

Research Project Description

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## **The Catholic Church in Lithuania during post soviet period 1990-2010**

(An insight into the basic domains of the Church: Martyria, Diakonia, Koinonia and Liturgia)

The aim of my research is to offer a theological insight into the life of Church in Lithuania on both sides of the threshold of XXI century and to show how it was impacted by the geopolitical changes and, possibly, visa versa. Although the world of our day is changing rapidly, I hope that a better understanding of the present moment can be helpful when we look to the future.

The theme and the aim of my research demand a specific structure and method. I have chosen a historical theological approach. So my purpose is not to present historical facts that are related to the Church but to analyze and interpret it theologically and to provide an insight into the life of the Church. It is in order to understand the image of the human person and the mission of the Christian, and, at the same time, the activity and the perspective of the Church during a specific period of time.

Every religion and every church exists and functions in a specific historical time, political and cultural milieu. There is no exception to the Catholic Church anywhere in the world or in Lithuania. Therefore in order to understand the present processes and tendencies in the Church, to see its strengths and weaknesses we have to treat the Church in its wider context. The main attention of my research is offered to the life of the Church during the two decades of the post communist period 1990-2010. However to understand properly the processes in the Church of this time it is necessary to take at least a short look at its background. In my case it is a very specific and much longer period of the totalitarian atheistic regime from the II World War (in Lithuania) until the restoration of independence in Lithuania in 1990. It affected the whole society and left some long lasting consequences. My research consists of three parts: 1. Preamble (the Church during the period of the soviet dictatorship); 2. The main part of my research spans during the two post communistic decades (a period of democracy). 3. I will end with a short summary.

From the end of the II World War until 1990 Lithuania was part of the Soviet Union and lived under a totalitarian atheistic regime. Lithuania is a Catholic country. Statistically, about 82% of the population is Roman Catholic. Officially there was a declared freedom of religion but, in fact, it was merely a propaganda ploy to show the rest of the world that in Soviet Union human rights, including freedom of religion, are observed. It should be kept in mind that religion was not

entirely forbidden. It was cast out of the public domain, restricted to the private religious practices and liturgy in the church. According to the constitution of the Soviet Union the Church was separated from the state, but in fact the state took control of the Church. State institutions decided which activities they would allow in the Church. For instance, they would not allow the Church to catechize or teach religion to children and youth or publish a catechism or religious books. Religious orders were suppressed and the number of seminarians drastically restricted.

The relatively long period of the totalitarian regime with its repressions, socialistic ideology, atheistic indoctrination and isolation from the democratic world left significant consequences in the Lithuanian society and in the Church as well. During the years of the regime some of the Christian traditions were destroyed, the sense of the community and badly affected the mentality of the people that as a result emerged a so called "*homo sovieticus*." As a basis for this chapter I use my dissertation and briefly will present each domain of the Church by summarizing its strong and weak points during this period.

The important theme of my research is the life of the Church after the totalitarian soviet period. In 1990 Lithuania restored its political independence and became a democratic republic. Since 2004 Lithuania is a member of EU and NATO alliance. The geopolitical changes occurred very rapidly. The society of Lithuania and the Church as well was not prepared for a new situation. To understand and evaluate this period properly it is necessary to look at it from a longer distance of time. I hope that the above mentioned fourfold theological approach, which I apply to this part of the research as well, will serve as a useful structure that will help to get a deeper insight into the life of the Church. As a data basis for the research of the life of the Church during this period I use a double source: 1. The press of the Lithuanian Church (letters of the bishops' conference, Church newspapers; and 2. The secular public press publications about the Church during this period.

#### **Theological approach:**

Although the life of the Church is a complex one and all its areas and processes are closely interconnected, but for a clearer theological insight I invite to pay special attention to its four main domains: Martyria (witness of faith), Koinonia (community and communication), Diakonia (service of love to one's neighbor) and Liturgy (worship). I analyze important historical events and phenomena in either of the periods and interpret them using the above mentioned fourfold schema.

There are important questions how the change of geopolitical situation affected the religious life in Lithuania, what kind of a heritage from the former period society brought into the democratic era, how the Church understands and cherishes its dynamic identity and so remains the authentic Church of Christ in the changing world of today. It is also related to the questions of how the Lithuanian Church recognizes the signs of time and responds to the new situation. I try to notice the strong points of the Church that can help to deal with the remnants of the past and respond to the

new challenges such as open borders, freedom of speech and the press, secularization and migration ... in a democratic context and the world that changes quickly.

During the past two decades in Lithuania there was published many articles and some more extensive studies that address one or another particular aspect of the life of the Lithuanian Church but there are few theological researches. I hope my study will bring a proper contribution to the development of ecclesiology and theology of the Lithuanian Church.

I would expect my completed research to publish in: The Annual of Lietuviu Kataliku Mokslo Akademija; Baznycios Zinios; Magazines: Lithuanus; Naujasis Zidinys, Draugas.