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pp. 31–42 **Lithuanian Case of Catholic *Complexio Oppositorum***

**Litewski przypadek katolickiej *complexio oppositorum***

### Abstract

**Keywords** Carl Schmitt's interpretation of the Roman Catholic Church as *complexio oppositorum* allows us to understand the Lithuanian national movement's rise better. Motiejus Valančius, Carl Schmitt, myth, *complexio oppositorum* The Samogitian bishopric under Motiejus Valančius (from 1850 to 1870) should be seen as a phenomenon in Lithuanian political history. This episode of Lithuanian history is an example of what Schmitt described as *complexio oppositorum*. The contemporary dominant understanding that Valančius was a leading religious figure is insufficient and does not do him justice. His political actions marked a definite break with the older tradition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth; its end brought the beginning of attempts to find new forms of political life.

### Streszczenie

**Słowa kluczowe** Postrzeganie przez Carla Schmitta Kościoła rzymskokatolickiego jako *complexio oppositorum* pozwala lepiej zrozumieć powstanie litewskiego ruchu narodowego. Motiejus Valančius, Carl Schmitt, mit, *complexio oppositorum* Biskupstwo żmudzkie w czasach sprawowania urzędu przez bp. Motiejusa Valančiusa (1850–1870) należy postrzegać jako fenomen w historii politycznej Litwy. Ten epizod w dziejach Litwy jest przykładem tego, co Schmitt nazwał *complexio oppositorum*. Dominujący współcześnie pogląd, że Valančius był ważną postacią religijną, nie jest wystarczające i nie oddaje mu sprawiedliwości. Jego działalność polityczna oznaczała zdecydowane zerwanie ze starszą tradycją Rzeczypospolitej, ten koniec zarazem przyniósł pierwsze próby znalezienia nowych form życia politycznego.

Lithuanians formed a new political nation only when they distanced themselves from the shared tradition of Polish-Lithuanian culture. The most explicit expression of such distancing was put forward by Vilnius University professor Feliks Koneczny. In his book *Polskie Logos a Ethos. Roztrząsanie o znaczeniu i celu Polski* published in 1921, he asked “What civilization do Lithuanians belong to?” Koneczny’s answer was painful to patriots in Kaunas, who were separated from Vilnius by the demarcation line. According to him, the modern Lithuanian nation belonged to a pro-Muscovite civilisation. Koneczny made an important qualification by claiming that the Catholic element of Lithuanian culture gave Lithuanians a chance to remain a part of Latin civilisation. Koneczny over-emphasised the influence of Russian civilisation in Lithuania. When Lithuania gained independence in 1918, the new state was clearly oriented towards the West. However, Koneczny was right when he observed that the founders of new Lithuania “[...] in discussions about Lithuanian question reject considerations about Lithuanian past, they want to create a nation according to a definite plan, under the Russian influence they believe in the possibility of creating a new society.”<sup>1</sup> Today this phenomenon would be called as construction of a nation. Koneczny was also right when he spoke about the artificial construction of modern Lithuanian history. Contemporary explanations of the genesis of the Lithuanian nation tend to overlook the influence of the Catholic Church. This is most clearly expressed in the evaluations of the role of Bishop of Samogitia Motiejus Valančius (1801–1875), who is seen as an important figure in the formation of the modern Lithuanian nation, although the nature of his importance remains unclarified. It has much to do with what Koneczny correctly saw as a crucial element of Catholicity in Lithuanian history. By overlooking the influence of Valančius, Lithuanians began to create a secularised mythos of the nation’s rebirth. Personalities from later stages of Lithuanian history are named Founding Fathers. Koneczny had a point when he stated that the element of the Catholic Church is of utmost importance in attempts to understand modern Lithuania.

### Carl Schmitt’s *Complexio Oppositorum*

A vital impulse behind the birth of political philosophy in ancient Greece was the desire to escape the seductive power of myths. This is often described by the expression “from *mythos* to *logos*.” Since the end of the Renaissance, this was understood as defining the development arc of modern European consciousness. Ernst Cassirer, one of the most famous critics of political myths, saw the struggle against myths as a battle between culture and barbarism: “[...] the world of human culture may be described in the words of Babylonian legend. It could not arise until the darkness of myth was fought and overcome. But the mythical monsters were not entirely destroyed. They were used for the creation of a new universe, and they still survive in the universe.”<sup>2</sup> Optimistic and rationalistic

<sup>1</sup> F. Koneczny, *Polskie Logos a Ethos. Roztrząsanie o znaczeniu i celu Polski*, Poznań–Warszawa: Księgarnia św. Wojciecha, 1921, p. 138.

<sup>2</sup> E. Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946, pp. 297–298.

tendencies in politics tend to overlook that irrational impulses often rule social life. Modern history has shown that myths in politics are often more potent than *logos*. Refusal to acknowledge this irrationalism leads to a distorted understanding of politics, as *mythos* remains an important dimension of social life.

Carl Schmitt's reactionary worldview was closely tied to his attempts to reevaluate the role of myth. He was particularly interested in George Sorel's philosophy of direct action which was based on the analysis of mobilising the power of myths. Sorel described myths as "expressions of a will to act."<sup>3</sup> According to the French writer, myths generate moral conviction necessary in all great political struggles: "[...] men who are participating in great social movements always picture their coming action in the form of images of battle in which their cause is certain to triumph."<sup>4</sup> Schmitt summarised Sorel's insights by stating that "[...] out of the depths of true life-instincts and not from reason or pragmatism rises the great enthusiasm, the great moral decision and the great myth."<sup>5</sup> According to the German jurist, the rebirth of myth in political struggles was closely tied with the crisis of political rationalism: "[...] the theory of myth is the most powerful symptom of the decline of the relative rationalism of parliamentary thought which has lost its evidence."<sup>6</sup> Schmitt understood liberalism as a position based on a belief that even the most intense social conflicts could be resolved through discussions. He thought that this type of rationalism crisis became apparent when challenged by all sides' opponents believing in the absolute truth of their convictions and rejecting all attempts at compromises with their adversaries. These absolute convictions were presented in terms of mythical images, which were essential in modern politics.

Schmitt did not provide a systemic and detailed analysis of the mythical. According to Carsten Strathausen, "Myth, for Schmitt, is the de-historicized and incontestable core of human knowledge. It is stronger than knowledge not only because it operates intuitively rather than intellectually, but, most importantly, because it can no longer be proven true or false, right or wrong. The power of myth is neither rational nor rooted in any epistemological principles whatsoever. On the contrary: epistemological principles are rooted in myth."<sup>7</sup> The idea that Schmitt understood myth as a de-historicised core of human knowledge needs to be qualified; it has to be seen in the light of his thesis that "arcanum of ontology" is the principle that historical truth is true only once.<sup>8</sup> This principle forms the basis of his position, according to which "[...] all political concepts, images, and words have a *polemical* meaning, they are focused on a specific conflict and are bound to a certain situation."<sup>9</sup> The content of political myths is always formed

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<sup>3</sup> G. Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, J. Jennings (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> C. Schmitt, *Die geistesgeschichtliche Lage des heutigen Parlamentarismus*, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2010, p. 80.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 89.

<sup>7</sup> C. Strathausen, "Myth or Knowledge? Reading Carl Schmitt's *Hamlet or Hecuba*," *Telos* 2010, No. 153, p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> C. Schmitt, *Staat, Großraum, Nomos. Arbeiten aus den Jahren 1919–1969*, G. Maschke (ed.), Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1995, p. 532.

<sup>9</sup> C. Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2009, p. 29.

by concrete struggles and constellations of power. To better understand political myth, we need to examine the specific struggle in which it was employed and the opponent against whom it was directed. For Schmitt, the sphere of the mythical is dependent on the agonistic logic of the political.

John McCormick observed that “Schmitt often characterizes modernity as an apparent opposition between, on the one hand, the abstractly formal elements of science, technology, and economics and, on the other, a concretely content-oriented fascination that is expressed most notably in romanticism, that often manifests itself in neomythology.”<sup>10</sup> Schmitt understood modernity as a process of neutralisation and depoliticization. However, he had no illusions about the possibility of escaping the seduction of mythical elements in politics. For him, politics was a struggle, and every great struggle produces new myths: “[...] the creation of a political or a historical myth arises from political activity. [...] A myth arises only in real war.”<sup>11</sup> *Mythoi* are products of *polemos*, so they always have a polemical meaning. Great world conflicts produce mythical accounts of these struggles, and myths are later used in attempts to legitimate political order. Jacob Burckhardt famously prophesied about the coming age of *terrible simplicateurs*. Schmitt saw that simplifications and mythologisations of various kinds were an inescapable reality in the age of mass politics.

Schmitt is often presented as an apologist of political myths. However, he distanced himself from such a position with the statement that “[...] the danger this kind of irrationalism poses is great. The last remains of solidarity and feelings of belonging together will be destroyed in the pluralism of an unforeseeable number of myths. For political theology that is polytheism, just as every myth is polytheistic.”<sup>12</sup> For Schmitt, the combination of democratic pluralism and the pluralism of myths was too unstable and dangerous. He attempted to find the ordering principles of politics in the sphere of theology in suprarational conceptions. His political theory was often inseparable from attempts to mythologise theological concepts and the rich tradition of political Catholicism. According to Jens Meierhenrich, Sorel’s analysis revealed to Schmitt that the absence of myth had created a structural weakness in the modern state, which had become a form without any substance and could no longer create and maintain political order. In this situation, “[...] the mythology of Catholicism, by contrast, supplied a veritable cornucopia of substance that promised to ensure that political order was not just stable and durable but also culturally meaningful.”<sup>13</sup> *Römischer Katholizismus und politische Form* was Schmitt’s attempt to construct a “secular apotheosis” of the Catholic Church.<sup>14</sup> In one of his last publications, he admitted that this essay was rhetorical and could be read as an *elogium*.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> J.P. McCormick, *Carl Schmitt’s Critique of Liberalism: Against Politics as Technology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 16.

<sup>11</sup> C. Schmitt, *Politische Romantik*, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2009, p. 166.

<sup>12</sup> C. Schmitt, *Die geistesgeschichtliche Lage...*, p. 89.

<sup>13</sup> J. Meierhenrich, “Fearing the Disorder of Things: The Development of Carl Schmitt’s Institutional Theory, 1919–1942,” [in:] *The Oxford Handbook of Carl Schmitt*, J. Meierhenrich, O. Simons (eds), New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 190.

<sup>14</sup> R. Mehring, *Carl Schmitt: Aufstieg und Fall*, München: C.H. Beck, 2009, p. 149.

<sup>15</sup> C. Schmitt, *Politische Theologie II. Die Legende von der Erledigung jeder Politischen Theologie*, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2008, p. 24.

It was an attempt to create a *mythos* of the Church. Schmitt saw his epoch as one that had lost all certainty regarding political principles, and he sought to develop a counter-myth of the Church in which this institution would be valorised for its ability to create order. The Church would appear as an institution that could fulfil the functions the modern state failed to achieve.

Schmitt begins his essay by observing that many opponents of the Church have criticised it for political opportunism, for its seeming lack of substantial political principles. This charge was very similar to the one he had levelled against liberalism, which he denounced as a “metaphysical compromise.” However, Schmitt argues that political “elasticity” of the Church and the ability to combine seemingly irreconcilable social and political positions is its greatest strength: “[...] the essence of the Roman Catholic *complexio oppositorum* lies in a specific, formal superiority over the matter of human life, which was not known by any other imperium. It has succeeded in constituting a substantial configuration of historical and social reality that, despite its formal character, retains its concrete existence which is at once vital and rational.”<sup>16</sup> The Church can transcend all antithetical positions by binding them together. It can achieve such seemingly impossible syntheses because it has its own institutional and juridical logic and is focused on “normative guidance of human social life.”<sup>17</sup>

Jan-Werner Müller notes that “The Catholic Church also relied on a scholastic idea of representation, namely the representation of an idea, which shines through the representative, just like Christ appears through the Pope. Representation, according to Schmitt, had to be personal, and had to involve the re-presenting of substantive beliefs, ideals or even myths. It also meant representation before, rather than for the people.”<sup>18</sup> Schmitt valorised the Church as an institution that stood as an alternative to the functionalistic tendencies of modernity. In his idealised account, the Church was a supreme example of an institution that was capable of realising the principle of representation: “[...] it represents *civitas humana*, it represents in every moment the historical connection to the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ, it represents the person of Christ, the God who in historical reality became man. In this capacity for representation lies its superiority over the age of economic thinking.”<sup>19</sup> In Schmitt’s account, the Catholic Church appears as a stabilising force in crises. Since its very beginning, the modern state was marked by the struggle against all types of *potestas indirecta*. The Roman Catholic Church was the most outstanding example of such indirect power.<sup>20</sup> The state’s battle with the Church since Thomas Hobbes’s mythical image of Leviathan revealed the potential for totalitarianism inherent in the logic of statehood. Schmitt’s counter-myth of *complexio oppositorum* presented the Catholic Church as an institution that could function as a counterweight to the totalising pretensions of the modern state.

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<sup>16</sup> C. Schmitt, *Römischer Katholizismus und politische Form*, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2019, p. 14.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 21.

<sup>18</sup> J.-W. Müller, *A Dangerous Mind: Carl Schmitt in Post-War European Thought*, New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 2003, p. 22.

<sup>19</sup> C. Schmitt, *Römischer Katholizismus...*, pp. 31–32.

<sup>20</sup> C. Schmitt, *Der Leviathan in der Staatslehre des Thomas Hobbes: Sinn und Fehlschlag eines politischen Symbols*, Stuttgart: Klett-Cota, 2018, p. 127.

## Lithuanian *Complexio Oppositorum*

Bishop of Samogitia Motiejus Valančius was the first from the new Lithuanian nation to have reached such heights in politics. He was entrusted with the Samogitian diocese, the largest Catholic bishopric in tsarist Russia. He always kept in touch with the leading politicians in Russia, met the Russian Tsar twice, and could be counted among prominent statesmen. Valančius's visitations to parishes and his movement for sobriety had clear signs of attempts to gain political influence. According to the historian Vytautas Merkys, "A magical bond between the bishop and the people was formed; it only grew stronger with each visitation. Governors in Vilnius noted this bond and could not hide their outrage."<sup>21</sup> Russian administrators noted that the influence of Valančius was so significant that "[...] in a few months he could start a new rebellion."<sup>22</sup> Even today, Lithuanian historians find it hard to recognise that Valančius was not only a Catholic bishop but also a politician of the highest rank. After the final partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1795, Lithuania had only disputed ethnographic boundaries and no coherent and distinct national consciousness, and it became almost impossible to explain what the name "Lithuania" signified. Valančius was the first person to formulate a new understanding of the boundaries of Lithuania. His activities today are mainly of interest to historians of the Church. However, he managed to make the institution of the Catholic Church the basis of a new political movement of national awakening. Valančius always saw himself as a Catholic bishop and not a politician. However, the results of his activities force us to reconsider many basic political concepts.

All attempts to understand Valančius's bishopric as a political form depend on how one answers the question "what is politics?." Without going into broader discussions, it must be noted that any social phenomenon can gain political meaning. Our understanding of politics is transformed by various sources—morality, religion, cultural identity, economic utility or even our notions of beauty. Schmitt clearly saw that politics could not be identified with the state.<sup>23</sup> On the contrary, the state is only one of many expressions of politics. If the state had been the only criterion of politics, we could have no understanding of political history and political thought before the end of the Renaissance, before the appearance of the state as a form of political unity. The bishopric is not only a form of religious life administration but can also become an essential factor in political struggles. The Samogitian bishopric under the rule of Valančius was the first form of political life in which the Lithuanian nation began expressing itself after the fall of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

The concept of *interregnum* gives us a better understanding of the political meaning of Valančius's activities. When he was in office, Lithuania did not exist as a separate political entity, and Lithuanians had no clear idea where the boundaries of such a political entity could be drawn. The Samogitian bishopric became the first administrative unit that began to form an understanding of the future boundaries of the new

<sup>21</sup> V. Merkys, *Motiejus Valančius: tarp katalikiškojo universalizmo ir tautiškumo*, Vilnius: Mintis, 1999, p. 229.

<sup>22</sup> M. Valančius, *Raštai*, Vilnius: Mintis, 1972, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> C. Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen...*, p. 29.



nation and state. In their book *Carų valdžioje: Lietuva XIX amžiuje* ["Under Tsar Rule: Lithuania in the 19th Century"], Egidijus Aleksandravičius and Antanas Kulakauskas note that "[...] there is no basis for considering the period of Valančius in post-rebellion times as a stage in the national movement, which clearly is a separate epoch in Lithuanian history."<sup>24</sup> However, in the book, we do not find any explanation of the particular characteristics of this distinct epoch. On the same page of the book, the authors contradict themselves, claiming that under Valančius, the Catholic Church in Lithuanian territories "[...] showed support for Lithuanian culture, even expanded the social basis for national rebirth," and further down stating that Valančius "[...] created a distinct epoch in Lithuanian history" which cannot be identified with the national reawakening. It remains unclear why the expansion of the social basis for the national rebirth cannot be seen as an element in the struggle for national revival. Aleksandravičius and Kulakauskas see Valančius as the most prominent personality in Lithuanian history of the first part of the 19th century. However, they do not explain what made him a figure of such importance. It also remains unclear what they understood as "a distinct epoch in Lithuanian history."

The contradiction in their statements stems from their refusal to see the political meaning of the Samogitian bishopric. Valančius created "a distinct epoch in Lithuanian history" because it was an *interregnum* between the duchy of the past and the nation-state of the future, between the old nation of nobility and the new nation of the peasantry, between the Polish-Lithuanian culture of the Commonwealth and the new culture of the Lithuanian nation. This *interregnum* marked the transition from the nobles' democracy to the modern form of mass democracy, from the formless mass of people to an enlightened society. The feudal *interregnum* concept allows us to understand the radical break in Lithuanian history better. Here it does not designate the time during which a throne is vacant between two successive reigns. The activities of Valančius could be described as *interregnum* between the feudal Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and what turned out to be the modern Lithuanian nation-state. It is important to remember that in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, during the *interregnum*, the role of interrex was traditionally entrusted to the archbishop of Gniezno. Valančius became a sort of regent for the modern Lithuanian nation. His bishopric played the role of Welfare Council. Bishopric turned out to be a transitory type of political form.

Aleksandravičius and Kulakauskas are correct in arguing that Valančius created a "[...] kingdom in the spiritual sphere, which turned out to be impenetrable to a large and well-trained Russian administration."<sup>25</sup> We can also say that Valančius wielded *potestas spiritualis* or *potestas ecclesiastica*. For many centuries the popes in Rome tried to prove that they had spiritual power, which was different from the temporal one. The activities of Valančius are not something that would have been unheard of in the history of the Catholic Church. His use of *potestas spiritualis* had clear political implications. His power, however, was not of the type described by Robert Bellarmine as *potestas indirecta in temporabile*. It would have been impossible for a Catholic bishop to

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<sup>24</sup> E. Aleksandravičius, A. Kulakauskas, *Carų valdžioje: Lietuva XIX amžiuje*, Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 1996, p. 191.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 174.

have such power in tsarist Russia, where politics were inextricably linked to the Orthodox Church. The authority of Valančius was limited to the Catholics who lived in his diocese. Within these limits, a new political nation was beginning to take shape. Catholic *potestas spiritualis* played a vital role in the birth of Lithuanian national consciousness. Valančius's case is peculiar in one respect—the spiritual power of Catholicism came into conflict with the Russian emperor and political culture formed under the guidance of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Valančius's *interregnum* clearly shows that the Lithuanian national movement grew under the protection of the Catholic Church. The bishop of Samogitia cared about the *Respublica Christiana* and not about the national movement, and was indifferent to political nationalism.

The problems of Lithuanian national identity appeared to Valančius as important factors in the struggle for Catholic faith. He successfully opposed the tsarist attempts to impose the principle *cuius regio, eius religio*. In his battle against autocracy, he masterfully employed weapons that had been used by Protestants—moral and religious teachings in the people's language, publishing books in the native language of the faithful and respecting the culture of the peasants. In Schmitt's terms, this could be regarded as an example of Catholic *complexio oppositorum*.<sup>26</sup> When facing the threats to the survival of Catholicism in the Lithuanian territory, he successfully used the cultural weapons that had been used against the Catholic Church. Valančius managed to combine various antithetical political positions. During the revolutions of 1848, Western European countries were choosing between the modern ideologies of liberalism, socialism, conservatism, and anarchism. Lithuania at the time was closer to the confessional conflicts of the 17th century. The conflict between Catholicism and Orthodoxy was not only religious, it was also political. Later on, it turned out to have played a crucial role in the birth of the Lithuanian national movement.

## National Movement without Nationalism

Lithuanian national movement has its own monarchic, aristocratic and democratic stages. Valančius played the role of the monarch. Next was the period of various intellectuals who can be seen as representing the aristocratic element, giving way to mass democracy when the national movement became a mass phenomenon. The power wielded by Valančius was similar to that of monarchs because his power was indirect—it was *potestas indirecta*. Valančius differed from various later activists of the national movement because he had clear institutional power recognised by the Russian empire. *Potestas indirecta* has a variety of dangers. A person who wields indirect power can enjoy the great support of the people; however, he has no actual political means to protect them.

Valančius ruled only the souls of his people, and, at the same time, he had to submit to the undisputed rule of the Russian Tsar. A weighty responsibility rested on him;

<sup>26</sup> The term *complexio oppositorum* for Schmitt has three or four different meanings (C. Schmitt, *Römischer Katholizismus...*, p. 14). In the case of Valančius this term designates the ability of the Catholic Church to accommodate itself to the changing circumstances of political life. Valančius did not see himself as a representative of any political movement. He understood his mission as being the representative of Christ.



no other leader of the Lithuanian national movement would have to carry such a heavy burden. The bolder his civic initiatives became, the more responsibility he had for his people, but he had no means to defend them. Valančius wielded only indirect political power. However, he was the first to take responsibility for the people who would soon create a Lithuanian nation-state. Others, for example, Simonas Daukantas, had to answer only for the books he published. Valančius was responsible for the people living in the Samogitian diocese, and he began to activate them politically. Vytautas Kavolis explained the relationship between Daukantas and Valančius: “Samogitian Tsar could not see a free intellectual as someone who was equal to him.”<sup>27</sup> Historians tend to emphasise that Valančius was a very talented organiser of social initiatives. However, his authority was of even greater importance. His political activities perfectly illustrate Schmitt’s argument: “No political system can survive even a generation with only naked techniques of holding power. To the political belongs the idea, because there is no politics without authority and there is no authority without an ethos of belief.”<sup>28</sup>

The term “pastoral power” rightly describes the activities of Valančius. He understood that people could be ruled not only by an imperial authority but also by an ecclesiastical one. The peasantry’s moral and religious self-understanding, conscience, and understanding of the world can be seen as an important political (or parapolitical) factor. Valančius cared for his faithful and did not care much about political geography or problems of the state and political nation. His pastoral activities created a form of unpolitical community which would become the basis of the political community for the newly created state a few decades later. What Valančius understood as *potestas spiritualis*, members of Lithuanian intelligentsia would designate later as “culture.” Lithuanian interwar philosophy of culture can be seen as a continuation of the older discussions about the phenomenon of *potestas spiritualis*.

Before Valančius, many authors emphasised the importance of the Lithuanian language. However, he was the first to have made care for the Lithuanian language an element of the policy of the Catholic Church. Valančius related the Lithuanian language’s exclusion from tsarist Russia’s public life to the social humiliation of Lithuanian peasants. He politicised language. However, he could never have imagined that his struggle for the Catholic faith, language and culture would lead to establishing an independent nation-state. It would have looked like some utopia. Valančius would always try to achieve only realistic goals. His policies were based on a careful and precise evaluation of the circumstances and resources at his disposal. Vincas Trumpa notes that “[...] the whole movement of romanticism was based on the past. Daukantas was influenced by that. Valančius was not.”<sup>29</sup> If conducted in the 19th century, sociological surveys would show that Lithuanian peasants had no idea of an independent state. The Samogitian bishopric under Valančius managed to realise the ideal of cultural autonomy for the new nation. The boundaries of the diocese would become the boundaries of the new state. Valančius always wanted to avoid an open conflict with the tsarist government. He explained that his care for the education of Lithuanian peasants was a part of his

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<sup>27</sup> V. Kavolis, *Žmogus istorijoje*, Vilnius: Vaga, 1996, p. 454.

<sup>28</sup> C. Schmitt, *Römischer Katholizismus...*, p. 28.

<sup>29</sup> V. Trumpa, *Apie žmones ir laiką*, Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2001, p. 122.

duties as bishop. By rising above politics, Valančius managed to influence political changes indirectly. His attempts to educate peasants in their native language would lead to significant political consequences.

The *interregnum* is an exceptional situation, and it always calls for unconventional actions and personalities. Using Schmitt's political theology language, we could describe *interregnum* as something analogous to a miracle. The Samogitian bishop created a phenomenon that preceding generations could not have imagined and that remained misunderstood by those who followed. Valančius was not a Lithuanian nationalist. His activities were always guided by Catholic orthodoxy. He began caring for Lithuanian peasants because the future of the Church in this part of the world depended on them. Valančius was the leading actor in the drama of *interregnum*, but his role has been misunderstood to a great extent even today. The Lithuanians recognise that he was a significant figure in Lithuanian history, yet they usually are afraid to call him the founding figure of the modern Lithuanian state. Other persons are indicated for this role. Religion is seen as a factor that divides the Lithuanians. However, that was clearly not the case with Valančius as the *interrex*.

The independent Lithuanian state can be understood as an unforeseen result of Valančius's activities. He did not talk about the independent state, so he cannot be seen as the patriarch of the modern Lithuanian nation. His position in the Catholic Church prevents historians from bestowing this title upon him. A great shepherd of the souls is not seen as a great political leader because his authority was primarily religious. Two generations of Lithuanian intellectuals between 1883 and 1918 found other people of authority. The source of Valančius's power, his masterful use of *potestas spiritualis* is the main reason why the meaning of his *interregnum* remains largely misunderstood. Lithuanian nationalism is much closer to Daukantas than to Valančius. The Samogitian bishop oversaw the first stages of the development of the Lithuanian nation that fifty years later entered a qualitatively new phase of its development with the formation of a new state. However, under new historical circumstances, a bishop could not be recognised as someone who had united the whole nation. This neglect was the price he paid for being the most important person in the transition period. The *interregnum* of Valančius marked a transition between the old feudal regnum and the new national movement. His *interregnum* enabled the Lithuanians to escape the Old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Russian Empire. In the 14th century, with the help of Poland, Lithuania became a member of Latin Europe. The fact that, under the guidance of Valančius, the Samogitian bishopric became the most important intermediary that allowed Lithuania to leave the Polish cultural sphere has not received sufficient attention. However, as already has been said, this process was not a conscious goal of the Bishop's activities. Catholicism functioned as an intermediary in the political divorce of Lithuania and Poland.

There is no doubt that Valančius was a critic of revolutions; however, he paved the way for a democratic revolution in Lithuania. We could even say that from the perspective of the Catholic Church, this was a short-sighted policy because, at some point, the democratic revolution became hostile to religion. Valančius played a vital role in the democratisation of Lithuanians; however, this also meant that new generations raised

on democratic ideals would often become opponents of the Church.<sup>30</sup> During his lifetime, Valančius was criticised by the older generation as a *chłopoman* [this Polish term, literary translating as “peasant-mania,” means a fascination with, and interest in, the peasantry], while to younger generations, he would appear as insufficiently nationalistic, *Polonophile* or even a tool in the hands of the Tsar. Fifty years after his death, Vaclovas Biržiška did not want to call him a Lithuanian patriot.<sup>31</sup> These evaluations allow us to see Valančius as a Schmittian *katechon* (κατέχων)–“that which withholds”–restrainer, a mysterious figure from the Second Epistle of Paul to Thessalonians (2 Thessalonians 2:6–7). Valančius restrained the power of the tsarist administration; he also restrained the more extreme tendencies of Lithuanian nationalism. His political Catholicism was an example of the restraining power of Catholic *complexio oppositorum*.

Since the 19th century, Lithuanians tell a paradoxical myth: on the one hand, they claim to be an ancient nation that founded the Great Duchy of Lithuania, while on the other, they claim that to establish a state, a new nation had to be created. The political forms of the Grand Duchy and the state are separated by a very different understanding of what it means to be a nation. Among many other things, these political forms are differentiated by conceptions of the relationship between the nation and political power. Nationalists were striving for a cultural revolution so that they could have distanced themselves from Bishop Valančius even earlier. The modern nation pushed out monarchical and aristocratic forms of government, it demanded to recognise all citizens as equals. A new basis for a democratic state was found, and it was incompatible with the political structure of the Commonwealth and the Russian empire. Valančius was the main protagonist of the *interregnum* because he broke with the feudal tradition and began the transition towards new forms of political life. Even if the culmination of the *interregnum* was contrary to his intentions, it would be difficult to imagine how Lithuania would have overcome its biggest crisis of cultural and political identity. Valančius laid the groundwork for a new nation. Aleksandravičius and Kulakauskas are wrong in claiming he cannot be seen as belonging to the movement of national awakening. Valančius shaped this epoch without becoming identified with it.

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<sup>30</sup> Valančius had no intentions to create a democratic society. However, his care for the education of peasants in their native language would form a basis for the democratisation of society. During the reign of Valančius, the Catholic Church was the most influential institution which was indirectly shaping the formation of the emerging Lithuanian democracy.

<sup>31</sup> V. Biržiška, “Iš vysk. M. Valančiaus veiklos,” [in:] *Lietuvių tautinio atgimimo istorijos studijos. Atgimimas ir Katalikų Bažnyčia*, Vol. 7, Vilnius: Katalikų pasaulio leidykla, 1994, p. 386.

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