

March 2016

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Recommended Citation

Laukaitytė, Regina (2016) "Greek Rite Catholicism in Lithuania: The Mission of Bishop Petras Būčys, 1930–1940," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 36: Iss. 2, Article 2.

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GREEK RITE CATHOLICISM IN LITHUANIA: THE MISSION OF BISHOP PETRAS BŪČYS, 1930–1940¹

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During the twentieth century, some Lithuanian Catholic clerics and members of religious orders were strongly engaged in projects aimed at the conversion of Russians to the Catholic faith. After 1990, in post-communist Lithuania, Greek Rite Catholicism rose from the ashes. Although the country did not have a surviving legacy of this rite, one of the churches in the Old Town of Vilnius was handed over to the monks of the Basilian Order who came there from Ukraine. Thus church service in the Greek Rite was brought back and efforts to restore the Eastern Rite Catholic Church were initiated.²

The emergence of the Eastern Rite Church and its activities in the region neighboring the Russian Empire several centuries after the Brest Union of 1596 was of immense geopolitical and cultural significance; basically, it had the potential of building the identity of Russian inhabitants in a Catholic country. Therefore, when independent nation-states emerged, Greek Rite Catholicism revived in Lithuania and Poland after 1918 and 1990 as a possible instrument of cultural integration of local Russians, the Orthodox, and the Old Believers. In Lithuania, it did not yield expected results of a noticeable number of Russian converts, although it is hard to tell what role the restored focus of Greek Rite Catholicism in Vilnius would be playing in the twenty-first

¹ The present paper is an adapted translation from Lithuanian: Laukaitytė, Regina, 'Rytų apeigų vyskupo Petro Būčio misija Lietuvoje (1930–1940)', *Istorija*, No. 84, Vilnius, 2012, pp. 26–37.

² The community of the Eastern Rite Church, which was restored in 1991, consists of the Ukrainians residing in Lithuania (according to the data of the 2011 general census, there were 706 Eastern Rite Catholics in Lithuania); service is offered in Ukrainian. On Sundays, about fifty believers attend the Church of the Holy Trinity that has been designated for Eastern Rite Catholics.

century were it not for the progressing secularization of society and for recent lessons in history, which this paper aims to discuss.

The period immediately following the year 1917 was the time of the most intensive efforts of the Vatican to unite the Russian Orthodox and the Catholic Churches.³ Much hope was placed on the propagation of Eastern (Greek) Rite Catholicism, that is, by bringing in the Catholic dogma, attempts were made to provide the Russian converts with the opportunity of observing their traditional Byzantine rituals in Old Slavonic. Such method of evangelization was stimulated by the conviction that it was the ritual that the believers were attached to and that due respect to it would eliminate the obstacles in the Russians' path to Catholicism.

The theme of the propagation of Eastern Rite Catholicism and the neo-union of the twentieth century has been addressed by historians of various countries, especially in the works by Polish and Russian scholars.⁴ It is directly related to the issues of proselytism and loyalty to one's own confession or cultural environment. In Lithuanian historiography, it is inseparable from the name of Petras Būčys (Peter-Francis Bucys);⁵ he was a bishop of the Eastern Rite and the head of the papal mission of *Spiritual Assistance to the Russians of Lithuania*. A rich collection of his correspondence on this theme has survived in the Lithuanian Central State Archives. This source is

³ The Vatican took care not only of the Catholics but also of the Orthodox believers left behind 'the iron curtain'. The Church of the latter was divided and destroyed by the Bolshevik regime. In 1917, Pope Benedict XV established the Congregation for Oriental Churches (of which he was the head) and founded the Pontifical Oriental Institute. The Pontifical Commission *Pro Russia* was founded by Pope Pius XI and started its activities in 1925. The Jesuits played the central role in this sphere of the Vatican's policy: they were entrusted with the said institute and the Commission *Pro Russia*; the order also established its branch of Eastern Rite. The Jesuits headed the *Russicum* College (est. 1929) that offered training to the Orthodox believers, too. In the Vatican there was no consensus in regard to the principles of evangelization in Russia and among Russian émigrés in other countries.

⁴ Maciej Mróz, *W kręgu dyplomacji watykańskiej. Rosja, Polska, Ukraina w dyplomacji watykańskiej w latach 1917–1926*, Toruń: Adam Marszałek, 2004 (historiography overview: pp. 10–13); Hansjakob Stehle, *Tajna dyplomacja Watykanu*, Warszawa: Real Press, 1993; Sergei Golovanov, 'Ocherk istorii katolicheskogo apostol'stva v russkom zarubezh'e v 1917–1991 gg.', available at: <http://vselenskiy.narod.ru/Rusapos24.htm> (last accessed on 8 January 2016); Francesco La Rocca, 'At the Crossroads: The History of the Greek-Catholic Church in Lithuania', *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: 2012, Vol. 31: No. 1. Available at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol31/iss1/1> (last accessed on 8 January 2016).

⁵ *Bishop Peter Francis Bucys MIC, Catholic Missionary for Russians in America*, Thompson, Conn.: Marianapolis, 1934; Steponas Matulis, 'Vyskupas Pranciškus Petras Būčys (1872–1951)', *Lietuvių katalikų mokslo akademijos suvažiavimo darbai*, vol. 4, Rome: LKMA, 1961, pp. 213–217; Vaclovas Aliulis, 'Lietuvis Rytų apeigų vyskupas', *Katalikų pasaulis*, 1992, No. 15, pp. 5–8; Aldona Vasiliauskienė, 'Rytų apeigų vyskupo Pranciškaus Petro Būčio MIC veikla', *Lietuvių katalikų mokslo akademijos metraštis*, vol. 12, Vilnius: LKMA, 1998, pp. 437–445; Regina Laukaitytė, *Staciatikių Bažnyčia Lietuvoje XX amžiuje*, Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas, 2003, pp. 66–77; Laukaitytė, 'The interest of Lithuania's Church in the apostolic activity in Russia and among Russians', *Church History between Rome and Vilnius: Challenges to Christianity from the early Modern Ages to the 20th century*, Vilnius: LKMA, 2012, pp.103-120.

complemented by the archival fund of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania and fairly recently published documents of the Vatican Secret Archives.⁶

This paper aims at an exhaustive analysis of the initiatives of Eastern Rite evangelization in interwar Lithuania, at discerning their stimuli, and at demonstrating the scope and outcomes of these activities. The functioning of the mission among the Russians of Lithuania should be examined in the context of the Vatican's policy. It complements considerably the biography of Bishop Būčys and the history of the Congregation of Marian Fathers, which also functions in the United States. Most importantly, the history of the mission can offer an explanation for prolonged cold and complicated relations between the Catholic and Orthodox churches and the causes of mistrust that are so persistent in the twenty-first century, and assist in answering the question as to why ecumenical relations between Christian churches in contemporary Lithuania are cautious and do not open prospects for broader cooperation.

Stimuli for Evangelization and the First Projects

Upon the establishment of the independent Republic of Lithuania in 1918, there were around 32,000 Old Believers and 23,000 Orthodox believers in the country who made up 2.49 percent of the its population.⁷ Scattered all over the country,⁸ their sparse parishes were rather closed; it was especially characteristic of the Old Believers. Were it not for the Vatican-propagated idea of church unity, they would have hardly attracted special attention of the Lithuanian Catholic Church. People who converted to the Catholic faith in Lithuania simply became Catholics, because the possibility of setting up conditions for them to continue practicing their rites would have required considerable investment into securing Eastern Rite priests and separate churches. A search for such an investment began in 1927, when with the Vatican's encouragement, attempts were made to set up a structure of the Eastern Rite Church. Essentially, this project was directed at

⁶ *Lietuva ir Šventasis Sostas (1922–1938): Slaptojo Vatikano archyvo dokumentai*, A. Streikus (ed.), Vilnius: LKMA, 2010.

⁷ *Lietuvos gyventojai. 1923 m. rugsėjo 17 d. surašymo duomenys*, Kaunas, [1924], p. XL.

⁸ In Lithuania, 79 per cent of Orthodox believers and almost 98 per cent of Old Believers were Russians. In 1939, there were 31 Orthodox parishes and 13 filial churches; in the autumn of the same year, when the Vilnius region was returned to Lithuania, their number jumped to 48 parishes and 16 filial churches. As for the Old Believers, in 1939 there were 50 parishes and 6 filial churches, and in 1940 – 60 and 6, respectively. After the First World War, the Orthodox believers lost all the land that had been given to their parishes by the tsar, and 41 churches (of the 72 that had survived the war; of these, the Catholics claimed 14 as their churches appropriated by the tsarist authorities). Due to these property matters the relations between Orthodox and Catholic clerics and communities in Lithuania were tense. The Old Believers were not part of this policy because they settled in Lithuania in as early as the seventeenth century when they were escaping the persecutions of the tsarist authorities.

the future. It was intended to assist in determining the means that would encourage the union of not as much the Orthodox and Old Believers of Lithuania as those of Russia with the Catholic Church.

It must be noted that Antonino Zecchini, who was the first appointed to the position of the Apostolic Visitor for Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia, received instructions from the Cardinal Secretary of State in as early as 1922 to find out about paths for the Catholic missionaries to penetrate this immense region [Russia - R.L.] under existing conditions'.⁹ Zecchini could find like-minded people in Lithuania, although at the time there were no religious preparing themselves for missions, there were many priests who had worked in tsarist Russia. After 1917, they returned to their homeland from Russia that was stricken by the civil war; legally, however, they still belonged to the archdiocese of Mogilev and had the experience of evangelization among Orthodox believers. However, during a year of work in Lithuania, Zecchini's attention was captured by the affairs of the Church and Lithuania's tense relations with Vatican, and the issue of evangelization in Russia was not being solved.

It was brought back on the agenda at the end of 1920s, when the Vatican's new institutions, and primarily the pontifical Commission *Pro Russia*, expanded their activities. The potential of religious became more obvious; in Lithuania, it was primarily the Marians Fathers as other missionary orders, for instance, the Jesuits, were in the process of formation during the interwar period. Very likely the Vatican came to realize their possibilities of evangelization in Russia and among Russians through the efforts of Bishop Jurgis Matulaitis (Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz), renovator and superior general of the Congregation of Marian Fathers. To him, one of the primary tasks of the renovated Marian congregation was the vast areas of Russia and Siberia. As the bishop of Vilnius, he collaborated with episcopate in Poland and in the Vatican in establishing the Eastern Rite Church in the diocese. To promote evangelization among Orthodox Belarusians, he established a Marian monastery in Druya and founded a women's congregation of the Handmaids of Jesus in the Eucharist. In 1926, the Commission *Pro Russia* recognized Matulaitis as the most acceptable candidate for the position of the bishop for Europe-based Russians.¹⁰ He cherished ideas to travel to the USSR and to promote missions among the

⁹ 'Instructions to the Apostolic Visitor to Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia No. B 28054' issued by the Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Gasparri, *Lietuva ir Šventasis Sostas (1922–1938): Slaptojo Vatikano archyvo dokumentai*, p. 41.

¹⁰Tadeusz Górski, *Palaimintasis Jurgis Matulaitis*, Kaunas: Marijonų talkininkų centro leidykla, 2009, pp. 295–305.

‘schismatics’ of Lithuania (for this reason, one of the Marians was studying the Eastern Rite; they were collecting liturgical implements for the churches and books on the rituals and history of the Orthodox and Eastern Rite).

Unfortunately, in February 1927, Matulaitis unexpectedly died and his activities in the field of missions were taken over by Petras Būčys, who had by then become the General of the congregation. The Marians were entrusted with the ordinariate of the Eastern Rite in Harbin (China)¹¹; Būčys himself was appointed an advisor for the congregation of Eastern Churches and for the Commission *Pro Russia*, and ordained a bishop of the Eastern Rite in 1930.

Position of the Lithuanian Authorities and of the Congregation of Marian Fathers.

Unofficial negotiations on the assistance of the Lithuanian authorities to the mission of evangelization in Russia started in 1927, at the time of the meetings in regard to the future concordat. They were initiated by the secretary of the apostolic delegate, Luigi Faidutti, who in August of the same year met Prime Minister Augustinas Voldemaras. The prime minister supported the idea of evangelization. In his opinion, as a small country maintaining good relations with Russia, a country situated in a good geographical location and aware of that nation’s character, customs and speaking its language, Lithuania was suitable for such a mission. He promised the government’s assistance if the Holy See established an institute or a college for the training of Russian missionaries.¹² This issue was not overlooked during Faiduttio’s conversation with President Antanas Smetona. “It would, of course, be delightful if our country were chosen by Providence for such a holy task, and we will do everything we can to show our good will,”¹³ Faidutti quoted the words of President Smetona in his report to the Secretariat of State of Vatican.

However the policy of the Vatican had to change after the visits of Michel d’Herbigny SJ, the head of the pontifical Commission *Pro Russia*, to the USSR and a failed attempt to restore the spiritual authorities.¹⁴ Having made sure that activities of the Catholic missionaries were

¹¹ For more on this, see: Jan Kosmowski, Jan, *Mariańska misja obrządku bizantyjsko-słowiańskiego w Harbinie (1928-1948)*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Księży Marianów, 2011; Michał Wojciechowicz, *Placówka wschodnia w Harbinie, Marianie. 1673–1973*, Rome, 1975, pp. 244-268.

¹² Faiduttio’s report to Cardinal Gasparri of 24 August 1927; Nuncio Bartoloni’s letter to Cardinal Sincero, *Lietuva ir Šventasis Sostas (1922–1938): Slaptojo Vatikano archyvo dokumentai*, pp. 192, 265. Such a college of a Russian gymnasium was planned in Kaunas under the aegis of the Jesuits. However, they were just settling in Lithuania (from 1923) and did not have opportunities to get involved in evangelization in the Eastern Rite.

¹³ Faiduttio’s report to Cardinal Gasparri of 14 September 1927, *ibid.*, p. 197.

¹⁴ In 1925–1926, he took several journeys to the USSR. He was secretly ordained a bishop so that he could ordain Catholic clerics. Shortly the NKVD tracked and repressed all four bishops he had secretly ordained.

impossible in the Bolshevik-ruled USSR, these activities intensified among the Russians residing in various countries. Pope Pius XI attributed their jurisdiction to the Commission *Pro Russia*. In 1928, a decision was made in the Vatican ‘to set in motion missionary activities among the Orthodox believers of Lithuania’.¹⁵ Cardinal Luigi Sincero, the secretary of the Congregation for Oriental Churches, authorized Ricardo Bartoloni, the newly-appointed nuncio for Lithuania, “to launch and intensify spiritual services to the Lithuania-based Russians.”¹⁶

Petras Būčys had prepared a plan for such missionary work, according to which the Garrison Church (also called the Sobor) in Kaunas was to be given to the Eastern Rite.¹⁷ In Bartoloni’s opinion, “a simple and quiet mission” were to be delegated to the Marians—Archbishop Pranciškus Karevičius and Priest Vladislovas Mažonas. The plan was that “after the first experiments in Kaunas, which would be led by Monsignor Karevičius, they would be able to expand the field of their mission to the districts with more Russian population”¹⁸ having rallied a larger number of clergymen for the purpose. Prime Minister Voldemaras gave his approval, allowed using the Garrison Church–Sobor, and even promised to provide—secretly—the money for the Slavic rite and a residence for Archbishop Karevičius in Kaunas.¹⁹

In spring 1929, the Marians attempted to find out what prospects Greek Rite Catholicism would have in Lithuania; during Orthodox Easter, an advert was published in the local Russian newspaper *Ekho* (Echo) that asked individuals interested in the Eastern Rite to respond. Although nobody did,²⁰ in summer 1929, Petras Būčys encouraged Archbishop Karevičius and Priest Mažonas to learn the Eastern rituals thus fulfilling the will of the Commission *Pro Russia*.²¹ In the Vatican, however, not all leadership of the Congregation of Marian Fathers supported the planned mission and the proposal to promote Eastern Rite Catholicism in Lithuania was met with an

¹⁵ Nuncio Bartoloni’s letter to Cardinal Sincero of 22 February 1929, *Lietuva ir Šventasis Sostas (1922–1938): Slaptojo Vatikano archyvo dokumentai*, p. 264.

¹⁶ Sincero’s letter to Bartoloni of 16 March 1929, *ibid.*, p. 267.

¹⁷ The Orthodox Cathedral - Sobor in the centre of Kaunas was built at the end of the nineteenth century. After the First World War it became a Catholic church of St Archangel Michael, or the Garrison Church, because service was delivered here to the army garrison. After lengthy debates about the possibility to demolish the church, in 1934 its interior was permanently reconstructed for the needs of a Catholic church.

¹⁸ Bartoloni’s letter to Cardinal Sincero of 22 February 1929, *Lietuva ir Šventasis Sostas (1922–1938): Slaptojo Vatikano archyvo dokumentai*, p. 266.

¹⁹ Cardinal Sincero’s letter to Cardinal Pizzardo, secretary of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, of 22 November 1929, *ibid.*, p. 283.

²⁰ V. Daugėla’s letters to the priest V. Mažonas of 21 May and 24 July, National Library of Lithuania, Rare Book and Manuscript’s Department, fund 173, file 24, leaves 1-2, 4.

²¹ P. Karevičius’ letter to P. Būčys of 23 February 1930, Lithuanian Central State Archives (LCSA), fund 1674, inventory 1, file 74, leaf 8.

especially high dose of skepticism. The nuncio was unpleasantly surprised by the Marianists. Provincial Jonas Kriščiukaitis did not allow Archbishop Karevičius to hold Eastern Rite Mass in the church of Marijampolė, which was the center of the Marian province.²² Karevičius himself was not hiding his unwillingness to learn the Eastern Rite and rejected the nuncio's urge to write about "holiness and beauty of *ritus slavici*, and about the efforts of the Holy Father to uphold this rite" in the press.²³ Fulfilling the will of the Holy Father, he agreed to hold service in Slavonic yet admitted that he could not identify the "aim of what to write to the Lithuanians about the holiness and beauty of the Eastern Rite. Would it not provoke the response that if we, Lithuanians, have our mass in the Latin rite, why not let the Russians rejoice at the beauty of their rite, and why on earth the Bishop would praise this rite to us, Lithuanians?"²⁴

Archbishop Karevičius had to travel to Yugoslavia to learn the Eastern rite at the age of 68. The Lithuanian government agreed to finance his journey and the acquisition of liturgical implements, and allotted 5,000 Litas for the purpose. However, in September 1929, Voldemaras was no longer a prime minister, and the growing tension between Lithuanian bishops, the government, and President Smetona alienated the country's leaders from the Eastern Rite project.

For the Vatican, such a sequence of events was rather unexpected. Having found out, in November 1929, about the Lithuanian government's unfavorable attitude towards the mission and resistance to church service to Catholics in the Eastern Rite, the envoy to the Holy See, Jurgis Šaulys, received a note from Secretary of State Cardinal Gasparri in which he requested to initiate some "moves" in the government "so that Lithuania would preserve the freedom for the Church, which would allow it to commence evangelization to convert the dissidents, which is inherent in its noble and divine mission."²⁵ Nuncio Bartoloni received corresponding instructions—Cardinal Gasparri asked him to "promote the mission among the Slavs that occupied a big place in the heart of the Holy Father" to President Smetona, simultaneously being alarmed about the decree of the government to subsidize spiritual courses for Orthodox and Old Believers. The Vatican feared that these courses would trigger Orthodox propaganda which "could be a cause of disastrous religious unrest highly detrimental to Lithuania."²⁶

²² *Vyskupo P. Būčio atsiminimai*, Z. Ivinskis (ed.), vol. 2, Chicago, Ill.: Lietuviškos knygos klubas, 1966, p. 87.

²³ P. Karevičius' letter to P. Būčys of 23 February 1930, LCSA, fund 1674, inventory 1, file 74, leaf 7.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Gasparri's letter to Jurgis Šaulys of 27 November 1929, LCSA, fund 383, inventory 7, file 941, leaf 24.

²⁶ Gasparri's letter to Nuncio Bartoloni of 8 February 1930, *Lietuva ir Šventasis Sostas (1922–1938): Slaptojo Vatikano archyvo dokumentai*, p. 292. Since neither Orthodox, nor Old Believers had spiritual seminaries in Lithuania,

The new government of Lithuania paid the 5,000 Litās promised to the mission by Voldemaras to Nuncio Bartoloni, but did not change its political orientation or its decision about the spiritual courses. The Secretariat of the Vatican State received an official response of Dovas Zaunius, the minister of foreign affairs, to the note of 27 November; although the minister did not directly reject the possibility of the mission, he asked to take into account the fact that active participation of Lithuanian clerics in the promotion of Catholicism among Russians might have undesirable political consequences to the country.²⁷

Activities of Bishop Petras Būčys from 1934 to 1937

When the government withdrew from the project of evangelization among Russians, the participation of the Church of Lithuania in it noticeably intensified. The interest of the Church was stimulated by the information about Būčys' ecclesiastical career. In July 1930, he was ordained a bishop of the Eastern Rite and later spent several years visiting the colonies of Russian émigrés in Balkan and Western European countries and in the United States, and informing the Congregation for Oriental Churches about the activities of the parishes of the Eastern Rite Catholics.²⁸

The Commission *Pro Russia* maintained its interest in the prospect of evangelization among the Russians of Lithuania, especially after its head d'Herbigny received information that "many Russians in Lithuania would desire to return to the union of faith."²⁹ This message, which surprised the curia of Kaunas archdiocese,³⁰ stimulated correspondence on the parishes and clerics of Orthodox and Old Believers in Lithuania between the heads of the Commission *Pro Russia* and

the Ministry of Education funded spiritual courses for the Orthodox believers in 1930–1932, and for Old Believers in 1931–1934. Eight Orthodox believers and 15 Old Believers finished those courses, but not all of them were ordained and appointed to parishes.

²⁷ The letter of the minister of foreign affairs Dovas Zaunius to Cardinal Gasparri of 31 January 1930, LCSA, fund 383, inventory 7, file 941, leaves 3-4. It should be admitted that the former prime minister Voldemaras, who demonstrated considerable support to the project in 1927 and promised to personally discuss the issue of the mission with the Soviet representative, was quite reserved about the possibilities of the government two years later, and said that "due to obvious considerations in foreign policy the government will have to stay aside of such initiatives." (Bartoloni's letter to Cardinal Sincero of 22 February 1929, *Lietuva ir Šventasis Sostas (1922–1938): Slaptojo Vatikano archyvo dokumentai*, p. 265).

²⁸ *Vyskupo P. Būčio atsiminimai*, vol. 2, pp. 87–91.

²⁹ M. d'Herbigny's letter to Bartoloni of 2 January 1931, Lithuanian Historical State Archives (LHSA), fund 1671, inventory 5, file 278, leaf 6.

³⁰ It took the curia quite some time to find out who had spread the information about 700 'Russian Catholics' in Kaunas; there was even a discussion on the establishment of a "Byzantine-Slavic rite parish." It turned out that the priest who raised this issue did not know the more or less precise number of Russian converts. It should be added that during the 1923 general census of Lithuania 522 Russians indicated they were Catholics, and 1747 Lithuanians stated they were Orthodox believers. (*Lietuvos gyventojai: Pirmojo 1923 m. rugsėjo 17 d. visuotinio gyventojų surašymo duomenys*, pp. 27, 67).

the Metropolitan Archbishop Juozapas Skvireckas. However, the actual steps were made in as late as 1934, when Bishop Būčys returned to Lithuania.

At that time, his activities in the Commission *Pro Russia* ended in a vague situation; since the Secretariat of the Vatican State did not respond to his observations concerning the shortcomings of the Eastern Rite Church in America, Būčys, who came to Lithuania for just a short time, stayed there, although he had a return ticket and expected an invitation. Such a situation was caused by changes in the Vatican; Būčys was a close colleague of Bishop ‘Herbigny, who in 1934, was removed from the position of the head of the Commission *Pro Russia*.³¹ In 1934, Vatican’s institutions failed to reach an agreement on his further duties. In July, the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs informed the general of the Marian congregation Andrei Cikota that the Commission *Pro Russia* could manage without Būčys,³² but almost at the same time he received a verbal authorization from the secretary of this commission to continue his work among the Russians of Lithuania.³³

He did not do it of his own free will. In the summer of 1934, he wrote of his wish to work in the province of America to the general of the Marian congregation,³⁴ hoping to become the rector of the Lithuanian Marian seminary in Hinsdale, Ill. However, it seemed that his further destiny was decided by the Mass he had offered in the Eastern Rite at the Jesuit Church in Kaunas on 21 October. It attracted numerous Orthodox intellectuals dissatisfied by the subordination of Metropolitan Elevferii (Bogoyavlensky) to the Moscow Patriarchate.³⁵ The service triggered a lively response and there appeared some individuals who expressed their willingness to become Eastern Rite deacons and priests. Encouraged by success, Būčys resolved to take up evangelization in the Eastern Rite among local Russians. Metropolitan Skvireckas supported him and granted all

³¹ Events in the Vatican, the fate of Michel d’Herbigny (in 1937 he was dismissed from all positions and until his death in 1957 lived isolated from any ecclesiastical policies) were among the reasons that encouraged Būčys to escape his subordination to the Commission *Pro Russia*.

³² *Vyskupo P. Būčio atsiminimai*, vol. 2, pp. 95–96.

³³ Būčys’ letter to Andrei Cikota of 20 August 1936, LCSA, fund 1674, inventory 1, file 51, leaf 27.

³⁴ Cikota’s letter to Būčys of 11 June 1936, *ibid.*, leaf 23. From 1930 to 2006, there existed a province of Lithuanian Marians in the USA. During the period of prosperity it owned eight houses, a Lithuanian college, and even a spiritual seminary.

³⁵ Metropolitan Elevferii (Bogoyavlensky, 1868-1940) was in charge of the Lithuanian Orthodox diocese from 1923 to 1940. Unlike the leaders of the Orthodox Churches of the neighbouring countries (Poland, Latvia, Estonia, Finland), he remained in the jurisdiction of the Moscow patriarchate. When the latter declared loyalty to the Bolshevik regime, Metropolitan Elevferii could not escape a conflict with Russian émigré politicians, public figures, and priests residing in European countries.

necessary authorization.³⁶ It should be noted, though, that this time too, the leadership of the Marian congregation was rather skeptical in regard to such plans. Basically, it withdrew from their implementation; it promised to guarantee the bishop's subsistence but refused to pay mission-related travel expenses, to fit out an Eastern Rite chapel, and to appoint assistants.³⁷ In the 1930s, the congregation was rapidly growing. It founded new monasteries, seminaries, and even provinces, and thus was in want of resources and staff for the Eastern Rite mission.

Būčys began to offer Eastern Rite Mass in the Garrison Church, or Sobor. However, the interest in Mass was short-lived. Several months later, in March 1935, the general of the Congregation of Marian Fathers interceded for Būčys in the Vatican to grant him permission to leave for America. "Nobody believes it will bring any benefit,"³⁸ Būčys wrote to the general about his activities in Kaunas. For the Vatican, the mission of evangelization among the Russians of Lithuania still seemed realistic, and Būčys was issued an instruction to continue, and in March, he was again in the jurisdiction of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches.

In autumn 1935, Būčys moved to Telšiai, a town situated almost 200 kilometers from Kaunas. It is hard to say whether he did not see any prospects for his activities in Kaunas or he was opposed by local clerics. Metropolitan Skvireckas approved of his departure and admitted that "there is no need to offer service in the Garrison Church, either daily or weekly;" several times a year would be sufficient, and people should be informed about the time in advance.³⁹

In Telšiai, Būčys was a professor at the spiritual seminary and the spiritual leader of the alumni. He continued to promote the idea of the church union; he visited villages populated by Orthodox and Old Believers, offered service in the Eastern rite in Catholic churches, wrote articles on this theme for newspapers, published a popular book, collected data about the Russians living in Lithuania, and summed them up in an exhaustive article.⁴⁰ During his time in Telšiai, Bishop Būčys was also making efforts to leave Lithuania.

The Papal Mission: The Background of Founding, the Staff, and Activities (1937–1940)

³⁶ Metropolitan Skvireckas' letter to Būčys of 28 November 1934, LCSA, fund 1674, inventory 1, file 127, leaf 5.

³⁷ Būčys' letter to Skvireckas of 4 December 1934, *ibid.*, leaf 7.

³⁸ Cikota's letter to Būčys of 27 May 1935, *ibid.*, file 51, leaf 5.

³⁹ *Vyskupo P. Būčio atsiminimai*, vol. 2, p. 71.

⁴⁰ Petras Būčys, 'Rusai stačiatikiai ir sentikiai Lietuvoje', *Athenaeum*, 1936, vol. VII, No. 1, pp. 65–136. Both Būčys and his contemporaries noticed at once that the statistical data presented in this article were something of 'a demographical miracle', because they were collected by the priests of Catholic parishes who had only approximate information.

Early in 1937, the Congregation for Oriental Churches founded the papal *Mission for Spiritual Assistance for the Russians of Lithuania* in Kaunas, and Bishop Petras Būčys was appointed its head. The emergence of the mission was in great likelihood encouraged by Būčys' discontent with his own situation. As has been mentioned above, from 1934, he was inclined to link his future with the Marian province in America. As he was denied permission to do that, in August 1936, he wrote a very pessimistic letter to the general of the Marian congregation in which he stated that he had been working in Lithuania as much as he could and thought that his work had been done. Complaining of poor health, he asked for permission to spend the rest of his life in a monastery (preferably of the Latin rite), and even maintained that he wished to renounce his bishop's title and rights to better prepare for Almighty's judgement.⁴¹

Andrei Cikota, General of the Marian congregation, constantly raised the issue of Būčys' position in the Vatican and in doing so, he took into account not only the bishop's wishes, but also the pressure exerted on him by American Marians. In January 1936, he received a "Memorial" undersigned by all priests of the Marian province in America, in which they voiced their indignation that Būčys, a personality of such a great merit to the congregation and the closest colleague of Archbishop Matulaitis, was "unappreciated and rejected by his own people and works for others,"⁴² and demanded to create conditions for him to work for his own congregation. The general did not have anything against it.⁴³ In November 1936, he submitted Būčys' and his own requests to allow him to work in the Marian congregation to Pope Pius XI. However, despite Pius XI's personal words of gratitude and assurance of willingness to satisfy his wish, a categorical answer came from the Congregation for Oriental Churches, to the effect that "the appeal cannot be satisfied due to the prestige of the Bishop and of the whole matter."⁴⁴ It is quite possible that the pontifical *Mission of Spiritual Assistance to the Russians of Lithuania* was founded to boost their prestige.

The Staff of the Mission

Having become the head of mission, in the summer of 1937, Petras Būčys returned from Telšiai back to Kaunas and held Mass in the Eastern rite in the Garrison Church. In autumn, two

⁴¹ Būčys' letter to Cikota of 20 August 1936, LCSA, fund 1674, inventory 1, file 51, leaf 27.

⁴² 'Memorial' of 18 January 1936 to the General Council of the Congregation of Marian fathers, *ibid.*, leaf 18.

⁴³ Cikota's letter to Būčys of 11 June 1936, *ibid.*, leaf 23.

⁴⁴ Cikota's letter to Būčys of 30 November 1936, *ibid.*, leaf 30.

assistants joined him and Mass was held daily. The staff of the mission consisted of Priest Frans Helwegen⁴⁵ and Deacon Roman Kiprianovich.⁴⁶ In spring 1938, Būčys demanded the latter to be replaced by Ivan Khomenka⁴⁷ as he had suspected that his deacon was discouraging Russians from converting to Catholicism and was secretly seeking the position of the successor of the Orthodox Metropolitan Elevferii.⁴⁸ In January 1938, the staff was joined by Semion Bryzgalov,⁴⁹ the former psalm reader of the Orthodox parish of Užpaliai. In December of the same year, Vladislovas Mažonas,⁵⁰ a Marian who had returned from Japan, joined the mission. Assistants settled in the vicinity of St Gertrude's Church in Kaunas; the mission was maintained by the Congregation for Oriental Churches that transferred money via the Vatican nunciature in Kaunas,⁵¹ and from fairly large donations of Lithuanian priests and private individuals.

About 200 to 300 people used to participate in Sunday Mass in the Eastern rite and up to 30 people on ordinary days.⁵² According to Būčys, "Orthodox believers seldom attended the service in the Eastern rite," and Catholics who were late for their Mass, or just curious people would come

⁴⁵ F. Helwegen (1910–1945) – a Dutchman who, in Būčys' words, spoke Russian fast and easily yet very incorrectly. He finished the *Russicum* College and was ordained an Eastern Rite priest in 1935. He graduated in theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University with a licentiate degree and was appointed to the mission in Kaunas in June 1937. When the Soviets occupied Lithuania, he was arrested and transported to Moscow. As a foreign citizen he was spared repression and could return to Lithuania. In January 1942 (1943 according to other sources) he left Lithuania for Holland, where he was arrested by the Nazis. He perished in Buchenwald.

⁴⁶ Roman Kiprianovich (1902–?) – a Ukrainian, a doctor of theology. The Marians published two of his small apologetic books in Russian. As Būčys was not satisfied with his activities, he was sent from Lithuania in 1938.

⁴⁷ Ivan Khomenka (1892–1981) – a Ukrainian who finished the *Russicum* College; a doctor of theology. In December 1938, Būčys ordained him as deacon. In 1940, he left for Rome, joined the Basilian Order, and devoted the rest of his life to the translation of the Bible into Ukrainian. He died in Italy.

⁴⁸ Būčys' confidential note to Cardinal Eugène Tisserant, the secretary of the Congregation for Oriental Churches, of 8 March 1938, LCSA, fund 1674, inventory 1, file 26, leaves 43–46.

⁴⁹ It is not known whether Būčys was aware of Semion Bryzgalov's (1893–?) colourful past. He was a Russian émigré, a non-commissioned officer of the tsarist army, who arrived in Lithuania in about 1919. As an active monarchist he was in the books of security services. In order to escape deportation from Lithuania, later he lived in Užpaliai and was not involved in political activities. In January 1938 his family of five members became Catholics. In 1951 he was arrested by the KGB and sentenced to five years in prison, but was released after Stalin's death in 1953. While in the mission, he received a monthly salary of 160 Lit. It was raised to 170 Lit. when thanks to his efforts the family of Nikolai But, the son of the Orthodox priest of Kolainiai, converted to Catholicism. Having converted, But, who was 22, took advantage of Būčys' financial support, just like other potential converts.

⁵⁰ V. Mažonas MIC (1881–1945) – a Lithuanian, a priest of the Mogilev archdiocese, who returned to Lithuania in 1921. He became a Marian and in 1934 accepted Eastern Rite Catholicism. He left for Harbin where he taught at the Marian gymnasium and was engaged in pastoral care. Later he studied Japanese in Tokyo. In 1938 he returned to Lithuania and joined the Eastern Rite mission. He was arrested in May 1941, soon after the Soviets invaded Lithuania, and died of emaciation in Butyrka prison.

⁵¹ 5,000 Lira were allotted for three months in 1938.

⁵² De opere catholici succursus spiritualis in bonum russorum in Lituania an. D. 1937. Relatio annua, LCSA, fund 1674, inventory 1, file 29, leaf 13.

there.⁵³ Service was held in accordance to the old Julian calendar, because Būčys admitted that the Gregorian calendar “will ruin all hopes to attract Old Believers” and was planning to distribute some pamphlets in the future about how this calendar did not contradict the doctrine of the First Council of Nicaea.

Activities of the Mission

Both Būčys himself and his assistants gave public lectures on the necessity to unite all Christians into the Catholic Church, on the similarities between Latin and Byzantine liturgy, dogmas, and the saints in the Marian hall in Kaunas on Sunday evenings. According to Būčys’ data, in 1937, the audience grew from 36 to about 80, but most of them were Catholics.⁵⁴ In other years, such lectures used to be delivered much more seldom. The bishop admitted that their results were modest, and the number of participants would decrease after heated discussions. In December 1937, one of the most diligent attendees of these lectures and a convert, Mykolas Juknevičius, died while delivering a paper and this had a negative effect.⁵⁵

Būčys and his assistants had sought to start contacts with Orthodox intellectuals and clerics, since in all probability, they agreed with the opinion voiced by Metropolitan Skvireckas: “The only possibility for missions among Russian schismatics is through converted priests of the Russian nationality, who are well-known among peasants,”⁵⁶ which he wrote to the nuncio in as early as 1930. Both the bishops and quite numerous parish priests in the parishes that were densely populated by Russian communities helped Būčys willingly. They probed into the moods of the clerics of the Orthodox and Old Believers, distributed apologetic literature to them, and invited Būčys to hold Mass in the Eastern rite. He was informed regularly that one Orthodox parish priest or another was interested in Eastern Rite Catholicism and was willing to “enter the union,” but none of them became a Greek Catholic.

Būčys must have been disappointed in his activities. Years passed but he did not succeed in attracting a single more influential Russian intellectual or a cleric to Eastern Rite Catholicism or

⁵³ *Vyskupo P. Būčio atsiminimai*, vol. 2, p. 100.

⁵⁴ *De opere catholici succursus spiritualis in bonum russorum in Lituania an. D. 1937. Relatio annua*, LCSA, fund 1674, inventory 1, file 29, leaf 15.

⁵⁵ *Vyskupo P. Būčio atsiminimai*, vol. 2, p. 100; *De Pontificio Opere ad Succurrendum Spiritualiter Russis in Lithuania. Relatio 1938 annua*, LCSA, fund 1674, inventory 1, file 29, leaf 34.

⁵⁶ Skvireckas’ letter to Bartoloni of 24 February 1930, LHSA, fund 1671, inventory 5, file 91, leaf 155.

in establishing a single parish. Quite a fair number of potential converts could hardly hide—or did not even hide—their calculations.⁵⁷

His experience in Latvia was not a cause for joy either. In December 1937, he received the authorization of Archbishop Antonijs Springovičs to lead pastoral care in the Eastern rite in the Riga archdiocese and Liepaja diocese.⁵⁸ He visited Latvia, where around 16,000 Russian Catholics lived on numerous occasions. He gave lectures, held Masses, sought missionaries among Catholic priests and Orthodox and Old Believers, and tried to organize pastoral care in the Eastern rite. It did not take long for him to realize that in Latvia, just like in Lithuania, various unrelated people tried to profit from this ecclesiastical project. As if that was not enough, the numerous and influential Russian ethnic minority of Latvia (which consisted of over 200,000 people and was almost ten times larger than that in Lithuania) succeeded in blocking the invasion of their religious life; in November 1938, the Latvian authorities forbade Būčys' entrance to the country, and it was only on the invitation of Nuncio Antonio Arata that he could visit this country for three days as a private individual.⁵⁹

It is hard to say what hopes Būčys was cherishing when he appealed to Metropolitan Eľevferii through his acquaintances, and in January 1938 by a letter requesting a meeting. He wrote he wanted to find out what the metropolitan thought about “the necessity, urgent as never before, for the believers in God and His One and Only Son Jesus Christ to unite.”⁶⁰ The metropolitan humored Būčys' request and agreed to discuss the subject he was concerned about.⁶¹ The encounter took place on 27 January. Būčys went alone, wearing the attire of an Eastern rite bishop. He was accepted by the metropolitan, two priests and three laymen. Having heard Būčys' rather lengthy speech on the Pope's favorable attitude towards the Orthodox faith and the Eastern Rite, the metropolitan stated that as long as the Pope sought autocracy, the church union was impossible. He also rejected Būčys' proposal of the cooperation of Churches in the fight against militant

⁵⁷ For instance, having received a letter from the Russians of Merkinė to the effect that many of them wanted a union with the Catholic Church, Būčys went there at Easter 1937. It turned out that the men who had invited the bishop had selfish motives: they did not want to return approximately 100 hectares of land that belonged to the Orthodox parish and which they divided among themselves. When they did not receive any promises regarding the land, they did not even come to talk about matters of faith (*De opere catholici succursus spiritualis in bonum russorum in Lituania an. D. 1937. Relatio annua, LCSA, fund 1674, inventory 1, file 29, leaf 3*).

⁵⁸ Antonijs Springovičs' letter to Antonio Arata, the papal nuncio in Latvia, of 7 December 1937, *ibid.*, file 41, leaf 63.

⁵⁹ *De Pontificio Opere ad Succurrendum Spiritualiter Russis in Lituania. Relatio 1938 annua, ibid.*, file 29, leaf 39.

⁶⁰ Būčys' letter to Metropolitan Eľevferii of 19 January 1938, *ibid.*, file 194, leaf 1.

⁶¹ Eľevferii' letter to Būčys of 24 January 1938, *ibid.*, leaf 2

atheism, as he had doubts whether an agreement could be reached on this issue. According to a well-informed correspondent of the Riga-based newspaper *Segodnia* (Today), the meeting ended in an incident when Būčys voiced his doubts as to whether Christ would side with those who did not respond to His urge to unite.⁶² Interestingly, this meeting was fairly well reported in the French and American press. Petras Būčys meticulously collected newspaper cuttings and corrected information given in some of them; he stressed that he had sought the meeting in Kaunas purely on his own initiative and without any authorization from anybody else.

It is possible that by resolving to have this conversation after many years of evangelization, Būčys attempted to demonstrate real possibilities of his mission to the officials of the Congregation for Oriental Churches. In the wake of this encounter, he wrote in the press: “[the Orthodox believers – R.L.] are not looking at the extended hand of the Lithuanian Catholics, and their answer to the call for the Christians to unite and coordinate their forces in the joint fight against threatening godlessness is a blunt “No!”⁶³ It is difficult to say whether it was because of this particular step or due to the shifts in the political line of the Vatican after the death of Pope Pius XI, but Būčys managed to escape the jurisdiction of the Congregation for Oriental Churches; in July 1939, he was elected a general of the Marian congregation and left for Rome.

Priest Mikhail Nedtochin,⁶⁴ who soon after was appointed head of the mission, did not spend a long time in Kaunas. The mission’s activities were disrupted by the first Soviet occupation in June 1940. Incidentally, in 1951, the Congregation for Oriental Churches upheld the appeal of Bishop Būčys and granted him the permission to return to the Latin rite (he received the permission on 24 October, on the eve of his death).⁶⁵

Orthodox believers were the fourth largest confessional group in Lithuania, yet they took the leading position in mixed marriages and conversions to Catholicism. However, eventually the tendency of the decrease in the instances of conversion became more pronounced. In Panevėžys diocese, for example, 179 Orthodox believers became Catholics (of the Latin rite) from 1928 to

⁶² ‘Mitr. Elevationis otклонil predlozhenie ob unii c katolicheskoi tserkov’yu’, *Segodnia*, 1938, No. 73, p. 3.

⁶³ Petras Būčys, ‘Rusijos krikšto jubiliejus’, *Draugija*, 1938, No. 23, p. 836.

⁶⁴ Mikhail Nedtochin (1897–1957) – a Russian born in Warsaw. In 1928 he became a Catholic, finished the *Russicum* College, and was ordained a priest in 1935. He worked in the USA, Lithuania, and France; a doctor of theology. From August 1939 he worked in the mission in Kaunas. When the Soviets occupied Lithuania he tried to flee the country, but was arrested on the border. At the beginning of the German occupation he was released from prison and later deported to Italy. After the war he returned to the Orthodox faith and worked in a parish. Later he converted to Catholicism again and lost his spiritual estate.

⁶⁵ Juozas Vaišnora, ‘Paskutinės vysk. P. Būčio dienos’, *Draugas*, 30 October 1951.

1932, and 106 from 1933 to 1937. In 1928, there were 34 converts, in 1935–17, and only 7 in 1938.⁶⁶ Statistics seem to show that the community was not indifferent to the mission of Bishop Būčys on the one hand, and to countermeasures of the leadership of its own diocese on the other.⁶⁷

Secret Methods of Evangelization

In addition to the above-mentioned methods of evangelization among Russians—Mass, lectures, and articles—Bishop Būčys initiated a number of secret projects. Their controversial nature, just like their significance in the mission's overall activities, does not give rise to doubts. He was seeking assistants among Orthodox and Old Believers who would be capable of infiltrating their communities, and who could not only promote Catholicism or the Eastern Rite, but also provide information on their life and their reaction to the activities of the mission. For example, the Old Believers were observed by the son of their priest, the military chaplain Agafon Pankratiev—he attended Mass and made notes of the content of sermons. Būčys appreciated these services and admitted he did not encourage him to convert to Catholicism as there would be no one who could continue this work.⁶⁸

Lithuanian Catholic clerics thought that taking care of young Russians and preparing them for the mission among their co-nationals had good prospects. Būčys wanted to send two sons of the priests of Old Believers to study in Rome to strengthen their positive attitude towards Catholicism,⁶⁹ but the Vatican refused to educate them as there were no guarantees they would become Catholics. The Vatican's apprehensions were not without reason as Dorotei Bezchastnov,⁷⁰ one of Būčys' wards from among local Old Believers, became a Marian, finished studies in Rome, and later became known as an apostate.

⁶⁶ Converts in 1928-1933, LHSA, fund 1650, inventory 1, file 77, leaf 111; Converts in 1933-1937, *ibid.*, file 252; Converts in 1938, *ibid.*, leaf 217.

⁶⁷ *Golos Litovskoi Pravoslavnoi Eparkhii*, the official periodical of the Orthodox diocese, published numerous articles and even special supplements intended to discredit the church union. To fill the gaps in theoretical training of priests, they started receiving templates of sermons. As a response to the public lectures organized by Bishop Būčys, the Orthodox fraternity of St Nicholas in Kaunas launched Sunday readings on religious and moral themes. From the beginning of 1938, such public readings were held weekly at the Orthodox cathedral and used to attract an audience of about a hundred people.

⁶⁸ De opere catholici succursus spiritualis in bonum russorum in Lituania an. D. 1937. Relatio annua, *ibid.*, LCSA, fund 1674, inventory 1, file 29, leaf 17.

⁶⁹ Būčys' confidential note to Cardinal Tisserant of 8 March 1938, *ibid.*, file 26, leaf 14.

⁷⁰ Dorotei Bezchastnov (later Beschastny, 1906-1973) graduated from the *Angelicum* University and the *Russicum* College in Rome. In 1943 he was ordained an Eastern Rite priest, but was degraded not before long. After the war he was repressed as 'a Vatican spy' in the Soviet Union. He later lived in Lithuania, gained fame as an apostate, and published an atheist pamphlet *Vatikanas, kokį mačiau* (Vilnius, 1964).

In Lithuania, one of Būčys' first assistants deeply dedicated to the idea of evangelization was Eugenija Kazlauskaitė (Sister Antonija). It is not known how she got acquainted with the bishop, but she went to Rome as his protégée and joined the St Peter and Paul's congregation of nuns. This community was in the process of formation and started its activities by evangelization of Russian émigré girls. It was not public—its members lived and worked individually. Having spent a year in Rome, in November 1932, Eugenija Kazlauskaitė returned to Lithuania where Bishop Būčys talked her into evangelization among local Russians by looking after sick women.⁷¹

Upon return, Kazlauskaitė was looking for accommodation among Orthodox believers (according to her, the Old Believers were 'hardened fanatics') and chose the town of Užpaliai in the Utena province. Here, she carried out evangelization activities for two years. It is hard to say whether the bishop was in full control of her activities. Although Būčys had instructed her not to reveal the sources of her subsistence either to Catholics or to the Orthodox believers, not to talk about him, not to give away money and not to get involved in farmers' affairs,⁷² Kazlauskaitė very likely disregarded these instructions as soon as she saw the extremely impoverished daily life of the Russians. She attended Orthodox Mass, struck contacts with priests and promoted Eastern Rite Catholicism.⁷³ Thus, contrary to Bishop Būčys' wishes, her mission did not remain unnoticed. She was eager to see the fruits of her work, which was to see an Eastern Rite priest in Užpaliai, either on a permanent basis, or who would visit the town and hold Mass at least occasionally. Būčys had to slow her down, but Kazlauskaitė was not willing to wait; she sought contacts not only with Lithuanian bishops and Jesuits, but even with the nuncio and Bishop d'Herbigny.

When Būčys was persuading Kazlauskaitė to work in Lithuania, he had a plan to establish a congregation of women devoted to missions among Russians. Assistance to 'sick women in their hardship'⁷⁴ was supposed to be the main activity of the future congregation. However, Kazlauskaitė's mission ended unexpectedly in August 1934, when the Vatican decided to abolish the congregation of St Peter and Paul a member of which she was. This news was very unpleasant both to the nuns and to Bishop Petras Būčys. He tried to appeal to the Commission *Pro Russia*,

⁷¹ Būčys' letter to the Bishop of Panevėžys Kazimieras Paltarokas of 8 October 1934, LCSA, fund 1674, inventory 1, file 112, leaf 8.

⁷² Būčys' letters to Eugenija Kazlauskaitė of 5 March and 30 July 1933, *ibid.*, leaves 36, 46.

⁷³ Kazlauskaitė's letter to Būčys of 9 February 1933, *ibid.*, file 81, leaf 35.

⁷⁴ Būčys' letter to Kazlauskaitė of 30 July 1933, *ibid.*, leaf 46.

suggesting that the nuns should be sent to other congregations.⁷⁵ These arguments were not considered, even though Būčys was convinced that this news would inevitably spread, compromise “the work of the conversion of Russians,” and intensify their bias against the Holy See.⁷⁶ He was probably right—this and other projects, which to some extent were a public secret, were quite controversial. By rendering financial support to a small group of converts, Būčys incurred mistrust of the majority of Orthodox and Old Believers in Catholics and in the Greek Rite Catholic Church. This hostility has not faded out up until our time.

Conclusions

How did it happen that quite intensive evangelization among the Russians of Lithuania, which aimed to merge them with the Catholic Church, and which was carried out under conditions seemingly acceptable to the converts and with exceptional respect to their rituals, did not yield any tangible results during a whole decade? Probably the main reason was that the organizers of the mission undervalued the resistance of Lithuanian Orthodox and Old Believers to Catholic proselytism. Among Russian clerics and intellectuals there were no apostates well known to the general public.

Effectiveness of the mission of evangelization among Russians was also impeded by ‘internal’ reasons. In 1929, the government of Lithuania withdrew from its implementation. The Vatican could no longer expect support or initiate ‘objective’ obstacles to Orthodox and Old Believers’ Churches by preventing the training of their clerics in spiritual courses. Therefore the mission of evangelization in Lithuania was of a pure ecclesiastical nature. It attracted considerably fewer supporters than initially expected. The mission was not joined by the priests who had returned to Lithuania from Russia after 1917; it was not supported by the leaders of the Marian province of Lithuania in which Bishop Petras Būčys, one of its founders and a former general, was doubtlessly influential. Following the dismissal of Michel d’Herbigny in 1934, Būčys made attempts to escape the jurisdiction of the Congregation for Oriental Churches as he did not expect to fulfill the task that had been set to him.

Despite the efforts of the Catholic Church of Lithuania to restore its branch of the Greek Rite after 1990, it does not have natural roots in the country. The long and controversial history of

⁷⁵ Būčys’ letter to Philipppo Giobe, secretary of the Commission *Pro Russia*, of 3 September 1934, *ibid.*, file 20, leaf 25.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Greek Rite Catholicism might become a unifying link and a condition for an honest ecumenical dialogue that would not leave dark wings in ecclesiastical politics and would not retouch the mistakes of the past.

Translated from Lithuanian by Diana Bartkutė Barnard