

Interconfessional Rivalry in Lithuania after the Decree of Tolerance

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Emperor Alexander II visited Vil'na on July 13, 1867. Among the representatives from all the estates that gathered to welcome him were peasants who had recently converted from Catholicism to Orthodoxy. The emperor stressed when speaking to them that “They *would not be able to* revert to their earlier faith, and I am pleased to see them as Orthodox believers” (my italics).¹ These words were printed and displayed at all volost'-self-governments (*volostnoe pravlenie*) in the Minsk province, so they would be known to anyone considering reverting to Catholicism.² The mass distribution of the emperor's words shows that reversion was indeed a likely problem, and that the involvement of an authority figure such as the emperor was necessary to solve it. Leaving the Orthodox Church was not an option according to the laws of the Russian Empire until the Decree of Tolerance (April 17, 1905) was proclaimed across the whole empire, including the Northwest region (NWR), where there were recent converts to Orthodoxy. The mass conversion of Catholic peasants to the Orthodox faith between 1863 and 1867 was part of the government's policy of “de-Polonization.”³ One of its outcomes was that between 1863 and

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- 1 We have no data to suggest that similar notices were displayed in the Vil'na, Grodna, or Kovna provinces. Perhaps this kind of measure was applied because the Minsk province had the greatest number of new Orthodox believers (35,569). Statistical data from: Darius Staliūnas, *Making Russians: Meaning and Practice of Russification in Lithuania and Belarus after 1863* (Amsterdam; New York, NY: Rodopi, 2007), 133.
- 2 Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv (Russian State Historical Archives, RGIA), f. 821, op. 125, d. 267, l. 28, 34.
- 3 For more details, see Staliūnas, *Making Russians*, 131–80.

1867 in the so-called Lithuanian provinces, which are the focus of this chapter, there were 18,775 new Orthodox believers in Vil'na province, 466 in Kovna province, and 16,267 in Grodna province.⁴

In the nineteenth century, the government and the Orthodox Church in the NWR were forced to deal with the category of “recalcitrants” (*uporstvuiushchie*), those who had formally converted to Orthodoxy but did not consider themselves as Orthodox believers.⁵ There were instances of legal and illegal efforts to return to their previous faith, usually among Roman Catholics. Personal and collective requests were written and submitted, couples were married, and children continued to be baptized in accordance with Catholic rites.⁶ The government resolved this problem through the use of repressive measures and increased control, transferring all the blame to the Catholic Church and its clergy. The registration of new Orthodox believers was enforced and threats were made to close down churches where the clergy provided religious services to nominal Orthodox believers; as a result, these clerics faced criminal and administrative liability.⁷

These kinds of measures were sufficient to control the situation: there were only a few mass efforts to leave the Orthodox Church and return to the former faith. For example, between 1881 and 1894, only 139 person-

4 Ibid., 133.

5 There were people like this among the Uniates as well because this Church was absorbed by the Orthodox Church in the Western Region in 1839; the Kingdom of Poland followed suit in 1875.

6 Statistics from the period 1881–1894 about submitted requests to return to Catholicism: RGIA, f. 821, op. 125, d. 267, l. 4–5. Orthodox Church hierarchs had already drawn attention to the actions of the Catholic clergy against new Orthodox believers in 1881–82; the issue of restricting Catholic “propaganda” was discussed for an entire decade in the Vil'na province. See Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas (Lithuanian State Historical Archives; LVIA), f. 378, BS, ap. 1882, b. 230 (Po otzyvu Arkhiepiskopa Litovskogo i Vilenskogo s zapiskoiu o dopuskaemykh otstupleniakh ot ustanovlennogo v SZK poriadka).

7 Report from the Vil'na Roman Catholic Consistory dated December 3, 1899 to the Bishop of Vil'na (it indicates that stricter regulations were enforced in 1888 for recording converts to the Orthodox Church in registries and other social status documents; Orthodox Church initiatives were indicated as well), LVIA, f. 694, ap. 1, b. 2482, l. 6–7; 9–10. When secular and Orthodox Church authorities investigated a case in 1887 in which the peasant Ivan Martsinchik sought to revert to Catholicism, it was found that he had received religious rites from the Dambravas parish priest Fr. Zimnocha. Officials suggested warning that if this situation continued, his church would be closed. The Vil'na governor-general informed the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which supported the recommendation. The priest was informed by an official from the Vil'na diocese. Report from the Vil'na governor-general to the Vil'na diocese official, March 19, 1888; report from the Vil'na diocese official to the Dambravas parish priest Fr. Zimnocha, March 22, 1888, LVIA, f. 694, ap. 1, b. 2482, l. 1–2.

al requests and 6 collective requests were submitted from the Vil'na and Grodna provinces.⁸ However, the situation changed fundamentally in 1905 with the declaration of the Decree of Tolerance, in which the first article indicated that individuals could leave the Orthodox Church without facing any legal repercussions. The “ruling” (*gospodstvuiushchaia*) status of the Orthodox Church was maintained even after the announcement of the decree, but nevertheless, the opportunity to legally leave the Orthodox Church was a radical innovation in the Russian Empire.

The aim of this study is to analyze the outcomes of the declaration of the Decree of Tolerance (April 17, 1905) on the Orthodox and Catholic Churches in the so-called Lithuanian provinces of Kovna, Vil'na, and Grodna, all of which were part of the NWR. Specifically, this essay asks the following questions: What was the social position of Churches in communities and what were the roles of Churches as institutions? How did these change over time? And what were the differences and similarities in the Lithuanian dioceses/provinces above? I shall also try to ascertain how the imperial government participated in these processes, and whether the burgeoning nationalisms of non-dominant ethnic groups influenced interconfessional relations. I intend to determine the innovations (and/or continuity) in government policy after 1905 as it compares to the policies regarding the Catholic Church after the uprising of 1863–64. In this study, I argue that the reversion from Orthodoxy that commenced after the announcement of the decree of April 17, 1905 demonstrated the low social prestige of the Orthodox Church in these specific provinces in the NWR at the time. This meant that the government's “de-Polonization” measures implemented after the uprising of 1863–64 were not only ineffective; they were also a stimulus for interconfessional tension that went on until 1904, and even intensified after the Decree of Tolerance. This inter-

8 Statistics from 1881–1894 about submitted requests to return to Catholicism, RGIA, f. 821, op. 125, d. 267, l. 4–5. Mikhail Dolbilov has analyzed the Minsk governor's initiative concerning the possible return of the peasants of Lagoshin to Catholicism in 1878–79. The initiative was not successful. M. Dolbilov, *Russkii krai, chuzhaia vera: etnokonfessional'naia politika imperii v Litve i Belorusii pri Aleksandre II* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2010), 702–706.

confessional tension can be understood, to a certain extent, as an outcome of the decree. The tension that arose between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches after the announcement of the Decree of Tolerance has to be explained by taking into consideration the socio-cultural norms that functioned in society for a long period of time, the traditions of each Church, and the political reforms underway (the Decree of Tolerance was followed by the Manifesto of October 17, 1905, the Temporary Provisions of Societies and Unions issued on March 4, 1906, and elections to the State Duma). I would like to stress that political reforms are not the focus of my research, and due to the scope of my study and my research questions, they will not be discussed. However, these simultaneous developments were also important for understanding interconfessional relations, and they appeared in the same context.

In this study, Lithuania is understood as part of the NWR, and specifically the Kovna, Vil'na, and Grodna provinces. The imperial government's policies in Lithuania in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries differed significantly from those implemented in the Belorussian provinces of Minsk, Mogilev, and Vitebsk, which were considered more politically reliable.⁹ These provinces made up the Lithuanian and Vil'na Orthodox diocese. In 1900, separate Grodna and Brest dioceses were formed from the former Grodna province. In terms of the Catholic Church, the Vil'na and Grodna provinces constituted the Vil'na diocese. Kovna (and Kurland) province made up the Samogitian (Tel'shi) diocese.¹⁰ It is important to note that the imperial administrative space correlated rather closely with the administrative spaces of both Churches. Meanwhile, the other provinces in the NWR, Minsk, Mogilev and Vitebsk, were part of the Catholic Church's Mogilev archdiocese; they did not have a separate

9 Zita Medišauskienė, "Lietuvos samprata: tarp istorijos ir etnografijos," in *Lietuvos istorija: Devynioliktas amžius; visuomenė ir valdžia*, vol. 8, part 1, ed. Tamara Bairašauskaitė, Zita Medišauskienė, and Rimantas Miknys (Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2011), 52.

10 The double name of the Tel'shi or Samogitian diocese was in use starting in the beginning of the 1840s, and it was this form of the name that was recorded in 1847 in the agreement between Russia and the Holy See. The government moved the center of the diocese from Varniai to the provincial center of Kovna in 1865. However, the diocese's name remained the same.

Church administration, and their separate jurisdictions were directly subordinate to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. So, in terms of both the government and the Church, they were different from the other NWR provinces. The confessional structure of the mentioned NWR provinces was not uniform with regard to the numbers of Orthodox and Catholic believers. Catholics dominated in Kovna province (1,214,603 believers in total as of January 1, 1904, and 45,906 Orthodox faithful in 1905). Almost half the Orthodox believers in Kovna province lived in the northern part of the Novoaleksandrovsk (Zarasai) district, which bordered Vil'na province. In Vil'na, there were 419,770 Orthodox believers (according to 1902 data), and 984,676 Catholics. In Grodna province, there were 920,277 Orthodox believers (according to 1905 data), and 403,362 Catholics (1905).¹¹ The network of Orthodox parishes was much denser, which meant that parishes were smaller and there was more clergy compared to the Catholic Church.¹² Both the Orthodox and Catholic parish networks overlapped, so neither of these Christian communities was isolated.

The Beginning of (In)tolerance in the NWR

The announcement of the Decree of Tolerance meant that it was possible to choose one's faith freely: it became possible to leave the Orthodox Church, join another Church, and profess another faith. Paul W. Werth argues that the government foresaw the mass conversion of nominal Orthodox believers to Catholicism.¹³ However, the conversion process in the NWR took place on a much larger scale than the local government or Orthodox Church expected. It was as if everything that happened in the NWR after the announcement of the Decree of Tolerance caught the government and the Orthodox Church completely off guard. For example, even before the

¹¹ Eighty-three Catholic parishes, 350 Orthodox parishes.

¹² Kovna province: 300 Catholic parishes, 37 [45] Orthodox parishes; Vil'na province: 154 Catholic parishes, 167 [171] Orthodox parishes; Grodna province: 83 Catholic parishes, 350 Orthodox parishes.

¹³ Paul W. Werth, *Pravoslavie, inoslavie, inoverie: ocherki po istorii religioznogo raznoobrazia Rossiiskoi imperii* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2012), 50.

Decree of Tolerance, when Vil'na governor-general Freze recommended a positive solution to the issue of "recalcitrants," that is, to allow them to profess the Catholic faith, he did not envisage mass conversion to Catholicism because he believed that the government's economic measures and the activities of the Orthodox clergy and schools would be effective in retaining believers.¹⁴ In a report written on April 8, 1905 about the situation in the diocese in 1904 (just before the announcement of the Decree of Tolerance), Nikanor, the Orthodox Archbishop of Grodna and Brest, stated that the "recalcitrants" living in the Slonim, Volkovysk, and Sokulka districts were not dangerous; they were elderly, they did not attract Orthodox believers to their side, and they "gave no grounds to fear the fate of Orthodoxy in the diocese."¹⁵ A member of the clergy in the Bystritsa Orthodox parish in the deanery of Shumsk in the Vil'na district admitted that *uporstvuiushchie* made up the majority in the parish of almost 1,500 believers, but he saw no danger that the parish would disappear as a result.¹⁶ In July 1905, one of the Vil'na governor-general's officials who analyzed the situation stated that in the Orthodox parish, which used to number 2,000, only thirty to forty believers remained.¹⁷

Even after taking the obvious statistical inaccuracies into account, the data shows clearly that the local government and the Orthodox Church did not fully grasp how important the need to change confessions—that is, to leave the Orthodox Church—was. Imperial officials and Orthodox clergy appeared to have forgotten that the Orthodox Church had grown so much in the NWR not as a result of the Church's successful missionary activities, but due to the imperial government's confessional political projects,

14 Report from the Vil'na governor-general Aleksandr Freze to the minister of internal affairs, February 23, 1905, RGIA, f. 821, op. 125, d. 268, l. 4.

15 Report about the situation in the Grodna and Brest diocese in 1904, April 8, 1905, RGIA, f. 796, op. 442, d. 2021, l. 41–42.

16 According to data from the cleric Lev Tyminskii, in 1903 the parish had 1,580 parishioners. They included 165 *uporstvuiushchie*. Data from the Shumsk deanery's cleric Lev Tyminskii about the Bystritsa church, June 19, 1904, LVIA, f. 378, BS, ap. 1904, b. 272, l. 466–68. In 1904, it is said that there were 1,604 parishioners. Statistics about the growth of the Bystritsa Orthodox parish, June 22, 1905, LVIA, f. 378, BS, ap. 1904, b. 272, l. 381.

17 Report by Pugavko to the Vil'na governor, July 17, 1905, LVIA, f. 378, BS, ap. 1905, b. 404, l. 47.

namely, the abolition of the Uniate Church, and the mass forced conversion of the peasantry to Orthodoxy. Without these government-initiated measures, the growth of the Orthodox Church was very slow: the Orthodox community in the Lithuanian and Vil'na dioceses recorded only a few hundred conversions from Catholicism to Orthodoxy annually; for example, in 1904, there were 152 such conversions.¹⁸

After the announcement of the decree of April 17, 1905, certain communities of believers in the NWR began to change. In some, the number of believers started to rise (Catholics), while in others it fell (Orthodox). Werth has conducted the most thorough research on how this process was regulated, the practices associated with changing one's confession in the Vil'na and Samogitian (Tel'shi) dioceses, and the obstructions to opportunities to actually utilize the religious freedom outlined in the Decree.¹⁹ His analysis shows that the legal regulations for changing confession were not prepared at the same time as the announcement of the decree; he also presents the historical development of the attitudes of the government and the Orthodox Church toward former Uniates and so-called "recalcitrants" up to the announcement of the decree. In addition, Werth draws attention to the fact that the majority of conversions to Catholicism (74 percent) were in 1905. This means that they took place immediately after the announcement of the decree.

Aleksandr Bendin has carried out probably the most comprehensive research on interconfessional relations in the NWR, and thus also conversions after the Decree of Tolerance.²⁰ His study stands out from others in the field in that he uncritically adopts the rhetoric and social stereotypes of contemporary sources (and also, in some cases, the broad anti-Catholic narrative typical of the government and officials dating from the context of the

18 Annual report about the situation in the Lithuanian diocese in 1905, RGIA, f. 796, op. 442, d. 2096, l. 37.

19 Paul W. Werth, *The Tsar's Foreign Faiths: Toleration and the Fate of Religious Freedom in Imperial Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Paul W. Werth, "Trudnyi put' k katolitsizmu: Verospovednaia prinadlezhnost' i grazhdanskoe sostoianie posle 1905 goda," *Lietuvių katalikų mokslo akademijos metraštis* 26 (2005): 447–74.

20 Aleksandr Bendin, *Problemy veroterpimosti v Severo-Zapadnom krae Rossiiskoi imperii (1863–1914)* (Minsk: BGU, 2010); Aleksandr Bendin, "Religioznye konflikty v Belorussii i Litve," *Chatverty mizhnarodny kangres dasledchykau Belarrusi. Pratsounyia materialy* 4 (2015): 106–10.

de-Polonization policy), and analyzes the confession-changing process within the context of the “Catholic Church’s propaganda,” Catholic “fanaticism,” and the actions of the “clever yet cunning” Catholic Bishop of Vil’na, Edward von der Ropp, toward the tsarist government. Bendin’s work creates an aggressive image of the Catholic Church (the clergy and believers) after the announcement of the Decree of Tolerance. He claims that until then, “good neighborly relations had been established,” while after the decree, they transformed along the lines of “intolerance,” which suddenly changed the character of interconfessional relations.²¹ Bendin also mentions “extremist” propaganda, arguing that “religious and ethnic extremism took on especially dangerous social forms” that spread throughout Lithuania’s Orthodox dioceses.²²

Even though his research covers the period from 1863 to 1914, he does not seem to realize the outcomes of the government’s “de-Polonization” policy actions on the position of the Catholic Church after the announcement of the Decree of Tolerance, nor does he take into account the cultural norms in interconfessional and social relations at the time. In his study, confessional changes are the outcome of “militant Catholicism,” thus eliminating any other possible reasons for such conversions, including a person’s individual right to choose. In this way, he remains stuck in the rhetorical narrative of his sources, which often discuss the dark (*nevezhestvennaia*) masses under the sway of an authority figure (the government or a member of the clergy). He does not delve deeper into expressions of religiosity, the nature of religious life, changes to the Catholic Church’s social education, the Christian tradition of the Western and Eastern Churches.

In this study, I present a critical assessment of Bendin’s position that the confession-changing process, which began after the announcement of the Decree of Tolerance, should be interpreted as Catholic religious extremism that produced a wave of Catholic violence that swept through Orthodox dioceses. He is correct in saying that many in these diocese converted to Catholicism: the Orthodox dioceses in the Lithuanian, Vil’na, Grodna,

21 Bendin, *Problemy veroterpimosti*, 273–74.

22 Ibid., 322; 328–29.

and Brest provinces lost over 20,000 faithful in 1905 alone (in Vil'na province 16,286, in Grodna province 3,625, and in Kovna province, 900 converted to Catholicism).²³ These are indeed enormous figures, but the need to change confession and return to Catholicism was alive and well in the nineteenth century as well, but the difference was that it was legally impossible to do so. I have no doubt that there were cases of psychological coercion and physical violence in the conversion process, but there is no proof that this happened in the majority of cases. What should also be considered is the context of cultural norms at the time, where violence and coercion were frequently used as a means of resolving tensions in social life. It is quite telling that corporal punishment was still exacted on peasants, even after legal reforms in the second half of the nineteenth century.²⁴

In my opinion, the confession changing process that commenced in the NWR after the announcement of the Decree of Tolerance, and the interconfessional tension that followed, were determined not only by political circumstances, but by a larger set of factors. Some of them were new; however, many measures in the confessional sphere enacted by the imperial government earlier (after the 1863–64 uprising) continued to function after the 1905 Decree. For example, measures forced upon the Catholic Church by the imperial government had a negative influence on interconfessional relations later on because the officials enacting them came to be identified with the Orthodox Church.²⁵ The perspective that “This government does not come from God, but from the Devil” was already apparent in 1876, as shown by these words spoken by a monk from a monastery that had been

23 Note that the Grodna governor indicated that in 1905, a total of 4,409 people had converted to Catholicism, and 1,931 in 1906, of whom 998 returned to the Orthodox Church. Report from the Grodna governor Boiarskii about the Polonisation of Belorussians in the Grodna province, September 11, 1913, RGIA, f. 821, op. 150, d. 167, l. 11.

24 Vladas Sirutavičius, *Nusikaltimai ir visuomenė XIX amžiaus Lietuvoje* (Lietuvių Atgimimo istorijos studijos 12) (Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 1995), 96; Vilma Žaltauskaitė, “Socialiniai aspektai Vilniaus ir Žemaičių (Telšių) vyskupijos Romos katalikų dvasininko tarnystėje ir gyvensenoje (XIX amžiaus antroji pusė),” *Lietuvos istorijos metraštis* 1 (2017): 109.

25 Such measures included: restrictions on the authority of bishops; deportations in 1863 and 1885; state control over the mobility of the clergy; church closures—sometimes even using military force against believers who resisted them, the last such case of which was in 1893 in Kražiai in the Kovna province—control and restrictions over religious practices; and even the prohibition of certain practices.

closed.²⁶ The approach that the Orthodox faith was the Devil's work can also be encountered in rhetoric after the announcement of the Decree of Tolerance.²⁷ Likewise, the Orthodox faith was sometimes called "the dog's faith" (*sobachia vera*) by the Catholic clergy and believers in the NWR, both before and after the announcement of the decree.²⁸ But the altered political conditions of the post-1905 period made these perceptions of the Orthodox Church among the Catholic population more visible in the public sphere. Not only were there more reasons and opportunities to make such declarations, but such declarations contributed to their entrenchment, government institutions issued sanctions for such phrases.

It is noteworthy that the Catholic Church based its relations with individuals of other faiths (and not only Orthodox believers) on the tradition of the Council of Trent, which was itself formed as a response to the Reformation. Consequently, its relations with people of other faiths were, on the whole, poor, and any positive cases were exceptions, not the rule. For example, due to this attitude towards other confessions, in 1898 students from the Imperial Roman Catholic Spiritual Academy did not participate in the funeral of their Lutheran lecturer.²⁹ Friendly relations between Catholic priests and Orthodox laymen were uncommon and were even punishable as a priestly misdemeanor, which might invite an investigation by superiors within the Church.³⁰ Three glasses of cognac shared by an Orthodox cleric and a Catholic priest were worth mentioning in one such investigation (it is

26 Vilma Žaltauskaitė, "Socialiniai aspektai Vilniaus ir Žemaičių (Telšių) vyskupijos Romos katalikų dvasininko tarnystėje ir gyvensenoje (XIX amžiaus antroji pusė)," *Lietuvos istorijos metraštis* 1 (2017): 83.

27 Report from the Porozovsk Orthodox church (Volkovysk district) to the Grodna Orthodox consistory, July 9, 1905, LVIA, f. 378, BS, ap. 1904, b. 272, l. 400.

28 Request from the former organist Adam Karvovskii to the Minsk governor, January 8, 1873, LVIA, f. 694, ap. 1, b. 2346, l. 4; report from the Archbishop of Lithuania and Vil'na to the Vil'na governor-general Eduard Totleben, February 15, 1882, LVIA, f. 378, BS, ap. 1882, b. 230, l. 14; report from the Grodna governor-general mentioning Fr Julian Karpowicz, January 28, 1891, LVIA, f. 378, BS, ap. 1891, b. 375, l. 31; annual report about the Lithuanian and Vil'na diocese in 1905, RGIA, f. 796, op. 442, d. 2096, l. 30; report from the Archbishop of Lithuania and Vil'na to the Vil'na governor-general, June 13, 1905, LVIA, f. 378, BS, ap. 1905, b. 405, l. 5.

29 Povilas Januševičius, *Visokių atsitikimų sąrašas: 1895–1898*, ed. Vilma Žaltauskaitė (*Bibliotheca Archivi Lithuanici* 5) (Vilnius: LII leidykla, 2004), 275.

30 Report from the Vil'na dean to the Roman Catholic Bishop of Vil'na, July 30, 1894, LVIA, f. 694, ap. 3, b. 1172, l. 42.

not possible to determine the exact circumstances as to why the investigation was conducted).³¹ In short, relations between Catholics and Orthodox believers were not idyllic both before and after the announcement of the Decree of Tolerance. Therefore, interconfessional relations before and after the Decree should be assessed by taking into account the whole context and socio-cultural norms active at the time.

Conversion to Catholicism after the Decree

As has already been mentioned, in 1905 alone, the Orthodox Church lost thousands of members in the NWR. It is significant to note just how the numbers relate to the numbers of those converted to Orthodoxy by imperial officials between 1863 and 1867. While this would be difficult to determine precisely, some general trends can be identified. It is quite likely that the first to convert to Catholicism after the Decree were those who were considered only nominal Orthodox believers, the so-called “recalcitrants.” In this way, during the several months after the decree’s announcement, the previously mentioned Orthodox parish of Bystritsa dwindled.³² Eighty-eight people joined the Slonim Catholic parish (Vil’na diocese, Grodna province) in December 1905.³³ There were many nominal Orthodox believers in the Slonim district, so we can presume that it was they who converted in 1905.³⁴ Elderly people, sixty-four or seventy eighty-year-olds, also reverted to the Catholic faith.³⁵ Entire families joined the Catholic Church (the ages of the parents went up to forty, which suggests that they may have been the descendants of “recalcitrants”). Ivan Minkevich from the Minsk province in the Vil’na diocese asked for the sacrament of baptism, as he claimed only to have been bap-

31 Report from a police officer to Stepan Petrovich[?], July 15, 1905, LVIA, f. 378, BS, ap. 1904, b. 272, l. 398–399.

32 See note 20.

33 Report from the Slonim priest B. Sarosek to the Bishop of Vil’na, December 31, 1905, LVIA, f. 694, ap. 1, b. 2806, l. 281.

34 [I.K.?] About the recalcitrants in the Grodna province, July 26, 1905, LVIA, f. 378, BS, ap. 1904, b. 272, p. 419.

35 Data about those who converted to Catholicism, 1905–1914, LVIA, f. 694, ap. 1, b. 2805, l. 1–80.

tized with water, indicating at the very start of his request that he was from the “Logishin parish of recalcitrant Catholics.”³⁶ The governor and the Ministry of Internal Affairs had examined the fates of former Catholics in Logishin (Minsk province) back in 1878–79, but they had not been permitted to convert back to the Catholic faith at that time.³⁷ The intention to return to the faith of their parents and their ancestors was recorded in numerous requests and in the characterizations of “recalcitrants” both prior to the Decree of Tolerance and afterward.³⁸ In a report about the parish from 1907, the Orthodox Archbishop Mikhail of Grodna and Brest stated that there were no mass conversions to Catholicism, as all the *uporstvuiushchie* had already reverted to Catholicism.³⁹ Eighty-one people converted to Catholicism in Grodna province in 1907.⁴⁰ Thus, it is fair to assume that the majority of those who changed their confession immediately after the Decree of Tolerance had been forced into Orthodoxy earlier.

The process of conversion to Catholicism was most evident in Vil’na province (Vil’na diocese): in 1905, 16,286 people became Catholics.⁴¹ Catholic Bishop Ropp of Vil’na was convinced that it was not true Orthodox believers who were converting to Catholicism, but rather those who had always considered themselves to be Catholic and were only nominally Orthodox believers, especially ex-Uniates and those who had been forced into Orthodoxy in the 1860s.⁴² Ropp was consistent. He underlined this expla-

36 Request from Ivan Minkevich to the Bishop of Vil’na, July 24, 1907, LVIA, f. 694, ap. 1, b. 2838, l. 8.

37 Dolbilov, *Russkii krai, chuzhaia vera*, 702–06.

38 Request from Adolfa Makarevich Burachevskaia to a Vil’na diocese official (she writes about the efforts of an Orthodox cleric to persuade her to return to the Orthodox Church. The woman claims that Catholicism was the faith of her grandparents and great-grandparents, which she had always wanted, and that she was attending church of her own free will, while she would only go to an Orthodox Church for Easter confession, and not of her own free will), December 4, 1908, LVIA, f. 694, ap. 1, b. 2954, l. 37, 40, 42–44. Report from the Ostrovets Orthodox clergyman Zhebrovskii to the Lithuanian Orthodox consistory, with data about the Ostrovets parish, July 19, 1904, LVIA, f. 378, BS, ap. 1904, b. 272, l. 462.

39 Report from 1907 by Archbishop Mikhail of Grodna and Brest about the diocese, RGIA, f. 796, op. 442, d. 2204, l. 26, 32, 33.

40 Bendin, *Problemy veroterpimosti*, 276.

41 Ibid.

42 Report from the Bishop of Vil’na to the Department of Foreign Religious Affairs at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, May 13, 1905, LVIA, f. 694, ap. 1, b. 2482, l. 18; report from the Bishop of Vil’na to the minister of internal affairs, July 23, 1905, LVIA, f. 694, ap. 1, b. 2482, l. 30–31.

nation in his report to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and, at almost the same time, the bishop sent out another circular to the clergy in his diocese in which he gave the same interpretation. In the circular, he indicated that in the procedure of conversion to Catholicism, a brief profession of faith that acknowledged the Pope and indicated an understanding of the differences between the Catholic and Orthodox faiths sufficed for those “who were Catholics in spirit.”⁴³

Cases that were dependent on the cultural environment in a region are also worth mentioning; for example, when an Orthodox believer who lived in a cultural space dominated by Catholics decided to convert to Catholicism. In this way, in Ponevezh (Panevėžys) district in Kovna province, twenty-four Orthodox peasants (known as “colonists”) from the Ri-azan’ *slabada* chose Catholicism because they now associated themselves with Lithuanian Catholics both in a linguistic and a cultural sense. They claimed to have accepted the tenets of the faith of their neighbors (Lithuanian Catholics), had forgotten Russian, and had married into Lithuanian (Catholic) families.⁴⁴ Officials of Kovna province examined this case very closely, and the governor purposely delayed sending his response (a term of one month applied) to the leaders of the Catholic Church.⁴⁵ Ultimately, the Orthodox cleric who tried to talk them out of their decision stated that the “Orthodox Church had completely lost these applicants.”⁴⁶ Perhaps for similar reasons, the number of conversions to Catholicism was lowest in Grodna province, where Orthodox believers rather than Catholics dominated; the number of conversions to Catholicism was smaller there than was the number of people forced to convert to the Orthodox Church between 1863 and 1867.

43 Report from the Bishop of Vil’na to clergy in the diocese, May 15, 1905, LVIA, f. 694, ap. 1, b. 2482, l. 21.

44 Report from a Ponevezh district *ispravnik* to the Kovna province board, April 7, 1906, Kauno regioninis valstybės archyvas (Kaunas regional state archives; KRVA), f. I-49, ap. 1, b. 24717, l. 110. Documents from 1905–07 related to these requests, *ibid.* l. 106–12.

45 Requests were submitted in November 1905, while responses only arrived on April 19, 1906. Report from the Bishop of Samogitia (Tel’shi) to the Vil’na governor-general, March 13, 1908, LVIA, f. 378, BS, ap. 1905, b. 403, l. 72–74.

46 Report to the Lithuanian Orthodox consistory, March 19, 1907, KRVA, f. I-49, ap. 1, b. 24717, l. 109.

There were other cases of confessional changes, notably as a result of various social circumstances: a person might have adopted Orthodoxy in prison and wished to return to his former faith; there were cases of mixed marriages where one spouse was Orthodox and the couple's children had been baptized as Orthodox believers and now sought a different faith, etc.⁴⁷ The activities of the Roman Catholic clergy was also one of the factors that influenced reversion to Catholicism. The Orthodox Church and local government specifically highlighted these activities. However, the central government only had information about fifteen Roman Catholic clergymen from Kovna province, five from Vil'na province, and six from Grodna province who could potentially face criminal prosecution for their anti-government activities.⁴⁸ Incidentally, "anti-government activities" was a broader concept than "crimes against the Orthodox Church," but they were often intertwined.⁴⁹ In any case, the number of priests prosecuted for such offenses in the first year after the Decree of Tolerance was not high. Furthermore, there were fewer clergymen accused of "anti-government activities" in Vil'na province in the first year after the decree's announcement, compared to Kovna province, although, as previously mentioned, the number of converts was much higher in Vil'na province. This seems to indicate that the Catholic clergy was active in many spheres of life and was not the sole trigger of conversions.

The Legitimization of Conversion to Catholicism: The Position(s) of the Church and Government

A number of social and cultural factors determined a person's return or conversion to Catholicism. Obviously, after the Decree of Tolerance, the Catholic Church was much better prepared for this process than was the impe-

47 Request from the peasant Chiapulis (to the Vil'na Roman Catholic consistory?), November 1, 1910, LVIA, f. 694, ap. 1, b. 2954, l. 63.

48 List of priests who could be held criminally liable, RGIA, f. 821, op. 125, d. 3250, l. 36; report from A. Mamontov, May 3, 1907, RGIA, f. 821, op. 125, d. 3251, l. 214–254; report from A. Mamontov (1907), RGIA, f. 821, op. 150, d. 254, l. 2.

49 Report (author unknown; 1905?), RGIA, f. 821, op. 125, d. 3264, l. 261–262.

rial government or the Orthodox Church. The Catholic Church's hierarchs reacted promptly to the decree with specific actions. Bishop Ropp of Vil'na had already confirmed the procedure for conversion from Orthodoxy to Catholicism by April 21, 1905, almost immediately after the announcement of the decree.⁵⁰ Archbishop Jerzy Szembek of Mogilev also sent a dedicated circular to the clergy on May 2, 1905.⁵¹ This may be an indication of the coordinated actions of both hierarchs, especially when we know that Bishop Ropp was in St. Petersburg when the decree was announced (where the Archbishop of Mogilev resided).⁵² The Diocese of Samogitia (Tel'shi) distributed their circular to the clergy somewhat later, on May 27, 1905.⁵³

The Catholic Church's leaders preempted the government by several months in regard to disseminating information about the conversion procedure; the Ministry of Internal Affairs set out provisional procedures for the registration of conversions from the Orthodox Church in a circular issued on August 18, 1905.⁵⁴ That circular was sent to the bishops on September 8, and went into effect in November. The government ordered the following procedure: it foresaw a term of one month, during which the governor of a province had to inform the leadership of the Catholic Church about submitted requests after a series of required actions. Importantly, those who wanted to leave the Orthodox Church would have to submit a written request to the governor, who would then inform the leaders of the Orthodox Church about the individual wishing to leave their fold. The Orthodox Church would have the opportunity to influence this decision (*uveshchanie*). Werth's study shows that the provisional circular from the Ministry of Internal Affairs was valid for over a decade.⁵⁵ It could be said that the speed of the Catholic bishops and their initiative through the

50 Circular from the Bishop of Vil'na, LVIA, f. 378, BS, ap. 1905, b. 404, l. 6.

51 Report from the Metropolitan of Mogilev Wincenty Kluczyński, 1910s?, LVIA, f. 694, ap. 1, b. 2482, l. 127–29.

52 Report from the Bishop of Vil'na to the Vil'na governor-general Konstantin Krshivitskii, April 20, 1906, LVIA, f. 694, ap. 1, b. 2482, l. 80.

53 Instructions from the Suffragan Bishop of Samogitia (Tel'shi) G. F. Cirtovt to members of the clergy, LVIA, f. 1671, ap. 4, b. 184, l. 9.

54 Circular from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, August 18, 1905, LVIA, f. 694, ap. 1, b. 2482, l. 40–41.

55 Werth, "Trudnyi put' k katolitsizmu," 471.

circulars were forerunners of the Catholic Church's decades of correspondence concerning the legitimization of converts' registration and reproaches over the ignorance of the government's circular.⁵⁶ Later on, repressions were exacted against clergy who provided religious services to Catholics who had not been registered in accordance with the procedures set out by the government. However, the bishops' initiative also demonstrated their authority, the Church's governance of the clergy, and the overall strength of the religious community. By registering conversions, local clergy were abiding by the procedures outlined by their religious leaders.

Several stages in the confession changing registration process can be distinguished. Initially, the imperial government reacted moderately; it waited patiently for information from Catholic bishops about individuals who had converted to Catholicism in the period from April 17 to August 18, 1905. By the end of 1905, taking into account the enormous number of conversions since the Decree of Tolerance and the demand to adhere to the procedures outlined in the circular from the Ministry of Internal Affairs on August 18, 1905, the Vil'na governor-general, Aleksandr Freze recommended that the procedure be simplified only for those who had converted to Catholicism before August 18, that is, prior to the circular's validity, so as to prevent cultivating the "belief in the minds of the uneducated masses that the government was disrupting their conversion to Catholicism." He asserted that it would suffice for the Catholic clergy to present lists of such people to the governor, indicating their estate, former faith, age, and the parish they were joining, while the governor would inform the Orthodox Church.⁵⁷ The central government approved an even simpler procedure: the temporary minister of internal affairs let Krshivitskii, the incoming Vil'na governor-general, know that he supported the idea of a more simplified procedure.⁵⁸ The State Council member Petr Durnovo also approved, saying it

56 File (O perekhodakh raznykh lits v katolichestvo), 1888–1913, LVIA, f. 694, ap. 1, b. 2482; File (Materialy iz kantseliarii Mogilevskoi eparkhii, smena veroispovedaniia), 1910–1914, LVIA, f. 694, ap. 1, b. 4273.

57 Report from Andrei Stankevich, an official in the Vil'na governor-general's chancellery, to the Kovna governor Petr Verevkin, December 5, 1905, KRVA, f. I-49, ap. 1, b. 24717, l. 34.

58 Report from a temporary official at the Ministry of Internal Affairs to K. Krshivitskii, the Vil'na governor-general, December 23, 1905, LVIA, f. 378, BS, ap. 1905, b. 403, l. 26–27.

would be enough to just “inform” the governor without abiding by the other instructions in the circular.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, subsequent correspondence between government institutions and the Catholic Church shows that imperial officials appeared to forget these simplified procedures and demanded that written requests be made to the governor, including those who had converted to Catholicism before the August 18 circular.⁶⁰

Starting around 1908–1909, the accuracy of registration took a much stricter approach. In 1909, Petr Reviakin, an official from Kovna province, prepared an announcement about conversions from Orthodoxy to Catholicism, in which he indicated that there were 353 cases of registration of Catholic converts that ignored the August 18, 1905 circular (at the time, there was a total of 1,148 converts), and that the prosecution of several dozen clergymen had been initiated in the so-called Peace Courts. Reviakin claimed that the clergy’s actions, described as insolent [*nagly*] and mocking [*izdevatel’s tvo*], threatened the government’s authority.⁶¹

The question of damage to imperial authority or the Orthodox Church arose not only regarding the actions of the Roman Catholic clergy. One police officer wrote that his subordinate, “without his knowledge or permission,” married and converted to Catholicism, ignoring the procedure set out in the August circular.⁶² In 1905, an Orthodox cleric in Grodna province wrote to the Vil’na governor-general’s office and said that the authority of the Orthodox Church was eroded in his deanery as a result of the conversion of the *volost’* and village elders to Catholicism; he alleged that Catholics argued that intelligent and influential people chose Catholicism.⁶³ The defense of government authority meant returning to pre-Decree repression. The government’s greater attention to the registration procedure for conversions could be

59 Report from Andrei Stankevich, an official in the Vil’na governor-general’s chancellery, to the Kovna governor Petr Verevkin, January 11, 1906, KRVA, f. I-49, ap. 1, b. 24717, l. 94.

60 Report from the Vil’na governor to the Bishop of Vil’na, July 18, 1906, LVIA, f. 694, ap. 1, b. 2482, l. 87.

61 Report from Reviakin to the Kovna governor, November 11, 1909, KRVA, f. I-49, ap. 1, b. 28259 (the pages are not numbered).

62 Report from the Grodna governor to the Vil’na governor-general, November 22, 1907, LVIA, f. 378, BS, ap. 1905, b. 403, l. 64.

63 Report from the Volkovysk Orthodox dean to the Vil’na governor-general’s chancellery (with a confidential additional note), July 26, 1905, LVIA, f. 378, BS, ap. 1905, b. 405, l. 60.

related to the reform of registration under discussion in 1906–07, which the Orthodox Church's Holy Synod opposed.⁶⁴ The Vil'na governor-general also opposed these changes after he received reports from the governors of Vil'na, Kovna, and Grodna.⁶⁵ It is most likely that the government's greater attention to the conversion procedure was determined by changes in confessional policy. The Catholic Bishop Ropp of Vil'na was dismissed from his position at the government's behest at the beginning of October 1907.⁶⁶

Further changes occurring after 1907 affected the government's approach toward the Catholic Church in a broader sense than just whether registration procedures were being followed correctly. Numerous circulars regulating the Catholic Church's activities were sent by the Ministry of Internal Affairs.⁶⁷ In the case of Fr. Zenkevicz, dated February 16, 1910, regarding his provision of religious services to Orthodox believers who had converted to Catholicism after the Decree of Tolerance, the Ruling Senate determined that the procedures for registering conversions to Catholicism of August 18, 1905 had to be followed, and if they were not, the individual would continue to be considered Orthodox.⁶⁸ This means that the formal registration norms based on Orthodox registry book entries that were valid up to the Decree of Tolerance were still in place.

64 Werth, "Trudnyi put' k katolitsizmu," 467.

65 Report from the Vilna governor-general to the minister of interior, March 6, 1908, LVIA, f. 378, BS, ap. 1908, b. 339, l. 16–17.

66 Darius Staliūnas, "Vilniaus vyskupo E. Ropo veiklos pėdsakais (1903–1907)," in *Lietuvių Atgimimo istorijos studijos*, vol. 7: *Atgimimas ir Katalikų Bažnyčia* (Vilnius: Katalikų pasaulio leidiniai, 1994), 213–18.

67 For example: a circular to governors on July 25, 1908 about restrictions on holding religious processions; a circular on January 17, 1909 regarding the appointment of convicted and punished clergymen as priests; a circular on January 29, 1909 regarding the comprehensive investigation of illegal actions by clergymen in the struggle against "religious-national fanaticism"; a circular on December 16, 1909 about the transfer of clergymen from other dioceses; circulars on December 21, 1909 and November 20, 1910 regarding the appointment of clergymen only with the approval of the ministry; a circular on January 13, 1910 about controlling the appointment of teachers of religion; circulars on September 19, 1911 and October 28, 1911 about the urgent investigation of cases brought against clergymen and whether their punishment had been enforced; a circular on September 21, 1911 about banning the catechism in all institutions apart from schools. *Sbornik tsirkuliarov po DDDII odnosiaschikhsia k rimsko katolicheskomu dukhovenstvu*, 1905–1912 god, RGIA library, 41, 43, 52, 54–55, 57, 60, 68–69, 75, 81.

68 Report-draft No 5984 from the Metropolitan of Mogilev (c. 1913/1914); report No. 945 from the Metropolitan of Mogilev to the clergy of the Mogilev archdiocese and the Minsk diocese, 27 February 1915, LVIA, f. 694, ap. 1, b. 4273, l. 2, 10–15. Excerpts from annual reports of the Minsk diocese. The Polish–Catholic question, RVIA, f. 821, op. 150, d. 172, l. 228.

In demanding that Catholic bishops adhere to its regulations for registering conversion to Catholicism, the government (the Ministry of Internal Affairs) claimed that the registration process outlined in the August 18, 1905 circular did not impinge in any way upon the Decree of Tolerance.⁶⁹ However, adherence to this bureaucratic formality was understood as an expression of the government's authority and power, and the clergy were expected to acknowledge it. On June 23, 1906, Petr Stolypin, the Minister of Internal Affairs, explained to the Bishop of Vil'na that the August circular was mandatory for both secular and religious authorities. Otherwise, the (Catholic) clergy's actions would be viewed as promoting opposition to and mistrust of the legitimate actions of the government.⁷⁰

The "Ruling" Church and Government after the Decree of Tolerance

Bishop Ropp of Vil'na knew in advance about the Decree of Tolerance and prepared accordingly. There is no doubt that leaders of the Orthodox Church also knew about the preparation of the decree.⁷¹ Nonetheless, unlike the hierarchs of the Catholic Church in the NWR, they trusted the imperial government's authority to regulate the procedures for conversion to Catholicism, or, more specifically, to halt any such conversions. The government's patronage was the accepted status quo for the Orthodox Church in the NWR. The Orthodox clergy demanded this patronage even after political conditions changed. Following his visits to churches in the Novoaleksandrovsk district in September 1905, Bishop Sergei of Kovna asked the Vil'na governor-general to protect the Orthodox Church and Russianness from erosion because they were closely associated with the government's authority and its "prestige."⁷² Thus, the Orthodox Church called on

69 Report from the minister of internal affairs to the Bishop of Vil'na, June 23, 1906, LVIA, f. 694, ap. 1, b. 2482, l. 85–86.

70 Ibid.

71 Aleksandr Polunov, *K. P. Pobedonostsev v obshchestvenno-politicheskoi i dukhovnoi zhizni Rosii* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2010), 322–37.

72 Report from Bishop Sergei to the Vil'na governor-general, September 12, 1905, LVIA, f. 378, BS, ap. 1905, b. 404, l. 139.

the government to act in defense of its interests. One of the Vil'na governor-general's officials even openly identified as a serious problem the inactivity of Orthodox clerics and their lack of authority after the announcement of the Decree of Tolerance.⁷³ Some Orthodox leaders also acknowledged this challenge in addition to other problems within the Orthodox Church.⁷⁴

Numerous appeals were made by the Orthodox archbishops of Vil'na, Grodna, and Brest to governors and governors-general regarding conversions to Catholicism as early as 1905. The Mother Superior at the Krasnostok monastery (in Grodna province) even appealed to the emperor in May 1905.⁷⁵ In June 1905, a congress of Orthodox clergy from the Diocese of Lithuania and Vil'na on "the struggle with Latin-ness" was held,⁷⁶ while another meeting about the revival of Church life and the establishment of parish communities was held on January 24, 1906.⁷⁷ There were also smaller congresses involving deanery clergy, who shared their impressions of conversions to Catholicism and suggested ways of resolving the ensuing problems. For example, a congress of clergy from the Shumsk deanery was held on January 2, 1906. The clergy appealed through their archbishop to the imperial government, asking it to protect the remaining Orthodox believers and clergy. In order to achieve this goal, they suggested that the procedure for appointing state civil servants should be changed: all civil servants should be Orthodox believers. It was claimed that this would undermine the Catholic clergy's networks and influence.⁷⁸ These cries for help from the Orthodox Church did not go unheeded: already by November 23, 1905,

73 Report from Pugavko to the Vil'na governor, July 17, 1905, LVIA, f. 378, BS, 1905, b. 397, l. 7.

74 Polunov, K. P. *Pobedonoscev v obshchestvenno-politicheskoi i dukhovnoi zhizni Rosii*, 239–52, 322–37.

75 Report from the mother superior of the Krasnostok monastery to the Vil'na governor-general, May 16, 1905, LVIA, f. 378, BS, ap. 1905, b. 399, l. 20–25.

76 Annual report about the Lithuanian and Vil'na diocese for 1905, RGIA, f. 796, op. 442, d. 2096, l. 24. "Latin-ness" meant the Catholic Church.

77 Report from Archbishop Nikandro of Lithuania and Vil'na to the Vil'na governor-general, January 23, 1906, LVIA, f. 378, BS, ap. 1906, b. 397, l. 7.

78 Report from Archbishop Nikandro of Lithuania and Vil'na to the Vil'na governor-general, February 14, 1906, LVIA, f. 378, BS, ap. 1906, b. 397, pp. 50–54; report from Bishop Sergei of Kovna to the Vil'na governor-general (where he cites the letter he received from the Shumsk deanery's Bystritsa Orthodox cleric Lev Tyminskii), March 26, 1906, *ibid.*, l. 56–57. Newspaper article from *Novoe vremia* (April 25, 1906, No 10797), which presents information identical to that in Tyminskii's letter. *Ibid.*, l. 61.

a circular sent out by the Vil'na governor-general ordered the local government to monitor the actions of the Catholic clergy and inform the Orthodox Archbishop of Lithuania and Vil'na.⁷⁹ Apart from other points, the circular indicated that, given that the majority population in the region was uneducated peasants, and taking into account their lack of independence, the administration should support the Orthodox Church to maintain a sense of order. It argued that the imperial government should take into account the demands of Catholics and their clergy; further, it should not allow Catholic antagonism against Orthodox believers—which the circular attributed to peasants' poor understanding of the decree and manifesto—to grow. This is why the governor-general drew attention to cases of religious intolerance and violence, ordering that the courts be informed of such events and appeals made. The circular explained which parts of the law were valid, and which ones were not, and stated that all cases should be heard only after religious authorities initiated them.⁸⁰ This circular was followed by orders from the local government: for example, the Kovna governor's circular to district police officers, *ispravniki* (district police chiefs), and city police chiefs issued on December 19, 1905. Thus, local government institutions attempted to protect the Orthodox Church from religious intolerance and cases of violence.

The diocese's official position on the announcement of the Decree of Tolerance was published in its newspaper, the *Litovskiiie eparkhialnyie vedomosti* (Lithuanian Diocesan News), rather late, only at the end of June 1905 (Nos. 25–26). It wrote that conversions were not harming the Church because it was only “false members” who were leaving. Additionally, the losses were considered the “outcome of militant Catholicism,” or a form of attack, and therefore, something that had to be countered by defending “Orthodox-Russian matters in the NWR.” The newspaper used a rather traditional rhetoric of attack and struggle, while also naming enemies, and similar

79 Report from the Vil'na governor-general Freze to Archbishop Nikandro of Lithuania and Vil'na, December 14, 1905, LVIA, f. 378, BS, ap. 1905, b. 404, l. 166.

80 Report from the Vil'na governor-general Freze to the Kovna governor, with the additional entry ‘*rasporiazhenie po kraiu*’, November 23, 1905, KRVA, f. I-49, ap. 1, b. 24717, l. 23–24.

rhetoric was also used by diocesan hierarchs and parish clergy in the NWR. This rhetoric of attack and militancy was neither incidental nor new. It had been applied broadly even before 1905, by both the Orthodox Church and the government.

In 1906, the Ministry of Internal Affairs received a note from the Roman Catholic Mogilev metropolitan over antagonistic activities against Catholics by Orthodox clerics, which also included spreading defamatory material about Catholicism. An appeal was made to the Synod of the Orthodox Church. The Synod replied that it did not approve of such phenomena, but neither did it condemn them. It maintained the view that a national-religious struggle between Catholics and Orthodox believers was taking place in the Western provinces, where it was Catholics, not Orthodox believers, who were on the offensive. Moreover, the Synod asked the Ministry of Internal Affairs to inform the Catholic metropolitan that his clergy should not engage in proselytization.⁸¹ Consequently, the very Catholics who initially made the complaint ended up as the accused.

The complaint from the Mogilev metropolitan was not the only one.⁸² Clergy from the Vil'na diocese often complained to the bishop about Orthodox clergy who disseminated literature that demeaned Catholicism, both in 1905 and later on.⁸³ For example, Fr. Necziporowicz of Shereshev (Pruzhan district, Grodna province) appealed to the Bishop of Vil'na over defamatory literature against Catholics that was being spread among the town's Orthodox believers by their own clerics.⁸⁴ It appears that the offend-

81 Report from the Chief Procurator of the Orthodox Holy Synod, October 29, 1907, RGIA, f. 821, op. 125, d. 3250, l. 88–89.

82 The official of the Archdiocese of Mogilev also lodged a complaint about anti-Catholic publications from the Polotsk diocese in 1908. See: report from the Mogilev archdiocesan official to the minister of internal affairs, August 26, 1908, RGIA, f. 826, op. 3, d. 193, l. 30. Report from the Borudzenichy parish priest to the Roman Catholic diocesan board, November 1906, LVIA, f. 694, ap. 1, b. 2954, l. 22, printed anti-Catholic materials on ll. 23–27. Incidentally, the same print was indicated in 1909, and the information contained in it is also recognizable in Catholics' testimonies about defamatory information about them.

83 Report from the Borudzenichy (Bezdzesho) parish priest to the Roman Catholic diocesan board, November 1906, LVIA, f. 694, ap. 1, b. 2954, l. 22, printed materials on pp. 23–27. Incidentally, the same was indicated in 1909, and the information contained in it is also recognisable in Catholics' testimonies about defamatory information about them, *ibid.*, l. 37–40.

84 Report from the Shereshev parish priest Jan Necziporowicz to the Bishop of Vil'na, September 2, 1905, LVIA, f. 694, ap. 1, b. 2954, p. 81; publications included in l. 82–102 of the file. It is important to note that

ing literature was copies of the June–September issues of *Pochaevskii listok* (Pochaev Pages), published by the Pochaevskaia Lavra.⁸⁵ Another cleric from the Grodna province, Fr. Gurski at Dambravas, also complained about *Pochaevskii listok*.⁸⁶ Roman Catholic clergy also mentioned other publications that propagated the same narrative: for example, the “leaflets to the people” by the Orthodox Brotherhood of the Holy Spirit in Vil’na.⁸⁷ This indicates the rather systematic dissemination of anti-Catholic literature in these provinces. The distribution of printed material published by Orthodox dioceses and monasteries was understood as a separate means of overcoming “Catholic propaganda,” and in 1912, Archbishop Mikhail of Grodna and Brest mentioned this as one of the measures that could be taken to counter conversions.⁸⁸

Analysis of the government’s approach towards the registration of organized conversions to Catholicism by the Catholic bishops, should include discussion of the ever-stricter position of the government towards the Catholic Church in the NWR. The dismissal of Bishop Ropp of Vil’na in October 1907 could be considered the formal end of this period of liberalization (this was not the first time the government had resorted to this kind of measure in the diocese: in 1863, Bishop Adam Stanisław Krasiński was deported, followed by Bishop Karol Hryniewicki in 1885). This was merely part of its policy to weaken “Polish influence/propaganda,” and it revealed dynamism in the government’s treatment of Polish-

the secular authorities viewed this cleric as being particularly fanatical, and he was known for his antagonistic activities. Report from the Vil’na governor-general K. Krshivitskii to the minister of internal affairs, May 2, 1906, RGIA, f. 821, op. 125, d. 3251, l. 1.

85 Pochaevskaia Lavra was a monastery in the Volhynia province. A branch of the *Sojuz Russkogo Naroda* (Union of the Russian People) party functioned under its wing, which actively defended the people from “Polonization” and Jewish economic influence (by making concessions to peasants to enable them to acquire land, and establishing consumer associations). It was headed by Archimandrite Vitaly. Report about the de-Polonization of the Church (1911–1912?), RGIA, f. 821, op. 10, d. 1072, l. 31–38.

86 Report from the Dambravas parish priest Fr. Gurski to the Bishop of Vil’na, November 23, 1905, LVIA, f. 378, BS, ap. 1905, b. 393, l. 71; the mentioned publications are added in l. 72–75.

87 “Leaflets to the people” with defamatory content against Catholics are mentioned here: report from the Vil’na diocesan official to the minister of internal affairs, May 13, 1910, LVIA, f. 694, ap. 1, b. 2954, l. 2, 64–65.

88 Annual report from Archbishop Mikhail of Grodna and Brest about the situation in the diocese in 1912, RGIA, f. 796, op. 442, d. 2521, l. 35.

ness (in the eyes of the government, Poles were again becoming the main enemy in the NWR).⁸⁹

The government did partly return to the former policy of “de-Polonization” regarding the Catholic Church. When writing about the situation in the Vil’na province in 1907, the governor indicated that a “Pole” had become a political concept rather than an ethnographic one. He began his review of the political situation in the province by noting that national-religious relations and the activities of the Roman Catholic clergy were the main focus of attention.⁹⁰ The governor also mentioned the struggle by Lithuanians against “Polonization” and the Polonized Catholic clergy, the struggle against the use of the Lithuanian and Belorussian languages in church services, and the intellectual darkness of the peasant masses.⁹¹ The government sought to shape relations with various national groups in the NWR based on different agendas, but “de-Polonization” was always a key target. Local governments even decided to study tsarist confessional policy in the post-1863 period and requested copies of documents from the Inspection Commission for the Affairs of the Roman Catholic Clergy in the North Western region (*Revizionnaia komissiiia po delam rimsko-katolicheskogo dukhovenstva Severo-zapadnogo kraia*), which operated between 1866 and 1868.⁹² But in this effort to “de-Polonize” the Catholic Church, the government distinguished between Catholic Poles, who, in the governor’s understanding, should have made greater distinctions between religion and politics, Catholic Lithuanians, and Catholic and non-Catholic Belorussians. The latter, Belorussians, were emerging from “the dark peasant masses” to become a (self-aware) people (*naselenie*), who also had to be protected from Polonization, especially by the Catholic clergy.⁹³

89 See the chapter by Darius Staliūnas in this volume.

90 Annual report about the situation in the Vil’na province in 1907 (draft), LVIA, f. 380, ap. 65, b. 215, l. 4.

91 Ibid., 4–8.

92 Delo s perepiskoiu o byvshej Revizionnoi Komissii uchrezhdennoi v Vil’ne v 60-kh godakh proshlogo stoletia po delam rimsko-katolicheskogo dukhovenstva, February 29, 1908–April 8, 1908, LVIA, f. 378, BS, ap. 1908, b. 368, l. 1–8.

93 Report from the Grodna governor-general Petr Boiarskii about the Polonisation of the Belorussian population in the Grodna province, September 11, 1913, RGIA, f. 821, op. 150, d. 167, l. 7–24.

Catholic Lithuanians were viewed in various ways: when they stood up in defense of their right to use the Lithuanian language in church, they were in line with the government's interests regarding its struggle against "Polish influence." However, the spread of Catholic culture in the form of societies, schools, and catechism education was not viewed in an entirely positive light.⁹⁴ This is especially evident in the government's attitude toward the procedure for registering converts to Catholicism in Kovna province. In meetings of higher officials initiated by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1914, some recommendations and the motivation behind them signaled a return to the measures applied to the Catholic Church after the uprising of 1863–64 (control over seminaries, the regulation of religious processions, and the question of supplementary Mass services).⁹⁵

Thus, interconfessional relations after the Decree of Tolerance of 1905 were affected by more than just the decree. In the NWR, the decree was implemented in the context of the new political conditions, but it also drew on an anti-Catholic narrative that had already existed for decades and featured rhetorical themes such as: "militant Catholicism," "militant Polonization," fanatical clergy, the "Jesuitical" way of doing things (meaning deceptive, evil, and sly), the fanaticism of believers, the strong religiosity of women and their activities, and the shadowy influence of the clergy on the dark peasant masses, which instilled them with discipline, obedience, and submissiveness. Some of these themes were encountered less, and others more frequently; however, none of them disappeared from central and local government rhetoric between 1905 and 1915.

94 Announcement from the minister of internal affairs about the activities of the Roman Catholic clergy (which mentions the meeting of NWR governors held in April 1914, so the document must have been written later), RGIA, f. 821, op. 150, d. 150, l. 10.

95 Report from the minister of internal affairs about the activities of the Roman Catholic clergy (which mentions the meeting of NWR governors held in April 1914), RGIA, f. 821, op. 150, d. 150, l. 1–15. On the discussion about the program for the struggle against Polonization in the Western region (re: Kovna province), RGIA, f. 821, op. 150, d. 172, l. 12–68; entries from governors' reports (1910), *ibid.*, l. 200–30. Darius Staliūnas gives a detailed analysis of the content of these discussions in his chapter in this volume.

Conclusions

In enacting its policy of “depolonization” after the 1863–64 uprising, the government created conditions that would allow tensions in interconfessional relations to flourish. These tensions were visible up to 1905, and became even more apparent after the Decree of Tolerance. In April 1905, the government was not prepared to issue legal regulations outlining procedures for conversion, even though this right was declared in the decree. It sought to maintain its control over the process, while also ensuring participation by both itself and the Orthodox Church in the process. Meanwhile, the procedures set out by the Catholic Church were repressed. The Orthodox Church remained the ruling Church and continued to enjoy the support of the government with regard to its hegemonic social position and in its dealings with the Catholic Church.

This analysis has also highlighted provincial differences concerning conversions in the NWR. There were conversions to Catholicism in Kovna province; however, these did not take place on a mass scale because the number of Orthodox believers there was not very large to begin with. Vil’na province (like part of the Vil’na diocese) was not confessionally homogeneous, and it had more newly formed Orthodox parishes that were significantly affected by the conversion process. In Grodna province, this process did not reach the scale it did in Vil’na province, and it was concentrated mostly in those districts where the population was mostly Catholic already. After the announcement of the Decree of Tolerance, the Orthodox Church lost some of its community of believers in the NWR (even though some of them were only nominally Orthodox) and had to revise its position in society, but it continued to enjoy the government’s support. The creation of a new model of social activity demanded time and intellectual and economic resources.

In his note to Vil’na governor-general Freze dated June 28, 1905, Orthodox Archbishop Nikanor of Grodna and Brest indicated the detrimental actions by the Roman Catholic clergy against Orthodox believers. He asked for a printed government note that explained the meaning of the

April decree to the “unenlightened peasant masses” (*maloprosveshchennia massa naroda*) to be hung up in district head offices and disseminated in other ways, hoping that this action could halt dangerous Polish-Catholic propaganda.⁹⁶ Archbishop Nikanor was not convinced that these kinds of actions would prove effective, but he hoped that they would have some effect, however small. In short, he trusted that the government would protect the Orthodox Church against the loss of its followers. This situation nearly repeated the situation from 1867, when Tsar Alexander II’s speech to the volost-self-government-offices was distributed. Thus, Nikanor had actually no new ideas; instead he harkened back to old models of tsarist regulation of interconfessional relations.

96 Report from Archbishop Nikanor of Grodna and Brest to the Vil’na governor-general, June 28, 1905, LVIA, f. 378, BS, ap. 1905, b. 405, pp. 11–12.