

# **Nation** and Religion

Aspects of European Identity

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## **Final Report**

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# The Church in the Transition between Socialism and Capitalism

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The sudden collapse of the Soviet system came as a surprise not only to the Western countries but also for the people who were born and grew up within it. Everything the socialist believed about values and ideals collapsed over a short period of time. The sudden transition to capitalism deeply influenced every area of societal life, including economic, political, cultural systems. These reforms shook to their depths every individual and social institution. The church was not left untouched by this transition. During Soviet times the church represented an ideological opponent to the socialist system, like everything else in society she embraced the spirit of change.

In this article we will take note of the reforms which affected the church in the process of transformation from a socialist to capitalist environment. We will examine the challenges which the church encountered during the past decade, and how she has attempted to deal with them. We will investigate society's reaction to the church from the first days of independence to the present. To accomplish this we must examine the church's life under the socialist regime, compare her stance in socialist and capitalist environments, and examine the difference between capitalistic and socialistic mentalities, beliefs and values, and the influences of the predominant mentality on the church, her worship, and her theology.

## **The Church Prior to 1940**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Lithuania has been the minority church since the time of the Reformation. Even though Lutheranism had made a significant impact upon Lithuanian

culture (e.g., the first book written in the Lithuanian language was a Lutheran Catechism), it is only in the 20th century that the church has become a single body. Until this time a large number of Lithuanian Lutherans lived in Lithuania Minor, under the supervision of the Prussian Consistory in Königsberg. Beginning at the time of the Reformation, parishes in the geographical regions of Vilnius and Kaunas acted independently of ecclesiastical supervision. In 1830, however, they decided to put themselves under the supervision of the Latvian Kuršo Mintauja. According to the decision of the Russian Czar, beginning in the year 1832 all Russian Lutheran churches were united into one body, and were made subject to the consistory of Saint Petersburg<sup>1</sup>. There is, however, an important exception. The parishes in the Suvalkija region were in 1815 incorporated to the reestablished kingdom of Poland and came under the supervision of the consistory in Warsaw. When in 1918 Lithuania proclaimed its national independence, the Lutheran church of the newly established nation in the church found herself in a struggle to establish her identity. In addition to the Lithuanian, there were also strong German and Latvian folk elements present. During this period there were strong tensions among these three ethnic groups. Tensions further increased when the National Socialists came to power in Germany. At that time there were more than 200,000 Lutherans in Lithuania, representing about 10 percent of the citizens of Lithuania<sup>2</sup>.

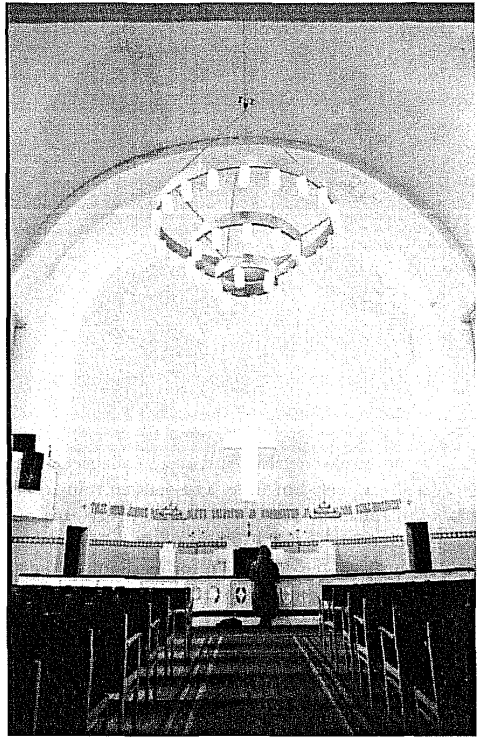
As a result of the decision of Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (1939), Lithuania was assigned to

the sphere of influence of the USSR. The country was occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940. The Lutheran Church, with only two decades of life as a single body behind her and with no strong sense of identity, lost a very large number of priests and parishioners. As a result, from the end of World War II until the present, Lutherans have represented only about 1 percent of the population, i.e., about 30 000 church members.

## The Church in the Soviet Regime

In the last days of WWII a Committee for Religious Affairs was established in Lithuania. Later in 1946, a regulation compelled all congregations to be registered and receive permission to conduct religious activity<sup>3</sup>. This decision marked the beginning of a systematic and carefully planned persecution of the church. The Soviet government confiscated all church property, including land and achieves. During the next two decades more than 2/3 of all the parish churches were closed, and approximately one half of them were demolished. Parish leaders and parishioners lived in constant danger of prosecution and deportation to Siberia.

The Soviet government also undertook the systematic control of every aspect of church life. Strict limitations on church activity were enacted and enforced. Catechization of children was strictly prohibited. Publication of Church material was almost impossible. During the Soviet period, only three modest reprintings of the old Hymnal were printed, along with the annual church calendar and a few other small publications. Because almost all the ordained priests had left the country in 1944, congregational worship was left in the hands of Pictistic lay preachers. Their activities were, however, quickly proscribed. None was allowed to conduct ministerial or other religious activity without the express approval of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Candidates for the priesthood were required to submit to detailed interrogation by the KGB. Files detailing every aspect of parish



life and activity were gathered by the KGB and delivered to the Ministry of Religious Affairs<sup>4</sup>. To facilitate its work, the KGB sought to recruit parishioners willing to supply them with information. The church was completely isolated from all foreign contacts. Unlike the churches in Poland, Hungary, and other Warsaw Pact nations, the churches in the Baltic states were not permitted to receive any material help from the West.

The isolation of the Lutheran Church in Lithuania extended also to the sphere of theology. Before WW II, theology was the particular responsibility of the Faculty of Theology in the University of Vytautas the Great in Kaunas. The Lithuanian government closed this faculty in 1937, with the result that theological activity slowed greatly. During the Soviet period such activity ceased completely. Theological developments and trends in the West remained completely unknown in the Lithuania Lutheran Church until 1991.

As was the case of the Roman Catholic Church in East Germany (DDR)<sup>5</sup>, the Lithuanian Lutheran Church took a attitude of political noninvolvement. Lutherans were not involved in the actively anti-Soviet movement which often was associated with the Roman Catholic Church in Lithuania. Lithuanian Lutherans found it necessary to follow this path, because they had always been so strongly identified with German culture and spirit. In some instances Lutheran priests criticized the Soviet school system for its atheistic foundations and its proscription on religious instruction. However, these cases were rare and cannot be compared with criticism which originated from within the Roman Catholic Church.

### **Soviet Ideology and its Influence upon the Mentality of the Individual**

The strong partisan movement which continued for many years after the Soviet takeover is an important indication of Lithuania resistance to Soviet indoctrination. However, resistance manifested itself primarily in rural districts; the cities quickly adapted themselves to life under the new regime. The spirit of resistance was quickly crushed after the first series of deportations to Siberia. A sense of anxiety and fear came to prevail. Gradually the people came to adopt the new way of thinking.

What sort of man did Sovietization produce, and how did he react? We find a clear answer to this question in the words of Vaclav Havel, president of the independent Czech republic:

Although we despised the communistic way of life, we quickly adopted ourselves to it. It included an unusually thorough system of regulations, minutely detailing permitted and proscribed activity, which must be adhered to, if unpleasant consequences were to be avoided. This code of conduct remained largely unwritten, but it was

completely clear and universally known—for example, everyone knew when and where one could speak openly, and the circumstances under which silence must prevail. It was clear to all what could be regarded as legitimate expectations and what were futile dreams. It was, in fact, a gray, empty, restrictive life. Its narrow boundaries were very restrictive and so strong that they created a kind of warped sense of confidence, under girded by the paternalistic guaranties of the socialist state. We knew that someone cared for us, but at the terrible price – the price of personal freedom<sup>6</sup>.

The implementation of this system brought with it a sense that the communist party and its ladyship were guardian and protector. The socialist system organized jobs, created a healed care system, provided opportunities for study without payment and a place to live. The apparatus of socialist propaganda constantly emphasized that capitalism was founded upon ruthless competition and brought with it high unemployment. It was never noted that socialism was dependant upon the confiscation of property, and an artificial equality of condition – everyone receiving the same regardless of his talents, abilities, industriousness, productivity. It escaped notice that socialist man had lost any initiative either to work, or to excel. Inevitable result was the final collapse of the system.

The Soviet government supported and taught atheism, often in populist and naive terms, matter of factly stating that God does not exist, that life is a strictly the result of random biological processes. It was, however, an atheism quite different from that found in capitalistic societies. Western atheism constitutes of a continuous denial of a religious message that can be examined in detail. The compulsive atheism of the

The Soviet system was able to fight against religion by instilling in the people a sense of shame or by manipulating the individuals whose sense of shame they were able to magnify and use for their own purposes. Communist propaganda ridiculed religious ideals, comparing them negatively with the materialistic ideals of socialist man. In comparison to Soviet ideals religious ideals were said to be meaningless unbeneficial. Christians were characterized as uneducated people enslaved by religious superstitions which had long since been exposed and rejected by science. In the schools religious children were caricatured, and religious traditions were mocked and ridiculed. This greatly influenced the young, who were anxious not to be associated with the group and ideals subject to ridicule.

It was characteristic that alternatives to the religious practice should be offered and recommended. Atheistic propaganda made use of such term as spirituality. "Man cannot live an empty life devoid of spirituality, he needs to be motivated by the highest principles, based upon true understanding of the meaning of life"<sup>1</sup>. Spirituality was often associated with cultural activities. Ceremonies, celebrations, and secular rituals were provided as a substitute or as a worthy alternatives which would make religious practice unnecessary. Especially popular in rural areas were celebrations and rituals associated with the cycles of nature: the beginning and end of the growing season.

The system understood its need to provide some answer to the haunting question of the meaning of life. It looked for its answers strictly within the human sphere. It gave its own special meaning to the notion of everlasting life. There could be no question that when men dies his physical existence comes to an end, but what survives in is the contribution he had made to society. He lives on in the memories of others.

The meaning of existence should not to be sought outside humankind but in itself that is in everything that stimulates and up builds the family of men and its prosperity. The

meaning the individual personality comes to blossom in relationship to the whole and the realisation of societies aims and objectives. The individual has his own biological role to play in the preservation of humankind and to nurture it to the direction of progress. This he does through his offspring. In some measure I survive in my children... Man lives on in the memory of others, in personal achievement, the fruits of his likelihood – in the literary, and artistic legacy, technological and architectural achievements. Thus men's legacy continues to influence and benefit his descendants perpetuating his life through many generations. It is in these things that men's immortality is hidden. Those who leave nothing behind are immediately forgotten after the funerals, those who leave behind a legacy are remembered through many generations<sup>2</sup>.

Who were the church members in socialistic society? They were mainly those who could be called underprivileged: the workers and peasants. Their membership in the church brought them no great loss of privilege or opportunity.

For the intelligentsia matters were far more complicated. For them church attendance was dangerous. It could result in the loss of position and privilege. Especially vulnerable were school teachers. To them was entrusted "the main task of the atheistic education of the younger generation"<sup>3</sup>. In many cases the intelligentsia remained nominal Christians. They asked for the clandestine blessing of their marriages, the baptism and confirmation of their children and on rare occasions they asked to receive the sacrament. They often traveled far from home to receive the church's ministry, most often in rural parishes. Only a few openly espoused and spread religious ideas defended Christian values. It was these who were most active in concert with the Roman catholic church in the anti-Soviet movement.

In the depths of his soul the Soviet man could feel great sympathy for the plight of the persecuted church and even desire to lighten her



burden. The majority had lost their religious confidence but saw great value in Christian virtues. Official prohibition of religious feeling only served to stimulate curiosity and appreciation. Religious feelings were driven underground but they could not be annihilated.

## The Period of Revival

The first indication of a change in the church situation came during the administration of Mikhail Gorbachev. Governmental control of the church and parish activities gradually diminished. Restrictions in the church's life and activity were lifted in 1988. It was in that year that the Soviet government returned to the Roman catholic arc cathedral which had been used as an art museum.

In this period it was the Roman church which took the leadership role in the newly emerging era of struggle against the Soviet domination. People began to speak openly in terms of "rebirth" and "revival". These were code words indicating a complete and open denial of Soviet ideal, beliefs and values. This became a time of increased public religious activity. Nominal Christians began again to attend the church.

On March 11th, 1991 Lithuania proclaimed her independence from the USSR and the reestablishment of an independent national state. A new constitution and the new legal statutes were approved. The country made 180 degree turn towards democracy and the Western free market system. These changes shocked the very foundations of the society. The sense of freedom brought in it a giddy espousal of Western values without a corresponding understanding of their content and significance. Vaclav Havel's description of the sudden collapsing of the Soviet system may be regarded as typical.

The collapse came quickly, almost overnight. Suddenly the vast expanse of freedom stood open before us and subconsciously we came to feel that there were no limits to life. The spiritual state of such a men can be compared to a prisoner suddenly released from his bondage. Such release brings with it a heady sense of euphoria and the deceptive

notion now on everything is possible, everything is allowed. The strict prison regulations no longer hold, indeed, it seems no regulations hold<sup>4</sup>.

Durkheim describes as "Anomie" precisely such situations of social and cultural collapse.<sup>5</sup> The sense of solidarity which had played such a critical role in social consciousness collapses bringing down with it former ideals, beliefs and values. In Lithuanian this phenomenon was indeed dramatic.

Statistics provide us with a clear picture. Whereas in 1989 there were 36 divorces per hundred marriages, within a year the number have risen to 45, and within three years there were 59 divorces; in 1990 there were 969 suicides; within four years the had risen to twice that number – 1703; In 1991 there were 5,000 unemployed, the number rose to 24,000 in 1992, and in 1993 it rose almost astonishingly to 83,000. Some societal trends skyrocketed, driving many to thoughtless, even irrational responses – increased alcoholism, narcotic addiction, hedonistic activities and widespread venereal infections<sup>6</sup>.

In the situation of "anomie" (to use Durkheim's term) there is again a search for values and the meaning of life. Soviet ideals and notions of immortality had evaporated. Many turned to the church for answers to deep questions of life. Under the previous regime religion was associated with ignorance, now it came to be associated with wisdom. The church was restored to a position of power and authority. The number of baptisms doubled and public church activity increased in the amazing rate. Society found a new source of solidarity in the church.

An unexpected result was the emergence of new and unfamiliar religious movements. A portion of the former atheistic society turned to movements which exude charisma and offer expressions of intimate fellowship beyond those found in the traditional churches.

## The Spirit of Reforms in the Church

During a period of the Soviet domination Lithuanian churches found themselves in the period of stagnation. Religious activity was restricted to the church building. The church lived in a theological vacuum, unaware of Western trends and developments.

In the early days of independence church leaders were accused of an ecclesiastical and theological conservatism which simply held uncritically to past positions. Many accused the leadership of perpetuating the style of autocratic domination which had characterized the Soviet years<sup>7</sup>. The Lutheran press often brought charges of a lack of democracy and incited the consistory to insist upon adopting democratic structures and Western leadership styles. A church official, a member of the Consistory said at a conference of the Lithuanian and Norwegian churches:

We have heard more than enough accusations that many left the church in former times and the church leaders ingratiated themselves to the communist government. It has been claimed that people were passive and that there exists a special privileged class in the church. Some say that those who do not understand church traditions bring only disorder, and there is widespread despair that church is being governed today by the same methods used 20-30 years ago. Here we mention only a few points. It is quite clear that our church now stands at the cross roads and is waiting to decide which path to follow. A discussions have already begun. Before leaving for this seminar I read the press report of the speech by bishop's assistant Jonas Kalvanas, Jr that there is too much democracy in our church. This provoked many thoughts. It is my strong conviction that the only possible future lies in democratic structures.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, the calls for democracy were well-intentioned, springing from deep and

strongly held convictions. No one questioned that church leadership should govern democratically. There was, however, no tradition of democracy in Soviet society, and no clear understanding of the essence of democracy. Often it was understood to consist only as opposition to autocracy. In post Soviet society there was no clear distinction between democracy and anarchy. When old system collapsed, many thought that now everything was allowable. Only today are we in the process of beginning to understand the nature and responsibilities of democratic systems.

In 1990 Lutheran church elected a new consistory, included in which were a large number of members who had only passively participated in the church activity during the Soviet period. They passionately desired to serve the church but they really had little theological understanding. Only a few of them had any theological understanding of the nature of the church. Some were of the opinion that the church should be constituted and directed in the same manner as any other social institution.

## Openness to Change

Like the rest of society the church undertook reform with much enthusiasm. The experience of Western churches became a basis for these revisions. Perhaps a most telling example is the creation of the diaconal organization "Sandora", which was organized according to the model of German "Diakonisches Werk", apart from the church herself. The German model, according to which the bishop serves only as a spiritual leader and church administration is left in the hands of lay men, was held up before the eyes of the consistory as the ideal model for the Lithuanian church to follow.

In 1990 a women was ordained in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Lithuania. This was the without precedent in the Church. By her own request she was ordained not to serve the Lutheran Church in Lithuania, but the Lithuanian Church in Diaspora<sup>9</sup>. At that time nobody questioned

the ordination of a woman to the Public Ministry; it seemed to be a wholly natural and inconsequential matter since at that time not only the Western European churches but also our closest neighbors, the Latvians and Estonians, had ordained women. This step was undertaken simply as a positive move toward reform. It caused no stir when the newly organized department of theology of Klaipėda University stated as its purpose "the preparation of qualified specialists in evangelical theology who could be ordained to serve as male and female priests". The senate of the university officially approved this statement in 1992. It was also included in the agreement between the university and the church, approved by the consistory and signed by the Bishop J. Kalvanas, Sr. and Rector A. Brėškis in 1993.

With regard to interchurch relationships 'openness' was the operative term. In 1995 the Evangelical Lutheran church in Lithuania signed the Porvoo declaration, proclaiming intercommunion with the churches of the Anglican communion in England and Ireland as well as the Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Scandinavian states and our sister Estonian church.

Openness to new theological directions with regard to biblical and systematic theology are also evident in the Mission Statement of Klaipėda University's Department of Theology. From its inception the leadership of the department made it clear that liberal theology and the higher critical examination of the Bible would be important components of its teaching program. Concerning the spiritual foundations the director of the department stated:

That theology is a science which must be understood on the basis of historical critical framework. It is our wish to understand how peoples in times past understood and acknowledged God and the world... From this standpoint we will be able better to understand and creatively interpret legends and scriptural stories especially in the Old Testament, which otherwise we would be forced to regard

intellectual unclear and morally unacceptable. By carefully attending to the life conditions of those times long past and putting them into the proper framework we will be better able to determine what is still of importance to us today. In this way the historical critical theology helps to bring Holy Scripture to life<sup>10</sup>.

Today the articulation of this viewpoint does not meet with acceptance in the church, but in those days it went largely unnoticed, even though since 1992 the department has been the primary source of preparatory training for the churches priests and teachers.

Many of the reforms enacted in that time have proved to be of great value to a church damaged and weakened by the Soviet regime. However, the church is now in a position to more critically evaluate all the reforms undertaken in that period.

Looking back, we now can see that in many areas of society changes were embraced too enthusiastically and uncritically. We now understand that the very foundations of society had collapsed and the vision of a bright, new future stood open before the nation, but lacking were formal critical intellectual and moral standards which would have made it possible to critically evaluate courses of action and set a true course. Indeed, at that time such a critical evaluation would have been quite impossible, because swept away along with a bankrupt ideology were all the accepted notions concerning the worth and significance of human and societal life which had been built upon that ideology.

## **Decline of Religious Activity**

In 1996 Vincentas cardinal Sladkevičius noted a new trend in the Lithuanian Roman Catholic Church "we have begun to decline both attendance and piety"<sup>11</sup>. At the special congress honoring blessed Jurgis archbishop Matulaitis noticed a decrease in the number of worshippers.

It was the Roman Catholics who first noticed the emergence a new secular mentality. It was

noted by the bishops conference special project on “evangelization and pastoral care,” that “the Catholic Church is undergoing a crisis in no measure less significant than she had experienced in Soviet times. The political system has been changed. We have won our independence, but our new situation has brought with new difficulties no less serious than those we have faced in the past”<sup>12</sup>. Such a statement indicates awareness of the significant obstacles which the churches facing today.

Other Christian confessions have felt the affects of this new mentality. Because the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Lithuania does not publish such official statements, we must rely on statistical data. This indicates that top year for the Baptisms, and the number of catechumens and church marriages reached their highest number in 1993. Since then the evidence points to steadily decreased involvement. This corroborates the testimony of the Roman church.

The Roman Catholic hierarchy believes this to be a time of crisis which is urgent as that of the Soviet era. In times past the church suffered and lacked the means to relieve her situation however the current situation has its origins in man himself. This new atheism is voluntary and reactionary. A religious vacuum has now been replaced by conscious neglect or rejection of Christian message. Previously church stood in the avant-garde of the struggle for freedom. The ideals of freedom and heart for Christian teaching seemed to be in harmony but now her answers to men’s questions appeared to secular men to be unsatisfactory.

## **Secularization and Capitalistic Mentality**

In socialist times the church was led to believe that secularism was an inevitable result of Communist ideology and Western religiosity was painted in vivid colors. There was some basis to this way of thinking since in the West the churches was not experienced the kind of governmental interference and persecution which was so much a part of the Eastern scene.

In the church faced no impediments in its work of evangelism and the nurturing of the faithful. We know see that Western societies *laissez-faire* attitude toward the churches may prove in the end a greater danger than the manifest hostility of earlier times.

Desacralization and rationalization of thought were undoubtedly two main components of secularization in both Communist and Capitalist thinking. Both have sought to analyze nature on the basis of so-called dispassionate, logical, even mechanistic terms with all emotion left aside. Differences between these two forms of secularization come to light in their approach to economic mechanisms and their applications.

In an amazingly short period of time Lithuanian society moved from a planned economy according to the socialist model toward a free market economy according to the Western model. This brought with it a radical alteration with reference to the role of individual initiative, mentality and life style. Long standing traditions were challenged by sudden changes.

We see here an illustration of Max Weber’s observations concerning “means-end” or functional rationality. In short, the profit motive now became an important component of economic programming and activity. Weber has posited that “capitalism is identical with the pursuit of profit, by means of continuous, rational, capitalistic enterprise”<sup>13</sup>.

Man released from the hold of communistic socialism now sees before him many possibilities. If in the former time there was no competition and no unemployment, now the rapid economic changes have brought with them the shaking out of meaningless enterprises and jobs. Now markets are very competitive and the level of unemployment has risen significantly. One must use his time and resources rationally and to make himself marketable as a worker.

Ordinarily the capitalistic mentality urges rationally critical scrutiny of traditional values. Traditional methods “the way it’s always been done” is held up to the light of rational criteria

and evaluated on that basis. In the new mentality innovation and change are not resisted. They are heartily embraced if it can be seen that they contribute to productivity and profitably. The profit motive takes on the character of an athletic confrontation with a resultant change in attitudes and life style. Where as in the past religious traditions were highly valued, now they begin to give place to personal freedom and a passion for results - "what works for you". Weber sees this moving man toward a condition of spiritual stagnation.

No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance. For of the last stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: "Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved"<sup>14</sup>

We see all around us new forms of secularization, bringing with them new economic relationships. This may be a key factor in the decline in the public practice of religion in Lithuania which is causing grave concern. Before the last general election in 1996 the Episcopal Conference stated its concerns in this way: "The new spirit which has obsessed so many, especially of our young people, is manifesting itself. This spirit proclaims a consuming mentality and freedom from every form of religious, moral and cultural values. In the name of so-called progress what man has honored as a sacred and for which so many have sacrificed, suffered, and died is profaned and ridiculed"<sup>15</sup>.

## **Conservative Trends in the Church**

It was clear in the Synod of 1995 that the spirit of conservatism was beginning to manifest itself in the church. The delegates determined to postpone the consideration of such sensitive issues for a time as the ordination of women. It was clear to the delegates of the later Synod

that the time for critical consideration of this issue had not yet come.

Such attitudes are generally considered evidence of a conservative mentality for several reasons. Unaware of theological and ecclesiastical developments during the period of its captivity the church in 1991, experiencing freedom for the first time in 50 years, faced the future on the basis of theological positions established before time of Soviet occupation. The gap between the former Soviet man and Western man, so evident in other areas of social life, found their parallel in theology and church life.

The Lithuanian Lutheran Church found herself unable to adopt some aspects of Western theological thought, not least because Eastern European thought clearly did not uncritically accept the social positions formed in the West. Conditions in the East did not reflect Western developments. Although the Soviets proclaimed equality between the sexes, this proclamation found little practical demonstration. There was no emancipation of women in the Soviet Union such as that which developed in Western society. In Soviet society homosexuals were legally regarded as criminals and were incarcerated. The law clearly stated that "homosexual activity is punishable by three years imprisonment"<sup>16</sup> No doubt this is one factor contributing to the negative attitude towards homosexual behavior still evident in the Baltic states and Russia. In the year 2000, the Russian Orthodox church officially petitioned the government of the Russian Federation to forbid practicing homosexuals from teaching positions. The negative position of the Latvian Lutheran Church against homosexual behavior has been on record for a number of years. In year 2000 the delegates to the Synod of the Lutheran Church in Lithuania determined to postpone consideration of a resolution on homosexuality because it did not make a clear distinction between homosexuality as a condition and homosexual activity. There was no disagreement that such behavior is sinful.

During the same period the church has clarified

her understanding of the nature of Scripture and the basis of biblical interpretation. We have already noted that during the Soviet time the church was unable to keep abreast of Western theological developments. It was first in 1992, with the establishment of the Department of Evangelical Theology at the university of Klaipeda, that the church came into contact with biblical criticism of a higher critical nature. Late in the year 2000 the consistory acting upon the results of the discussions in the Synod affirmed that "the church holds to the traditional Lutheran method of interpretation of the Holy Scripture and rejects higher (historical) criticism"<sup>17</sup>. The Old and New Testaments are confessed to be the inspired, inerrant Word of God and the only rule and norm of all church teaching. Impoverished by higher critical methods, the biblical message loses its spiritual value. Here the church understands that she is merely reaffirming a traditional position which she held in the Soviet time.

Lithuanian Lutheran Church was among those churches which did not sign the Joint Declaration on Justification between the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, regarding it as a challenge to a most important Lutheran doctrine which may ultimately prove destructive. Had this declaration appeared in the earlier day of Lithuanian independence, a different position might have been taken.

Unsatisfied merely to react to the socio-political and ecclesiastical trends of the age the Lithuanian Church is increasingly concerned to study and come to terms with the theological documents which she confesses and which identify her as Evangelical Lutheran. The church is increasingly concerned to discriminately seek deeper relationships with other Lutherans who share and promote these same theological positions. It was on this basis that the Synod in 2000 resolved to seek a closer and deeper relationship with the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. In its resolution the Synod clearly states the church's position with reference to the authority of the scriptures, confessional subscription, and homosexual behavior.

Rejecting these false doctrines, we confess the complete authority of the Bible and its teachings, as it is correctly and unchangingly stated in the Book of Concord. We can have full fellowship with those Churches who share with us the same faith and teachings, and which do not ordain or promote the ordination of women, do not defend homosexual behavior, do not make compromises on the doctrine of Justification, and who confess that each communicant in the Holy Communion under the sign of the bread and wine is given and receives the true Body and Blood of the Lord<sup>18</sup>.

This action clearly represents a change of direction away from the terms of the Porvoo Declaration adopted in 1995. However, the consistory emphasizes that it is not turning it back on its sister Lutheran church and her ecumenical partners.

Often church hears the charge that her theological position is the result of the influence of the Lutheran church Missouri Synod. The German language paper "Glaube in der 2. Welt" spoke of this recently in an article entitled "Missouri-Synode im Anmarsch"<sup>19</sup>. In actual fact, however, the church's present position no way differs from its stated position during the Soviet time. The Lithuanian church began her own critical evaluation of theological trends and found that she holds a common theological ground with so-called conservative churches than with the churches which have embraced theological liberalism.

## Conclusion

We have thought to trace briefly the life and development of the Lutheran Church during the Communist era and in the days since the declaration of Lithuanian independence. We have seen that the transition from one era to the next has not been steady or straight. The church has sought always to be true to her Lord's commission to serve him by bringing the saving Gospel to the Lithuanian people. For this reason the church has sought to face significant challenges and make changes, on the basis of a godly intention and the best available information.

The last decade has been a period of struggle and theological vacillations for the church. We have only just begun to critically examine and evaluate the tremendous upheavals experienced in our country in general and in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in particular during this past century. Indeed only now are we beginning to come to an understanding of the tumultuous history of which has marked almost the entire four hundred and fifty years of the existence of Lithuanian Lutheranism.

Independence from the Soviet Union brought with it an enthusiastic embracing of all things Western. It was largely assumed that the embrace of Western capitalism would bring with it instant prosperity. The past structures were immediately repudiated and society made a 180 degree turn, opening itself to instant reform. We have seen very similar phenomenon at work in the church, for the church is a part of society.

With the passing of time both society and the church have begun to evaluate more critically our underlying presuppositions and the directions we have taken. Society begun to question its achievements because of increasing bankruptcies, unemployment, continued corruption, and economical crises. The church has now begun to detect a new spirit of secularism, gnawing at the soul of man, even beyond these obvious social economic problems. The church has come to realize, that the problems which she faces in the modern secular society are no less critical than those she faced during the years of Soviet domination. Indeed they may be more critical.

The church's "conservative" stance is a conscious reaction. It attempts to provide stability and solid values in a time a great societal unrest and secularism. Theological modernism cannot effectively critique the system of which it is itself an expression. One may ask at this point whether this conservatism is merely reactive or an expression of a deep motivation. On the basis of the present evidence it would seem to be reactive. It appears also that the present critical attitudes about liberalism in Western theology,

church order, and ethics may also be essentially reactive in character. Consequently the future may bring with it new expression of a spirit of vacillation primarily reactive in character and without sufficient grounding, like wind chimes which offer no meaningful tune, but simply indicate that the winds are blowing.

The church understands it to be to her advantage that her present theological stance is consistent with her position during the years of Soviet occupation and before. The faith which this theology articulated was more than a theoretical expression. It worked, and on the basis of it the church successfully resisted every attempt to destroy her. The present interest in Luther and the Lutheran Confessions may be an indication of a desire to put some meat on the bones of this theological structure. The church realizes now that she must develop a substantive position.

In the Communist era the church was very definitely not a part of the excepted social fabric. It represented a foreign element to socialist ideals which the communists sought very actively to destroy, both overtly and through subversion. But in the new order the church is an honored, even revered, component of the social fabric. Now there is no need to destroy the church. However, the Lithuanian Lutheran Church now observes another danger - she may be subverted by the spirit of the age in which she lives. As Dean William Inge warned over 60 years ago, "He who marries the spirit of the age will soon be a widower".

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Artur Hermann. Lietuvių vokiečių kaimynystė. - Vilnius, Baltos lankos, 2000, p. 98

<sup>2</sup> Vilius Gaigataitis. Atsiminimai. - Klaipėda, Mažosios Lietuvos Fondas, Klaipėdos universiteto leidykla, 1998, p. 187, 188

<sup>3</sup> Albertas Juška. Mažosios Lietuvos Bažnyčia XVI-XX amžiuje. - Klaipėda, Mažosios Lietuvos Fondas, Klaipėdos universiteto leidykla, 1997, p. 229.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 234.

<sup>5</sup> Religion, State & Society. The Keston Journal.

<sup>6</sup> "Dienovidis". 10 May, 1996, No.19 (275).

<sup>7</sup> "Ateisto knyga", redaktorius S. Skazkinas. - Vilnius, „Mintis“, 1986, p. 432

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 220

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 435.

<sup>10</sup> "Dienovidis". 10 May, 1996, No.19 (275).

<sup>11</sup> Thomas F. O'Dea. The Sociology of Religion. - New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, 1966, p. 56

<sup>12</sup> Lietuvos statistikos metraštis. - Vilnius, Metodinis leidybinis centras, 1997

<sup>13</sup> Artur Hermann. Lietuvių vokiečių kaimynystė. - Vilnius, Baltos lankos, 2000, p. 143

<sup>14</sup> Liuteris gyvas ir budi. Apie Lietuvos - Norvegijos konferenciją. - Vilnius, išleido Vilniaus evangelikų liuteronų bažnyčia, 1994, p. 41-42

<sup>15</sup> Lietuvos evangelikų bažnyčios kalendorius 1991-1992 metai. Lietuvos evangelikų-liuteronų konsistorijos leidinys. - Tauragė-Kaunas, 1993, p. 42

<sup>16</sup> Teologijos katedra. Evangeliškosios teologijos centras. Informacija I. Klaipėda, 1995

<sup>17</sup> Bažnyčios žinios. Lietuvos Katalikų Bažnyčios Informacijos centro leidinys. „Kardinolas Vincentas Sladkevičius: tauta pavargusi nuo triukšmo, kurį mes patys sukeliame“. No.14, 30-Th. July, 1996

<sup>18</sup> Bažnyčios žinios. Lietuvos Katalikų Bažnyčios Informacijos centro leidinys. „Evangelizacijos ir sielovados programos projektas“. No.11. 14-Th. June 1996

<sup>19</sup> Max Weber. The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. - London and New York, Routledge, 1992, p. 17

<sup>20</sup> Max Weber. The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. - London and New York, Routledge, 1992, p. 182

<sup>21</sup> Bažnyčios žinios. Lietuvos Katalikų Bažnyčios Informacijos centro leidinys. "Atsivertimas ir pilietinė atsakomybė". No.12. 28-Th. June 1996

<sup>22</sup> Article 122. - Former Soviet Criminal Code.

<sup>23</sup> Decision of the Consistory. 24-Th. August 2000. Protocol No. 9

<sup>24</sup> Lietuvos evangelikų kelias. 2001-2002, p. 10

<sup>25</sup> Glaube in der 2. Welt. No. 12, 2000, p. 5



