to the evangelization. He wrote to the Pope that the priests educated in them “would take over the evangelization to convert Russia” (exactly he wrote about “the evangelization to convert Russia” and not the pastoral care of Russia’s Catholics).

The Kaunas Spiritual Seminary was the first one to respond to the project initiated by T. Matulionis. In January 1942 the *Institutum Russicum* was established in it, studies of Eastern Church doctrine and liturgy were begun, almost half of the seminarians began to attend not required Russian language courses.<sup>17</sup> In all the parishes of Lithuania during the war years donations “for the missions”, “for the missions in Russia” were collected.

The Apostolic See agreed to the request of Bishop T. Matulionis. Already at the beginning of October it gave him permission “with the greatest desire” (*libentissime*) to travel to the Nazi occupied areas of the USSR. This was not limited to priests who had worked earlier in Russia as all priests willing to do so could travel there to work.<sup>18</sup> Bishop Matulionis received quite broad authorization for the administration of pastoral care.<sup>19</sup>

Lithuania in the 1930’s there lived two more priests nominated as apostolic administrators, but not ordained as bishops: Mykolas Juodokas (Kazan, Samara and Simbirsk) and Julius Gronskis (Siberia vicariate). Like Bishop T. Matulionis, through the efforts of diplomats in the 1930’s they escaped from the USSR. They did not participate in the project of sending missionaries initiated by Bishop T. Matulionis.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. 70.

<sup>17</sup> Account of the activities of *Institutum Russicum* from September 25, 1942 to October 1, 1943, The Department of Manuscripts of Lithuanian Institute of History, fund of Bishop T. Matulionis.

<sup>18</sup> Report of Cardinal L. Maglione on October 4, 1941 to Bishop T. Matulionis, LVIA, f. 1671, a. 5, b. 109, l. 23.

<sup>19</sup> Addendum to the report of Cardinal L. Maglione on October 4, 1941 to Bishop T. Matulionis, authorizations signed on October 2, *Ibid*, f. 1650, a. 1, b. 239, l. 45-49.

The Vatican very quickly organized the apparatus for the hierarchs responsible for the evangelization of the Nazi occupied areas of the USSR. Already on September 10, 1941 the duties of the Apostolic Administrator of the Mogilev Archdiocese (it included all the territory of European Russia and eastern Belorussia) and Minsk Diocese were assigned to Vilnius Archbishop Metropolitan Romuald Jałbrzykowski. The Vatican's choice, apparently, was determined by the fact that the Vilnius Archdiocese had a border with Belorussia and it would be easiest to send priests from there. However, it was not taken into account that in view of the especially strict Nazi occupational regime there could not be any talk about negotiations by a Polish bishop with the Nazi authorities on the sending of Polish priests to the East. The war circumstances were also not considered and there were no deliberations about the end of the war. The victories of the Wehrmacht on the Eastern front did not raise any doubts about the swift collapse of the USSR. It was not thought that missionaries tied to the occupants could be a danger to the small number of Catholics in Russia.

Without waiting to get the permission of the German occupying authorities Vilnius Archbishop R. Jałbrzykowski sent about 30 priests to the territory of former Soviet Belorussia. However, all of them after several months were returned back, several were arrested by the Germans and killed.<sup>20</sup> Apparently for this reason Bishop T. Matulionis first tried to obtain the official permission of the military and civil German authorities. He presented the travel of the priests to the occupied USSR districts as returning to their parishes. He appealed to the highest German civil and military authorities: the Ostland Reichskomisar in Riga, the Minsk General Commissar and even Ostland Minister Alfred Rosenberg. But none of these offices gave such permission.<sup>21</sup> The highest authorities of

<sup>20</sup> Letters of Bishop T. Matulionis on January 5 and July 17, 1942 to priest Vincentas Dainys, P. Gaida-Gaidamavičius, *Nemarus mirtingasis arkivyskupas Teofilius Matulionis: ganytojas, kalinys, kankinys ir laimėtojas*, Roma, 1981, p. 233-236.

<sup>21</sup> K. Jūra, *Monsinjoras*, Brooklyn, NY, 1979, p. 136-137; reports of Bishop T. Matulionis on February 25, 1942 to the Ostland Reichskomisar in Riga and the Minsk General Komisar, *Arkivyskupas Teofilius Matulionis laiškuose ir dokumentuose*, p. 104-105; report of Bishop T. Matulionis to General Komisar for Belarus on March 9, 1942

the Germany Reich had decided not to allow Catholic missionaries into the occupied areas. The Vermacht authorities also forbade most severely war chaplains (not only German, but also Italian, Hungarian, Slovak) to have contacts with the local population.<sup>22</sup>

The refusal of the occupying authorities to allow Catholic missionaries, without doubt, made national and religious conflicts more difficult. These were begun already in 1941. Relations between the Orthodox and Catholics (Belarussians and Poles) were extremely strained.\* Not only the Germans, but also the Belorussian administration impeded the travel of Catholic missionaries to Belorussia. They tied their culture with the heritage of the Orthodox Church and held the Catholic faith to be a “Polish” religion. Therefore, they were unwilling to talk about the entry of priests, even clergymen of Belorussian nationality were hardly tolerated. For the Polish and Lithuanian priests they appeared to be dangerous Belorussian nationalists, forming

and Ostland Reichskomisar on March 15, *Ibid.*, p. 107, 108; Undated “Pro memoria” of T. Matulionis to Eastern lands General Komisar, *Ibid.*, p. 82-83.

<sup>22</sup> August 16, 1941 operative order no. 10 “Attitude to the church question in the conquered districts of the Soviet Union” М. Шкаровский, *Политика Третьего рейха по отношению к Русской Православной Церкви в свете архивных материалов 1935–1945 годов*. (Сборник документов), Москва, 2003, p. 184; A. Vubnys, *Vokiečių politika Lietuvoje Bažnyčios ir religijos atžvilgiu (1941–1944)*, *Lietuvių katalikų mokslo akademijos metraštis*, 1999, t. 14, p. 210. In fact, some of the military chaplains ignored the categorical prohibition of serving the civilian population.

\* In December 1941 the metropolitan suspended Belarussian priests Stanisław Glakowski, Dioniz Malec, Kazimierz Rybałtowski, who already during the summer without receiving permission traveled to German occupied Belarus, held Masses in Minsk and other places. All three were arrested by the Nazis and executed. In November 1941 in Borisov the priest Henryk Hlebowicz, whom Belarussian nationalists, dissatisfied with his pastoral care in the Polish language, had betrayed to the Germans, was executed; in 1943 Belarus Uniate egzarkh Antonij Niemancewicz died in a Minsk prison, see Ю. Туронак, *Беларусь над нямецкай акупацыяй*, Мінск, 1993, p. 82-83; February 14, 1942 report of R. Jałbrzykowski to Cardinal L. Maglione, *Le Saint Siège et la situation religieuse en Pologne et dans les pays Baltes*, 1939–1945, Libreria editrice Vaticana, vol. 2, p. 532; A. Hlebowicz, “Kościół katolicki na Białorusi Sowietckiej po II wojnie Światowej”, *Dla Boga i Wielkiego Księstwa dawnej Rzeczypospolitej*, (Materiały międzynarodowej konferencji naukowej), Менск–Літоўскі, 2005, p. 124; Z. Ignonis, *Praeitis kalba*, Vilnius, 2007, p. 44, 48, 76.

national consciousness in the region to which their political leaders had expressed territorial claims.

In Russia the Catholic missionaries had to have an unavoidable encounter with Russian partisans whose armed resistance to their occupiers and their collaborators was very strong. They even persecuted Orthodox clergymen whom most of the local population invited and supported. The war awakened not only religious, but also nationalistic, patriotic attitudes in the Russian community. Activists of émigré organizations returned to their homeland and in the underground spread the idea of the restoration of the Russian state. In such circumstances Catholic missionaries could administer to Catholics with considerable risk. However, it is hard to imagine a less favorable time “to convert Russia”.

#### THE EVANGELIZATION OF PRIESTS AND MONKS IN THE USSR REPUBLICS IN 1944–1990

Let us look at the third period in which Lithuania's Church ended up in totally new conditions in the Soviet system. As is known, it endured great repressions – it was forced to end all public ties with society, the monasteries were officially liquidated, the priests and faithful were terrorized. However, at the same time one of the noblest pages in the history of Lithuania's Church – its activities underground – was begun.

Under underground conditions the quite active evangelization by Lithuanian priests and monks took place in almost all the USSR republics. How was it organized? One has to note that this was care for Catholics living in the USSR.

The already mentioned Vilnius Metropolitan R. Jałbrzykowski and Leningrad Apostolic Administrator Bishop of Kaišiadorys T. Matulionis made the first initiatives to send priests to the East. The first of them also this time held church matters to be exclusively in his own competence and acted without informing the authorities. Already in the fall of 1944 Jałbrzykowski looked for priests able to travel to the East. The priests of the Vilnius Archdiocese Poles without doubt took

advantage of the newly opened USSR borders and travelled to serve their countrymen. Meanwhile, Matulionis immediately after the end of the war before the religious policies of the Soviet regime had become clear and massive repressions had not begun, hoped to send several priests to Belorussia and Russia (Leningrad) legally – he presented official requests to state institutions.<sup>23</sup> However, these permits were not given, but so, in 1946 the elderly (73 year old) Bishop Matulionis was repressed.

Namely the initiators of broader scale missions were priests who in the middle of the 1950s were released from the labour camps and willingly remained to serve Lithuanian deportees and Catholics of other nations. Understandably, they could carry out their priest duties only secretly, in their free time after work in factories or offices.

The role of Lithuania's monasteries was especially important in these missions. Namely, they had numerous secretly ordained priests who could not carry out duties in parishes legally so they departed to evangelize among the Catholics of the USSR. These monasteries worked in the underground. Some priests removed from duties in Lithuania's parishes also travelled there (according to Soviet laws, priests of all confessions could work in parishes only after getting from the representative of the Council of Religious Cults Affairs at the Lithuanian SSR Council of Ministers a certificate about registration: by not issuing "the certificate of cult official registration" or later withdrawing it, the Soviet authorities forced the church authorities to transfer the untrusted priests to remote parishes or in general did not allow them to fulfill the duties of a priest). The Marians and Jesuits of Lithuania sent the most priests for shorter or longer "work assignments". In the 1980s the young generation of Lithuanian Franciscans began to take part in such evangelization. In the novitiates of Lithuania's Marians and Jesuits many Belarusian and Ukrainian priests, who now hold high posts in the hierarchies of their Churches, were educated.

<sup>23</sup> June 2, 1945 report of Bishop T. Matulionis to the representative of the Council of Religious Cults Affairs at the Lithuanian SSR Council of Ministers, LCVA, f. R 181, a. 1, b. 5, l. 37. In June 1945 Kaišiadorys Bishops T. Matulionis wanted to send two Lithuanian priests to Leningrad and its districts.

Nuns assisted the priests in the missions a great deal. All of the women convents of Lithuania were active underground during the Soviet period. From the beginning of the 1970s they began to send nuns to USSR republics – Georgia, Armenia, Ukraine, Moldavia, Kazakhstan, Tadjikistan, Siberian cities. Some of them would depart for a long time, obtain work in the factories of major cities where were more opportunities for evangelization. Another method of missionary work was short-term trips from Lithuania, usually during vacations. Settling in the families of acquaintances, the sisters would teach the catechism to children and adults for several weeks, prepare them for the sacraments that were administered by traveling missionaries. Thanks to the priests and sisters Catholic communities were formed. They later founded parishes, opened churches. Some of the convents opened their own chapters in the former USSR republics.\*

It is difficult to say who were initiators of the missions in the USSR, the organizers are better known. They are considered to be the Marian and Jesuit monks, most bravely, most active in the underground – Pranas Račiūnas MIC and Pranciškus Masilionis SJ.<sup>24</sup> There is no doubt that they carried out the will of the Apostolic See. Every more capable Lithuanian male and female monastery contributed to the missions.

Evangelization among Catholics of various nations under underground conditions, overcoming thousands of kilometers required considerable sacrifice so only truly dedicated individuals decided to undertake it. The diary of the missionary nun Birutė Žemaitytė about trips to the USSR is entitled *Viešpaties trupinėliai* (Crumbs of the Lord)<sup>25</sup>

\* Namely four sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus congregation regularly visited the Volga German Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, Moldavia, and Armenia; another branch of this congregation Handmaidens of the Sacred Heart of Jesus congregation had for a longer period 1976–1993 sent 9 sisters as missionaries, they worked in Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan (especially in its capital Alma Ata), the Transcaucasus (Neviešos Švč. Jėzaus Širdies kongregacijos Lietuvos Katalikių moterų kultūros draugijos) istorija [manuscript], l. 70.

<sup>24</sup> V. Spengla, Žiupsnelis iš neparašytos *Apštalų darbų* knygos. From: B. Žemaitytė, *Viešpaties trupinėliai. Misijų dienoraštis*, Alytus, 1999, p. 154-165.

<sup>25</sup> B. Žemaitytė, *Viešpaties trupinėliai. Misijų dienoraštis*, Alytus, 1999.

because thousands of kilometers had to be traveled for the religious needs of several or up to 20 people. Nevertheless, due to the Lithuanian priests and nuns multinational Catholic communities formed in the USSR.\*

After Lithuania regained its independence in 1990 the monasteries one after the other began to call back their priests and sisters from the disintegrated USSR. Lithuania's church authorities encouraged this, trying to embrace the multitude of arising works in their own land. On the other hand, the social and political circumstances changed essentially: many Germans and Poles used the opportunity to depart from the former USSR republics, under the changed conditions aid from the rich funds of Western Churches reached this region, the number of clergy and sisters from various Western states increased. The Orthodox Church was also reborn and became the most important impediment for the spread of the Catholic faith in Russia.

Is the history of Lithuania's Catholic Church's apostolic work among Russians over? Does ecumenism encourage a new era of mutual trust between Churches based on cooperation? Hardly – it is not known how long will it take for real changes, when will the attitude of the Catholic and other faith Christians to each other change essentially. The leaders of the Churches and the clergy continue to rub shoulders and cooperate, but the real distance between the confessions does not decrease. In spite of the changes encouraged by the Vatican II Council, most likely there is only sluggish movement in the same direction. One of the first steps of the reborn Catholic Church after Lithuania restored its independence 20 years ago was the establishment of a hearth for the Eastern rite Catholic faith in Vilnius. Because there were no Eastern rite Catholics in Lithuania two Bazilian monks from the Ukraine were invited. In 1991 one of the Catholic churches in Vilnius closed during the Soviet period was handed over to them. Where the liturgy was held

\* Namely the sisters of the Eucharistic Jesus Congregation (founded in 1947 by the Jesuit priest Pranciškus Masilionis) at this time has chapters in Latvia, Moldova, Kazakhstan, the St. Catherine Congregation sisters – in Sovetsk (in the Kaliningrad oblast), *Katalikų žinytas 2011*, Vilnius, 2011, p. 193, 199).

in the Ukrainian language. According to the 2001 census there were 364 Uniates in the Republic of Lithuania.\*

It is not surprising that Lithuania's Church cares for the Ukrainian Uniates with whom close ties were maintained in the Soviet period, working in the underground. However, the mentioned Holy Trinity church handed over to them in 1991 has an unambiguous history. It was built as an Orthodox church at the site of the death of the 14th c. Orthodox martyrs Ivan, Anthony, and Eustaphius. The current building was built in the 16th c. with funds from the Orthodox magnate Konstanty Ostrogski. The Orthodox church became a Catholic one only after the Union of Brest (1596) when its property was transferred into the hands of the Uniates. In czarist times it was returned to the Orthodox diocese, and after World War I Masses were held in it for Catholics. It is ironic that the church is located by the Gates of Dawn, several steps from the historically formed center of Lithuania's Orthodox Church. One should think that this hearth of Easter rite Catholic faith did not appear incidentally,\*\* but in any case it significantly actualized historical memory and remains functioning in the background of the ecumenism era.

## CONCLUSIONS

In general one has to note that Lithuania's Church was a quite active participant in the Vatican's efforts to convert Russia and Russians, especially in the years between the wars. It was a small "polygon of practical training". Public and non-public methods of evangelization, the effectiveness of Eastern and Latin rites were tried out. None of the

\* According to the data of the 2001 census, Lithuanians comprised 83,45% of the population of the Republic of Lithuania, Poles – 6,7, Russians – 6,3, Belarusians – 1,2, Ukrainians – 0,7%. 93% Poles, 85% Lithuanians, 13% Ukrainians, 47% Belarusians consider themselves as belonging to the Roman Catholic community; 32% Belarusians, 52% Ukrainians, 46% Russians – to the Orthodox community; 11% Russians – to the Old Believers' community (Statistikos departamento Informacinis pranešimas nr. 8, October 3, 2002).

\*\* A priest of Lithuania's Orthodox Diocese converted to the Greek Uniate Church.

mission methods provided anticipated results even though there was no lack of idealism and dedication to implement this impossible idea among the evangelizers.

The failures of evangelization in Russia and among Russians (not only in Lithuania, but also in other states of Europe and America) significantly changed the Catholic Church's point of view toward Orthodoxy, the Second Vatican Council approved radical changes, the Catholic Church joined the ecumenical movement. However, one cannot say the same about the views of Orthodox believers and especially the Russian Orthodox Church. As in the past Catholics and the Vatican were viewed with antagonism and a lack of trust. For distance divides not only different religions, but also different cultures, pierced by historical memory.