

stroika. It has a long tradition and broad base in society. It has built up a network of activists and has tried and tested working methods. But it relies above all on Christian teaching, the truth of which history reveals over and over again. Communism has nothing to set against this. Forty years of communist rule for Slovak Catholics represent a challenge to which Catholicism has risen.

The communists are still unaware of this fact. From time to time they wage a press campaign against Bishop Korec. Yet if ever they wish to begin dialogue with the Catholics of Slovakia they will have to talk first of all to Bishop Korec. By their attacks in the press, the communists are themselves hindering this dialogue. Without dialogue with the Catholics it will again prove impossible to overcome society's passivity, even in the economic sense. Yet the communists assure us that the activation of citizens is a feature of

restructuring. How then do they wish to achieve this?

In Poland there is no difficulty in General Jaruzelski meeting with Cardinal Glemp and discussing with him the key issues of nation and state. In Czecho-Slovakia in May 1988 the government turned down Cardinal Tomášek's suggestion of dialogue and the communists have nothing but criticism for Bishop Korec. Must the communists allow the state to enter an economic crisis of Polish dimensions before they are willing to negotiate, for example, with the Catholics?

The Catholic movement in Slovakia is experiencing natural growth. It is ready at any time to hold dialogue with the communist government, but cannot force the government to negotiate. Neither does it need to. Time is on the Catholics' side.

JÁN ČARNOGURSKÝ

The Catholic Church in Lithuania

*The following interview by the Polish journalist Andrzej Chodkiewicz with a senior member of the Lithuanian Catholic clergy, Fr Vaclovas Aliulis, was published on 31 July last year in the Polish newspaper Lad. Fr Aliulis is head of the Episcopal Liturgical Commission in Lithuania and a member of the Marian Order.**

Religious Observance in Lithuania

Q: How would you describe the religious faith of the Lithuanians?

A: I would rather speak of the Catholics of Lithuania than single

out the Lithuanians in particular, as we believe that about ten per cent of Catholics in Lithuania are Poles or people who pray in Polish, although their everyday language is Belorussian. There is a difference between these two groups. I would like to say that Polish piety is more traditional, which shows itself, for example, in the way a member of the Polish-speaking group will go to Mass every Sunday, but to Confession and Communion only once a year. On the

*For a review of recent developments in Lithuanian Catholic life, see *Chronicle* item on pp. 150-52.

other hand, if a Lithuanian goes to church every Sunday, he goes to Confession three or four times a year. I think the faith of the Lithuanians is more conscious. But for all that a greater percentage of people in the Polish group go to church than in the Lithuanian group. [. . .]

Q: Are there visible differences in Lithuania between religious expression in the country and in the towns, as was so characteristic of Poland — especially a few decades ago: on the one side the village with its traditional faith, on the other the gradually secularising town?

A: For a long time the village — which has now lost a lot of people and is ageing — was the centre of religious life. The older generation preserves the faith, while the younger generation from early morning to late at night is overloaded with work in the fields. And so they come to their religious duties in an exhausted state, and have no time for bringing up their children in the faith. On top of that the headmaster or school inspector, if he is particularly zealous — more for the sake of his career than out of conviction, causes problems for the children or personally tries to convince them of atheism. [. . .]

Now the main centre is in the towns, where although they are not large, there are very determined circles which are closely connected with the church and help it. In Vilnius for example, any visitor can easily see how many young people are to be found at the altar.

Q: How many children are baptised? How does their religious upbringing continue? Do many go on to their first Holy Communion?

A: It is difficult to say how many children are baptised, as we keep no statistics, nor have we tried to keep

them. Personally I would guess that at least two thirds of children are baptised. More than half of them go on to receive first Holy Communion. Preparation for First Communion is very weak. Officially only parents can instruct their children in the truths of the faith. But nowadays priests do help more with instruction, or else a devout person or someone you could consider a nun, although officially orders do not exist. Such catechism before the First Communion takes three weeks and is held in the summer holidays. But often it is shorter, as children are pressured into going on official summer camps and into the country.

A serious problem is caused by the fact that not many families have sufficient religious knowledge. Of course they are pleased to take their children to an attractive festival at First Communion and go themselves to the altar of the Lord; but already a week later very few children are in church. Many children from practising families are already indifferent to religion by the age of 15 or 16. Some submit to the popular belief to be found, above all in schools, that religion is only something backward that cannot be reconciled with science. By the age of 20 there are so few young people left who regularly practise their religion. Those who remain are outstanding, they have firmly decided not to separate their lives from the church.

Q: And how many people get married in church?

A: Church weddings are very numerous, as now people are not so afraid as earlier, although it is only about ten years since six assistants were dismissed from the medical faculty after getting married in church. Such cases still happen even today. Unfortunately young people are not well prepared for marriage. In the countryside there is almost no

one in a position to conduct preparation for marriage, as few weddings take place there. In towns instruction takes place, and young people are keen to attend. But some priests turn a blind eye, so young people go where few demands are made of them and where they have to do the least. Many bring no joy as they will not practise their faith later. But those who come back to the church, without doing so because of marriage, are very true and zealous. They are young converts of about 20 or 30 years of age, mostly from the younger artistic circles, who are more independent and are discovering the need for spirituality.

Q. What is the situation with regard to church burials? In Poland many who are not even practising Catholics, and some who did not even believe are given a church burial, because that is the wish of their families. Are burials in Lithuania an expression of religious faith?

A: No, we have problems with burials, as not all Catholics — even good, practising Catholics — have a church burial. The reason is the cowardice of the family of the deceased who are afraid that if there is a burial in the presence of a priest no one will attend from the deceased's place of work and that they will not get any financial support from the place of work. So a requiem is arranged early in the morning for a few people, then afterwards there is a purely secular burial. And so the unfortunate people foster the illusion that Lithuania is no longer Catholic. But there are devout families.

According to the law a funeral can take place in the church or at the cemetery. In the bigger towns funeral processions are not allowed, though they still take place in villages and small towns. However, it is strictly forbidden to perform religious funeral rites or even to place any religious

symbols in state funeral homes. On the other hand it is officially permitted to perform funeral rites in state crematoria. Perhaps the situation will change in time. [. . .]

It used to be difficult to take the Sacrament to the sick in hospital, but now there are no longer problems. One can visit a sick person in any hospital — at his request or at the request of his family.

Church Life

Q: What is pastoral work in Lithuania like? Is there, as in Poland, a growth in specialised pastoral work?

A: There is no such specialised work. It is forbidden to hold services for people according to their age or sex. Only services for the whole community can take place, although we do direct them at young people.

Q: Are there enough churches to carry out pastoral work?

A: For a small country we have lots of churches, but in Vilnius and other towns where new districts have been built there is a need for new churches. When an application was made to the state authorities for building permission the head of the Council for Religious Affairs, Anilionis, replied in the journal *Literature and Art*: 'How can we declare our support for the building of a church in new districts when there is not yet a cinema or a house of culture? That means the believers would be privileged, as they would have churches on the spot.' That sounds as though the state wants to build churches for us. But in fact all we need is a little form, giving permission to build. But we hope in any case that this too will change.

Q: How does the church in Lithuania support itself?

A: As for support for the church,

believers help us willingly and very generously. Churches are restored and looked after. As the priest has been deprived of the possibility of teaching religion and working in Catholic organisations, he devotes his whole energy to the fitting out and appearance of the church. Some are not too happy with this, as it can lead to pretty but empty churches.

Some, especially young priests, seek out more personal contacts and start to visit parishioners at home. In 1961 it was forbidden to collect donations in homes. However, as the priest is visiting families without collecting donations, there is no reason to forbid this. In towns this is impossible, as one does not know who lives where and who wishes for a visit. But it is possible in smaller towns.

Q: What is the situation as regards religious literature in Lithuania; is there a great interest in Catholic books?

A: It is as though we were still in the 16th century, in that we have only the Liturgy book, the catechism and the Scriptures. Recently we received a calendar as well.

As for a regular Catholic journal, there isn't even unanimity among the clergy. The Catholic intelligentsia is very much in favour. Part of the clergy, let us say the more militant, fear that any journal would have to appear in a form that would be unacceptable to us and that there would be pressure to make it like the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*, whose style does not appeal to us. I myself do not share this fear as the calendar which we publish shows that it is possible to publish serious religious works and that censorship is not that bad. They ask us to leave something out or write something in another way, but one can put up with that. We ourselves should make sure that the journal has a high standard.

And I am an optimist. [A new journal for Lithuanian Catholics *Kataliku Pasaulis* has now appeared, *Ed.*]

Q: What kind of literature do readers like?

A: Well known at home is the popular writer Antanas Maceina, whose complete works on religion and philosophy have reached us from America and circulate in typed copies. Many foreign books are translated into Lithuanian and copied on typewriters. Hundreds of articles are translated, even if sometimes not quite accurately.

A popular area is devotional literature: small booklets with prayers, revelations, little pictures etc. [. . .] They circulate fairly widely, but that is rather a shame as it is such superficial piety and one could get hold of more serious literature. But that is the need.

Q: Does the church in Lithuania use religious literature from abroad?

A: Most literature from abroad comes in from Poland. We share it with Polish Catholics, with the intelligentsia and with priests. A considerable number of young priests have learnt Polish in order to use Polish religious literature. You see it is much more difficult to get literature in other languages. We get a few books in German, from the GDR as well as Austria, maybe because Austria is a neutral state. The younger generation of priests has learnt English at least in secondary school, but unfortunately we get very little English literature. Perhaps even our Lithuanian brothers in England and the United States are not informed of how much we need English-language literature. We can receive it also via Vienna. Sometimes literature reaches us which is printed in Lithuanian in the United States.

Relations with other Nationalities

Q: Only part of the Catholic population of the USSR lives in Lithuania. There are Catholics too in Belorussia, Ukraine, Latvia and even in Central Asia and Siberia. Does the church in Lithuania maintain contact with Catholics in other republics?

A: Unfortunately we do not maintain such close contacts with Latvia as I consider we should. Somehow we have always had a 'rather cool' brotherly relationship with the Latvians. We have nothing against each other, but on the other hand there is no heartfelt closeness. Each nation considers itself the proudest. Once Latvia considered itself the richer and more civilised. . . Today people in border areas are getting to know each other.

In the religious sphere there is little cooperation between the liturgy commissions, and with the seminaries cooperation is very weak. As for the bishops, they travel only to attend the funerals of other bishops. . . Priests from Lithuania are not accepted to work in other republics. Theology students in Riga are warned not to travel to Lithuania and not to develop any contacts with Lithuanians. However, the theology students know each other a little, although up to now there has been no official meeting.

Polish priests from the area of Vilnius maintain contact with Belorussia, as they support each other spiritually and patriotically. At the Marian shrine at the Gates of Dawn in Vilnius there is always a concelebrated Mass in Polish with priests from Belorussia during the 11th November celebrations. Vilnius is also a source of material help for the church in Belorussia, as here the priests can get hold of religious objects, books and liturgical items. A considerable part of the Vilnius Archdiocese lies within Belorussia,

but the Apostolic Administrator of Vilnius is not allowed to administer the church on the territory of the Belorussian SSR. However, priests and believers like coming here for Confession and for Holy Communion, and also quite frequently for First Communion or to get married. . .

There are very few contacts with Ukraine, even though believers travel from there to visit the Gates of Dawn shrine in Vilnius. Ukraine is now the cradle of vocations for all churches, Latin, Eastern-rite and Orthodox — from among former Uniates. In Ukraine, young priests predominate who now use Ukrainian for catechism and preaching. They are trying to establish some form of life in orders, even if without monasteries. . .

Contacts are maintained with Estonia, although on a slightly different basis, as Estonia is almost completely Lutheran. Before the war, 14 per cent of Estonians were Orthodox, but today Orthodoxy has no appeal in Estonia, and there is a shortage there of priests of Estonian origin. Our Liturgy Commission maintains contact with the Estonian Lutheran Commission, mainly in the field of Bible translation.

Q: The Lithuanian Catholic Church has few contacts abroad. Recently the bishops have travelled more frequently to Rome. What links now exist between the church in Lithuania and other churches in Central Europe?

A: A lot of priests from Poland travel to Vilnius, and Polish priests from the Vilnius area travel to Poland. In this way they support Polishness and Catholicism. Since these priests, who strengthen Polish identity, are at the same time strengthening the church, they are free to come. It would be good if they would act in the broad Catholic spirit, accepting that not only Poles are

Catholics, but also Lithuanians and Belorussians.

Contacts with Catholics in other countries are very weak. Perhaps the best contacts are with the GDR, from where delegations have visited, led by Cardinal Bengsch and later Cardinal Meisner. Professors from the Kaunas Theological Seminary travel frequently to the GDR to visit the Seminary in Erfurt. The Rector of the Seminary also has links with priests from Germany, as he takes part in the Berlin Conference. Cardinal Paskai of Hungary has visited us [. . .] This year [1988, *Ed.*] Cardinal Sin of the Philippines came unexpectedly to Vilnius. The date of the visit was changed several times, so many priests heard of the Cardinal's visit only from the press.

Travel abroad to study is very rare. At the moment there are attempts underway to allow priests to travel for study or to do correspondence courses at the Warsaw Catholic Theological Academy. One priest wants to study church history at the Catholic University of Lublin, but no one knows what will come of this.

Ecumenical Relations

Q: Lithuania is a country where for centuries many other denominations existed alongside Catholics: Protestants, Orthodox Evangelicals, Old Believers. What can you say about the relationship between the Catholic Church and these denominations?

A: Ecumenical contacts exist on a personal level. We participate in special feasts. Occasionally the local Orthodox dean attends the ordination of new priests at the Kaunas seminary, whilst both Orthodox and Lutheran bishops attend the consecration of Catholic bishops. The Orthodox say they feel protected by us in Vilnius [. . .]

Lutherans are a tiny minority.

There are 22 small parishes. Their bishop is an educated and highly knowledgeable man and he helped us translate the New Testament. He confined himself to commenting on the text and not doctrine and recommended this version of the New Testament to his faithful.

Six Hundredth Anniversary of the Conversion of Lithuania

Q: The Lithuanians last year [in 1987, *Ed.*] celebrated the great 600th anniversary of the Conversion of Lithuania. The Poles too took part eagerly in this anniversary. What influence do you think this anniversary had on the religious life of the Lithuanians? The Poles often criticised the fact that in the Lithuanian bishops' letter on the occasion of the anniversary, there was not one reference to Poland, a country which played an important part in the work of conversion.

A: The anniversary was celebrated intensively by the faithful. There was a three-year preparation: the first year was about history, the second about catechetics, and the third was the year of the Living Christian Spirit. The plan was best carried out in the first year. The anniversary commission prepared 40 themes for sermons from the history of Christianity in Lithuania. There was even a letter from the bishops on this theme. In this letter both Jadwiga and Jagiello were mentioned, together with the Poles. As they were in sermons. That explains why in the last pastoral letter there was no mention of them [. . .]

The celebrations in Vilnius were splendid in spite of the rain. In four churches Mass was said in Lithuanian, in two in Polish. The bishop was present in every church and preached a sermon on the theme 'There is no Greek or Jew'. All

rejoiced. [...] We appreciated the efforts of the Holy Father who did his utmost to give the widest publicity to this anniversary. We are so grateful and love him dearly.

Q: What do you consider will be the results of the anniversary celebrations for the future of Christianity in Lithuania?

A: I think the nation has been made more strongly aware of being a Christian nation. For the future the canonisation of Archbishop Jurgis Matulaitis will have great significance. This is something permanent. We have a new saint, we have his grave and his relics. The Holy Father listened to the Lithuanian bishops' request and made 12 July — the day his body was transferred to Marijampole [Now known as Kapsukas, *Ed.*] — his feast day. This is a much better date for the faithful than the date of his death, 21 January; it is difficult to get to his grave in the midst of winter snow and frost.

Of last year's celebrations, the most significant and beautiful were the canonisation celebrations in Marijampole. Tens of thousands of pilgrims with over 1,000 in national costume, altar clothes or in white took part in the processions. Everyone celebrated with enthusiasm the faith of their forefathers. We have our own saint: the Holy Father knows us and loves us.

On the occasion of the jubilee the bishops chose one church in each diocese to be a 'church of pilgrimage'. A parish priest from Pivašunai, whose church was a 'church of pilgrimage', told me that last year twice as many pilgrims visited his church and twice as many people received Holy Communion.

I think the honouring of St Jurgis will contribute more and more to the development of religious life [...]

Relations between Polish and Lithuanian Catholics

Q: I have kept the most difficult question to the end. In Poland you hear the reproach again and again that the Poles living in Lithuania are being Lithuanianised. Some people complain that the church in Lithuania is contributing to the denationalisation of the Poles. What are relations like between Polish and Lithuanian Catholics.

A: On these questions I look through rose-tinted spectacles. We know the old rivalries, now they are less fierce. There is less hostility than 50 years ago. It is life that has taught us this. [...]

I come from a generation which was brought up to be very anti-Polish. I was educated by the Marian Fathers and they did not inculcate this at all, but among the general population anti-Polish feelings persist. When I arrived in Vilnius in 1948 I was frightened at first. What do I do if a Pole comes to confession? I soon changed, though, when I saw they were sincere, very good Catholics. Why should they be blamed if their fathers abandoned Lithuanian and accepted Polish culture. . . . We greatly admire any Pole who is proud of his Lithuanian heritage. However, the majority of Poles reject their Lithuanian roots.

In my opinion, relations within the church are good. If our Polish brothers in the Vilnius area in particular complain, then they are telling lies. There are Masses in Polish in all parishes with a larger or smaller group of Poles or Polish-speakers, as is the case quite often in villages, where the people normally speak Belorussian, but use Polish in church. In Vilnius itself there are two purely Lithuanian churches and one purely Polish church (the Holy Spirit Church), a splendid church right in the centre of the city

of which we can only be envious. In the other churches the time is divided exactly between Polish and Lithuanian Masses.

In 1945-46 and 1956-57 many Polish priests went to Poland, a higher proportion than believers, as Archbishop Jalbrzykowski wanted the young priests to leave and settle in Poland while the old stayed behind. At that time many churches would have had to close were it not for the Lithuanian priests. Bishop Paltarokas repeated again and again that theology students for Polish believers should learn Polish.

There are about 60 or 70 churches in the Vilnius area where Masses are held in Polish, of them 36 are churches where all Masses are in Polish. Sometimes the Gospel is read in Lithuanian. About 50 Lithuanian priests have learnt Polish to be able to minister to Polish Catholics. Perhaps they do not teach a faith which is tinged with Polishness, but they teach the same faith to Poles as to Lithuanians. So the Poles should not speak of Lithuanisation.

It is very sad that the vast majority of Polish families send their children to Russian schools. Before First Communion, three out of four children can read Polish, but often learn Polish prayers written in the Cyrillic alphabet. In Belorussia this is even more common, as Polish parents feel that Russian schools give their children better prospects.

It is sad that there are no Polish kindergartens, but only Lithuanian and Russian ones. [. . .] In Russian schools the children lose their faith fastest in the atheist environment. Fr Leopold Chomski was not able to convince his fellow priests to put in an application for a Polish school. I consider that a great tragedy.

The situation of the Belorussians is even worse. Only Fr Charniauski is a Belorussian patriot. Perhaps he is too fanatical, and thereby does more

harm to the cause of the Belorussians. Fr Charniauski translated the Missal, the Lectionary and the readings from the Bible into Belorussian. They were approved by the Holy See, but they cannot be printed as the Soviet authorities maintain it is not worth it, as ten priests at most would celebrate Mass in Belorussian. All the priests in Belorussia are strongly Polish nationalist. I hold the principle that if you do not allow a language into church you leave a whole nation standing outside the doors of the church. At the moment there is a religious and national rebirth among the Belorussians, especially among young people. If Catholicism there has only a Polish face, people there will give it the cold shoulder.

Q: And how do you view relations between the two nations in the light of your experiences on this visit to Poland? How do Lithuanians view the Catholic Church in Poland?

A: I am now seeing the church in Poland. Three things bring me joy: the catechetical work, the press and the new churches. I am pleased to see such a large number of young people holding fast to the church [. . .]

Many see the strength of the church in Lithuania as closely linked with the church in Poland. We are quite clear about the importance for us of the Polish church. We are happy that the church in Poland has such strength, that it has able cardinals, the beloved Holy Father, and Polish martyrs such as St Maximilian (Kolbe) and Fr Jerzy (Popieluszko) [. . .] but we beg people to remember that the Lithuanian Church has its own resources. And so we prefer to speak of good neighbours, rather than a union. [. . .]