

Kestutis Girnius

“Die katholische Kirche im postkommunistischen Transformationsprozess aus der Sicht eines Laien” (engl. Vers.)

The role of the Catholic Church in the transformation process has been modest. But so has been the input of many other factors despite Lithuania's undeniable progress in becoming a stable democracy and functioning market economy. Contingency triumphed over purpose, unexpected consequences over planned results, sleepwalkers rather than determined actors have driven the transformation process.

Democracy in Lithuania was never really threatened. No coups took place because there was no army to carry them out. The results of the first three parliamentary elections were so one-sided that election rigging or miscounting would not have made an appreciable difference.

Factory owners rather than ideologues of the free market played the central role in forcing the pace of privatization, when they realized that it let them seize, even if dishonestly, ownership of the factory or set up a daughter firm to which they could transfer the assets they had stripped from the state-owned entity. The dismantling of the collective farms was the crucial step in the creation of a market in land, but the primary motive of its originators was political - to break the influence of the kolkhoz directors before the next elections.

Eminent writers and intellectuals rallied the masses in the crucial years of 1988-1990 with their patriotic rhetoric. But many of them spent the subsequent years lamenting the past, or more exactly the generous system of subsidies that the Soviets offered them. Journalists and the media broke the chains of censorship, breathed the heady air of freedom, only to convert to yellow journalism without a whimper of protest when directed to their paymasters.

There were genuine heroes - the defenders of the Parliament in January 1991, and sage choices - the decision to allow people to buy their apartments for vouchers. But they were far and few in between. There were also positive constants, although most were exogenous - NATO, the European Union, the IMF, and other international organizations that determined the parameters of what could be done without forfeiting their support. I mention all this so that my rather gloomy assessment of the Church's role and prospects not be misinterpreted.

I repeat: the role of the Catholic Church in the transformation process has been modest. In retrospect this seems almost inevitable, but during the first burst of enthusiasm in 1988-90 the Church seemed to be destined for a central role in Lithuanian political and social life. The return of the Cathedral in Vilnius during the founding congress of Sajudis seemed to signal the joint resurrection of the nation and the Church. On 14 June 1990 Lithuania's Cardinal and the head of state Vytautas Landsbergis signed an act dedicating Lithuania to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. These were grand demonstrative gestures that did not adequately reflect the underlying reality, namely that the Church's strength and support were modest, while indifference and even virulent anti-clericalism were fairly prevalent in the population at large.

The major consequence of Soviet rule (about which I shall speak later) was the isolation of the Church, an isolation that has not yet been overcome and that is manifested in many ways. I shall mention but a few:

(1) The church's activity is primarily inner-directed, concerned with catering to the needs of the faithful. Only modest endeavors have been launched to expand the scope of the Church's activity by seeking converts or broadening its role in society at large.

(2) Catholics remain relatively isolated from one another. Parish life consists primarily of attending Mass and receiving the sacraments. Social capital and a sense of community are underdeveloped, although there exists a Catholic identity that is defined in opposition to what is perceived as a relative hostile environment.

(3) There are not many Catholic intellectuals. Their influence in academia and the arts is modest. Few are prepared to face the intellectual challenges of modernity.

(4) Many Catholics are suspicious of and hostile to the mass media, and do not know how to make use of its potential. The means at the disposal of Catholics to present their views and thoughts are inadequate. Catholics do not have a daily newspaper, their other publications have modest circulation and are directed at believers rather than the public at large.

(5) Catholics are politically isolated. The Church was identified with and identified itself with the Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party. The party gained a respectable 12.2% of the vote in the 1992 parliamentary elections, 9.91% (the second largest) in 1996, but a mere 3.05% in the elections of three weeks ago. The party did not clear the 5% barrier, although two Christian Democrats won seats in single mandate districts. The demise of the Christian Democrats is attributable to many factors, including very weak leadership, bitter and unseemly internal disputes, an evident lack of Christian spirit, an undistinguished record in Parliament. But the party's catastrophic defeat drives home how little support the party has in the voting public. Its fortune may change for the better, but it will remain a minor player, forever unsure whether it will pass the 5% barrier. And it will not be a voice capable of speaking in the name of the Catholic community.

The Catholic Church in Lithuania is not be under siege any more, but it is not flourishing. The reasons will be clearer if we look back to the unhappy past that lies heavily on Lithuania and its Catholics. Fifty years of Soviet occupation placed a great burden on the Church as it sought to fulfill its self-appointed dual role of guardian of the universal truths of Catholicism and champion of the national heritage. The Church persevered and triumphed, against all odds. But the price of victory was deceptively high. The prolonged isolation from Western Europe's Christian heritage and educational institutions deprived Lithuania's Catholics of the opportunity as well as the challenge of confronting modernity, generated suspicion of the changes and innovations that have been gradually introduced into the Church since the Second Vatican Council and fostered a sceptical attitude toward many Western values. Convinced of its moral probity but intellectually indigent, the Church in Lithuania faced major obstacles in finding a stable role in a volatile society.

During the fifty years of Soviet rule the Catholic Church in Lithuania suffered more than that of many other Eastern European countries for it bore a double disadvantage. First, the Church's influence in national life made it a potentially powerful opponent and thus a special object of persecution. Intent on breaking the power of all institutions that promulgated a different world view and could mediate between the individual and the unitary structures of Party and state, the Soviet authorities embarked on a concerted effort to undermine the Church's hold on Lithuania's faithful. Had the authority of the Church been less, the enmity of the regime would have been less virulent. The Church in Latvia, for example, was treated more leniently. Second, because Lithuania was incorporated into the Soviet Union and ruled from Moscow, Lithuanian institutions, including the Church, were deprived of many of the advantages that accrued to East European countries that retained formal sovereignty. More isolated from the West than its counterparts in Hungary and Poland, the Church in Lithuania was less able to communicate with the West, receive advice and support.

The occupation of Lithuania in 1940 came at an unfortunate time for the Church. During the twenty years of independence the Church had made remarkable progress in transforming itself from an institution whose primarily served the spiritual needs of a relatively backward agricultural society to one that had to deal with the emergence of an increasingly urban and nationally self-conscious culture. The task was daunting. Even at the beginning of the 20th century many priests, particularly in the hierarchy, were indifferent to the Lithuanian national renaissance, fearing that the development of a distinct national identity, based on a conscious opposition to Polish influence in cultural life, would undermine the foundations and unity of the Church in Lithuania. For many older Lithuanian priests renunciation of Polish influence was tantamount to apostasy. Moreover, a majority of Lithuanian intellectuals were educated in Russian universities and generally espoused the dominant socialist ideology and anti-clericalism. These intellectuals considered the Church to be a bastion of reaction that could not be granted a significant role in education and public life in general.

By 1940 the situation had altered significantly. As a younger generation of priests and laymen came to the fore, the Church could no longer be accused of indifference to national concerns. Young Catholic scholars, educated in Lithuania and in West European universities, influential and self-assured, were gradually assuming the leading role in the nation's intellectual life. Catholic philosophers, historians and journalists were in the forefront in acquainting the nation with the newest intellectual and artistic trends in Western Europe and publishing the most progressive journals.

The Soviet occupation terminated the growth of the Church. Survival and not expansion of influence became the chief priority of Catholics as the new regime proceeded to arrest priests and bishops, close monasteries and lay Catholic organizations, confiscate Church property. But even during the darkest days of Stalinist rule the Church continued to function and to retain some independence from the dictates of the Kremlin. Yet a fierce toll was exacted on both the morale and the structure of the Church. When individual priests began to fight back against religious discrimination and violations of human rights, they were motivated by a feeling of desperation at the steady demise of the Church rather than by an outburst of exuberance caused by confidence in an inevitable victory. The founding of Lietuvos

Kataliku Baznycios kronika (The Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania) in 1972 was not the act of a Church triumphant. It was rather based on dread that continued silence in the face of repression would inevitably lead to the enervation, if not destruction, of Catholicism in Lithuania.

The decades of oppression left their mark on Lithuanian Catholicism. The Church that emerged victorious in 1989 was unable to assume the role in society that the Church in 1939 had appropriated for itself. During the hiatus of 50 years radical changes affected both secular society and the Church. Their mutual relationship was transformed. In 1939 the Church was to a significant degree setting the agenda for society at large. Now the Church is a secondary player, a source of comfort in times of trouble rather than of advice, an institution rarely criticized because in many areas it is somewhat superfluous.

Several parallel processes contributed to this development. Intense atheistic propaganda and the general proscription of public manifestations of religiosity have undercut the traditional faith of many believers. Lithuania is to a large degree a religiously indifferent society, in many respects different from Poland to which it is so often but superficially compared. The respect that the Church possesses should not be confused with actual religious commitment. Although there have been few careful and adequate studies of the religious disposition of the Lithuanian population, the available evidence suggested that twenty years ago perhaps a fifth of all Lithuanians are relatively firm believers, less than a fifth are convinced atheists, while the remaining majority contained many individuals who retained a sufficiently large residue of religious sentiments that they attempt to consecrate the more important moments of their lives in a religious fashion. Children are once again receiving religious instruction unimpeded, the number of practicing adult Catholics has increased modestly.

Polls indicate that the percentage of individuals who attend church weekly increased sharply in 1989-90 and then leveled off at about 15%. 16% claim to go to Church once a month, while another 40% attend Mass during major religious holydays. But one must treat the survey results with caution. Careful comparisons of survey responses in the United States with actual counts of parishioners in the pews suggest that many 'misremember' whether they attended services last week. Estimates of the overreporting of church attendance range as high as 50%. In Lithuania the scale of the overreporting is, if anything, greater. It is almost physically impossible for 60-70% of the population to attend Mass during major religious festivals, since there are no churches in the mass housing developments built in Lithuania's major cities during the Soviet years. Even the modest figure of 6% for weekly attendance for youths up to 30 years of age seems exaggerated.

If polling statistics are taken at face value, the Church is one of the institutions most trusted by the population at large. Only the media and the presidency have consistently higher ratings. The polling results reflect an underlying ambivalence toward the Church in large sectors of the population. The residual respect for the church is the result of many factors. It is the religion of one's forefathers. It is respected for its perseverance during years of Soviet repression and because it is considered a cornerstone of the national identity and national heritage. In some very diffuse fashion being Lithuanian means being Catholic. Certain Catholic traditions,

often emptied of all religious symbolism and content, have been appropriated on a national scale, even by atheists. An example is the traditional meal of Christmas Eve, the observance of which in Soviet years some even considered to be a dissident act. But the defiance, if there was any, was purely secular. This quasi-identification of Church and nation that leads many to exaggerate their religious commitment and even tempts some of the clergy to deceive itself about the extent of its flock.

Even the nominal popularity of the Church is misleading. To a great degree it is popular because it is irrelevant. Having little or no influence on decisions that directly affect the lives of the majority of the population, it does little that would evoke the anger or discontent of ordinary Lithuanians. If the Church attempted to cash out its popularity in terms of support for its positions, say on abortion or pornography, or for a campaign to increase religious education in the schools, it would be evident that the Church does not command divisions or regiments, but platoons.

Moreover, this superficial benevolence ambivalence conceals a deep-seated enmity that occasionally bursts forth with extreme virulence among a broad sector of the population. In 1995, for example, the leftist dominated parliament passed a law that severely restricted the Church's right to recover previously nationalized property. At the same time the ruling LDLP, consisting primarily of former Communists, published a declaration on Church-state relations that accused believers of trying to make Catholicism a state religion and asserted that this 'relict of totalitarian tendencies' constituted a threat to democracy, in a fashion similar to Islamic fundamentalism. Later that year amendments were passed to the legislation on religious communities that prohibited chaplains in the military and religious instructions in state schools. In both cases the president's intervention led to the offending passages being deleted from the final legislation. A recent example of virulent anti-Catholicism is the publication in the editorial page of Lithuania's leading daily *Lietuvos rytas* of an article by a physician who argued that the Pope's disabilities were a symptom of his being in the terminal stages of syphilis. The paper subsequently defended its decision to publish this scurrilous speculation as a contribution to the freedom of speech and the exchange of ideas. The decision to publish indicates that the editors, ever concerned with circulation figures, calculated that more of its readers would find the article acceptable rather than despicable.

During the years of Soviet rule the Church lost much of its vibrance, self-assurance, and intellectual vigor. The clergy was isolated, the activity of religious communities circumscribed radically, and many Catholics began to look suspiciously on a society that they deemed hostile to their fundamental interests. Although the Church that emerged from the catacombs believed that its sacrifices and the attitudes that underlay them had been vindicated, it continued to believe and act as if it were an uninvited guest. The existence of a siege mentality has hampered the missionary impulse. And the awareness that many intellectuals, Catholics among them, eagerly adopted the self-serving attitude that their compromises with the regime were ultimately beneficial to the nation as a whole led not only to distaste for such individuals but to a mild contempt of intellectual life in general.

At the beginning of the transformation the conditions facing the Church were not very auspicious. Unfocused good will was more than counterbalanced by very focused anticlericalism, the Church had few charismatic and politically astute leaders. A number of factors quickly made the situation even worse.

(1) Activists priests, many of whom had suffered during the Soviet years, entered politics, offering unequivocal support to Sajudis (the Christian Democrats were not yet a separate party) and virulent criticism of the former Communists. These priests, and in part the Church itself, were successfully branded as intolerant fanatics and inquisitors. That they obeyed the hierarchy's directive to abandon politics went unnoticed.

(2) The hierarchy of the Church was intellectually hesitant, decidedly conservative, and relatively suspicious of change. Cardinal Sladkevicius was the one individual of undiminished prestige and commanding universal respect. But the cardinal, a saintly and pious man, was neither interested in politics, nor in assuming a public role. His passing acquaintance with the former Communist Party leader and president-to-be Algirdas Brazauskas was frequently presented as the Cardinal's approbation of Brazauskas and implicit criticism of politically outspoken priests.

(3) Cardinal Sladkevicius was not the only priests favored by the press and the political left. In his memoirs published this year Brazauskas mentions three other priests - Tevas Stanislovas, kun. Mikutavicius, and Kazimieras Vasiliauskas - as model priests. The mass media were also unstinting in their praise of such individuals, but the image of the ideal priest so promulgated was of an extremely tolerant individual, perhaps even left-leaning, undogmatic and not even concerned with dogma, devoted to culture, mutual acceptance and political inactivity. With these priests functioning as acknowledged role models, clergy who criticized the left, spoke of the past persecution of the Church, or simply expounded the Church's position on pornography, the restitution of property or abortion were portrayed as intolerant and lacking Christian charity.

(4) During 1989-92 Sajudis took the support of the Church for granted and did not invite the Church to assume a public role. Priests were invited to bless buildings, speak invocations on important public occasions, and perform other religious and quasi-religious functions. But the Church was kept at arm's length when important political, economic or social matters were being discussed. Priests were treated as religious specialists rather than as individuals who could speak meaningfully on matters of general concern. The victory in 1992 of the LDLP, comprised of former Communists, ensured that the Church would be kept on the sidelines for another four years.

(5) The Church, in particular the politicians who represent or are thought to represent the views of Catholics, focused their attention on the wrong, i.e., secondary, topics and so contributed to the perception of the Church as an institution whose major concerns were peripheral to society at large. For a variety of reasons - shock and moral indignation perhaps being foremost - the Church decided to emphasize moral issues and to rebel at aspects of modern life that they found disturbing, for example, the appearance of violent and mildly pornographic (at least by Western standards) publications or television programs. A great deal of effort was expended in trying to

pass legislation that would have permitted the government to impose controls or punish publications that transgressed the norms of decency. No less central to them was the project to prevent the introduction of legal gambling and casinos.

Success did not crown these efforts, but the Church was perceived as a 'no-sayer', an exponent of bans rather than of positive actions, an institution that was trying to introduce censorship, roll back the tide of history. Opponents of the Church were able to tap into the anti-clericalism lying just below the surface and to depict the Church as the bogey man of Soviet propaganda.

The tilting at windmills took place at a time when Lithuania faced serious dislocations, caused by the switch to the market economy, including a drop in the standard of living, high unemployment, gaping differences in individual wealth and life chances. Social inequality and pauperization were sensitive issues that needed to be addressed, but few politicians had ready answers or sensible advice. The Church could have tried to take a lead in trying to resolve some of these problems by drawing on the traditions of Catholic social thought to influence government policy. But the intellectual fire-power was simply not there. Nonetheless, there were real possibilities, in particular after the 1996 elections. The Conservatives offered the Christian Democrats the ministry of Social Affairs, but the Christian Democrats refused the portfolio, arguing they lacked a person who could take charge of the ministry. Thus, a substantial opportunity to influence policy in an important area was missed.

The prospects of the Church to become a more active player in the transformation process are rather inconsiderable, particularly with the return of the left to political dominance once again. But more important are the internal handicaps that hinder the Church's activity. First, its social capital and sense of community are undeveloped. Second, the Church lacks intellectual vigor; it does not possess a brain trust that it can mobilize in order to make a meaningful contribution to intellectual debates or formulate attractive public policy alternatives. Third, Lithuania is in the throes of a moral crisis, making it less receptive to the message of the Church.

A community of whatever kind cannot function efficiently without fraternity or solidarity. Even among bands of mercenaries there are codes of behavior and norms of bonding. In recent years sociologists, worried by the fraying of community life in conditions of rapid societal and technological change, have rediscovered the concept of social capital. Just as physical and human capital - the tools and technology as well as the training of workers - enhance productivity, so, according to social capital theory, do social networks, the connections and bonds that tie men together.

In his now classic study of regionalism in Italy the Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam came to the conclusion that the most accurate predictor of a region's future course of developments was the nature of its social networks, the amount of social capital it possessed. Northern Italy was characterized by a dense multifaceted network of horizontal ties. Men and women belonged to many different organizations hunting and fishing clubs, football teams, unions, discussion groups. In such organizations they learned to associate as equals with one another, to discuss and resolve issues, assume positions of leadership, and most importantly learned to trust their fellow members, their abilities to get things done and their conscientiousness.

This dense network of social ties created feelings of trust and self-imposed obligations of reciprocity. Social capital is created when individuals respect informal rules and norms that enhance trust-creating cooperation. In a society rich with social capital an individual can trust his fellow workers and associate, undertake actions which require their support and cooperation. People are more willing to extend loans, help in time of trouble, volunteer, give blood, help neighbors in need, pay their fair share of taxes, respect traffic rules (this is rather difficult to believe of Italians from the north as well as the south).

In Southern Italy vertical and hierarchical ties predominate. The most important relationship is that of patron and retaine. A man seeking to get ahead seeks support from powerful superiors and close associates, while remaining indifferent to those outside his family and clan. One is taught to be suspicious of one's neighbours, not to trust them for fear of being taken advantage of.

Social capital, like other forms of capital, grows with use. Successful cooperative efforts increase trust. The greater the number of problems resolved through joint ventures, the greater the growth of social capital which can in turn be used to overcome even greater problems and obstacles. Social capital, if not used, will decline, as social networks weaken and a man is no longer sure whether a neighbour will repay kindness with kindness.

In his work on Italy Putnam expressed the view that the hierarchical structure and other-wordliness of Catholicism limited the amount of social capital that Catholics could generate. In his newest work, published this year, he has disabused himself of this idea. Detailed studies of American society indicate that religions in general, Catholicism included, are one of the major sources of social capital. They serve 'civic live both directly by providing social support to their members and social services to the community, and indirectly by nurturing civic skills, including moral values, encouraging altruism, and fostering civic recruitment among church people.' Membership in religious groups was the factor most closely associated with other forms of civic involvement, including philanthropy and volunteering.

Social capital can be conveniently divided into two types: bonding and bridging. Bonding social capital is inward looking and tends to reinforce more inclusive identities and relatively homogeneous groups, for example, ethnic organizations, or religious study groups. Bonding can also take place on a large scale, such as in the Catholic and Social Democratic subcultures of Imperial Germany that covered the gamut of social life and made both these groups relatively impervious to Nazi propaganda. Bridging social capital is outward directed and seeks to encompass individuals of various backgrounds and social standing in a common endeavor. Groups for the defense of civil rights or the protection of the environment are examples of organizations that nurture bridging capital. Bonding social capital reinforces solidarity among members of a similar group, while bridging networks seek to reach out to a broader community and allow its members to draw on the resources of more distant and passing acquaintances.

The Soviet government destroyed most of Lithuania's social capital by imposing hierarchical ties on society, banning almost all organizations that were not subordinated to the Communist party, and leaving the isolated individual to face the

might of the Soviet state. The Church faced even greater pressure than other organizations. Determined that parishes would not be the centers of community life that they were in pre-war Lithuania, the government succeeded in transforming religious worship into a solitary activity. Even for those who openly declared their faith going to Mass became an activity disassociated from others, because all other church-supported activities were prohibited. The clergy was at the mercy of belligerent local activists, who at times would treat the preparation of children for First Communion as illegitimate religious propaganda and would harass both the priest and the children. By restricting the practice of religion to essentially private acts of worship within the strictly circumscribed boundaries of the churchyard, the regime destroyed most of the social capital of the Catholic community.

The Church has had only limited success in rebuilding its social capital. Parish life, particularly in the larger cities, has not been rejuvenated. Many priests simply do not know how to organize a vigorous parish life and are too burdened with other duties. No less important is the lack of physical facilities, such as parish halls that would normally shelter sodalities, youth and other organizations and could be used for such simple but important functions as coffee after Mass. Too often the only bond among parishioners is a nod of the head after Mass.

Because of the lack of a sense of community the ties that join Catholics are brittle and often uni-directional. They center on the priest rather than on one another, binding the faithful to the parish in a hierarchical rather than a horizontal relationship. When this bond is broken, the individual is more liable to leave the parish if there are no other ties that bind him and supply him with emotional support.

Catholic organizations frequently do not associate with one another much less with those of a different ideological bent. This insularity prevents the development of social capital and of a firmer Catholic identity that would help overcome their to enter self-imposed ghettos.

There are exceptions. Nuns and the Caritas organization have dedicated themselves to the care of the sick and the elderly, thereby generating good will for the church by embodying altruism and good will toward one's neighbour. Socially active priests have played a similar role by deciding not to confine their pastoral mission to the confines of their parish. But such attempts to build bridges to circles outside the Church have not always been favorably received by conservative priests, some of whom publicly criticized the Archbishop of Vilnius Audrys Backis for his personal ties with former Communists.

I place great emphasis on social capital, which in Lithuania is conspicuous by its absence, although it is an essential building block of that third element -the spirit of solidarity and civic virtue - needed to bring the transition process to a successful culmination. The formal structures necessary for democracy and the market economy are now in place, but the development of civil society is progressing slowly. I believe that it was Ralf Dahrendorf who said that democracy can be built in six months, a market economy in six years, but that 60 root. Lithuanian society remains atomized, individuals often distrust and dislike their neighbours. These uncivil relations hamper the functioning of both democracy and the market, and until they are superseded they

will remain a drag on Lithuania's development. And they add to the general discontent and unhappiness with the transition that many feel.

Catholics are still not an exception, but could be if they shook off their siege mentality and acted more often as missionaries eager to spread a message of hope instead of as members of a sect, looking out suspiciously on a world that contains the seeds of contamination.

This development of social capital is the last major undertaking of the transition, and it is one that the Church is, probably better suited to perform than other organizations. The Church has a rich history of social involvement, going out into the world is part of its mission, and it does have more members and branches (parishes) than any other organization. That said the task will not be easy. Because of television, declining size of families and other causes social capital seems to be decreasing in most Western states. But success in this project would be beneficial not only to Lithuanian society, but to the Church itself for this would rejuvenate some of the latent good-will still present in society.

In Lithuanian Church and academia have gone their separate ways. The intellectually confident Church of the late 1930s is nowhere to be seen, The clergy and the lay community are decidedly less well-educated than their precursors 60 years ago. The number of prominent Catholic intellectuals can probably be counted on one's fingers. The student branches of the major Catholic intellectual organization Ateitininkai have only about 200 members in a student population of about 40,000. Their activity is to most a well-kept secret. The newly founded or reestablished Catholic journals, for example, *„Klausa“*, *„Klausa“*, with their steady diet of devotional articles and translations from classical and Western European thinkers are but a pale reflection of the intellectually vigorous Catholic publications of the 1930s. Even more discouraging is the lack of concern that this elicits. The major Catholic journal *Naujasis Zidiny/Aidai* has a circulation well under one thousand, a telling fact which indicates that even the majority of priests do not read it, do not feel that they should read it, and do not feel an obligation to support it. The intellectual vacuum is considered a natural state of affairs rather than an abnormality calling for swift rectification.

The standard narrative of persecution, exclusion, and selfisolation is once again applicable. Disproportionately many Catholic intellectuals fled to the West at the end of World War II, were exiled, or banned from academic employment. When the dissident movement emerged during the 1970s and 1980s and Lithuania produced more samizdat publications per capita than any other Soviet republic, intellectuals were conspicuous only by their absence. They also avoided joining or expressing support for the public organizations that sought to monitor and defend religious, human, and national rights. The equivalent of a Lithuanian *Charta 77* or a *Sakharov* was unimaginable. But the timidity of the intellectuals did not go unnoticed.

The public sphere is now open and Catholics must decide which areas they want to enter. Some timid steps have taken. Almost 300 students and seminarians are studying at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Kaunas. The University of Vilnius has established a Center for Religious Studies (*Religijos studiju ir tyrimu centras*). Jesuit high schools in Vilnius and Kaunas are regarded highly, the Catholic Academy of Sciences has been reestablished.

But these steps have been very tentative. Catholic must be aware of the state of the current debate and be able to address sensibly the issues raised. More importantly, knowledge of, and facility with the language of the ruling fashion are necessary in order to participate in discussions concerning broad moral theories, such as consequentialism or proportionalism, as well as specific moral dilemmas, such as cloning and genetic engineering, doctor-assisted suicide, population control. Gone are the days when Catholic intellectuals, such as Mauriac in pre-war France, addressed issues as Catholics, when there was such a role as that of the Catholic intellectual. But statements by the Church can have resonance in society at large, as shown by the church's acceptance of responsibility for the role of Catholics during the Holocaust.

The consequences of Catholic reluctance to engage with issues of the mind have so far been limited. Intellectual life in general has been in a state of suspension, as institutions of higher education, research institutes and individual intellectuals have been overwhelmed by the need to adjust to the structural changes generated by the transition to capitalism. But this torpor will be not permanent, more vigorous debate will soon break out. Because the Church does not have at its disposal lay intellectuals who could propose novel solutions or formulate a Christian approach to a set of problems. Catholics face the danger of being marginalized further. Standing to the side is not a real alternative, for the Church does make truth claims and must be in a position to at least understand the objections of its opponents.

A final point. Lithuania is in the middle of a moral crisis, generated by three distinct causes. First, Lithuania has not been spared the wave of moral relativism that has done much in the Western world to weaken the conviction that there are right and wrong answers to moral questions, that not every problem can be resolved by the utilitarian calculus, and that the point of departure for judging action is not the question 'what's in it for me?'

Second, the suggestion made by Solzhenitsyn and others that oppression can be the crucible of virtue, while perhaps occasionally true is false on the whole. Coping in the Soviet system encouraged the cultivation of hypocrisy and duplicity. The cynicism at one time expressed rather exclusively toward the authorities has for many also become the norm in private life.

Third, matters have been made worse by the politics and economics of the transition period, in which the corrupt and greedy have flourished unpunished, while selfishness and indifference to the fate of neighbours have been elevated to imperatives of reason. These three factors have also contributed to the demise of social capital and civility.

Many aspects of modern life are bound to shock Lithuanian Catholics, and some of them should be resisted. But tilting at every windmill is not the appropriate response. The Church must choose judiciously the issues it intends to make a matter of public debate, for such choices help determine the new public perception of the Church. There is much truth in Aristotle's assertion that practical wisdom consists in doing what the practically wise man would do. But because of the novelty of the problems there has been less practical wisdom than one may have expected. Too much

attention has been focused on the sins of the flesh, too little on those of the spirit, such as the callousness toward the losers of the transition and tolerance of social injustice. And the tone has at times been too strident. The sternness and uncompromising stance needed to resist the threats and blandishments of a totalitarian regime and to avoid a slide down to the slippery path to compromise are not well suited for generating solutions to the more nuanced economic and social problems of the day. Once again a voice of reason and compassion would find resonance but will it be that of the Church?