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Editor of this issue: Thomas Remeikis

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CURRENT EVENTS:

NEW APPOINTMENTS TO THE HIERARCHY OF THE LITHUANIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Introductory Note

The appointment of bishops to vacant sees remains one of the more serious unresolved issues between the Soviet regime and Lithuanian Catholics. As the decade of the 1980s opened, only two bishops were functioning in three of the six dioceses of Lithuania (Bishop L. Povilonis in Kaunas and Vilkaviškis, and Bishop R. Krikščiūnas in Panevėžys). Bishop Julijonas Steponavičius and Bishop Vincentas Sladkevičius remained exiled for two decades from their sees in Vilnius and Kaišiadorys respectively. The Catholic dissidents have argued and lobbied with the Pope that new bishops should not be appointed until the exiled bishops are reinstated. Besides, the dissidents feel that the government will agree only to the appointment of bishops who will be subservient to its orders. Therefore, they argue, it is better to be without a hierarchy than with one that collaborates with the regime in the destruction of the Church.

In recent years, in part as a response to militant Catholicism in Lithuania, the Soviet regime began showing some concessions toward the believers and indicated a willingness to reach a compromise on the appointment of bishops. During the fall of 1981 reports were in the air that a solution had been agreed upon, as indicated by Vatican sources and the underground Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania. According to this plan, the exiled bishops were to be reinstated, but not in their own dioceses, and three unnamed priests were to be elevated to bishops. Bishop Povilonis, Chairman of the Conference of Bishops of Lithuania, took the recommendations to the Holy See. However, the plan fell through, very likely as a result of the intervention of Bishop Steponavičius, the informal head of the underground Church, who objected to the treatment of his status and the personalities of the candidates for elevation.

A partial compromise was worked out by the summer of 1982. The Soviet government agreed to reinstate Bishop Sladkevičius in the See of Kaišiadorys and to elevate the administrator of the Diocese of Telšiai Rev. A. Vaičius to the rank of bishop. Thus exiled Bishop Steponavičius remained outside his see and the Diocese of Vilkaviškis continued to be headed by Bishop Povilonis of Kaunas.

*The Catholic dissidents accepted the latest appointments as a triumph of principle and victory over the government. Their joys and concerns are quite evident in the excerpts from the unofficial press that follow here. Their happiness soon soured, however, when Pope John Paul II announced the selection of the Latvian bishop Vaivods for a cardinal's hat. The Lithuanian Catholics were at a loss to explain this. The reaction in the Catholic Chronicle was rather angry and very disappointed that the sacrifices of the Lithuanian Catholics were ignored by the Vatican. Whatever the specific reasons of the Pope, the appointment of a Latvian instead of a Lithuanian cardinal suggests that the normalization of the situation of the Catholic Church in Lithuania is still an unresolved problem. The following items are excerpted from the Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania, No. 54 (Aug. 75, 1982). The first item represents the viewpoint of the editors of the Chronicle. Lithuanian reaction to the appointment of a Latvian cardinal will be presented in the next issue of LITUANUS. For more details on the Catholic Church in Lithuania under the Soviet regime, see the following work: Thomas Remeikis, *Opposition to Soviet Rule in Lithuania, 1945-1980* (Chicago, 1980).*

OUR JOY, HOPE AND CONCERN

In July, 1982, the Apostolic See, with the agreement of Moscow, appointed the exiled Bishop Vincentas Sladkevičius Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Kaišiadorys, and named Father Antanas Vaičius bishop, appointing him Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Telšiai and of the Prelature of Klaipėda. Lithuania is especially happy that one exiled bishop has been able to take over an episcopal see, but asks with uneasiness what the fate of the other bishop will be.

Today in Lithuania no one can tell why the Soviet government consented to the appointment of these two bishops. What advantage could it hope for? Does this appointment mean, as some foreign radio broadcasts commented, that the Soviet government is relaxing its oppressive stranglehold? Quite the contrary! Lately, even greater pressure is being felt by priests to conform with the Regulations for Religious Associations, the purpose of which is to strangle the Church. Those who try to defend the rights of the Church or of the faithful are being attacked even more vehemently.

Perhaps the most correct answer would be this: When the Soviet government's plan to raise to the episcopacy candidates favorable to itself fell through last year, this year it decided to carry out its plan more subtly: to allow first the arrangement acceptable to the faithful, and then, to take advantage of the momentum to try to push through candidates favorable to itself. For this reason in Lithuania, among the clergy and the laity, much uneasiness is felt; with reason, but everyone believes in the Providence of God and the vigilance of the Apostolic See. The faithful and priests of Lithuania want to find "in their shepherd spiritual care, zeal, and encouragement to persevere in faith" (John Paul II), but they are seriously afraid of experiencing the tragedy of the Orthodox Church with the hierarchy going one way, and the believing public — another!

Lithuania needs bishops who would be able to accompany the believing nation to jail, labor camp, and even to death; not those who would hinder from "below" the spiritual renaissance which has begun.

At the present time, of the six dioceses of Lithuania, only the question of the Archdiocese of Kaunas and the Dioceses of Telšiai and Kaišiadorys has been resolved. The Diocese of Vilkaviškis is assigned to the Archdiocese of Kaunas, and clearly wants to have its own suitable shepherd, and to take care of its own affairs. The situation of the Diocese of Panevėžys is downright tragic, and the Soviet government will most surely try to prolong the status *quo*, so that the diocese might undergo as much damage as possible. Meanwhile, the episcopal throne of the Bishop of Vilnius has been waiting more than twenty years for its rightful occupant — the exiled Bishop Julijonas Steponavičius, who is especially beloved in Lithuania. Anyone who tried to contribute to the moral destruction of this bishop, would become a cancer as much in the nation as in the Church in Lithuania.

STATEMENT OF BISHOP SLADKEVIČIUS

In June 1982, it became known that the Soviet government was agreeing that His Excellency, Bishop Vincentas Sladkevičius should return from exile to his diocese, and, at the same time Father Antanas Vaičius, Administrator of the Diocese of Telšiai, should be consecrated bishop.

On July 16, western radio broadcasts officially announced the news. Everyone waited impatiently for the exiled bishop to take possession of the Cathedral of the Diocese of Kaišiadorys. On December 25, 1957, Archbishop Teofilus Matulionis, a national and religious martyr, consecrated Father Vincentas Sladkevičius bishop without the consent of the Soviet government. In an attempt to subjugate the ecclesiastical hierarchy of Lithuania to its own interests, the Soviet government did not allow the newly consecrated bishop, who had already managed earlier to fall into disfavor with the government for his loyalty to the Church, to assume his duties. Bishop Sladkevičius remained in exile for twenty-three years, and a non-functioning bishop almost twenty-five years.

All that time believing Lithuania prayed for the bishop in exile: priests and faithful wrote petitions, and even went to the labor camps, and now ... the exile has been allowed to assume the See of Kaišiadorys.

The solemn entry of Bishop Vincentas Sladkevičius into his cathedral is one of the greatest victories of the Catholic Church in Lithuania, built on great sacrifices.

Participating in the ceremonies were Bishops Liudvikas Povilonis, Julijonas Steponavičius and Antanas Vaičius. All concelebrated Holy Mass with Bishop Vincentas Sladkevičius. During the Mass, the Bishop of Kaišiadorys himself spoke. Following is a summary of his sermon:

"Exactly fifty years ago, in 1932, here, in this cathedral, I stood as a little twelve-year-old boy behind the flag of the *Ateitininkai* (Lithuanian Catholic Action organization — Trans. Note). With childish but enthusiastic voices we used to sing the *Ateitininkai* hymn. Now, after fifty years, I again stand before you as the Holy Father's appointed Apostolic Administrator of Kaišiadorys, your bishop and shepherd. You gaze at me curiously, as if to say, 'What will you be like?' This question I shall not and I cannot answer. The answer will be given by my whole life, by history, and by the judgment of God. I can only tell you what I should be, according to the mind of Christ and the Church's assignment. This is best revealed by the telegram of our Holy Father Pope John Paul II, sent to the president of our country's episcopal conference,

Bishop Liudvikas Povilonis. Our Holy Father, by sending such a meaningful, wonderfully encouraging telegram, showed our country unusual kindness. Now let us all hear the words of the Holy Father's telegram:

" Urged on by love and concern for the Church of Lithuania, most dear to us, we address our brother bishops this blessed day on which the new bishop, Antanas Vaičius, is being consecrated, who is to govern as Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Telšiai and the Prelature of Klaipėda. We share in the joy of that Catholic community, especially since at this same time, the honorable shepherd of souls Vincentas Sladkevičius assumes his episcopal role as Apostolic Administrator of Kaišiadorys.

" The bishop is truly a priceless gift of God given to the Church, for the bishop takes the place of the apostles, and by the imposition of hands and the words of consecration obtains the grace of the Holy Spirit and the sacramental character. By its power, in a noble and wonderful manner he represents Christ Himself, the Teacher, Shepherd and Bishop, and acts by the power of His Person, to gather the People of God in truth and holiness, and to care for them by prayer, preaching and performing all the works of charity.

" Priests, who are participants in the universal priesthood of Christ in order to minister to the People of God, on account of this participation in the priesthood and mission, should acknowledge the bishop as their father and listen to him respectfully. Finally, let the entire Catholic community, whose faith has been tested by the trials and tribulations of the truth, find in its shepherd protection for the soul, zeal and the strength to persevere in the Faith with the powerful support of hope and love, so that they might live worthily, practicing the Christian virtues, which complement the culture and knowledge of the nation.

" We commend the Catholic family of Lithuania to the Mother of God, the Mother of Mercy, with a heart full of love conferring the Apostolic blessing upon the bishops, priests, youth, those called to the Lord's inheritance, and also to all those devoted to the worship of God and to all the faithful.'

" 'Pope John Paul II' "

"The Holy Father's telegram beautifully expounds the Church's idea of what a bishop should be to his diocese: He represents Christ Himself, the Teacher, Shepherd and Bishop. From now on I am your bishop, and on my shoulders falls the responsibility for you. Everything which touches your life will touch my heart also. All the storms which touch your life will first touch my head; all troubles, hardships, even all your mistakes, will find an echo in my heart.

"While I was unable to carry out my duties others bore the burden, and for that I am most grateful. I am also grateful to you, my beloved priests of the Diocese of Kaišiadorys, who have always been good to me. Divine Providence has given our diocese such noble bishops as the remarkable martyr, Archbishop Teofilus Matulionis. When you experience difficult times, you would remember those saintly bishops and this used to protect you from erroneous actions.

"Our diocese had the good fortune, at the time of the establishment of the Ecclesiastical Province of Lithuania, to begin its life and to get such wonderful shepherds. In our diocese the most beautiful shoots of Christian living began to spring up.

"However, our diocese had its sorrowful mysteries also. Then we suffered, prayed and waited, trusting in Divine Providence. Will our diocese have its glorious mysteries? That depends on us. Will we know how to arise from our weaknesses and turn our gaze towards Jesus Christ? Will we sustain our child-like devotion to Mary? Will that devotion be the property not only of Šiluva, of the Gates of Dawn, or Žemaičių Kalvarija, but also of Pivašiūnai? It depends on us whether our diocese, having experienced the joyful and the sorrowful mysteries, will experience the glorious mysteries as well."

GREETINGS OF BISHOP STEPONAVIČIUS

During dinner the once exiled bishop was greeted by his brother bishop-in-exile, Julijonas Steponavičius. Here we present his greeting almost in its entirety:

"A very fitting commentary on the beautiful and pleasant celebration today — namely, the solemn entrance of His Excellency into his own cathedral, his return to his true duties — is provided by the words of the Saviour: 'You will mourn, but your mourning shall be turned into joy.' (Jn 16,20).

"The entire Church of Lithuania mourned, seeing that throughout most of the post-war era, the Diocese of Kaišiadorys was without its bishop, for its true shepherds were prevented from fulfilling their pastoral duties. The clergy and faithful of the Diocese of Kaišiadorys, who were orphans for thirty-five years, without their father and shepherd, also mourned. Mourning, too, was their true shepherd, who for twenty-five years was separated from his own, and had to live in remote loneliness. Today that sorrow has turned to joy. But this day of joy dawned for you, Your Excellency, after long suffering, pain and

concern. Apparently, in the plan of Divine Providence, it is ordained that the shepherds of dioceses born in pain should tread the path of sorrow, should drink the cup of pain to the dregs.

"The beginnings of the Diocese of Kaišiadorys were painful. As Canon Kiškis mentioned, after World War I, after the establishment of independent Lithuania, in 1920, Vilnius was seized. The Diocese of Vilnius was divided into two parts. When in 1926 the Ecclesiastical Province of Lithuania was being established, from one part of the Diocese of Vilnius was established the Diocese of Kaišiadorys. Its first shepherd, Canon Juozapas Kukta, was an exile; in 1922, with three Lithuanian activists, he was banished to independent Lithuania. The beginnings of the new bishop's administration were not easy. Not only was there no cathedral, but Kaišiadorys did not have at that time any suitable parish church. After World War I, in place of the planned parish church, a cathedral sprang up, and in 1926 it was consecrated.

"After the death of Bishop Juozapas Kukta, the Apostolic See appointed as Bishop of Kaišiadorys Teofilius Matulionis, a real martyr, who suffered sixteen years in the camps and died outside the borders of his diocese. And Divine Providence led you also, dear Excellency, to the See of the Diocese of Kaišiadorys by way of sacrifice and suffering. When Bishop Teofilius Matulionis, unable to perform his duties, was looking to his diocese's future, his eye fell on you. He found a way for the Holy Father to appoint you bishop and consecrate you. Unfortunately, you were never allowed to work among your own. Living in exile, you were considered a leper. Someone passed the word that it was dangerous to meet with you; and the clergy, succumbing to this fear, began to be afraid even to visit you.

"Someone has classified our priests into the reactionary and the progressive, extremists and sensible, and recently, a new term has cropped up: the opposition and the loyal. Such classification is foreign to the Church. For the Church, every priest is, in the words of St. Paul, a servant of Christ and a bestower of God's grace, taken from among humans and set before them. I would wish that in your diocese there be no so-called reactionary priests, nor progressive, neither extremists nor sensible, but that all priests, be servants of Christ and faithful sons of the Church.

"And finally, I wish that having been tried by sacrifice and suffering, for your steadfast priests, you would shine with courage and loyalty, and would strengthen the weak and doubting. May the good Lord strengthen your bodily powers and the powers of your soul, so that together with all the bishops of Lithuania, and with the priests of your diocese, you might labor in a holy and salutary fashion for the good of the Church in our country and the good of your diocese, and may the Good God bless your prayers and works."

CONSECRATION AND INSTALLATION OF BISHOP ANTANAS VAIČIUS

On July 21, 1982, the Holy Father appointed Father Antanas Vaičius Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Telšiai and of the Prelature of Klaipėda, and at the same time, bishop. The priests and faithful of Lithuania received this appointment favorably, since Fr. Antanas Vaičius has distinguished himself in pastoral work, approving and supporting the temperance movement, and confirming the priests' senate of the Diocese of Telšiai.

The consecration ceremonies were very beautiful. Bishop Antanas Vaičius was consecrated by Bishops Liudvikas Povilonis, Vincentas Sladkevičius, Julijonas Steponavičius and Romualdas Krikščiūnas. In his talk during the Mass, Bishop Liudvikas Povilonis read a telegram of greetings from Pope John Paul II to the Church of Lithuania, announced the appointment of Bishop Vincentas Sladkevičius, after twenty-three years of exile — as Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Kaišiadorys, and spoke at length about the episcopal ministry, emphasizing that "the ministry of bishop is not one of honor, but a ministry of work and sacrifice".

At the end of his talk, Bishop Povilonis addressed the one being consecrated in the following words: "My dear brother in Christ, Antanas, on this your consecration day, resolve to strive for the episcopal ideal, with the resolve of the Servant of God, Archbishop Jurgis Matulevičius: 'God, grant that I be consumed like a candle on the altar from the heat of work and the fire of love, for You and for Your Church.' "

During Mass, Canon Kazimieras Gaščiūnas delivered the sermon, during which he read the pope's telegram of greetings. After Mass the Bishop of Telšiai was greeted by the youth of Samogitia. Everyone was especially impressed by the sensitive greetings from the youth of Telšiai.

The bishop was also greeted in the name of the Catholic Committee for the Defense of Believers' Rights in Lithuania, by Father Alfonsas Svarinskas. Among other things he said, "The Catholic Committee followed with great interest the efforts of all of our shepherds to escape the atheists' oppression. It followed your efforts, too. We are grateful to you for arranging the memorial of the martyr-bishop Pranciškus Ramanauskas; we are grateful to you for reviving Žemaičių Kalvarija, for the rosary devotions, most popular in Samogitia; we are grateful to you for the temperance movement. Vatican Radio once stated: 'Only the Administrator of Telšiai, Father Vaičius has not undermined the temperance idea.' I think that was the best recognition given you."

Speaking on behalf of the priests of the Diocese of Telšiai was Father Klemensas Arlauskas, who expressed the happiness of all the priests over this appointment by the Holy Father.

In response to the greetings, Bishop Vaičius spoke as follows: "Brother priests, guests and my own dear people of Telšiai, very special and dear young people, little children and old folks:

"I am deeply moved and downright astounded, and cannot find words to thank you for this welcome. First I would like to thank Almighty God for the boundless love He has shown me, by allowing me to be born 'where the Šešupė runs, where the Nemunas flows', where the Šatrija, Rambynas, and the swift Vilija are, allowing me to be born and to grow up in the family of my believing parents, where there was much trouble and pain, where even black bread was often in short supply, but where there were prayer and hymns, and where songs rang out in the evening.

"Many beautiful things have been said to me today, in which not only warnings were involved. This morning when I called on the President of the Lithuanian Bishops' Conference, Bishop Liudvikas Povilonis, I had to take an oath, together with the Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Kaišiadorys, Bishop Vincentas Sladkevičius. At this time I would like to repeat that oath in my own words:

" 'I will devote all my efforts only to God and only to the Church of Christ. I will seek neither rest nor peace, and whatever I shall be able to, I will do, so that the Catholic Church might thrive in our beloved Samogitia.' "Solemnly give you my word and assurance, that I will offer my whole self and all my powers to Christ and the Church. At the same time I ask your help. Today in Kaunas I said, 'I draw close to you, your Excellencies the bishops, as to my own spiritual Fathers, who today have fathered me as a bishop'. This evening I repeat to you: I draw close to you, brother priests, asking you to help me, just as you bade me to remain faithful and to do all that is possible for God and His Church; I draw close to you, the dear faithful, that you might remember me and sustain me in your prayers".