

LCC IN THE CROSSFIRE OF RELIGION AND POLITICS

The formative period of LCC was both marked and marred by the conflicting views of what kind of society Lithuania would become as it emerged from the shadow of Communism and foreign control. Several writers in this book refer to various incidents and pressures in relationship to the Catholic Church, local and national authorities and also the protective nature of the traditional Universities. There is a large quantity of historical documentation that could be printed but it may not be helpful to publish views that have been mellowed by the passage of time and experience. A limited example of excerpts placed in historical context may, however, assist the reader in understanding the temper of the times.

The initial resistance to the arrival of a “Protestant” LCC was in the form of a public letter from a senior official in the Catholic Church challenging the presence of an institution at variance with the “historic” Catholic character of the country. The attached article entitled “And How Shall We Answer Art DeFehr” was published in a major national newspaper just prior to the opening of the first English language Summer Institute targeted at teachers in the Lithuanian school system. It raises the core question of whether the hoped-for post-Soviet nation would be nationalistic and inward-looking or would become an open society consistent with Western European values and practices.

Lithuania led the drive for independence within the Soviet Union in large part because it had retained a relatively homogenous population of ethnic Lithuanians and, like Poland, had a unifying religious center. These characteristics that served it so well during the pre-independence period became obstacles in the post-independence effort to become part of Western Europe and the Western World. The young and secular group that was at the center of power in the period prior to full independence was replaced in the first election by a party that would be characterized as nationalistic and with strong links to the Catholic Church.

In this context the elements in society that preferred certain options for the future of Lithuania took liberties to press their points of view and frequently acted independent of legal authority. This expressed itself in attitudes to Russia and local Lithuanians with a Russian heritage as well as the Polish minority. In the religious sphere this resulted in restrictions on religious

groups that were not Catholic with the reasoning that these “altered the historic character of Lithuania”.

LCC became a flashpoint in this whole debate because it was located in the City where President Landsbergis, leader of the nationalistic movement, was elected and a City in the historic Catholic countryside of Lithuania. In addition, a university-style institution was a highly visible intrusion and coming so early in the events surrounding independence – in fact LCC was founded prior to independence – it became both a symbol and a target.

The excerpts from newspaper and other articles reflect the many dozens of interventions in journals, television and other forms that reflect the temper of the times. There were also many stories and interventions that were in support of the performance and right to exist of LCC. These excerpts are published to help the reader understand some of the forces that shaped the character and even location of the College and explain the reasons for the delay in attaining accreditation.

LCC came into existence in large part as a political statement. Pre—independence local authorities wanted to drive Lithuania toward the West and the initiators of the College understood the role that higher-level educational institutions could play in shaping the emerging leadership of a small country. In that sense the debate was very real and reflected different views of what a society should be like. As we observe the progress of Lithuania and the current philosophy toward being part of a larger Europe we believe that LCC has played the role intended by both Lithuanian and foreign initiators.

Art DeFehr