Between Democracy and Authoritarianism: Political Catholicism in interwar Lithuania

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Abstract

The Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party was one of most principal examples of political Catholicism in interwar Europe. Together with other confessional parties, which emerged in a significant part of Europe in the 1920's, it constituted a distinct political force, in many ways, hostile to both liberal and fascist sates. The author of this paper analyzes the evolution of political Catholicism in Lithuania by focusing on its stance held towards liberal structures and radical politics throughout the interwar years. In addition, an asymmetrical comparison between analogous Catholic political movements in Europe is made in order illustrate distinct trends of the Lithuanian case.

The paper reveals that rather early radicalization of the Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party, still unusual for the Catholic politics in the mid 1920's, was one of the distinguished features of political Catholicism.

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Introduction

In 2004, two famous scholars published a pioneering book on interwar political Catholicism.[1] This study is one of the very rare cases when the Catholic parties of the interwar period are treated in a systematic pan-European comparative perspective. In addition, the authors included chapters on the confessional political forces of East-Central Europe which were usually omitted in similar attempts to put European political Catholicism in a comparative framework.[2] However, even a quick glance at the map of the interwar Europe illustrates that at least one case study could have been a valuable addition to this brilliant work. Ironically, the case which was not included is one of the most principal examples of successful political Catholicism in Europe during the interwar period. It would be unfair to criticize the authors whose goal was not to provide an over-arching analysis of the Catholic parties, neither to comment on this splendid work. On the contrary, this informative study served me as an inspiration to start the more in-depth analysis of the case which is absent from this profound work.

The Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party (Lietuvių Krikščionių Demokratų Partija, LCDP) was the force which tried to fuse politics and religion in a newly born Lithuanian state. The history of the Party deserves serious attention. In Lithuania, as in many interwar European countries, the political system underwent significant transitions. In 1926, Parliamentary democracy was replaced with an authoritarian right-wing regime which lasted until 1940, when independent Lithuania ceased to exist. The success of the LCDP largely coincided with the period of the democratic parliamentarism when out of the four elections held in the period the

[1] Wolfram Kaiser and Wohnout Helmut eds., *Political Catholicism in Europe 1918 – 45* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).
[2] Tom Buchnanan and Martin Conway eds., *Political Catholicism in Europe 1918 – 1965* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

Party with its heir organizations managed to win all of them, with two being the absolute majority victories. This extraordinary electoral success enabled the LCDP to shape the policy of the country, without further need to form broad coalitions which were so common in the interwar Europe of the 1920s. Although it is a great challenge to measure the influence which one or another political force had within particular national context, the example of the LCDP suggests that hardly any other interwar political party with a confessional identity could match the success shown by the LCDP. However, the Parliamentary elections of 1926, and especially the coup d'état of 1926, which lead to restrictions of the non-governmental parties, forced the LCDP to resign to a minor role during the forthcoming years of an independent Lithuanian state.

The emergence of the Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party does not deviate from the general European context. Almost every country of post World War I period, in which Roman Catholicism was the primary denomination, witnessed the emergence of a political force which drew its inspiration from the Catholic faith. For instance, Partio Popalare Italiano, led by the Sicilian priest Luigo Sturzo, was established in Italy while the Československa Strana Lidova, led by its long - serving chairman Jan Šramek, came into being in a newly formed Czechoslovak state. In addition, parties with the strong traditions of the 19th century social Catholicism like Chritlichsoziale Partei in Austria or Zentrumspartai in Germany repossessed themselves under the changed geopolitical circumstances of interwar Europe.

Moreover, the evolution of the Confessional Parties largely followed the same path. The significant electoral success enjoyed in the early 1920s was followed by the more difficult period, as liberal democracies were challenged by the primarily secular right-wing dictatorships. As most of Europe opted for the rightist solution, Catholic parties, to a large extent, forming a distant political force and in many countries and being at the core of liberal

system, found themselves in a crucial position. Their stance towards right-wing nationalism and loyalty to a liberal state was an important factor to the fate of democracies in many countries. In the same way, in Lithuania LCDP found itself in the forefront as the state plunged into authoritarianism. In a broader sense, the confrontation with the 'newly emerged' extremes from political right was the inevitable feature of the interwar Political Catholicism.

This paper will focus on the interaction of the Catholic - oriented parties with right-wing nationalism and their stance towards liberal state in Lithuania and 'Catholic' Europe. The comparison between two time spans will be done. In the first part of this paper, I will analyze general trends of the evolution of the Catholic parties. Herein, the central focus of my research will be on the stance Catholic parties held towards right-wing nationalism and liberal state in the 1920's and 1930's. In addition, the factors which led to the rightist reorientation of the confessional parties from the 1930's will be discussed.

The second part of this paper will deal with the case study of the Lithuanian political Catholic camp represented by the Christian Democratic Party and its heir organizations. In the same way, its stance towards liberal state and right-wing nationalism throughout 1920's and 1930's will be analyzed. By making asymmetrical comparison between the Lithuanian Catholic political camp and general European context of political Catholicism, I will seek to illustrate distinct trends of the Lithuanian case, positioning it in a broader framework of European Political Catholicism. I will argue that rather early radicalization of the Lithuanian Catholic bloc, still unusual for the Catholic politics in the mid 1920's, was one of the distinguished features of the Lithuanian case.

This paper narrows itself roughly to a party-level analysis,[3] nevertheless, occasionally, I will exceed these boundaries by discussing such developments as emergence of the Catholic youth organizations in the 1930s. Although the members of these organizations rarely officially belonged to political parties (usually they were tossing between belonging to Catholic action and membership in parties) they were closely tied to the Catholic political blocs. In addition, this study concentrates only on European countries[4] where Catholicism was the primary denomination. However, Germany is included due to its significant number of the Catholic minority which constituted one third of the population, and due to historical influence the Centre Party had on Catholic politics.[5] The research begins with addressing broader problems one might encounter studying political Catholicism. Herein, I will discuss the definition of political Catholicism employed in this paper, the most frequent interpretative strategy of the phenomenon: political Catholicism as Christian Democracy; in the same way, the difficulties in establishing a relative comparison between the Catholic parties will be analyzed.

[3] In this paper, I avoid broad intellectual debates on the connection between religion and politics. In the same way, I use the terms Catholic party, confessional party, party of Catholic inspiration, Catholic-oriented party etc. in a simplified form. Most of these parties were reluctant to stress their confessional character.
[4] Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Belgium, Ireland, Spain, Portugal, France, Austria, Italy.
[5] See: Frank J. Coppa, *The Modern Papacy since 1789* (London and New York: Longman, 1998) p. 130.

1. Political Catholicism as Phenomenon

The term Political Catholicism, loosely used in the introduction, demands some working definition which will be employed in this paper. However, one might find an attempt to define this complex and ambiguous phenomenon as irrelevant. Rather wide range of diverse political and social organizations, movements and individuals claimed to have Catholic inspiration for their action and may be attached to the phenomenon of political Catholicism to place it into a single satisfactory definition. Nevertheless, without making any far - reaching pretensions of contribution to the theoretical studies on the subject, it is crucial to find the most appropriate usage of the term.

As one scholar on the phenomenon suggests, in the broadest sense "the term 'Political Catholicism' gives a name to that activities of the Roman Catholic Church which overstep its religious mission and lead to strengthening Church's positions in the political, social and cultural society."[6] In this vein, "the noun 'Catholicism <…> means a religious and philosophical trend <…> whereas the adjective 'political' emphasizes the Church endeavours to pervade public life and to meddle in its affairs.[7] Alternative definitive account was provided by Martin Conway, one of the leading scholars of political Catholicism. In one of his essays on Catholic politics, the author claims that political Catholicism can be understood as 'political movements <…> which claimed a significant, though not necessarily exclusively, Catholic inspiration for their actions.[8] In a broadest sense, according to Conway, the term may encompass political parties, intellectuals as well as wide range of socio-economic organizations

[6] Miloš Trapl, *Political Catholicism and The Czechoslovak People's Party in Czechoslovakia* (New York: Social Science Monographs, 1995) p. 8.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Martin Conway "Introduction" in *Political Catholicism in Europe 1918 – 1965*, p. 2.

and others.[9] In other words, political Catholicism is too broad phenomenon to limit it only to a party-level analysis.

Nevertheless, it is arguable that "Catholic-oriented parties are one of the most important elements of political Catholicism" because, as Miloš Trapl suggests, "their apparat (machinery) controls many other interests groups, societies and clubs tightly or loosely associated."[10] Thus, in order not to create the ambiguity by flooding the text with explanatory notes (taking into account the complexity of the phenomenon) in the scope of this paper, the term political Catholicism will be understood in its narrowest form and will be referred to only on a basis of party politics.

The variety of interpretative traditions of Catholic political movements is another problem which makes the interwar political Catholicism a complicated subject to study. One can easily come across the attempts to label this phenomenon as Catholic nationalism, clericalism, Catholic conservatism, ultramontane Catholicism, Clerical-fascism' (predominantly used by the Marxist school), with Christian democracy being the most common label of the phenomenon.

1.1. Political Catholicism as Christian Democracy

One of the most frequently used approaches to the interwar Political Catholicism is to attach it to the phenomenon of 'Christian Democracy.' As Martin Conway argues, the followers of this theory see the "distinct Christian Democratic tradition which first emerged in the 19th century and gradually grew in strength until it emerged as a dominant force in the democratic Catholic politics of much of Western Europe after Second World War."[11] One of the pioneering

[9] Ibid.
[10] Miloš Trapl *Political Catholicism*... p. 8.
[11] Martin Conway, "Introduction…" p. 10.

works in this field belongs to M. P. Fogarty[12] who followed this interpretative theory. The fact that this approach to the phenomenon is legitimate is also argued by some political scientists who tend, albeit with some reservations, to attach political Catholicism to Christian Democracy and to stress predominantly democratic character of the phenomenon.[13]

It is probably true that at least some individuals, Luigo Sturzo for instance, or even some 'progressive' groups of the interwar Catholic parties shared roughly the same ideals as the post war modern Christian Democracy. Nevertheless, bridging of the linear continuity between pre and post war traditions could be possible only with certain elements of the interwar Political Catholicism. To a much larger extent, (as it will be shown in the first part of this paper) Catholic parties of the interwar period shared only few similarities to those which emerged after 1945. In other words, during the interwar period, they were, to a large extent, hostile to the liberal democratic structures. The inability to strike an agreement on the usage of the term 'Christian Democrat,' even among 'moderate' Catholic politicians in SIPDIC[14] meetings, may also indicate that 'Christian democratic' stream was not dominant within Catholic politics throughout the interwar years.

The recent studies also stressed the anti-democratic character of the phenomenon. For instance, Martin Conway, in his study on Catholic politics, argues that the term 'Christian Democratic,' historically adopted by some Catholic-oriented parties (Lithuanian including) in their official party name, in most of the cases, tended only to "demonstrate the popular orientation" rather than to "signify identification with the principles of a democratic political

[12] Martin P. Forgaty, *Christian Democracy in Western Europe 1820 – 1953* (London: Routledge, 1957).
[13] David Hanley, "Introduction: Christian Democracy as a Political Phenomenon" in *Christian Democracy in Europe. A Comparative Perspective*. David Hanley ed. (London and New York: Pinter Publishers, 1994) pp. 3-4.
[14] International Secretariat of Democratic Parties of Christian Inspiration.

system."[15] In many cases, it was derived from encyclical *Graves de communi* 1901 which did not favour any type of government.[16] Thus, not to neglect the Christian Democratic currents within interwar political Catholicism, it has to be addressed in its own terms and can be best understood through developments of the 19th century.

1.2. Modernity and Rerum Novarum

It was the accommodation with the modernity which presented great challenge for the established structures of Catholicism in the second half of the 19th century. Urbanization and the birth of militant socialism, as well as liberal anti-clerical attacks on the Church, encouraged Catholic intellectuals and the Papacy to adapt to the changed circumstances. It is widely accepted that Pope Leo XIII, with his famous encyclical *Rerum Novarum* in 1891, after numerous previous attempts by the Papacy to condemn 'the modern world,' encouraged Catholics, finally, to come to better terms with modernity. Although Leo XII still renounced 'the manifold diseases of the 19th century' as anti-Christian political doctrines, he already acknowledged the social problems of the 19th century and offered "a Christian solution to the social dilemma"[17] which provided the alternative for both liberalism and socialism.

In many ways, it was Leo's XIII encyclical which produced "an intellectual platform that valorised serious Catholic movements across Europe over the next century," which, together with earlier Catholic foundations such as Zentrumspartai of Germany or Catholic of Belgium, became a significant force in the 19th century politics.[18] To a large extent, these movements were still nostalgic for the pre-modern world and defended traditional Catholic

[15] Martin Conway, *Catholic Politics in Europe 1918-1945* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) p. 24.
[16] Frank J. Coppa, *The Modern…* p. 132.
[17] Frank J. Coppa, *The Modern…* p. 131.
[18] John W. Boyer, "Catholics, Christians and the Challenges of Democracy: The Heritage of the Nineteenth Century" in *Political Catholicism in Europe 1918 – 45*, p. 25.

values; however, at the same time, they accepted the rules of modern political system and became adjusted to a new type of politics. As Boyer suggests, political Catholicism in the 19th century represented "a third variant of modernity."[19] This modernity, according to the scholar, "coupled mass party mobilization with the institutions of the liberal *Rechtsstaat* (constitutional state), and accorded to that state powerful interventionist responsibilities in maintaining and enforcing preconceived ethno-historian responsibilities."[20]

Prior to World War I, political or social Catholicism, as it was usually called in the 19th century, was already a broad phenomenon in Europe. Almost every 'Catholic' (not necessarily) country in Central and Western Europe (the Iberian Peninsula could be seen as an exception) possessed political force of Catholic inspiration. At the same time, in most of Europe, on the eve of a military conflict, Catholic - oriented parties were already adjusted to "various liberal and liberal-authoritarian constitutional regimes,"[21] and became the integral part of existent political system. Not all of them, however, necessarily identified with "structures of liberal parliamentarism" – the system which became dominant in a significant part of Europe prior to 1918.[22] In some countries (especially the Catholic Party in Belgium), Catholic-oriented parties were strong proponents of parliamentary politics; however, in other places such as France (French Catholics, led by the Albert De Mun, never managed to come to terms with the Third Republic) Catholic politics still shared the hostility to the existing regimes.[23]

Those were predominantly different traditions and historical role of the Catholic faith in these countries that added distinct trends to their Catholic-oriented parties. By the end of the 19th century, political Catholicism was both local and universal. Much the same can be said

[19] John W. Boyer, "Catholics…" p. 34.
[20] Ibid.
[21] John W. Boyer, "Catholics…" p. 35.
[22] Martin Conway, *Catholic Politics*... p. 27.
[23] Ibid.

about the interwar period. Moreover, the emergence of new nation states after World War I resulted in new expansion of Catholic political movements which emerged in extremely different national environments. The following sub-chapter will analyze the factors which unite and divide political Catholicism of the interwar period.

1.3. Diversity and Unity of Political Catholicism

As Martin Conway concluded in one of his essays, Catholicism was one of the more surprising beneficiaries of the First World War.[24] As it has been mentioned in the introduction, Catholic - oriented parties emerged in almost every country of 'Catholic' Europe, however, they came into being in a completely different national environments. Catholicism in Ireland, for instance, differed from Catholicism in Hungary where it was associated with the Hapsburg rule in the latter and became the symbol of the resistance to the English domination in the former. Similar statement could be made about inherited tradition of the Catholic faith in Poland, where throughout the 19th century Roman Catholic clergy blocked almost all assimilatory attempts of the Russian Orthodox bureaucracy. In some cases, even on the state level, Catholicism played a dividing role. Slovak national building project, for instance, throughout the interwar years, could be hardly imagined without clergy's attacks on 'protestant' or 'atheist' Prague. On the other hand, in Czech lands, the role of the Catholic faith in the society was undermined by the cult of Jan Hus and Masaryk's secular state vision. Therefore, autonomist Slovak People's Party and pro-centralist Czechoslovak Peoples' party had difficulty with striking the cooperation.

Moreover, the starting positions of the Catholic political movements differed. For instance, in countries such as Austria and Germany, strong Catholic parties already emerged in

[24] Martin Conway, *Catholic Politics…* p. 31.

the 19th century, whereas in others, such as Italy, it was only the post-World War I phenomenon. Above all, what is most important, the differences in practice of religion, class stratification, even in mentalities and temperaments of the interwar societies are the factors which make it difficult to tear Catholic-oriented parties off from their national environments.

However, sharp differences do not conceal the common trends which were shared by political Catholicism. First of all, despite various national peculiarities, all Catholic political parties saw the defence of the Church interests, in all spheres of life—from resisting to civil marriage to teaching of religion in schools, as the priority for their agendas. Moreover, probably even more importantly, Catholic parties were significantly dependant on the papal involvement in politics. Starting from the 19th century and throughout the interwar period, a number of determined Popes tried to steer Catholic politics in their own way. By numerous encyclical guidance which extended beyond "questions of faith and morality," they wanted to establish themselves as ultimate leaders of international Catholic community, and Catholic – oriented parties had to accommodate themselves against ever fluctuating Vatican's policy.[25] For instance, it was predominantly Pope Benedict XV who "permitted (if not encouraged)" the formation of Catholic Partito Popolare, unlike his precursor Pius X who had proposed Italian Catholics to be involved in national politics.[26]

Finally, as recent studies have stressed, interwar political Catholicism, unlike social Catholicism of the 19th century, "proposed programmes and policies that were relevant to the needs of the society as a whole."[27] In many ways, political Catholicism marched to the turbulent

[25] Martin Conway, "The Christian Churches and Politics in Europe 1914-1939" in *The Cambridge History Of Christianity.* Hugh McLeod ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): p. 165-166.
[26] J. Coppa, *The Modern*… p. 167.
[27] Martin Conway, "Catholic Politics or Christian Democracy? The Evolution of Inter-war Political Catholicism" in *Political Catholicism in Europe 1918 – 45*, p. 236.

years of 1920's and 1930's "with a new tone of confidence" and, in contrast to Catholic social movements of the 19th century, which were still predominantly defensive in their character, were concerned more with advancement of its political, social and economic ideas.[28] Above all, Catholic-oriented parties during the interwar period truly established themselves as one of the key players in modern European politics.[29]

1.4. Literature Review

Nevertheless, however, the attempts to put interwar political Catholicism in a comparative perspective have been limited. Despite numerous publications on Catholic parties within national historiographies, it was only the middle 1990's when political Catholicism of the interwar Europe was started to be treated in a European – wide framework. The pioneering study in this field belongs to the already mentioned work edited by Tom Buchanan and Martin Conway.[30] This work included case studies on all major Catholic political movements of Western Europe. More importantly, the joint project of scholars criticized the tradition of the 'Christian democratic' interpretation of the phenomenon and was the first to stress the distinguished character of interwar political Catholicism. It was the platform on which the next attempt to represent an over-embracing picture of Catholic political movements was build. The studyedited by Wolfram Kaiser and Helmut Wohnout[31] applied the similar comparative approach as the work mentioned above, however, with the inclusion of the case studies of the states of East Central Europe (Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia) the geographical scope of political Catholicism was broaden. Moreover, the profound analysis on common trends of Catholic parties in summarizing chapters makes this study the most in-depth comparative work

[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Tom Buchnanan and Martin Conway eds., *Political Catholicism in Europe 1918 – 1965.*
[31] Wolfram Kaiser and Helmut Wohnout eds., *Political Catholicism in Europe 1918 – 45*.

on political Catholicism written so far. However, it was Martin Conway, probably the most productive scholar in the field, who in his monograph[32] established comparison of Catholic political movements between different chronological periods. The author showed the transition of Catholic politics from the pre-World War 1 social Catholicism to the interwar political Catholicism and its evolution throughout the interwar years. These three[33] studies are the major cases when Catholic political parties of the interwar period have been treated in a systematic pan - European perspective. In addition, all of them paid a significant attention to the stance of Catholic parties held towards liberal state and right-wing nationalism which are the central focus of this research.

However, certain aspects of the interwar political Catholicism such as the Papal impact on Catholic political movements or their emergence and evolution throughout late 19th and early 20th centuries have been profoundly researched.[34] However, the historiography on political Catholicism is predominantly focused on Western Europe; East Central European cases have been to a large extent under researched. In the same way, the Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party has yet to be put in a broader perspective.

On the other hand, the literature on the party's history is rich. Being one of the major players in Lithuania's interwar politics its history already deserved attention from the contemporary scholars.[35] Subsequently, the attempts to analyze LCDP in the period of the 1940-1990 can be divided into two distinct groups; however, none of them contributed with a

[32] Martin Conway, *Catholic Politics in Europe 1918-1945*.
[33] See also: Martin Conway, "The Christian Churches and Politics in Europe 1914-1939" p. 178.
[34] See: S. N. Kalyvas, *The Rise Of Christian Democracy in Europe* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996); John F. Pollard, *The Vatican and Italian Fascism 1929 – 1932* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Frank J. Coppa, *The Modern Papacy since 1789* (London and New York: Longman, 1998).
[35] Mykolas Rėmeris, *Lietuvos konstitucinės teisės paskaitos* (The Lectures of the Lithuanian Constitutional Law) (Vilnius: Mintis, 1995).

profound study. To the first group may be attached the works written by émigré scholars and former members of the Christian Democratic Party.[36] Although the study by A.J. Kasulaitis is the largest monograph on political Catholicism of Lithuania, however, uncritical interpretation of facts, such as the role of the Party in 1926 coup d'état, as well as something that might be described as outdated views and strongly felt nostalgia to the first Lithuanian republic, resulting in a huge doze of biases, may suggest to treat this work with a certain doze of precaution.

The works written by soviet historians forms the second group of the historiography on LCDP.[37] However, orthodox Marxist interpretation of history, despite profound factual analysis, is the main obstacle to view these studies as relevant sources.

It was only the years after the fall of communism when certain aspects of LCDP history were started to be analyzed critically. The years after 1990's witnessed the great expansion of various publications on party politics in Lithuania which directly and indirectly dealt with LCDP. Due to limitations of this paper, the thorough analysis of literatures is not possible. However, the most important for this research are the following: the origins of the political Catholicism in Lithuania and the emergence of the party in 1917 - 1920 have been analyzed by D. Bučelis, and T. Balkelis respectively[38]. In addition, the trends of radicalization of the younger generation of Catholic politicians have discussed by and T. Tamošiūnas and A. Svarauskas.[39] The latter author also published an important essay on the internal conflict in the

[36] See: Algirdas J. Kasulaitis, *Lithuanian Christian Democracy* (Chicago: Leo XII Fond, 1976); Mykolas Krupavičius, *Atsiminimai* (Memoirs) (Chicago: Lietuviškos knygos klubas, 1972).
[37] J. Aničas, et al. *Klerikalizmas ir katalikų bažnyčia Lietuvoje* (Clericalism and Catholic Church in Lithuania) (Vilnius, Mintis, 1978).
[38] See: Darius Bučelis "Lietuvių Krikščionių Demokratijos partijos sukūrimas ir jos raida 1917 – 1920 m." (The Emergence of the Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party and its Genesis 1917 – 1920) in *Lietuvos Katalikų Mokslo Akademijos Metraštis VIII.* Liudas Jovaiša ed. (Vinius: Aidai, 1996) 512 – 571; Tomas Balkelis, *The Making of Modern Lithuania* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2009).
[39] Artūras Svarauskas and Tamošiūnas Mindaugas, "Lietuvos politinių partijų jaunosios kartos radikalėjimas XX a. 4 – ame dešimtmetyje" (The Trends of Radicalism in the Younger

Catholic bloc of the late 1920's.[40] Nevertheless, the second part of this paper is compelled to really heavily on the primary sources (Catholic press, archival material). LCDP stance towards liberal state and right-wing nationalism throughout 1920's and 1930's received little attention.

Generation of Lithuania's Political Parties, the first half of the 20th century) in *History. A Collection of Lithuanian Universities' Research Papers*, (68/2007): pp. 43 – 57.

[40] Artūras Svarauskas "Lietuvos Darbo Federacijos nesutarimai su katalikų politine srove po 1926 m. perversmo" (The Conflict between the Lithuanian Labor Federation and the Catholic Stream after the Coup of 1926) in *Lietuvos Katalikų Mokslo Akademijos Metraštis XXXI.* Liudas Jovaiša ed., (Vinius: Aidai, 2009), 48 – 76.

2. Catholic Parties in Europe 1918 – 1939: through the lens of democracy and authoritarianism

'God is a fascist!'[41]
(I. P. Prudendi 20 July 1937)

The founders of Christian Democracy were not democrats.[42]

(Joseph Hours)

When in 1933 Hitler was striving for additional votes to enable the law which would let the dictatorial plenary to go through, the Zentrumspartai found itself in a key position, as its votes were vital for a two-third majority needed for passing it.[43] Under enormously strong psychological and political pressure, members of the Center Party concealed to the Nazis and voted for the legal empowerment of Hitler's regime. It was a capital punishment for the party; few months later it ceased to exist. In the same year, in neighbouring Czechoslovakia the long - serving leader of the Czechoslovak People's Party (ČŠL), J. Šramek, reflecting on anti-democratic tendencies within its own party warned of the possible dangers of radical Catholic politics: 'If we allow terror against Czech social democrats, it would strike us as well. We saw what happened to Zentrum Party in Bavaria.'[44] It seems the party listened to its leader; for the

[41] Quotation is taken from: Matthew Feldman and Marius Turda, " 'Clerical Fascism' in interwar Europe: an Introduction" in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 8 N.2(June 2007): p. 208.
[42] Quotation is taken from: Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe,* p. 257.
[43] Karl-Egon Lönne, "Germany" in *Political Catholicism in Europe 1918 – 1965,* pp. 170-171.
[44] Miloš Trapl, *Political Catholicism,* p. 87.

forthcoming years of the republic, the ČŠL remained one of the core members of Czechoslovakia's democratic camp.

However, ČŠL was one of the very rare cases when the Catholic-oriented party remained loyal to democratic structures in the 1930's, a decade of continuous radicalization of European politics. The Center Party example is more typical of that time. Already in 1928, with the election of Prelate Kaas as the party's chairman and former coalitions with the German National People's Party in 1925 and 1927, the master copy for Catholic parties shifted the party to the political right.[45] Definitely it would never go as far as becoming fellow traveller to Hitler. Rather the opposite was true. In many ways, it opposed the National Socialism. Nevertheless, the rightist reorientation of the Center Party from the late 1920's was vivid and its firm loyalty to the Weimar's republic was already before the crucial events of the 1933 in question. It is still highly debatable whether the Catholic party could have really restricted the Nazi machine by voting against Hitler's proposal, as retrospective judgments are all controversial; however, the historian who evaluates the Center Party's stance on the Weimar's downfall in the following lines probably does not distort the historical facts heavily: 'It [Center Party G.V.] added fuel to the fire at the time of the crisis in its compliance with the demands of the proposed authoritarian solutions'[46]

The Center party's position during the Weimar crisis, to a large extent, might serve as an archetypical example of the Catholic-inspired party's stance towards right-wing nationalism. As different kinds of authoritarian and totalitarian extremes from both political left and right were crushing interwar Europe, Catholic - oriented parties found themselves in an ambivalent situation. On the one hand, these parties, in most of the cases, upheld a rather cautious attitude

[45] Karl-Egon Lönne, "Germany" in *Political Catholicism in Europe 1918 – 1965,* pp. 162-163.
[46] Jürgen Elvert, "A Microcosm of Society or the Key to a Majority in the Reichstag? The Center Party in Germany" in *Political Catholicism in Europe 1918 – 1945*, p. 58.

towards radical or, moreover, racial nationalism advocated by the right-wing movements; only limited numbers within the Catholic ranks, openly saluted ultra radical chauvinism. On the other hand, the perceived danger of possible leftist turmoil caused by far the greater concern for them and as the rightist, even secular elements rarely threatened the Church's position; the Catholic loyalties certainly lay with the right. Thus, when the democratic structures were challenged by the nationalists, the answer from the Catholic parties was usually coy at best. That Catholic politics were tempted to merge with nationalist is even more seen in the countries which failed to produce mass confessional parties. Spanish Catholics in great numbers pledged their support for both the dictators, Primo de Rivera and Franco, political Catholicism in Portugal flourished under Salazar's regime whereas politically engaged Catholics in Hungary became part of 'Christian Nationalism' system and collaborated closely with the protestant Horthy.

The anti - democratic nature of Catholic political movements was also encouraged by the Papacy. In 1922 Achille Ratti (Pius XI) was elected as a new Pope. 'A bibliophile suspicious of party politics,'[47] Pius XI saw stable authoritarian regime as the most efficient mean in upholding Catholic interests. In his point of view, a liberal state was also unstable and vulnerable to communist overthrow; thus, by pledging support for 'strong government,' Vatican hoped to prevent any kind of anti-clerical turmoil. Therefore, from the very beginning, regimes which managed to guarantee Catholic interests intact as in Hungary and Portugal were welcomed by the Holy See.[48] In contrast, parliamentary democracies, even though controlled by strong Catholic parties like Austria, where the Christian Social Party dominated domestic

[47] Frank J. Coppa, *The Modern*… p. 171.
[48] For friendly Hungary – Vatican relations see: Frank J. Coppa, *The Modern*… 172; For friendly Portugal – Vatican see: Martin Conway, "Introduction…" p. 14.

politics, were seen with distrust.[49] Instead of a political party, the Vatican treated Catholic action as an organization which had to unite all active proponents of Catholicism. This policy was a huge blow to both Catholic parties and to democratic systems of which (at least in the early 1920's) they were a supporting part; contributing to the authoritarian leaning, the course of Catholic politics continued to evolve throughout the interwar years.

With the fascist experiment starting in Italy, the People's Party (PPI) was the first to witness the results of the changed Vatican attitude. It was predominantly the Papacy's support to Mussolini, as a guarantee for 'political stability, social peace and protection from communism,'[50] rather than to moderate Luigo Sturzo, a perceived obstacle for the Pope's domination among Italian Catholics, which buried the PPI and, by the same token, the chances for the liberal state's survival. However, notwithstanding being a victim of the Pope's 'betrayal,' the accusation remains that PPI, as it was the case with Center party in Germany, did not take the firmer stance on the basic values of the republic. The party was presented twice with an opportunity of taking on the leading positions in the government; however, both chances of becoming the core of the Italian democratic front were renounced.[51] It happened in February and July 1922 when the King asked Felippo Meda, 'veteran Catholic politician and the leader of the parliamentary caucus of the PPI,' to take on prime minister's position; the party refused and, by this act, plunged the country into further chaos.[52] Ironically, when after the fascist 'March to Rome' Mussolini was called to form his new government, the PPI's leadership gave the green light to some of its members to participate in it 'in a personal

[49] Frank J. Coppa, *The Modern*… p. 172.
[50] John F. Pollard, *The Vatican and Italian Fascism 1929 – 1932* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) p. 29.
[51] See: John F. Pollard, "Italy" in *Political Catholicism in Europe 1918 – 1965.* Tom Buchanan and Martin Conway eds. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) p. 81
[52] Ibid.

capacity.'[53] The unwillingness to take the responsibly into its own hands and half–hearted endeavours in opposing fascism made PPI pay a high price. In the following year, on the eve of the crucial debates on the Acerbo Law under increasing pressure from Mussolini and the Vatican, Luigi Sturzo, firmly anti-fascist leader of PPI, was forced to resign.[54] With his withdrawal, the chances for PPI's and, at the same time, the opportunity for democracy's survival became minimal.[55] The party vanished from Italian political life at the end of 1926, with the fate of the liberal state being already decided earlier.

However, the early dispersal of the PPI and the ambivalence of some of its components to liberal structures should not overshadow the predominantly democratic line which was taken by the Catholic political parties in the 1920's. The New liberal environment which emerged after World War I was, to a large extent, beneficial for them and at least in the early years of the interwar Europe, while the Catholic-oriented parties enjoyed a significant success[56] in the elections, their loyalties to parliamentary democracies were sound. Together with socialist and liberal camps, they became key components of the European politics and presented themselves, first and foremost, as democratic alternatives to socialism and liberalism. Thus, the 1920's were marked by the Catholic attempts to build up alliances with these moderate left - centre forces. In the countries where strong nationalist movements did not arise, Catholic-oriented parties remained a sustaining part of the democratic system, and although the temptation to ally with anti-democratic right, after increasing Catholic – socialist antagonism was rising throughout the

[53] Tiziana di Maio, "Between the Crisis of the Liberal State, Fascism and a Democratic Perspective: The Popular Party in Italy" in *Political Catholicism in Europe 1918 – 1945*, p. 143.
[54] See: John F. Pollard. *The Vatican…* p. 29.
[55] Ibid.
[56] PPI received 20 percent of the vote in the first democratic elections; the Catholic success was the same or even greater in countries such as Germany, Austria and Belgium where strong parties have also emerged.

1920's, they kept on supporting the liberal structures till the 1930's. The Centre Party was at the core of almost each Weimar coalition; similar statement could be made about the Catholic Party in Belgium or the Christian Social Party in Austria.

Nevertheless, the increasingly radical tendencies of European politics, which were gathering pace in Europe in 1930's, inevitably affected Catholic politics too. Although the radicalization of Catholic political parties was a gradual process which was happening throughout the 1920's, the pan – European factors such as economic depression or the emergence of the new radical right movements resulted in a significantly more militant Catholic stance, namely, from the 1930's. This new anti-democratic rhetoric was, first and foremost, echoed in the younger generation of Catholic students and intellectual circles, such as Emmanuel Mounier and his *Espirit* journal. They proposed to 'reject conventional political divisions and spoke of Catholicism' as of a "third way" 'between fascism and liberalism.'[57] Instead of short-lived coalition governments, the youngsters advocated the new social and political structure in which under Catholic spiritual values the order would be restored.[58] In the same way, 'corporatist institutions, bringing together the representatives of workers and employers had 'to replace the class conflict of capitalism' and 'restore a lost unity to modern society'[59]. Similar ideas of Christian corporatism and of the 'third way' were also expressed in the famous encyclical Quadragesimo Anno (1931). Thus, in the 1930's, many Catholic parties (and other Catholic movements) deserted their alliances with social-liberal forces and looked for the political alliances on the right of the political spectrum. As one historian reflected on Catholic politics of 1930's: "the centre of gravity of political Catholicism had empathically moved to the right and hostility to the pluralist principles of democratic politics, support for the

[57] Matin Conway, *Catholic Politics…*, p. 53.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Martin Conway "The Christian Churches and Politics in Europe 1914 – 1939" p. 168.

replacement of directly elected parliaments by a structure of socio-economic corporations and a strong anti-communism were all prominent features of the rhetoric and policies of Catholic movements during the 1930's.[60]

The Christian Social Party (CSP) in Austria might serve as the prime example of the changed Catholic agenda of the 1930's. The party, typically for a Catholic one, was never too enthusiastic about the republic.[61] Nevertheless, constantly providing Chancellors for it, CSP remained one of the core members of the parliamentary system. However, at the turn of the decade, the radical tendencies within the Christian Socialists intensified. Already back in the second part of the 1920's, the party began to 'to set "true democracy" against "dictatorship of the proletariat."[62] The party has further drifted right, as its leader Ignaz Seipel started increasingly rely on the paramilitary Heimwehr (Home Guard) movement as the anti-socialist ally, although some groups within the party still remained pro-democratic.[63] As was in the case with other Catholic parties, the CSP was tossing between liberal and authoritarian discourses. In 1930, the party was even on the verge of a split as the party sections (Lower Austrian farmers led by Joseph Reither and Christian Workers' Movement) 'considered leaving the parliamentary group of the Christian Socialists in protest against the pro-Heimwehr policies.'[64] In these circumstances, CSP marched into the elections of 1930 which weakened its positions. Nevertheless, CSP managed to form a government with the Christian Socialist Engelbert Dollfuss becoming the Chancellor. However, due to increasing confrontation with Austrian Social democrats and the governmental crisis of 1933, Dollfuss, with the support of some CSP

[60] Matin Conway, *Catholic Politics*… p. 52.
[61] Helmut Wohnout "Middle-class Governmental Party and Secular Arm of the Catholic Church" in *Political Catholicism in Europe 1918 – 1945,* p. 178.
[62] Helmut Wohnout "Middle-class…" p. 181.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Helmut Wohnout "Middle-class…" p. 183.

party circles, ended the parliamentary democracy in Austria. Next year CSP dissolved itself. However, the majority of CSP Catholics joined the official "Fatherland's Front."[65]

About the same time, rather similar anti-democratic tendencies in the polarized Catholic Party (CP) of Belgium occurred as well. Save for the Social Democrats, the strongest party in parliament, as early as during 1920's, were absorbing some radical currents, as some inner groups of the CP (first of all, Fédération des Cercles) drew an inspiration from Charles Maurras writings.[66] These groups steadily grew in strength and, by the 'early 1930s, the pressure of events both within and outside Belgium caused some of these radicals to seek political expression for their ideal of a more militant Catholicism' which did not go along with the Catholic Party's moderate line.[67] It was a member of a younger Catholic generation, L. Dergelle, whose attempts to change the Catholic Party's course was the most militant. After failure to organize a 'spiritual renewal' or, in other words, to radicalize the party from the inside, Dergelle with his supporters, split from the CP and founded new Christus Rex (Christ the King) movement which, with its militant anti-democratic rhetoric, for the short period, received a significant support.[68] Already the first meeting of the Rexists was held in 'Italian fascist style' and the members drawn into the movement aimed at, as their leader described, the 'purification' of Catholic politics.[69] However, the movement failed to capitalize on his early

[65] Robert Pyrah, "Enacting Encyclicals? Cultural Politics and 'Clerical Fascism' in Austria" in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 8 N.2(June 2007): p. 372.
[66] For Action Française's and Mussolini's impact on Belgium Catholic camp see: Bruno de Wever "Catholicism and Fascism in Belgium" in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 8 N.2(June 2007): pp. 343-352; see also: Martin Conway "Belgium" in *Political Catholicism in Europe 1918 – 1965,* p. 200.
[67] Martin Conway "Belgium," p. 201.
[68] In the parliamentary elections of 1936 Rexist got around 11% of the vote and won 21 seats in the parliament (Bruno de Wever "Catholicism…p.345)
[69] Emmanuel Gerrard, "Religion, Class and Language: The Catholic Party in Belgium" in *Political Catholicism in Europe 1918 – 1945*, p. 106.

success; Belgium remained a democracy and the Catholic party, in 1936, reorganized itself into the Belgian Catholic Front, alienated from L. Dregelle's radicalism.[70]

However, the radicalization of Catholic politics in the 1930's was not universal. For example, The Popular Democratic Party (PDP) in France, despite its minor role in domestic politics, could serve as an instance of a moderate putative 'Christian Democratic' Catholic party.[71] 'Centrist' in its political orientation, combining elements of moderate social and liberal Catholicism, PDP never showed any real signs of the rightist temptation.[72] Much the same, especially from the mid 1930's, after J. Štasek's radical wing was defeated and the party finally split from its heir – the autonomist Slovak People's Party, might be said about the Czechoslovak People's Party. However, they were just exceptions from the general anti-democratic climate in which Catholic parties plunged in the 1930's.

At this moment, few general observations are to be made. By the early 1920's, almost every European country where Catholicism was prime denomination possessed a political force which drew the inspiration from the Catholic faith. In many of them they held significant

[70] Emmanuel Gerrard, "Religion, Class…" p. 109-112.
[71] Jean-Claude Delbreil, "Christian Democracy and Centrism: The Popular Democratic Party in France" in *Political Catholicism in Europe 1918 – 1945*, pp. 116-135.
[72] Ibid.

positions. Two most striking exceptions are Poland[73] and Ireland,[74] where strong Catholic parties did not emerge. Besides the geographical divisions, political Catholicism was also divided in their social composition. Being able to accumulate as diverse components of priests, intellectuals, workers, businessmen and farmers (etc.), these parties, unlike social Catholicism of the 19th century which was predominantly oriented towards nascent proletariat, appealed to a very broad electorate.[75] It was both their strength and weakness. It helped them to gain support of various social groups; however, the tensions between clergymen and laymen were the usual cause of cleavage within the Catholic parties and often led to their dissolutions.

The amorphous nature of the Catholic parties may be even better depicted in their ideological divisions. For instance, within Italian PPI alone, there were at least four distinct

[73] Although Chrzecijansko-Narodowe Stronictwo Pracy (Ch-NSP) was formed in 1922, it played minor role in domestic politics. (From June 1925, the Party is known in shorter form as the Chrzescijanska Demokracija, or Christian Democracy, or, briefly chadecja). The weakness of the Polish political Catholicism, as represented on the party-level, might be explained by the historically strong Catholic Church's. The Polish bishops recognized no party as being Catholic, and gave neither official nor even merely unofficial support to any of them. Holding an extremely strong position in the society, there was no need for strong identification with any particular force; however, their hidden sympathies to R. Dmowski's National Democrats should not be neglected. In addition, all political parties, including political left (except for the marginal communists), did not threaten Church's authority, and even traditionally anticlerical elements elsewhere were somewhat 'conciliatory towards it' in Poland. In the same way, Catholicism as the strong component of the Polish nationalism was successfully integrated into all right-wing movements, from 'Endecja' to 'Falanga', and the opportunities for a 'genuine' Catholic party were somewhat limited in this political environment.
See: Leszek Kuk, "A Powerful Catholic Church, Unstable State and Authoritarian Political Regime: The Christian Democratic Party in Poland" in *Political Catholicism in Europe 1918-1945*, pp. 150-169.

[74] In Ireland, as in Poland, Catholicism 'had been long inextricably bound with the sense of the national identity' and was fused with the Irish nationalism. Thus, both of the major political forces, Fianna Fail and Cummannan Geadheal, developed rather close links with the Church hierarchy, and there was no room for the Catholics to emerge.
See: Dermot Keogh and Finin O'Driscoll, "Ireland" in *Political Catholicism in Europe 1918 – 1965,* pp. 275-276.

[75] The exception is Christian Social Party in Austria which, after the death of its charismatic leader Karl Lueger, narrowed its identity and, instead of appealing for the middle class, concentrated on the farmers support.
See: Helmut Wohnout, *Middle-class*…p. 172

ideological currents running parallel with each other but having little in common; the interests groups were also diverse.[76] Thus, it is barely surprising that the rightist elements of the party saw Mussolini's regime (especially as it officially did not show hostility towards Catholic interests) as the better option for the defence of their beliefs and concerns. Many of them joined the fascists' ranks. Much the same can be said about other Catholic political movements of interwar Europe.

Nevertheless, despite these differences, in many ways Catholicism in interwar period came to an age as a distinct political ideology.[77] If one would try establishing the central feature of it, he should, first and foremost, concentrate on the so called "third way" policy which was hostile to both fascist and liberal states, namely advocated from the early 1930's. It was the Encyclical *Quadragesimo anno*, published in 1931, which, with its Christian corporatist ideas and militant anti-communism, in many ways, further pushed the Catholics to ally with the anti-democratic right to which they were increasingly engaging from the 1920s. Although some Christian democratic currents remained in the 1930's, they were in minority, the course of Catholic politics, as Europe was marching towards the general war, was increasingly gathering radically anti-democratic tendencies. In the same way, Catholic parties became more fractured in 1930's, as they were challenged by both internal and external forces. In the countries where

[76] On the right, there were the intransigents grouped around the Padre Gemelli, friend of Pius XI and later rector of the Catholic University in Milan. The center – right was occupied by the clerico moderate grandees such as Grossoli, Santucci and Crispoliti who effectively controlled the Catholic press.' Luigi Sturzo's camp, Christian Democratic in character and 'the dominant force in the party,' together with 'the bulk of the white trade-union leadership' represented the center of the PPI. Finally, a group circled around Guido Miglioli 'whose socialist leanings had inspired him to suggest the name "Party of the Christian Proletariat" at the Bologna congress' stood on the party's left.
See John F. Pollard, "Italy"…p. 79.

[77] That Catholicism of the interwar years might be treated as distinct political ideology is argued by Martin Conway. See page 4 in his *Catholic Politics in Europe 1918 – 1945* (London and New York: 1996).

democratic system still functioned, they were challenged by the predominantly young and more militant groups of Catholics who strove for spiritual renewal and did not see the rotten liberal system compatible with the Catholic values. In the countries which plunged into one or another form of right-wing dictatorships, the Catholics, except some extreme case as in Germany, remained generally compliant, if not supportive to them.

To sum up, the stance of the Catholic-oriented parties towards democracy, as this chapter aimed to illustrate, may be unfolded into two different periods. In the 1920's Catholic parties were part of the liberal system and, although with some reservations, supported it. The 1930's were marked with the rightist reorientation (radicalization) of the Catholic parties and increasing hostility to the liberal state.

These two different time spans of evolution of catholic politics will be taken into account in the next two chapters which will deal with the Catholic political camp and its stance towards liberal state and radical politics in interwar Lithuania.

3. Catholics in Power: radicalization and a democratic state (1918-1926)

"Let us assume [that] the right took over the government [and switched to] dictatorship. <….> Would not it mean that few of our allies would turn their backs? Would not the domination of the chauvinist elements mean the menace of war?[78]
(Catholic press 1924)

To our brave and valour men, who fulfilled the will of the nation and made Lithuania free<…>in the name of our society, we shout thunderous hurray![79]
(Catholic press few days after the rightist coup d'état of 1926)

It was 1907 when the Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party (CDP) was founded. Nevertheless, the formation of the Party was complicated and one may speak that real clerical political force came into existence only as late as 1917.[80] Despite its late formation, political Catholicism had a good starting position in a newly-born Lithuanian state. The Russian revolution of 1905 shifted the balance to the political right[81] and politically active clergy, with the gradually increasing number of lay Catholic politicians becoming the dominant force of Lithuanian politics for the forthcoming couple of decades. The success political Catholicism enjoyed in the early years of the interwar Lithuania is remarkable. In the elections of Constituent assembly (1920), the Catholic-oriented politicians received 52,7% of the seats in the Parliament.[82] The elections to the first Lithuanian Parliament (1922) guaranteed 48.7 proc.

[78] P. Karvelis, "Dešiniųjų krizis" (The Crisis of Right) in *Rytas* N. 49/60) (1924) p. 3.
[79] Anonymous author "Narsiems mūsų karžygiams"(To Our Brave Men) in *Rytas* N. 287/879 (1926): p. 1.
[80] Although the CDP was formed in 1907 due to ideological differences and organizational problems CDP did not functioned as a real political party up until 1917. Only at the end of the WWI when the 'leftist' (affected by the Russian revolution and radical in social questions) group of Catholics who during the WWI were close to formation of their own political party merged with the conservatives the process of CDP formation was finally finalized.
[81] For post 1905 politics in Lithuania see: Tomas Balkelis. *The making of modern Lithuania* (London and New York:Routledge, 2009) p. 85-104.
[82] For electoral results see Liudas Truska "Parlamentarizmo I Lietuvos Respublikos (1918 – 1940) bruožai" The features of Parliamentarism in the 1st Lithuanian Republic) in *Parlamento studijos*. No. 2 (2004). http://www.parlamentostudijos.lt/Nr3/Istorija_Truska.htm (accessed March 12, 2010).

support whereas in premature elections to the second (1923) Parliament, Catholics retained full control with 51.3% of the seats.[83] Only the last parliamentary elections (1926), held in a fully democratic environment, marked a significant decline in support for Catholic politics; although with 35,3% of the seats Catholic bloc remained the strongest political force in the Parliament the unified opposition managed to form the government without Catholic presence.[84]

This success of the Catholic-oriented politics and, to a large extent, their stance towards liberal system which was favourable in the early 1920s, can not be explained without analysis of the specific political fragmentation of democratic Lithuania (1918-1926) which was extremely favourable for the Catholic-oriented political forces.

On the eve of independent state, Catholic-block found three main rivals in Lithuanian politics. Political left was represented by the Social Democratic Party (SDP)[85]. The oldest political party, founded in 1896, SDP was a stable third political force in Lithuanian politics, however, in a highly agricultural society, socialists struggled to win a wider support for their program and were usually left out from 1918 – 1926 governments.

Political right, extremely weak before 1926, was occupied by the Lithuanian Nationalists' Union[86] (LTS) led by the first democratically elected President of the Republic A.

[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Lithuanian Communist Party (LCP) was also conditional representative of the political left in interwar Lithuania. LCP, as an illegal organization, participated in the elections to the first Lithuanian Parliament (1922-1923) under changed name and won 5 seats in it. Nevertheless, this was the only occasion when LCP received more significant support. For the entire discussed period LCP predominantly concentrated only on underground activity.
[86] "Lietuvių Tautininkų Sąjunga (LTS)" (abbreviation *Tautininkai* - Nationalists') the official English translation: "Lithuanian Nationalists' Union". However, due to the peculiarities of the Lithuanian language, *Tautininkai* does not literally mean Nationalists. In Lithuanian, the name of the party refers more to the Union of the Lithuanian (political) nation. Therefore in Lithuanian, *Tautininkai* does not evoke any negative implications (as possibly Nationalists' could).

Smetona. The party of intellectuals[87], LTS was popular among the limited circles of the upper strata of the society (state bureaucracy, military elite). Nevertheless, due to its ultraconservative stance towards land reform, LTS was extremely unpopular among peasantry who constituted the critical mass of the voters. This failure to appeal outside its traditional electoral frontiers did not allow LTS to win a single seat in the first two Lithuanian parliaments. The constant setbacks in elections led to LTS radicalization in 1922 - 1923. As one recent study has shown, LTS, the party of formerly moderate politicians, was strongly influenced by Mussolini's success in Italy, and starting from 1923, one might speak of LTS as the proponent of the anti-democratic right in Lithuanian politics.[88] Nevertheless, up until late 1926, political right was to a large extent unrepresented in Lithuania.

Conditional political centre – left was taken by the Peasant Populist bloc,[89] which traditionally rivalled Catholics in the period of democratic parliamentarism. It is difficult to define the bloc's ideology as it was a mix of socialist and liberal ideas. Nevertheless, as early as 1922 the block gradually alienated itself from the socialist agenda and, at least for a forthcoming decade, one might speak of it as of a conditional proponent of the weak liberal traditions in Lithuania.

In this political environment, the nominal political centre was taken by the Catholic bloc, which itself constantly stressed its 'centrist' stance.[90] Nevertheless, the bloc was not

[87] Among the party members were many prominent figures of interwar Lithuania such as A. Voldemaras (first prime minister of Lithuania), J. Basanavičius (leader of the national awakenening) J. Tumas, V. Krėvė (famous Lithuanian writers) etc.

[88] Zenonas Butkus, "Kai opozicija gauna parama iš svetur" (When Opposition is Supported from Abroad) in *Kultūros barai*. N. 8-9 (1995): p. 63.

[89] The bloc included the Lithuanian Socialist Popular Democratic Party (LSLDP) and the Lithuanian Union of Peasants (LVS), and after the merger of these forces in December 1922, also the Lithuanian Peasant Popular Union (LVLS). Even before the merger to a single party, LSLDP and LVS used to form a common bloc of Peasant Populists in the Parliament.

[90] See: Anonymous author, "Supraskime" (Let's Understand) in *Tėvynės sargas*, N. 39,(1922): p. 423; see Anonymous author, "Krikščionių demokratų partijos programos revizija (Revision

uniform. It consisted of three major ideological currents. The Catholic left was represented by the Labour Federation (LF). Founded in 1919 as a professional organization for Christian workers, it was obliged to compete with Social democrats for the working class' votes. The Labour Federation ran in elections as a distinct political force, nevertheless always joining the joint Catholic block in parliament.

Another political force, the Farmers' Union, was used by the Catholics to gain support from the peasantry. In the same way as the Labour federation, it did not officially intend to be a political organization; however, it participated in elections with its separate list and political agenda. It would be difficult to dissect any ideological distinctiveness in the Farmer's Union; however, the organization, slightly more conservative in agricultural issues, generally supported the official Catholic ideological line advocated by the core of the Catholic Block - Christian Democratic Party (CDP).

The Catholic centre, as the CDP officially identified itself, treated the mentioned 'non-political' organizations as the left (LF) and the right (FU) wings of the party. Ideological wise, being the only official Catholic political party, CDP had to absorb the 'leftist' ideas of LF and the more conservative ones from FU, and to ensure the splendid work of the Catholic bloc. Moreover, as CDP correspondence reveals, in the future Christian democrats were aiming to reorganize the Catholic bloc into one political force, according to the Zentrumspartei model in Germany.[91] The success in the elections to the Constituent assembly in 1918 also increased consolidation within the Catholic ranks and the emergence of the trinomial Catholic bloc seemed imminent. The sense of unity in the bloc shows the free migration of members within

of the Christian Democratic Party's Programme) in *Rytas,* N. 95/106, (1924): p. 1-2.; etc.

[91] *Dėl suvienijimo* (On Uniting), Krikščionių demokratų partijos byla (File on Christian Democrats Party), Lithuanian Central Sate Archive (hereinafter – LCSA), F. 1114, Ap. 1, B. 3, L. 3.

its ranks; distinct individuals due to the tactical reasons used to change the organization membership very often; double membership was also possible. However, the full unification of the Catholic bloc never happened, and for the moment it functioned as three separate, nevertheless closely bound political forces. In the electoral campaign, they would traditionally support each others candidates and would agitate for Catholic unity; in the Parliament, they would strictly form a joint bloc.

The Catholic bloc relied heavily on Church hierarchy support. Before the elections, the official press of CDP always published the official release of Lithuanian bishops in which they directly and indirectly agitated for the Catholic bloc's lists.[92] In the same way, on a lower lever, priests from the pulpits actively campaigned for the Catholic win.[93] Moreover, CDP itself possessed a great number of Roman Catholic clergy which were active both in pastoral and political work. For a long period in the Lithuanian political environment this was enough to ensure Catholic domination. In economic policy, except for SDP, the other parties did not provide any viable alternatives. Despite militant anticlericalism, in other spheres such as land reform, for instance, the main opponents, Peasant Populists, argued for similar solutions as the Catholic bloc.[94] In a peasant - agricultural society where the local priest was in many aspects the only luminary person, his support for CDP or its branch organizations guaranteed that Catholic lists would come on top against their secular rivals. In addition, with the first victories in the elections, the state's administrative apparatus fell to bureaucracy close to CDP; with the

[92] See: Anonymous author, "Ganytojiškas Lietuvos vyskupų raštas tikintiesiems" (Lituanian Bishops' pastoral letter to congregation) in *Tėvynės sargas*, N.17(1923): p. 189.
[93] Liudas Truska, *Parlamentarizmo I*... p. 75.
[94] Aldona Stalgienė, "Agrarinės reformos koncepcija Lietuvos politinių partijų programuose iki 1922 metų" (The Concept of the Agrarian Reform in the Programmes of Lithuanian Political Parties up to the year 1922) in *Studentų mokslinės konferencijos JAUNASIS MOKSLININKAS 2007 straipsnių rinkinys*, http://www.lzuu.lt/jaunasis_mokslininkas/smk_2007/ekonomika/Stalgiene_Aldona.pdf (accessed April 15, 2010).

country following constant martial law and the restrictions being put on people gathering, control of the regions enabled Catholics to constrain the activity of the opposition. Furthermore, a wide range of Catholic organizations and regional representatives[95] enabled the Catholics to dominate their leftist opponents. With unpopular rightist LTS not posing any threat till late 1926, the Catholic bloc owned the monopoly of patriotic appeal too.

In the midst of these circumstances, the Catholic bloc took on a broad centrist stance and, as the CDP official periodical claimed, sought to 'defend the freedom of the Catholic Church from left-wing parties' and 'new social order from the right' ones.[96] That the Lithuanian Catholics in the early 1920's were not tempted to ally with conservative nationalist forces and was somewhat, like the whole political climate, affected by the leftist radicalism was noticed by the Lithuanian émigré historian Sabaliūnas who attached (although not fully convincingly) it to the influence of the Russian revolution:

> After the war Catholic leaders found themselves in a quandary. The radicalism of a democratic period made conservatism virtually synonymous with reaction and thus augured its defeat at the polls. Moreover, many Catholic politicians were relatively young men who had lived in Russia during the war and the revolution. The years they spent in that country left an imprint upon their attitudes and political behaviour. These factors explain why Lithuania's political Catholicism, soon after the war, was more progressive that it would have been under less disrupted conditions.[97]

Thus, the Catholics were cautious about patriotic rhetoric as the bursts of extreme nationalism would have benefited the secular LTS. However, moderate anti-Semitism based on economic terms and old prejudices and pressure on legal Jewish institutions, in relatively mild to national

[95] According to the archival documents, CDP started to stress the importance of representatives' network from 1922. See: *Instrukcija Nr. 7 Visiems parapijų katalikų rinkimų komitetams* (Instruction Nr. 7 to all Catholic Parish Represenatives), Krikščionių demokratų byla (Christian democrats' file), LCSA. F. 1184, Ap. 1, B. 3, L. 47; *Instrukcija kaimo įgaliotinis* (Instruction to Parish Representative*s*)*,* LCSA. F. 1184, Ap. 1, B. 3, L. 7-8.

[96] Anonymous author, "Supraskime" (Let's Understand*)* in *Tėvynės sargas*, N. 39, (1922): p. 423.

[97] Leonas Sabaliūnas, *Lithuania in crisis 1939-1940* (London and Bloomington: Indiana University Press) pp. 5-6.

minorities' Lithuanian political climate of 1920's, distinguished the Catholic bloc as the most intolerant force of the dominant trio. Nevertheless, this should not be exaggerated as the CDP would always warn of the possible dangers of radical policies. If any critique appeared of the democratic establishment, as was the case with LTS from 1923 onwards, the Catholic press would always mock the secular right belittling them by labelling them 'pseudo patriots.' For instance, when in 1924 one of the first waves of antidemocratic nationalism in LTS press appeared, the Catholic press rejected any possibility of flooding the politics with radicalism. The 'crisis of the right' and similar publications in Catholic periodicals, in a surprising modern fashion, accused the LTS of advocating the introduction of dictatorship, of being anti-constitutional and anti-national power.[98] The up-to-date argumentation of imminent international isolation in the case of the anti-democratic overthrow, as well as the possible menace of militant chauvinism and the threat of breaching nascent parliamentary traditions presented the Catholic bloc as a truly moderate force.[99] At the same time, the official programme of CDP was flooded with moderate democratic principles - the defence of democratic values was proclaimed as one of the three fundamental principles of CDP policy.[100] And it seems up until late 1925 - early 1926, the CDP and all Catholic bloc was obliged to them. For instance, in the annual overview of CDP policy in 1924, Christian Democrats basically repeated the same ideological stance which was proclaimed in the first days of the independent state; rightist radicalism was rejected.

> <....> when looking more carefully at the Lithuanian political relations, there seems to be a tendency to go rather to the right, especially among the red and "progressive" [LTS G.V.] sides <…> Christian Democrats must be extremely careful in this regard and base their actions on the current Constitution. <...> For this reason Christian Democrats should not be

[98] See: P. Karvelis, "Dešiniųjų krizis" (The Crisis of Right) in *Rytas*: N. 49/60 (1924): p. 3.
[99] Ibid.
[100] The other two were the defense of Christianity and Nationality, see "Lietuvių Krikščionių Demokratų Konferencija" (The Conference of Lithuanian Christian Democrats) in *Mūsų politika* (Our Policy) (Kaunas: 1921) p. 2.

> fascinated neither with conservatism nor radicalism, but to adhere to a rational policy, to seek for the most appropriate measures for meeting all purposes[101]

While the trinomial Catholic bloc dominated Lithuanian politics, rather moderate ideas prevailed in the CDP branch organizations as well. Despite the direct appeal to a particular group of voters (FU – peasantry, LF – working class), the Catholic bloc established the unitary electoral strategy and the so-called 'centrist' or 'balance' policy was jointly campaigned by all 3 bloc members.[102]

However, late 1925 and early 1926 was the last period when the moderate ideas within the Catholic bloc dominated. The first trends of radicalization of Catholic politics can be traced as early as 1923. A few months after the successful elections to the second Lithuanian parliament, the organizational section of CDP published the instruction which was addressed to all Catholic organizations.[103] Despite the absolute majority victory, this document, written in a militant style, accused the Catholic bloc of being unprepared for the elections.[104] The serious shake-up of Catholic organizations was demanded by unification of the small Catholic units into the bigger ones; the plans for establishing a Catholic Center Party with a merger of Labor Federation and Farmers Union with CDP were also announced.[105] Moreover, what is more important, the need for a serious change in what was called "Catholic strategy' was declared.[106] First of all, the victory in elections was attributed only to the inert build up on former dominant

[101] P. Karvelis, „Krikščionių demokratų partijos programos revizija (Revision of the Christian Democratic Party's programme" in *Rytas,* N. 95/106 (1924): p. 1-2

[102] As the results to parliamentary elections reveals the CDP's branch organizations received a significant support, in some cases even greater than the core CDP, and one might suggest that it would have been difficult to expect the same amount of votes if the joint Catholic block would have participated under single list. The direct appeal to a particular group of voters seems to be a successful step for the Catholic block.

[103] *Dėl suvienijimo*, LCSA, F. 1114, Ap. 1, B. 3, L. 3.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid.

positions, but not on successful tactics which must have been switched 'from defensive to offensive'.[107] Unfortunately, data evidence does not allow providing any reliable conclusion on the affect of this document. What was vaguely defined as the revision of Catholic tactics had to be discussed in detail in the forthcoming meetings of CDP territorial divisions. In the same way, as has been mentioned, the analysis of the Catholic press does not suggest any change in Catholic rhetoric of late 1925. However, this continuity in moderate Catholic rhetoric might be explained by the fact that the years 1923 – 1926 marked the only period in interwar Lithuanian history when the parliament managed to function during a full three - year term (from 1923 to 1926). With Catholic bloc controlling the Parliament, the threat of premature elections was minor, and thus, there was no need for Catholics to begin the early electoral campaign which would enable identification of any shift in their agenda. However, from 1924 onwards, the Catholic government gradually undermined the legal situation of the Jewish minority. First of all, in 1925, a law was passed which introduced new harsher regulations on establishment of new Jewish communities and organizations.[108] In addition, in early 1924, the position of the minister without portfolio for Jewish affairs was abolished.[109]

However, the most dramatic shift to radicalism and rightist reorientation of the Catholics can be traced to the period of 1925 - 1926. The reasons for this radicalization might be several. First of all, in February 1925, the Concordat between the Vatican and Poland was signed. The treaty which granted the Church province of Vilna (Polish - Wilno, Lithuanian - Vilnius) to Poland was perceived as a great blow to Lithuanian diplomacy. In the same way, the ratification of the Polish-Vatican Concordat had a great impact on domestic politics. In the midst of the

[107] Ibid.
[108] Mykolas Rėmeris, *Lietuvos konstitucinės teisės paskaitos* (The Lectures of the Lithuanian Constitutional law) (Vilnius: Mintis, 1995) pp. 156-158.
[109] Ibid.

looming elections, the Catholic government was challenged by the wave of anti-Vatican protests and interpellations to CDP ministers organized by the opposition.[110] The growing pressure destabilized the government. Even the president A. Stulginskis, elected by the Catholic bloc's votes, was dramatically affected by the occurring pressure, and advocated for a *de jure* break in Lithuanian – Vatican relations.[111] The opposition press fiercely attacked "the clericals" for their impotence in solving the crisis. The CDP official *Rytas* also joined the ranks of the opposition press by protesting against the Vatican for 'cutting out the heart of the nation'[112] In these circumstances, the country marched into regular parliamentary elections. It is still arguable whether the Polish - Vatican concordat alone could influence the radicalization of the Catholic bloc. Nevertheless, the electoral campaign before the elections up to the third Lithuanian Parliament witnessed a dramatic change in Catholic rhetoric. The fight against Masonry and the Judeo – Bolshevik block became frequent slogans of CDP press.[113]. If LTS was formerly criticized for radical nationalism before the elections to the third Parliament, it suddenly 'became not patriotic enough'. The rallying cry for a fight against the mystical anti-Christian front covered the headlines of the Catholic press.[114] Catholicism was no longer just a 'confessional', but a 'fundamental form of Lithuanian society;'[115] the struggle against internal

[110] Algimantas Kasperavičius, "Lietuvos ir Vatikano santykiai, arba Šventojo Sosto reikšmė tarpukario Lietuvos užsienio politikai (Lithuanian – Vatican Relations Or The Imporance Of The Holy See On Lithuanian Foreign Policy in The Interwar Period) in *Lietuvos Katalikų Mokslo Akademijos Metraštis XXV*. Liudas Jovaiša ed., (Vinius: Aidai, 2003) pp. 312 - 330
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Anonymous author, "Seimo rinkimų frontas" (Front Line of Parliament Elections) in *Tėvynės sargas* N. 7 (1926): p. 135.
[114] Anonymous author, "Susmulkėjimas" (Going Petty) in *Rytas* 87/679 (1926): p. 3.
[115] Anonymous author, "Tauta ir religija" (Nation and Religion) in *Rytas* N.76/688(1926): p. 3.

enemies such as Populists, Socialists and minorities for the independent Lithuania was declared.[116] Catholic press would campaign for the Catholic bloc in the following ways:

> The Lithuanian, the Catholic! The Party of National Progress [LTS G.V.] in a coalition with the Peasant Popular Union and Farmers [117] has repudiated its people. For as Socialists, they do not care for the nation, the nation is not a concern for their coalition allies Smetona followers – "The Progressive (calling themselves Nationalists). Traitors of the nation, be off![118]

> In the electoral fight, our society has divided itself into two major front lines. One of them is constant and persistent, insurmountable - it is the front line of the Christian society, and its struggle for the eternal ideals of Christianity and the welfare of this life. Another front line is the accumulation of darkness and gaucherie forces where the main roles are played by the socialism apostles [119]

Full of hatred, the campaign organized by the Catholic bloc, reached new extremes when Catholic press came up with quasi-scientific publications on leftist 'diseases' and 'microbes'.[120] Above all, the Catholic campaign was 'strengthened' by the proclamations of the formerly barely known "Committee of Lithuanian fascist fighters"[121]. In its appeal, the Committee attacked all political forces but the ruling Catholics.[122] By using militant rhetoric, Fascist fighters swore not to let "Jewish and Socialist butchers reign in Lithuania."[123] Lithuanian 'Fascists' declared to be armed and ready to fight for Lithuania's survival[124] [that is for the Catholic victory]. It is interesting to notice that, in the election fight, at one point, Catholic press even outnumbered the nationalist in publications on Italian fascism.[125]

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[116] Anonymous author, "Kas yra vidaus priešai?" (Who are the Internal Enemies?) in *Rytas* N. 7/601(1926): p. 1.
[117] Farmers' Party - not influential liberal political party founded in 1926.
[118] Anonymous author, "Lietuvi, katalike!" (The Lithuanian, the Catholic) in *Rytas*, N 93/685(1926): p. 1.
[119] Anonymous author, "Susmulkėjimas" (Going Petty) in *Rytas* 87/679 (1926): p 3.
[120] Anonymous author, "Rasti kairumo mikrobai" ('Leftist' Microbes are Found) in *Rytas*, Nr. 7/666 (1926), p. 2.
[121] Algimantas Kasperavičius, "Kunigas Mykolas Krupavičius…" p. 448n.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Algirdas Kasperavičius, "Parlamentarizmo ir politinės kultūros problemos Lietuvoje 1920 – 1926" (The Problems of Political Culture and Parliamentarism in Lithuania 1920 –

Despite this demagogic run for elections, it finished with the feeling that, at last, the Catholic reign would come to an end. On the eve of elections only a few doubted that eight years of Catholic bloc hegemony would be prolonged; the mentioned setback in foreign policy, as well as affects of the economic crisis[126] of 1924 - 1926, together with inadequate state financial support for the Catholic organizations and revealed corruption cases among high rank officers, undermined Catholic chances to achieve the fourth straight victory.[127] The whole political climate was unfavourable for the Catholics. As M. Römer, one of the brightest contemporary intellectuals in Lithuania, concluded on the 1926 situation: "the lengthy domination of the Catholic bloc evoked much hatred to them [Catholics G.V.]; Populists as well as Nationalists became their sworn enemies, all political currents were fed up with the Catholic hegemony, everyone hated them"[128]. The outcome of the elections was not surprising — the results showed a significant shift to the political left.

Thereafter, for the first time in the history of interwar Lithuania, a leftist coalition of Social democrats and Populists took over the government. This coalition did not have the absolute majority; however it was supported by the minority parties and it ensured that the Catholic bloc, still the largest in Parliament, was left out of the government. The first few months of the centre - left bloc in power resulted in a significant change. First of all, a law was passed which amnestied a number of Communist activists. The reduction of political police apparatus and the call off of martial law soon followed. These measures provoked severe protests from the opposition. Nevertheless, the government continued on carrying its leftist

1926), *Parlamento studijos*. No. 6 (2006). http://www.parlamentostudijos.lt/Nr6/6_Istorija_Kasparavicius.htm (accessed March 12, 2010).

[126] Years 1924 – 1926 is known for their bad harvest. Due to this the agricultural Lithuania encountered significant economic problems. See: Liudas Truska, *Parlamentarizmo I*... p. 75n.

[127] Liudas Truska, *Parlamentarizmo I*... p. 6.

[128] Mykolas Rėmeris, *Lietuvos konstitucinės teisės paskaitos* (The Lectures of the Lithuanian Constitutional Law) (Vilnius: Mintis, 1995) p. 204.

policy. The coalition expanded the network of minorities' schools and was aiming at cutting financial support for the Catholic Church; plans to ban wage payment from the state budget to priests were announced. In addition, the modernization program for military forces was introduced. The budget of the army was reduced, resulting in dismissal of a certain number of military officers.

The discontent in society as well as in the opposition grew rapidly. This presented the defeated Catholics with the opportunity to retain their influence, especially since their sympathies for democratic system were already questionable. As one recent publication shows, as early as the second day after the results of the election were announced, the very first secret meeting on possible governmental takeover between military officers and Catholic representatives might have been held.[129] The fact that the radical tendencies took over in the Catholic bloc was also indirectly noticed by contemporary intellectuals. For instance, S. Šalkauskis, an unofficial leader of the Catholic action in Lithuania, bemoaned the 'disorientation of Catholic society' after formerly moderate Catholics moved into the opposition.[130] In their private conversions Catholic leaders expressed their disillusion with democracy even more directly – radical rightist reorientation among Catholic establishment was more than evident.[131] For instance, several influential members of CDP became co-editors of the pro-fascist weekly *Will of the Nation* (Tautos valia).[132] Even former Catholic President A. Stulginskis contributed financially to this newspaper.[133] However, the drift to the right of the Catholic bloc can be best illustrated by one of CDP leaders', M. Krupavičius, example. A formerly moderate politician became one of the most active proponents of antidemocratic ideas

[129] Algimantas Kasperavičius, "Kunigas Mykolas…" p. 449.
[130] Algimantas Kasperavičius, "Kunigas Mykolas…" p. 451.
[131] Algimantas Kasperavičius, "Kunigas Mykola*s*…" p. 452.
[132] Algimantas Kasperavičius, "Kunigas Mykolas…" p. 455.
[133] Ibid.

of the Catholic bloc. After one of the rightist student demonstrations[134] in Kaunas, the former Minister of Agriculture delivered a defensive speech in Parliament:

> Fascism in itself is a wholesome nationalist movement (strong applause and shouts 'bravo' on the right), a reaction against socialist government or *Kerenshina* which are leading the state to its doom. Today Fascism is a legal organization in all states. But I make a difference between fascism [as ideology] and fascism [as a system]. If you accuse national self-consciousness, patriotism, and national ideals of being fascist – in this sense I am also a fascist. And all of us Lithuanians nationalists are fascists! (Thunderous applause from the right).[135]

M. Krupavičius was only one of many Catholics who saw the antidemocratic overthrow of the contemporary government as the only possible way of returning to power. During the final weeks of the democratic government in power, Catholics and LTS nationalists finished co-ordinating the last details of the takeover. Finally, in a bloodless putsch of December 17, 1926, Lithuania switched to authoritarianism.

[134] This demonstration occurred in November 1926. Student procession to the tomb of Unknown Soldier ran into the Kaunas mounted police. In the ensuing mêlée some were wounded. This clash immediately elicited protests against the police from the Christian Democrats and other rightist elements in Parliament. The leftist press accused the students of being fascists. M. Krupavičius defended the protestors.
See: Romuald J. Misiunas, "Fascist Tendencies in Lithuania" in *The Slavonic and East European Review*, N. (48/110) p. 92-93.

[135] Romuald J. Misiunas, "Fascist Tendencies in Lithuania," p. 93.

4. Catholics in Opposition: new generation and the authoritarian state (1926-1939)

"So far…the young Christian Democrats lack an intelligibly political ideology. It is not clear whether they tend toward an authoritarian or a democratic regime"[136]
(Nationalist press, 1939)

The first months of the regime were marked with the declared Catholic – LTS unity. During the CDP conference, the new Prime Minister, nationalist A. Voldemaras, hailed Christian Democrats as the core of Lithuania's independence; the leader of CDP M. Krupavičius, in turn, suggested unification of the political forces.[137] However, behind the scenes, both political entities maneuvered to establish their dominance. The Catholics, as the more popular and more numerous, hoped for new elections to be held. In this case, as the Populists and Socialists already compromised and LTS traditionally weak, the Catholic bloc had high chances to return to power legally. Nationalists, on the contrary, kept on ruling with presidential decrees as the opportunity to be elected through democratic procedures (even conditional) where minimal for them. It was the beginning of tensions between the two. The disagreements on foreign policy soon followed. Finally, after less than half of a year of common work in the government, the Catholic ministers were called off, and the CDP has officially moved into opposition.

This move has marked the end of unity in the Catholic bloc. If the Farmers' Union joined the CDP in leaving the coalition, the leftist Labor Federation continued to support the LTS nationalist government.[138] In the same way, this fragmentation broadened the spectrum of

[136] Quotation is taken from: Leonas Sabaliūnas, *Lithuania*…p. 41.
[137] Artūras Svarauskas, *Kunigo M. Krupavičius opozicinė veikla valstybinei valdžiai (1927 – 1940 m.)* (The Activities of Priest Mykolas Krupavičius Opposing the State Authorities (1927 – 1940) in *Lietuvos Katalikų Mokslo Akademijos Metraštis XXVII.* (Liudas Jovaiša ed., Vinius: Aidai, 2005) p. 500.
[138] Labour federation moved to opposition in 1928.

ideas represented by political Catholicism in Lithuania. For instance, formerly leftist Labor federation split from the united Catholic bloc, taking on extreme nationalist agenda. Although, it is still arguable whether it was only a tactical move to appease the ruling LTS in order to become the only representatives of working class' in the nationalist government, as socialists now marginalized and the LTS traditionally not popular among proletariat, however, the LF rhetoric changed dramatically since 1926. The LF press was full of praise for Mussolini's Italy; it openly saluted the formation of "Lithuanian fascism."[139] The leader of the LF K. Ambrozaitis himself became an active member of the mentioned ultra radical *Will of the nation* weekly.[140] Former allies and coalition partners CDP and FU in LF press were accused of being "polluted by the liberal spirit."[141] The demarche of the LF against its heir organizations continued as they kept reprinting publications from the nationalist press.[142] However, despite chauvinist rhetoric, the LF did not provide any stance towards the existing (authoritarian) regime – neither openly supported it nor criticized.

This flirt with Nationalists gradually led to marginalization of the LF. Catholics would start to see it as the unreliable partner, whereas ruling LTS rejected it as a possible ally. With no real influence, former Catholic left wing fractured even more. In 1932, ambiguous chairman of LF, K. Ambrozaitis, established new Lithuanian Labor Youth Organization (LLYO)[143] which continued radical, yet incoherent agenda of LF. Already during the first conference, LLYO declared its militant intensions:

> "We are in need for pure spirit fighters. Fighters! We do not need silent Christianity – we need brave and fighting Catholicism (applause).[144]

[139] Artūras Svarauskas, "Lietuvos Darbo…" p. 53.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Artūras Svarauskas, "Lietuvos Darbo..." p. 57.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Lithuanian – Lietuvos Darbo Jaunimo Sąjunga.

The slogans of 'death for an idea' and the 'obedience to the leader' were the dominant in LLYO rhetoric.[145] However, contrary to LF, LLYO managed to incorporate wide spectrum of self-contradicting ideas. The Catholic Nationalism was combined with socialist theory; the organization itself would occasionally identify itself as "Christian socialist' or even 'Christian communist.'[146] For instance, in one of the articles LLYO press suggested:

> We do not need to slander socialism, we openly accept the brightest ideas of socialism and we have many comrades within idealist socialists and we are proud of them.[147]

The ideological obscurity of LLYO even attracted some Communist activists to its ranks.[148] Moreover, in a toss between ruling LTS and the Catholics, LLYO completely lost Church hierarchy support, while only few radical priests continued to support the marginals.[149] Consequently, LLY0, yet temporary, was even reluctant to stress its confessional identity. Nevertheless, this (involuntary) alienation from the old Catholic establishment and re-orientation into lay organization gave new impulse for the Lithuanian Catholic camp. Both LLYO and earlier LF provided the opportunities for younger generations of relatively radical Catholics to mature and to build their political platform, quite opposite to the mainstream Christian Democratic Party.

It was the Movement of Young Catholics (Jaunųjų Katalikų Sąjūdis, JKS), as it is known in Lithuanian historiography, not LF and LLYO, which was the most successful

[144] Artūras Svarauskas, "Lietuvos Darbo..." p. 57. See also: Anonymous author *Lietuvos darbo jaunimo sąjungos I-asis suvažiavimas* (The first Meeting of Lithuanian Labor Youth Organization) (Kaunas: Darbininkas, nr. 23, 1932) p. 2.
[145] Artūras Svarauskas, Lietuvos Darbo... p. 61.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Artūras Svarauskas, "Lietuvos Darbo..." p. 62.
[148] Artūras Svarauskas, "Lietuvos Darbo..." p. 64.
[149] The conflict between the Catholic establishment and LLYO was reached in 1934 as in one of LLYO meetings K. Ambrozaitis was presented a stick to beat 'bad Catholics'. See: Artūras Svarauskas, "Lietuvos Darbo..." p. 67.

proponent of Catholic radicalism in 1930's Lithuania. It first came into existence around 1930 and was the movement of predominantly Catholic youth who matured in a fully Lithuanian environment that is with only short living memory of the Tsarist Russia; moreover, many of them got education at leading European Catholic universities and were more attached to Western political developments than to old, predominantly 'provincial clericals' from CDP. Circled around two cultural journals, *Naujoji Romuva* and *XX amžius,* young generation of lay Catholics at first did not have political ambitions.[150] Nevertheless, kept as the CDP reserve,[151]that is most of the young Catholics did not officially belong to Christian Democratic Party, JKS gradually became involved in politics.

This engagement into politics can be explained by two factors. First of all, it was already five years since the Nationalists took over the government, and during this period, they managed to consolidate their power and to establish themselves as a strong single-party force. The Catholic bloc, except for ambiguous LF and its heir LLYO, as it has been mentioned, were in opposition and were unsuccessfully opposing the LTS, and their chances of returning to power seemed dim than ever before. Being not closely bound to the CDP, young Catholics hoped to fuse new energy to Catholic camp and tried to reinitiate new cooperation between the two. As it was the year of economic crisis in Europe, the support from at least some Catholics would have been welcomed by the Nationalists who were internally encountering economic difficulties.

[150] LKS used to stress the cultural character of the movement.
[151] CDP invited senior students who belonged to the Catholic Youth Organizations to CDP Central Committee meetings. They were able to participate in CDP discussions, pass their legislation even without being the official members of CDP.
See Ramūnas Labanauskas, *Jaunųjų Katalikų Sąjūdis* (The Movement of Young Catholics) p. 249.

Secondly, youngsters came into being when Catholic intellectual climate underwent significant changes in Europe. *Quadragesimo anno* was published in 1931 and, at least for some Catholic groups, it seemed to provide the solution to manifold problems of modern life. The discussions on Christian corporatism and organic society, and various interpretations of their meaning gathering pace in Europe were thoroughly followed by the LKS. Being by far the intellectually strongest Catholic group in the interwar Lithuania, the youngsters believed in possibility to improve the current regime by providing their own alternatives to the current authoritarianism.

Thus, from the early 1930's with the emergence of LKS the relations between Catholics and Nationalist moved to an intellectual level. The LKS youngsters challenged the Nationalist ideologists to debate the current regime and possible implication of Christian corporative system. Although, at least in the early 1930's, *Quadregesimo anno* was barely mentioned, its impact was strongly felt, and the LKS devoted a lot of space to discussion of corporatist ideas in their press. For instance, in one of the articles in 1933 named "liberal or corporative state?" *Naujoji Romuva* suggested:

> "The question of form of government is very important to us. It has been few years since we stand on crossroads, not knowing which path to take. One group unconditionally defends the old liberal system, the other denies it <…> We have the solution. We have to return to the times destroyed by the French Revolution and its children – capitalism and liberalism. We need to return to the organic society, to organic state, to organic economy.[152]

The article continuous with naming of numerous advantages that the corporative state has over the liberal one, including elimination of social question and class struggle.[153]

It is interesting to notice that the corporative system of LKS did not seem to be compatible with the democratic structure. Rather similar interpretation of the encyclical, which

[152]V. Juodeika "Į naująją visoumenę' (towards new society) in *Naujoji Romuva* N. 40 (1932):p. 843.
[153] Ibid.

was an abstract and did not propose an implication of the form of government, was chosen by Austrian Christian Socialists and their contemporary leader Ignaz Seiper, for whom Quadregesimo anno ideas went 'hand in hand with the undoing of the democratic state which existed up until that time'.[154] The leading Catholic theorists in Germany such as O. Nell-Breuning and G. Gundlach, for instance, 'did not see the corporatist system as being contradictory to parliamentary democracy.'[155]

However, for the JKS, the implication of corporatism automatically meant the destruction of liberal system that was, at that time, not returning to the democratic parliamentarism. Although in their manifests, the young Catholics tended to avoid the term 'authoritarianism' (JKS would usually impose the term "improved democracy') which would give the hint and, at the same time, concessions to the existing regime, the fact that they were the proponents of the authoritarian solutions is clear from their rhetoric and numerous critiques on liberal democratic system:

> <...> The internal fight of political parties goes beyond any decency. Their demagogy is killing countries… Liberal democracy still passably functions in France and England. In other countries, it is in deep crisis. The old forms [of government] are in catastrophe. The legacy of the French revolution is being removed and there is nothing to regret.[156]

The critique of liberal system, however, did not give any chances for the Catholic bloc to return to power, as the main ideological opposition to the ruling LTS were already coming from democratic circles—that is from Socialists, Populists and, at the time, already from the Christian democrats who, marginalized after 1926, sough the re-rapprochement with these center - left forces as only unified and strong opposition might have had any chance of overthrowing the ruling LTS, who kept on consolidating power. At the same time, the

[154] Helmut Wohnout "Middle-class…" p. 182.
[155] Ibid.
[156] V. Juodeika "Į naujają visoumenę" (Towards New Society) in *Naujoji Romuva* N. 40 (1932):p. 842.

opposition had to propose something ideologically different to the current authoritarianism, and, consisting of such diverse components as socialists, putative liberals and Catholics, saw parliamentary democracy as the only possible alterative.

The LKS, being hostile to the liberal state, however, were, in general, satisfied with the authoritarian regime, and proposed only to expand the ruling LTS, incorporating some representatives of Catholic' and Populist' groups.[157] One of the reasons of this conditional Catholic participation in government, besides distrust in democratic structures, advocated by the young Catholics, was their reservations held towards confessional parties. Although this question of Catholic participation in party - politics and their belonging to one Catholic party, was a constant dilemma for European Catholics since 1922 and Pius XI policy in Lithuania, it started only in 1930's with emergence of LKS. Despite being heir of Christian Democrats, the LKS were not convinced of necessity to have the unified Catholic political force:

> In Lithuania, more frequently than elsewhere, the misunderstandings occur because we have only one party of Catholic-Christian inspiration. <…> on one hand, Christian democrats tend to identify themselves with all Catholics. On the other hand, the rivals of Christian democrats sometimes mix them with all Catholics….[158]

Another reason for this JKS half-hearted supported for the Christian Democratic Party was the perceived conservatism on the social questions of the old members of the party. Many members of the CDP elite in the 1930's were the already matured politicians, and the JKS, being young (many members of the movement were in their 20's) and more radical on social questions, did not see 'ageing' CDP establishment as capable of solving the social problems of contemporary Lithuania. On the other hand, the CDP saw JKS Catholics as too radical and were coy on their 'enthusiasm' to execute the overwhelming reforms. This was the cause of internal cleavage between the two, as the JKS program was indeed far reaching and radical.

[157] E. T. Kaunas "Didysis blokas" (The Greater Bloc) in *Naujoji Romuva* N. 42 (1931):pp. 995-996.
[158] Ibid.

For instance, one of the chief ideologists of JKS A. Maceina proposed to pursue 'social justice' by confiscating the Church's lands.[159] Other JKS members advocated nationalization of the richest estates.[160] Moreover, it seems that from the late 1930's JKS incorporated anti-Semitic elements in their agenda. K. Pakštas, another member of young Catholics, elaborating on JKS 'social equality program,' suggested 'blooding of the 'foreigners' [the Jews]' in order to ensure the right 'balance' in the society.[161] In addition, the JKS, as predominantly lay organization, were highly critical of Church's hierarchy; Maceina, criticizing wealth of the Church, would even label the clergymen as 'half a century backward religious bourgeoisie.'[162] In a conservative agricultural society these kinds of proclamations from the Catholic youth evoked contradictory reactions;[163] old CDP members, among whom were a significant number of clergymen, would find these radical proposals 'incomprehensible.'

However, this cleavage should not be exaggerated as for the time being, at least till the mid 1930's, as JKS and CDP were still close and, despite different views on social questions, Catholic unity has prevailed; thus, the JKS members kept close ties with CDP, some of them even became members of the party. In addition, in early 1930s, JKS saw itself, first and foremost, as a cultural movement rather than a political one.

Nevertheless, increasingly frustrated by the conservatism of the old CDP members, young Catholics gradually (especially from 1934) started to form their own agenda. Renewal in Catholicism, strive for the radical social reforms and spiritual rebirth of the nation through the youth became frequent slogans of the JKS press around 1933. Although, at that time, it is still difficult to speak of JKS as of a distinct movement, around these years, the JKS periodicals

[159] Artūras Svarauskas and Mindaugas Tamošiūnas, "Lietuvos politinių partijų…" p. 54.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid.

became increasingly concerned with political matters. Militant rhetoric for the change of the old system was demanded and though the real attempt of the split from the Catholic bloc by the LKS will be made a bit later, one my suspect that the preparation for the 'break away' was gathering pace in the years of 1933-1934. For instance, in 1933, on the 15 anniversary of independence of Lithuania, one of the leaders of JKS manifested readiness to take the responsibility to their own arms and to transform the country:

> "The spirit of heroism has disappeared in our prosaic life <…> the nails of brutal materialism is tearing the nation. Careerists and other parasites are sucking our blood <…> we are breathless and deteriorating…This Lithuania cannot fruitfully exist. It needs to be reformed otherwise we would not see the birth of the nation's genius. It [Lithuania] has to reborn for the new life. It must retained its youthful spirit…This can be done only by the youth, born and matured in the fresh air of Lithuania. And there are many of them…just they are drowning in the see of Russophiles and 'Germanophiles' and other parasites. It is time for the idealism and enthusiasm <…> Enough! If we would live somewhere in Scandinavia, maybe we could still exist like that, but we live surrounded by huge neighbors - Germans, Poles, Russians [we live in the region] where the eternal fight between Eastern and Western cultures are taking place…we have to be heroic…we are the talented nation! <...> The Youth…raise your heads…we need new values and radical reforms in all spheres of life…[164]

However, it was the period 1935-1936 when the JKS reached its peak of influence and came closest to formation of a separate political force. Around this time, *Christus Rex* movement in Belgium split from the Catholic Party and formed its own political unit. The early success it enjoyed has certainly influenced[165] the young Catholics, and the LKS prepared their first distinct and truly political "Towards the Creation of Organic state" manifest.[166] It was written in an open form, proclaimed as a programme, and all political entities were invited to join in the realization of its principals which combined corporative ideas with contradictive

[164] J. Keliuotis "Penkioliką Laisvo Gyvenimo Metų" (Fifteen Years of Independent Life) in *Naujoji Romuva* N. 111 (1931):pp. 144-145.

[165] JKS press closely followed the events in Belgium, some of the JKS members even met with L. Dergelle in person while studying abroad They sympathies towards the Rexists were widely known in Lithuania, oppositional parties, occasionally, referred to LKS as Rexists. See Ramūnas Labanauskas, *Jaunųjų Katalikų Sąjūdis*, p. 256.

[166] A. Maceina et al., "Į organiškos valstybės kūrimą" (Towards the Creation of Organic state) in *Naujoji Romuva* N. 8 (1936):pp. 169-173.

democratic and authoritarian elements. It is important to notice that in this manifest, unlike in the early 1930's, JKS criticized both liberal and authoritarian states - both were treated as only transitive forms of government which had to evolve into an organic state:

> <…> there can be a path [which goes] from liberal democracy through authoritarianism to an organic state. When authoritarianism wants to stop being only a transitional form, when it wants to become permanent form of government, it is in danger of becoming particular apologia for oppression. It is true that oppression sometimes evokes stagnant energy of the nation. However, [it] can not keep this energy flowing. <…> Liberal democracy sometimes leads to anarchy and the dispersal of the nation's energy into small interests <…> Both [liberal democracy and authoritarianism] brings death to a nation and kills its creative energy.[167]

This manifest, was one of the few attempts of late 1930's that challenged the ruling LTS by providing alternative concept for contemporary political system. However, under the repressive conditions, the JKS manifest had no chances of having real impact on domestic politics, and was just another, yet probably the most sophisticated, anti-government resolution written in the authoritarian period. As in the last years of independent state, the LTS nationalist regime introduced even harsher repressions of opposition: according to 1936 law, all political parties were officially banned; the JKS has never had real chance to become a distant political force in the interwar Lithuania. It continued to exist as semi-political current, tossing between the joint Catholic front and its own political ambitions. Nevertheless, with the emergence of the JKS, the lay Catholics became more and more influential in Lithuanian camp of political Catholicism.

However, the main component of political Catholicism in Lithuania remained the Christian Democratic Party, with significant Roman Catholic clergy playing a significant part within its ranks. In contrast to already mentioned organizations such as the LF and the LLYO, and, to a certain extent the JKS, the main Catholic political force – the Christian Democratic Party, withdrew to the democratic opposition to ruling LTS. Its short flirt with radical policies

[167] Ibid.

(rhetoric at least) ended in mid in 1927. In the following annual CDP conference of 1929 (which was the last in authoritarian period), the party proclaimed to retain its policy of the 'center'[168] which was never officially abandoned. For the forthcoming years, with the support of the influential Church hierarchy, the main stream of Catholics would remain the biggest democratic opposition camp of the Lithuanian authoritarianism. However, as the CDP activity was, to a large extent, paralyzed and, as one Lithuanian author summarized it, only "existed as a discussion club,"[169] its main practice remained the underground resistance to the nationalists. Although the call to return to liberal democracy and to convene the parliament was the main goal of the CDP, in numerous petitions to the nationalist President and in some anti-government protests,[170] the party managed to organize in the authoritarian period, one might assume that this pursue for democracy was the only real chance for the CDP to return to power.

The coup 1926 divided the country into two major blocs: ruling authoritarian nationalist and the oppositional, predominantly democratic one. In this formation, the formerly influential Catholics found themselves in ambivalent situation. As it was the case with many Catholic political movements of the interwar Europe, neither of two represented true Catholic aspirations.

[168] Artūras Svarauskas, "Kunigo M. Krupavičius…" p. 503.
[169] Artūras Svarauskas, "Lietuvos Darbo..." p. 51.
[170] The biggest anti-governmental protest occurred in 1936. CDP members,such as M. Krupavičius was one of the most active proponent of the revolt.

Conclusion

To keep loyalty to a liberal state was a great challenge for Catholic politics in turmoil years of 1920's and 1930's. As this paper aimed to illustrate, despite operating in particular national environments, most of the parties of Catholic-inspiration were not the proponents of democratic structures. More precisely, the evolution of the interwar political Catholicism can be unfolded into two distinct periods: the 1920's when confessional parties still supported liberal system, and the 1930's, which marked the rightist re-orientation of them. Taking this time-frame into account, rather early radicalization of the Catholic bloc, which might be detected from the 1925 - 1926 and materialized in the coup d'état of 1926, distinguishes the Lithuanian case from the general European context. At the same time, it is striking that radical rhetoric of the Lithuanian Christian Democratic was short-lived, and, already in the 1930's, was collaborating with democratic forces.

However, this chronological difference does not say much about the content. In many ways, the CDP stance towards right-wing nationalism was typical of a Catholic – it was tempted to ally with it. In the same way, to a large extent, political Catholicism in interwar Lithuania corresponded to general European tendencies: in the 1930's, it was more fractured and witnessed the emergence of lay Catholic movement which echoed the more militant rhetoric. As elsewhere in Europe, in Lithuania it was predominantly the students and young intellectuals, less dogmatic and clerical, who dominated the Catholic politics of the 1930's and sought to transform the country with Catholic spiritual values. To a large extent, political Catholicism in Lithuania does not deviate much from the general context of European political Catholicism.

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