

## The Election of John Paul II: the Reaction from Soviet Union

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This article presents a panorama of religious life of Catholics in the republics of the Soviet Union at the time of election by Pope John Paul II. The authors describe the relations of Soviet leadership with the Vatican and note the lack of strategic line at the international level. Attention is paid to the consolidated Catholic protest movement in the Soviet Union in the 1970s, regular criticism of Vatican Eastern politics and public organizations that put the discriminatory position of believers and churches on the public agenda. The article also describes the Soviet leadership's efforts to consolidate Eastern European countries in relations with the Vatican and attempts to play on different political currents within the Catholic Church clergy.

**Key words:** John Paul II, Karol Wojtyła, Catholics of the USSR, anti-Church policy in the USSR, relations between the Vatican and the USSR, Lithuania, Latvia, Ukraine.

**Relationships and Activities:** none.

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**Received:** 12.11.2020

**Revision Received:** 26.11.2020

**Accepted:** 08.12.2020



**For citation:** Nadezhda A. Beliakova, Viktor P. Bilotas. The Election of John Paul II: the Reaction from Soviet Union. *Russian Journal of Church History*. 2020;1(4):00-00. doi:10.15829/2686-973X-2020-4-46

The aim of the given article is to examine the reaction of the Soviet Union to the papal election of John Paul II, which, according to A. Tamborra “had the effect of a detonated bomb within the Soviet Empire” [Tamborra 2007]. To what extent did the elevation of a Catholic from Eastern Europe to the Papal See come as a surprise to the Soviet Union, and in how much did John Paul’s II election influence the Catholics within the USSR? The article provides the first complex analysis of the Pope’s election from the perspective and context of Soviet-Catholic relations. This article is the first to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Pope’s election from the historical context of Soviet-Catholic relations. In the proposed study, for the first time in research history, new sources are introduced into academic circulation, representing both the position of Soviet authorities and the reaction of the faithful to the election of a new Pope.

### The Catholic Church in the Soviet State: A Schematic Sketch of the History of Bilateral Relations

The struggle against religion and religious institutions remained an integral part of state ideology and practice of the USSR until the beginning of Perestroika:

atheistic propaganda was widely channeled, ideological control kept a firm grip over arts and the humanities (notably — a ban on publications dedicated to religious topics in the media); a system of restrictions on the printing and sale of religious literature was in place, an open struggle against the spread of the Holy Scripture was in effect, various forms of discrimination against believers were practiced; a system was in place aimed at controlling and restricting the activities of religious organizations. The last all-out struggle against religious institutions in the USSR took place in the late 1950's and early 1960's (it was known as the "Khrushchev anti-religious campaign")<sup>1</sup>, and all the legal mechanisms, launched for this campaign, continued to operate with varying degrees of efficiency until the second half of the 1980's.

Throughout the entire period, state institutions tried to shape a loyal church leadership, the main channels of influence being the participation in the selection of those who applied to theological educational institutions, the obligatory registration of religious ministers, the infiltration of agents in the religious environment.

Under state influence within the religious structures of the USSR, a similar organizational system was formed, which at the vertical level was characterized by a rigid hierarchy, bureaucracy, the irremovability and self-isolation of church leadership, and at the horizontal level — the lack of ties and disunity between the communities, lack of coordination and distrust, "autonomy" from hierarchical structures<sup>2</sup>. The crucial part of the authoritarian state was the establishment of a monopoly on the provision, spread and interpretation of information, and massive resources of the Soviet state were spent on maintaining the image of a country which provided "freedom of conscience", at the same time — marginalizing representatives of the religious circles of the USSR.

The Catholic Church within the Soviet Union, on the one hand, was in a particularly vulnerable position, since the Vatican was perceived as an ideological enemy of the Soviet Union. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that state oppression and deportation of the population from territories, annexed to the Soviet Union during the Second World War<sup>3</sup>, contributed to the fact that Catholics began to live in those territories where historically their presence was very weak; for example, in Siberia and Central Asia (historiography cites the number of about 500,000 Catholics). Territories with a traditionally Catholic population also became part of the Soviet Union; and if in the Baltic republics (Lithuania, Latvia) the diocesan structures remained intact, in Western Ukraine and Western Belarus (previously part of Poland) the boundaries of the dioceses (whose centers remained in Poland) were not changed, but only individual Catholic religious societies were registered.

The powerful, albeit localized, presence of Catholics within the Soviet Union fundamentally changed the balance of power. For example, in 1956, the leaders of several USSR dioceses appealed to the Soviet leadership with a demand for

<sup>1</sup> There is a corpus of studies, dedicated to "Khrushchev's persecution". Among these, see: [Geraskin 2007], [Maslova 2005], [Pashchenko 2005], [Chumachenko 1999].

<sup>2</sup> For more on the subject, see: [Belyakova 2012a].

<sup>3</sup> By 1945, 12 dioceses and 2318 churches were registered in the USSR; by 1946, only 1431 remained.

the Catholic Church to receive equal rights with other churches (RGANI. F. 5. Op. 33. D. 23. R. 4780. L. 1-5)<sup>4</sup>, and although Catholic religious life went on largely beyond legal boundaries, the global nature of the Catholic world gave them a certain degree of protection.

Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign, which unfolded in the late 1950's and early 1960's, led to a sharp decline in communities of all denominations, including the Roman Catholic communities and the total number of registered Catholic clergy. For example, during the period from 1958 to 1962 the number of Catholic associations in the Ukraine decreased by almost a third. In the Volhyn, Rivne and Ivano-Frankivsk regions, there were no registered Catholic communities left at all. Overall, between 1945 to 1968, the number of communities decreased from almost 1400 to slightly more than 1000, and the number of clergymen fell from almost 1500 to barely 1100. In 1960-1963 143 Catholic societies were removed from state registration (Russian State Archives. F. 6991. Op. 3. D. 1423. L. 139)<sup>5</sup>. Some tendencies towards the legalization of Catholic religious life of Catholics began to shape in the late 1960's. In 1969 Catholic communities was registered in Karaganda (Kazakhstan) and Frunze (Kyrgyzstan). By 1970, according to the Council for Religious Affairs, the Catholic Church operated in 10 Soviet republics, but almost 60% of Catholics lived in Lithuania, 16% in Latvia, and official statistics counted 10% in Belarus and the Ukraine (RGANI, F. 5. Op. 62, file 38, sheet 51).

The Soviet leadership developed a certain interest towards the Vatican in connection with the latter's peacekeeping initiatives at the turn of the 1950's-1960's; at that time, even the prospect for establishing diplomatic relations was discussed. The Second Vatican Council played a significant role in changing the Catholic Church's situation within the country. Representatives of the Catholic Church in the Soviet Union (albeit to a limited extent) were able to take part in the ecumenical initiative aimed at developing relations with other churches, especially with the Orthodox Church, which to some extent contributed to the de-escalation of interfaith tensions between Orthodox and Catholics and within the USSR. Moreover, during the participation in the Council, it was possible to restore relations with the circles of the nationally-oriented emigration, which provided serious assistance to Catholics (for example, in Lithuania and Ukraine). Thus, Stasis Lozoraitis, the head of the Lithuanian diplomatic service and the representative of Lithuania to the Holy See, a frequent guest of the Lithuanian section of the Vatican Radio, who received information from various circles of Lithuanian Catholics, was active in Rome in 1943-1991 [*Laukaitytė* 2015]. Cardinal Joseph Slipy, released from the Soviet prison camp directly to the Second Vatican Cathedral, undertook significant activities in support of Ukrainian Greek Catholics. In any case, the information blockade of the Catholics of the Soviet Union came to an end, and in the consequent period a struggle for the interpretation of what was happening in the media ensued.

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<sup>4</sup> The USSR Cabinet of Ministers' Council for Religious Cults' report to the Central Committee from April 4<sup>th</sup> 1956, № 19-110c.

<sup>5</sup> The official data of the Council for Religious Cults, regarding the number of communities removed from state registration in 1960-1962 and during the first 9 months of 1963.

As for the Soviet leadership, it had no strategic line in its bilateral relations with the Catholic Church, and, in fact, there was nothing to oppose the Vatican's Eastern policy. Throughout the 1970's, as far as their resources allowed, the Soviet leaders sought to hinder the development of relations between the Vatican and the leadership of Eastern European countries [Fejérdy 2015], by organizing regular meetings with representatives of relevant departments in the countries of the Socialist Block, in order to shape a consolidated position in relations with the Vatican and prevent the establishment of bilateral diplomatic ties with the Holy See. However, the leaders of the socialist countries had strong arguments in favor of building their own relations with the Vatican, and by the time of John Paul II's election, the consolidated policy of the Eastern Block in the religious sphere was practically non-existent [Roccucci 2015].

By the second half of the 1970's the Soviet officials' theoretical concept of USSR-Vatican relations was reduced to the following: the Soviet government supports the peacemaking initiatives of the Vatican [Stehle 1993, Melloni 2006, Riccardi 1992, Barberini 2007] and is ready to cooperate with it on these issues, however, the Vatican's attempts to change the position of Catholics in the USSR is perceived as interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state. It was for this reason that the Soviet government closely followed the contacts of Catholic representatives in the USSR with the Vatican and sought to keep the initiative in its own hands.

However, throughout the 1970's the growth of Soviet Catholic delegations to Italy increased steadily [Pivovarov 2017], Catholic tourists also visited the Vatican, and the monopoly on providing information was definitively lost by the USSR's leadership.

### **Perception of the Vatican within Soviet Agencies**

Internal documentation of Soviet agencies from the 1960-1970's clearly shows that within the Soviet Union there was no single strategic line in relation to both the Vatican and the global Catholic Church. The policy of the Central Committee of the CPSU on Catholic issues depended on the influence from one of the three state agencies — the KGB, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR and the Council for Religious Affairs, which provided analytical notes to the Central Committee. The other notable agents of influence were representatives of the Politburo from other Soviet republics, the largest of which was the Ukrainian SSR. Basically, the Communist Party's central committees within the Soviet republics would adopt resolutions towards the Vatican and the Catholic Church that could either follow the pan-Soviet policy, or, at times, drastically disagree with it<sup>6</sup>.

In the rather complex system of Brezhnev's administrative apparatus, the KGB held the most radical and irreconcilable position towards the Vatican, and the Foreign Ministry held the most positive. The KGB argued that the Vatican was using all of its resources to strengthen its influence in the USSR in order to

<sup>6</sup> For the first academic analysis of the Central Committee's Decrees on the Greek Catholic issue, see [Pashchenko 2002]; a faction of the documents was published in [Sergiychuk 2001]. Some issues pertaining to the state-religious affairs within the republics are represented in the following publications: [Cakuls 2001]; [Yarmusik 2006]; [Streikus 2002].

undermine the socialist system; thus, this agency's efforts were aimed at limiting Vatican's influence, namely — through annihilating the channels of Vatican's "religious-bourgeois propaganda", restricting the exchange of information, and hunting down "spies" who collaborated with the Holy See.

The Central Committee received regular updates on the growing number and escalating activities of "enemy voices" — radio broadcasts to the USSR, as well as reports on the agency's fight against Catholic parcels and the illegal imports of religious literature. The KGB opposed the influence of Vatican supporters within the country and looked for agents of influence among the Orthodox clergy. However, there were also different movements within the KGB itself, and there were regular tensions in between the KGB's central office and its republican departments. The Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs held a position that was in stark contrast to the KGB. The Foreign Ministry clearly understood the importance of the Vatican and noted the regular attempts by its representatives to improve relations. This is attested to by the regular notes from the staff of the Soviet embassies. At the same time, the Foreign Ministry's leadership tried to "sit on two chairs": on the one hand, by building favorable relations with the Vatican, especially in matters pertaining to the peace movement, and on the other — by supporting Vatican's opponents: Old Catholics and leftist Catholics [Corley 1994].

The Council for Religious Affairs of the USSR's Council of Ministers, on its part, had the task of accumulating and formulating the leadership's multidirectional and unbalanced directives. A very difficult task for the staff of the Council was to translate into the verbal sphere the non-articulated expectations, fears and doubts of the Soviet leadership towards Catholicism. An attempt by the Deputy Chairman of the Council for Religious Affairs P. V. Makartsev to explain the concept of the Soviet leadership to officials in Lithuania in February 1977 caused resonated throughout the opposition's Samizdat. This concept came down to the following: the churches and their leadership are loyal to the Soviet regime, moreover, socialist values are sincerely shared by a significant part of religious thinkers, which means there is no reason to consider religious institutions as opponents of the socialist system. Moreover, the desire of Western opponents to accuse the USSR of restricting religious freedom should prompt the Soviet leadership towards a neutral attitude towards religious institutions. Within Soviet society, the process of secularization is inevitable and must be gradual. However, in the country of triumphant socialism, the rash pursuit for a successful demonstration of the secularization, a pursuit demonstrated in the reduction of the number of religious associations and a decrease in religious rituals, is clearly backfiring. The legalization and depoliticization of religious life make it possible to control and gradually neutralize the social influence of religious institutions. In this regard, the actions undertaken by the Lithuanian authorities to combat religion only strengthen protest religiosity, slow down the process of secularization and risk transforming religious structures into a force of the opposition. The use of the administrative resource in the fight against religion leads to the growth of fanaticism and extremism. During the past decades, the Soviet administration developed certain conditions under which Catholic parishes in the USSR exist, but Vatican's influence over them is minimal. The goal of the Council for Religious Affairs is to prevent the transformation of

Soviet religious organizations into actors of the Cold War. As for the Vatican itself, the following strategic line was proposed: The Soviet government supports the peacekeeping initiatives of the Vatican and is ready to cooperate with it in these matters, however, it perceives attempts to change the position of Catholics in the USSR as interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state. "We are doing everything to prevent Vatican's direct interference in the internal life of our Catholic Church," P.V. Makartsev stated in his speech<sup>7</sup>. It is obvious that, by the late 1970's, within the Soviet agencies there was no balanced strategic line in relations with the Vatican and that this situation led to tensions between the departments, sometimes even to scandals on the international level.

### **The Catholic Church in the Soviet Republics**

By the time of John Paul II's election, the Catholic Church in the U.S.S.R had the following structure: the best-preserved church structures were in Lithuania, where there were 6 dioceses, and in Latvia, where the Riga Archdiocese still functioned. Bishops Julionas Steponavičius<sup>8</sup> and Vincentas Sladkevičius<sup>9</sup>, deprived of the opportunity to govern their dioceses (when their nomination was not agreed with the government of the USSR), were in exile; nevertheless, they retained serious moral authority in the Church. A certain compromise between the Soviet government and the Vatican was reached during the Second Vatican Council, after which the following clerics gradually received their episcopal ordination: first J. Matulaitis-Labukas, who actually administered the dioceses of Lithuania (died on May 28, 1979), then in 1968 — L. Pletkus, in 1970 — L. Povilonis and R. Krikščiūnas [*Bankowski* 1981:189]. All of them were collectively dubbed the "pink" episcopate. The "College of Ordinaries of the Lithuanian Dioceses" continued to function after 1965; in the 1970's it was renamed to the Lithuanian Catholic Conference. However, the presence of exiled bishops who resisted the violent atheization of the clergy, monastics and laity made Lithuania — in the eyes of officials — a dangerous Catholic-protest.

The Catholic Church in Latvia was in a fundamentally different situation, since it managed to avoid demonstrative confrontation with the state authorities<sup>10</sup>. On the other hand, during the 1960-1980's the Catholic Church went from being a regional, Latgalian community, to a pan-Latvian one, seriously "pressuring" the traditionally dominant Lutheran Church. Since 1960, the Catholic Church of Latvia was headed by Archbishop Julian Vaivods, who gradually obtained permission to appoint vicars for himself, expand the student body at the Riga Seminary, and even train a limited number of new priests for Catholic parishes all over the USSR in the Riga Seminary. According to the memoirs of Heinrich Troop-Trops (Rector of the Riga Seminary), a papal order

<sup>7</sup> For the recording of the speech and commentary, see: The Questions on the State of Religion in the USSR are under close observation... [*Belyakova* 2019].

<sup>8</sup> Was appointed by the Vatican as the Apostolic Administrator of the Panevezėnsis Diocese and the Archdiocese of Vilnius in 1958, lived in exile until 21.10.1988.

<sup>9</sup> Vincentas Sladkevičius (1920-2000). From November 14<sup>th</sup> 1957 to June 28<sup>th</sup> 1988 — the Titular Bishop of Abora. On December 25<sup>th</sup> 1957 he was secretly ordained bishop in Birstonas by Teofilius Matulionis. Under house arrest in 1963-1982 In 1988 became the first Lithuanian Cardinal.

<sup>10</sup> "The republic exhibits a steady decline in the population's religiosity" [*Belyakova* 2012b:123].

decreed that priests ordained by Latvian bishops received the right to serve in the Ukraine, Belarus and other republics of the USSR from the administrator of the Riga Metropolis and were in his jurisdiction until local Catholic bishops could be instated<sup>11</sup>.

By 1978, the situation with the registered Catholic communities in the various republics of the USSR was as follows (Summary table from the State Archive of the Russian Federation, F. 6991. Op. 6. D. 1083) (see Figure 1)

	Ukraine	Belarus	Latvia	Lithuania	Estonia
The Roman Catholic Church	94	101	178	630	2

**Figure 1.** Number of registered Catholic religious associations in 1978.

In the Baltic States, there were two Catholic seminaries: one in Kaunas, which by the end of the 1970's could accommodate about 50 people, and the other being the Metropolitan Seminary in Riga, where the number of students could reach 20. In Lithuania, the future priests were trained only for the Lithuanian Catholic Church, and the consolidated Catholic opposition<sup>12</sup>, close to the national and human rights opposition movement, was unique for the Soviet environment, primarily for the level it occupied; it caused serious concerns for both the central Soviet and the republican leadership.

The main reason for the confrontation between Catholic circles and the state authorities in Lithuania were the extrajudicial restrictions against the Church. During the period 1960's and early 1970's, the researcher A. Streikus counts 10 large petition campaigns pertaining to various ecclesiastical subjects<sup>13</sup>, but the consolidation of the protest took place on the issue of religious education, namely — the catechesis of children. In 1972, 17 thousand people signed a petition to Leonid Brezhnev, the General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, about the oppression of the Catholic Church; in 1973 petitions to the Ministry of Education and the Commissioner of the Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the Lithuanian SSR were signed by 14604 and 16800 people, respectively [Streikus 2006:508, 511-513]. The activists J. Zdebskis, P. Plumpa, S. Tyamkevičius were involved in writing petitions, collecting signatures and delivering documents to addressees, while Moscow-based dissidents, primarily S. Kovalev, helped to transfer materials to foreign media representatives. According to the memoirs of S. Tyamkevičius [Tyamkevičius 2012], the coordination of activities in defense of the Church gave rise to the idea, approved by Bishop V. Sladkevičius, of organizing their own periodical, which was published in March 1972 with the help of the nuns, who produced the issues with the help of typewriters. The Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church (LCC), thanks to the efforts of Moscow-based friends and Lithuanian emigrants, was sent, namely, to the editorial office of the Draugas newspaper in the United States and was broadcast by radio stations, especially

<sup>11</sup> By 1990, within various republics in the USSR there were 70 Catholic priests in the jurisdiction of the Riga Bishop [Trūps-Trops 1994:100].

<sup>12</sup> See about the open letter of the leadership of the Catholic Church of the Lithuanian USSR [Belyakova 2020].

<sup>13</sup> The petitions were signed by 350 pastors — half of the total number serving in Lithuania. The most active were the clergy of the Vilkaivish Diocese and the Vilnius Archdiocese, who wrote 7 out of 10 petitions.

by Vatican Radio. A few years later, representatives of the Lithuanian clergy joined the Lithuanian Helsinki Group (late 1976). Later on, the priests S. Tamkevichius, J. Zdebskis, A. Svarinskas founded a special body — the “Catholic Committee for the Protection of the Believers’ Rights” (KKZPV), having refused the invitation to join the “Christian Committee for the Protection of Believers’ Rights in the USSR”, which was already operating in Moscow (the proposal came from Fr. Gleb Yakunin in the summer of 1978) and on November 13<sup>th</sup> 1978, at a press conference given to foreign journalists, they announced the emergence of their own organization [*Streikus* 2006:515].

The situation was much more complicated in the Ukraine and Belarus, where formally Catholic dioceses did not even exist. According to state documents, there were only independent parishes of the Roman Catholic Church, whose flock was comprised mainly of the Lithuanian and Polish population of these republics. A special place, unique in terms of numbers, was occupied by the dioceses and parishes of the Greek Catholic Church, but they existed outside the boundaries of Soviet legality<sup>14</sup> and were not taken into account by Soviet statistics as Catholic. “Recently the Vatican, in order to strengthen its influence in the socialist countries, and especially in the USSR, has been taking a number of measures to revitalize the Catholic Church as a whole, and especially the Greek Catholic (Uniate) Church, with whose aid the Vatican would receive the opportunity to catholicize the population, especially in the western regions of Ukraine, where the remnants of the Uniates separated from Orthodox Church continue to operate “(TsDAGOU. F. 1. Op. 24. D. 6291. L. 14-21)<sup>15</sup> — such passages can be found in numerous Ukrainian documents, issued by both — the Ukrainian KGB and the Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR in the second half of the 1970’s.

As for Belarus, there were practically no “Uniate” communities [*Yarmusik* 2006]. According to M. Sapietz, after consulting with the apostolic administrator in 1970, the Pope expanded the powers of the vicar generals in Belarus. The Vicars General had the power to ordain, appoint, transfer priests, perform confirmations of young men and women, as well as to annul marriages. By 1979, according to the data published by M. Sapietz, there were three such general vicars in the BSSR [*Sapiets* 1982]. There were no diocesan structures in the RSFSR either; individual Catholic communities were separated by several thousand kilometers from each other.

### Reactions to the election of the Pope from Lithuania and Ukraine

If in Poland the election of John Paul II caused the confusion within party elite and a huge wave of enthusiasm among believers [*Volobuev* 2020: 195-224], the reaction to the event within the USSR was far more restrained. The Catholic Committee for the Protection of Believers’ Rights informed the new Pope of

<sup>14</sup> Regarding the liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church in the Ukraine in 1946-1949, see. [*Pashchenko* 2001] и [*Pashchenko* 2005].

<sup>15</sup> Memorandum of K. Lytvyn, the Commissioner of the Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the USSR addressed to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine regarding the influence of the Vatican on the revival of the Greek Catholic Church in the western regions of Ukraine (in Ukrainian) June 9, 1967.

its ecclesiastic initiative and expressed its satisfaction regarding the fact that the Pontiff was a representative of the Church east of the Iron Curtain:

“Holy Father, for a long time now, even when the troubles of our faithful cried out for help, when we struggled and were persecuted, we were considered a “church of silence.” We were very happy to hear from the lips of Your Holiness that from now on, the “Church of Silence” no longer exists, since it will speak through the lips of the Pope. In the Church, the best voices we hear are the voices of the heirs of the apostles — bishops. However, in the conditions of militant atheism, this voice is sometimes completely muffled. Realizing our responsibility before God and the Church, and also knowing that objective information does not always reach the Apostolic See, we, priests of Lithuania, decided to speak and defend the most sacred rights of the Church and believers, since our silence and expectations create the most fertile soil on which atheists will destroy the Church from the outside and from within. For this reason, we have come together in the Catholic Committee for the Protection of Believers’ Rights”.<sup>16</sup>

In this text, Lithuanian priests draw attention to the Pope’s thesis calling to end the practice of silence, which had been chosen as a tactic of appeasing the Soviet government, and notified of their efforts to report violations. It is interesting that the compilers of the Lithuanian Catholic Church Chronicle saw the Pope’s speech in terms of the attention to the “Lithuanian component” of his inaugural speech and, especially, welcomed the changes in Eastern Policy announced by the new Pope.

“Most of all, we hope that the new direction of Vatican diplomacy under your guidance will instill in us the deep respect and confidence in the Apostolic See and will not push the believers and clergy from the countries of the East to pessimism and passivity because of diplomatic concessions made to atheists. You brought joy to us at the 41<sup>st</sup> Eucharistic Congress when you presided over the mass, celebrated for countries where faith is persecuted. With your bold words, you defended their rights, giving courage to the believers of Lithuania in the struggle for Christ and the Church. In your first speech to the cardinals, you remembered the people suffering for their faith in prisons.

Indeed, many sons and daughters of our people — Petras Plumpa, Niyole Sadunaite, Ona Pranskunaite, Vladas Lapenis<sup>17</sup> and others — are suffering for Christ in the camps and in exile.

News has already reached us that, in your very first statements, you said that half of your heart belongs to Lithuania. You have expressed your desire to visit your homeland, Poland and the Soviet Union. We would very

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<sup>16</sup> The letter was signed by priests who were Committee members. *Laiškas Šventajam Tėvui*. 13.11.1978. Available at: <http://www.lkbkronika.lt/index.php/tgkk-dok-nr-1-5/3415-laiskas-sventajam-tevui.html> (Accessed on: 21.11.2020).

<sup>17</sup> The letter speaks of Lithuanian dissidents, who were subject to various forms of discrimination and oppression.

much like you to visit Catholic Lithuania. You will have the opportunity to see the piety of the Lithuanians and their loyalty to the Church and its head Shepherd".<sup>18</sup>

In the Ukraine, the new pontificate was assessed primarily from the perspective of relations with the "anti-Soviet" Ukrainian emigration and the existing problem of Greek Catholics. By the early 1980's, the situation with Catholics in the Ukraine was as follows: the authorities had overwhelming data on the "underground" Greek Catholic Church. The archives of the Council for Religious Affairs of the Ukrainian SSR contained data on the numbers and location of the clergy, monastics, house churches and secret monasteries; administrative and judicial measures were occasionally taken against Greek Catholic activists. However, there was no strategic vision of a solution, except for the Moscow-proposed concept of solving the "Uniate issue": believers who valued the Eastern Rite would join the Orthodox; those who chose the Pope — to Latin-Rite churches. The change in Eastern Policy by the new Pope brought the "Uniate question" back into the international agenda. The memo, addressed to the chairman of the Council for Religious Affairs by Metropolitan Filaret of Kiev (State Archives of the Russian Federation. F. R-6991. Op. 6. D. 2038. P. 1-9), stated: "The Uniate problem, as a result of the improvement of relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church during the pontificates of Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI, significantly weakened and the impression was made that Rome has abandoned the "Union" as a strategy in its relations with the Orthodox Churches. With the election of John Paul II, the Uniate question escalated again. The Pope once again raised the Union of Brest on his shield, which, according to him, 'has retained all its ecclesiastic and religious strength to this day, the fruits of which are abundant'". Attention was drawn to the Letter to the Major Archbishop of Lviv, Cardinal Joseph Slipyi<sup>19</sup>. The memo noted: "While encouraging the revival of the Uniate Church in Ukraine, Pope John Paul II does so under the guise of religious freedom". The memo cited links to UPI and the Vatican City Teletype that the Pope's letter contained direct and harsh remarks regarding the situation of the church and human rights in the Soviet Union. The meeting of the synod of Ukrainian bishops, which took place in Rome from November 25<sup>th</sup> to December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1980, was perceived as the start of the implementation of the Pope's call for "the renewal of Uniatism on the territory of Soviet Ukraine" (State Archives of the Russian Federation, F. R-6991. Op. 6. D. 2038. L. 9), which caused notes of protest from Pimen, the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus (Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate, 1981. №10. P. 7). Propaganda of the Lviv Council of 1946 was entering a new phase in Ukraine [Beliakova and Vishivanyuk 2018:217-225].

### **How the countries of the Socialist Block were supposed react to the Papal election?**

<sup>18</sup> Cp. *Sveikiniimas popiežiui Jonui Pauliui II*. 16.11.1978. , in: *Lietuvos Katalikų Bažnyčios Kronika* (The CHronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania), c. 35 Available at: <http://lkbkronika.lt/index.php/35-kronika-1978-m/1500-sveikiniimas-popieziui-jonui-pauliui-ii.html> (Accessed on: 21.11.2020).

<sup>19</sup> For more on this figure, see: [Bociurkiw 1996] and [Pelikan 1990].

Since the mid-1950's, the direct influence of the Soviet Union on the religious policy of the countries of Eastern Europe was significantly reduced [Volokitina, Murashko and Noskova 2008], and the USSR clearly saw the threat of Eastern policy, carried out by Cardinal A. Casaroli and aimed at direct dialogue with the leaders of individual Eastern European countries, completely bypassing Moscow [Rocca 2014]. However, there were very few levers of influence; one of them was the regular meetings of the heads of religious policy departments from socialist countries.

A meeting of the heads of religious affairs departments from socialist countries was held in Warsaw on October 25<sup>th</sup> 1979. V.A. Kuroedov, the Head of the Council for Religious Affairs under the USSR Council of Ministers, made a keynote speech (State Archives of the Russian Federation. F. 6991. Op. 6. D. 1734. L. 5-16), in which he repeatedly spoke about the need for a common line, aimed "at countering the anti-socialist activities of the Vatican". Kuroyedov gave the following characterization to the new Pope: "We must reckon with the fact that a strong, strong-willed, and, in his own way, a single-minded person, a man by far not sympathetic to the socialist system, has become the leader of Catholicism's global center. The forces that brought Wojtyla to the pinnacle of Catholic power relied on his election to radically change the foreign policy of the Vatican and, above all, its policy towards the socialist countries".

During the first year of John Paul II's pontificate, the Soviet leadership witnessed the following disturbing moments in papal activities: the Pope's desire to increase the active role of the Roman Catholic Church and "turn it in the long term into political opposition within the socialist countries" through the support of nationalist movements, intellectuals and youth. V.A. Kuroyedov argued that the Pope is very popular in the "capitalist media" and characterizes his actions as political manifestations.

In addition, Soviet representatives saw a demonstration of the Pope's anti-socialist orientation in his speeches during papal trips to Mexico and the United States. The Soviet representatives were offended by the Pope's speech in which he declared that "the United States is the hope of mankind". In their opinion, "the Pope made it clear that imperialist America, and not the socialist world is the future of mankind"<sup>20</sup>. The Pope's public support for Cardinal Joseph Slipy and the assumption of the prospect of the revival of the Uniate Church in the USSR were dubbed openly hostile actions against the USSR.

Kuroyedov informed the representatives of the socialist countries about the harsh reaction of the Russian Orthodox Church to these papal actions: the meeting between the representatives of the Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches in April 1979 was canceled and the invitation to the USSR to Cardinal I. Villebrands was called off<sup>21</sup>. Among John Paul II's other "anti-Soviet" actions was the papal reception

<sup>20</sup> Soviet representatives have already seen the influence of the United States in papal actions since 1978: "There is an active desire of the US administration to impose on the new Pope the idea that the main task of the Vatican should be to activate Catholicism in Eastern Europe, to fight a united front with the West for human rights," wrote Soviet diplomats in December 1978 (the quote was published in the monograph by V. Volobuev with reference to the RF AWA. F. 0122. Op. 63. P. 459. D. 130. L. 71.)

<sup>21</sup> Willebrands Johannes (1909-2006) was Chairman of the Secretariat, later the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity from 1969-1989.

of the Ukrainian dissident V. Ya. Moroz, reports in the press on the appointment of the state-ousted Lithuanian bishop Y. Steponavicius to the rank of cardinal, the Pope's remark at Auschwitz that not only Germans were to blame for the suffering of the Polish people, and support of the Committee for the Protection of Catholics' Rights, which began its activities in Lithuania.

According to the speech "the Pope "directly claims a leading role in the struggle for religious freedom against 'totalitarian' regimes". For example, in the encyclical *The Redeemer of Man*, "the Pope seeks to cast a shadow on the socialist countries, quite transparently attributing to them the persecution and oppression of believers. At the same time, the exercise of religious freedoms is put forward as the main criterion for the observance of human rights" (State Archives of the Russian Federation, F. 6991. Op. 6. D. 1734. P. 7).

Among positive tendencies in the new pontiff's activities, V. Kuroyedov names his participation in the peacekeeping process, drawing attention to the Pope's calls "for real disarmament, for cutting military budgets, calls for resolving controversial international issues not through the use of force, but through peaceful negotiations" (State Archives of the Russian Federation, F. 6991, op. 6, file 1734, P. 9).

Paul II's Eastern Policy received the following characteristics in V. Kuroyedov's speech:

- offensive character;
- differentiation in relations with socialist block countries (the main focus of Eastern policy was now Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary);
- establishing closer ties with episcopal conferences in these countries and supporting the conservative wing in them;
- orientation towards the strengthening the clergy's role, and an emphasis on young people;
- the intensification of the human rights campaign in the socialist countries, and the expansion of opportunities for the Catholic Church, which indicated "the adjustment of the Vatican's policy and a tougher approach to relations with socialist countries, along with the toughening of ideological pressure on them".

Kuroyedov could not offer any new recipes for counteracting the Vatican's policy to his Eastern European colleagues, but suggested continuing the adopted tactics: "on one hand, in the interests of peace, detente, of ending the arms race, where it is possible we need to develop cooperation with the Catholic Church, and on the other hand — resolutely oppose the attempts of the Vatican to interfere in the political life of our fraternal countries, to strengthen the position of the church and, moreover, to turn the Church into a political opposition to the socialist system" (State Archives of the Russian Federation, F. 6991. Op. 6. D. 1734. P. 12).

V. Kuroyedov proposed a list of practical measures which would allow the socialist countries' leadership to counter the Vatican:

"— in the most decisive way possible to dispel Vatican's illusion that the Catholic Church in the socialist countries will be allowed to impose the norms of political and social life;

— since there is dissatisfaction with the new pope among many Catholic bishops and priests, use this circumstance to create active opposition within their ranks to oppose those papal activities that run counter to the policies of his predecessors — John XXIII and Paul VI;

- given that in the leading circles of the Vatican there is a certain number of realistic-minded people, with whom we maintain contacts, it is necessary and important to continue to develop these contacts, to find an opportunity to maintain their opposition to the radical, reactionary groups;

- to intensify the work with representatives of the so-called “Liberation Theology” to counter the reactionary policies of the Vatican in Asia, Africa and Latin America;

- to make wider use of our opportunities within international religious organizations <...><sup>22</sup> to criticize the Vatican’s policies, in particular, its anti-socialist actions, in the fields of the national liberation movement and in the field of social problems;

- to take steps to expand cooperation between the Catholic Churches in the socialist countries on the problems of peace and social progress, as well as on certain theological issues, in order to reduce the influence of the Vatican on their activities”.

Kuroyedov reported that within the USSR, it was planned to intensify repressive measures against Catholic extremists, to attract academics to study the policies of the Vatican, to intensify “the activities of all loyal clergymen, particularly in Lithuania and Latvia, in the effort of neutralizing negative aspects in the Vatican’s policy” (State Archives of the Russian Federation, F. 6991. Op. 6. D. 1734. P. 14).

### **Conclusion**

By the time of Pope John Paul II’s election, there were already a protest movement in the Soviet Union, aimed at protecting the rights of the faithful, in which both — Catholic clergy and laity — took part.

Having clearly noted the anti-communist sentiments of the new Pope, the Soviet authorities realized that they would have to adjust their policy towards the Vatican. However, the reaction was a working one, with various combinations being drawn up and played out with the active use of agents and special services, deep immersion into the Catholic environment to search for internal disagreements and discrepancies. There was no vivid or stormy negative reaction on the part of the USSR to the fact of John Paul II’s election, but relations with the Vatican quickly deteriorated because of the Pope’s position on Ukrainian Greek Catholics. Representatives of the Soviet Union tried to develop a consolidated line of behavior, uniting Eastern European countries towards with the Vatican’s new leadership; for this purpose a meeting of representatives of the departments responsible for religious policy from the socialist block countries was held in Warsaw in October 1979, where the representative of the USSR proposed the concept presented in the present study.

**Relationships and activities:** do not affect the presented material.

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<sup>22</sup> The quote names the WCC (World Council of Churches), KMK (Christian Peace Conference) and the CEC (Conference of European Churches).

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