

A Small Nation with a Big Soul: Reflections on the National Character of Lithuanian People

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SUMMARY

The collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 initiated rapid and irreversible changes which have widened the geopolitical context of Europe. Europe is slowly becoming a bicultural community made up of people who retain ties

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Mit dem Fall der Berliner Mauer im Jahre 1989 begannen schnelle und unumkehrbare Veränderungen, die den geopolitischen Kontext Europas erweitert haben. Europa wird langsam zu einer bikulturellen Gemeinschaft, die aus Menschen besteht, die Verbindungen zu ihren ursprüng-

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RÉSUMÉ

La chute du mur de Berlin en 1989 a engendré une série de changements rapides et irréversibles qui ont élargi l'espace géopolitique européen. L'Europe est en train de devenir lentement une communauté biculturelle,

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A few years ago when I was studying in the US, *Chicago Tribune* had an article about Lithuania which began as follows: 'Vilnius. Lithuania – for most Americans, this newly admitted member of the European Union is *terra incognita*...' ¹ In fact, not only most Americans but also many Europeans know very little, if anything, about Lithuania – recently at FEET conference in Prague a dear sister from Germany was really surprised that Lithuania is already a member of the EU. What is far more disturbing to me, as a teaching pastor who for the past 16 years has been ministering in Lithuania, is the fact that for most missionaries coming from

to their original cultures yet at the same time are open for the exchange of ideas. This essay provides a brief historic review of Lithuania (a former republic of the Soviet Union), discusses the national character of Lithuanian people and draws some missiological implications for missionaries.

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lichen Kulturen behalten, dabei jedoch gleichzeitig offen für den Austausch von Ideen und Vorstellungen sind. Dieser Aufsatz bietet einen kurzen historischen Überblick über Litauen (einer früheren Republik der Sowjetunion), diskutiert den nationalen Charakter litauischer Menschen und zieht einige Schlüsse hinsichtlich der missiologischen Implikationen für Missionare.

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comportant des gens qui conservent des liens avec leur culture originelle tout en s'ouvrant à l'échange d'idées. Cet article retrace brièvement l'histoire de la Lituanie (une ancienne république de l'Union Soviétique), considère les traits caractéristiques du peuple lituanien, et en tire des implications de stratégie missionnaire.

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different parts of the Western World my homeland remains *terra incognita* too. Yet, our country and people have a long and spectacular history, as well as rich and distinctive culture, understanding of which should certainly be helpful in reaching her with the gospel. In this paper, I would like to discuss the national character of Lithuanian people and then to consider some missiological implications that properly applied could make the ministry of missionaries as well as that of indigenous churches more effective.

I realize my limitations. Firstly, my research cannot escape my own cultural biases. Thus, I

understand that my analysis and proposed insights will be more of emic rather than etic nature. Secondly, there have been very few attempts on the part of Lithuanian academics as well as those from foreign countries to do serious anthropological research in this field. This is understandable – almost the whole half of the twentieth century we have been under the communistic regime, one purpose of which was to eradicate fully our national identity. Denationalization of occupied peoples was the primary goal of Stalin and his successors. Any anthropological attempt would be considered to have anti-ideological implications and thus was forbidden. The scarce publications that have been written on the subject come mostly from Lithuanian authors, who have fled the coming of communism and have been living outside the country, most distinguished of whom are A. Maceina, J. Girnius and V. M. Kavolis. I am heavily indebted to them and will turn to their observations time and again. Yet, before we turn to analysis of Lithuanian national character, a brief historic review will be in place.

History of Lithuania

Lithuanians, the Balts proper, live on the south-eastern shores of the Baltic Sea. The name Balts, derived from the Baltic Sea, has been a neologism from the middle of the nineteenth century. It has applied not only to Lithuanians and Latvians, but also to several nationalities now extinct, namely Prussians, Yotvingians, Semigallians, Curonians and Selonians. Along with the ancient Prussian language, which has not been spoken since the seventeenth century, Lithuanian and Latvian languages form a distinct Baltic branch of the Indo-European linguistic family. Yet, as J. Kudirka points out, 'of all the living Indo-European languages the Lithuanian language has retained the ancient phonetic and morphological characteristics best of all. It has a complicated system of flexions and word derivation. Therefore, as part of general linguistics, it is taught at a number of foreign universities (in the USA, Italy, France, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Japan and other countries).'²

From all the Baltic tribes Lithuanians were the first ones to create a state entity in the mid-13th century. Lithuania's first king, Mindaugas, was crowned on July 6, 1253, yet some historians argue that the establishment of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) reaches back even farther, perhaps around 1183. Though there is little documen-

tation for this period, it is generally accepted that for one to two hundred years prior to Mindaugas' rule, Lithuanian tribes had already begun the process of unifying themselves. Castles, manors and systems of defense were established during this period. Under the rule of Mindaugas, Lithuania was able to repel the attacks of Teutonic knights on the Western front, and also to succeed expanding its territory into the lands of Russia in the East. According to historian Zigmantas Kiaupa, a very strong regional leader, Mindaugas, attempted to unite three worlds under his rule: pagan Lithuania, Catholic Western Europe and Orthodox Russia.³

The Grand Duchy of Lithuania lasted until the 18th century. However, she reached her apogee during the rule of Duke Vytautas, called the Great (died in 1430). Under his rule the realm of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania extended from the Baltic Sea south to the shores of the Black Sea and east almost to the city of Moscow. In the century following Vytautas' reign, the power of the GDL began to decline. By the mid-16th century, Lithuanians made up only around one-third of the total population of an estimated 3 million people while Slavs, Germans, Jews, Poles, Tatars and Karaites composed the remaining two-thirds.⁴ In 1569, in the Union of Lublin, the Kingdom of Poland and the GDL became a commonwealth or *Rzeczpospolita* and had common currency, governance and policy. Nobles from both states had the right to own land and to sell goods without paying taxes in either part of the commonwealth. The two states did retain their own borders, names, armies and administrative powers. During the 18th century, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth also declined as a political power. Three partitions of the Commonwealth reduced significantly its size. One bulk went to Russia, another was annexed by the Kingdom of Prussia, which in 1815, at the Congress of Vienna, became the Kingdom of Poland. Finally, Lithuania was placed under Russian rule, although as a separate political entity. Lithuanian uprisings of 1830-31 and 1863 were harshly suppressed and followed by waves of Russification. Liberalization occurred after the Russian Revolution of 1905. The press prohibition had been annulled in 1904, allowing the appearance of the first Lithuanian daily newspaper *Vilnius News*. However, Lithuania had to suffer one more occupation before she would be able to declare its independence, namely military rule of Germany during the World War I. It was on February 16, 1918 that the independent Lithuanian state was declared by the council of 20 mem-

bers, who had been elected several months before at the congress in Vilnius. The independence was short-lived and not without fights regarding the demarcation of borders. The constitution adopted in 1922 set up a parliamentary democracy. Yet, a coup d'état by a group of army officers in December 1926 introduced an authoritarian presidential system with restricted democracy that lasted until the Soviet occupation of 1940. The Second World War brought Lithuania from Soviet rule to that of German Nazism. Yet, by the end of 1944, most of Lithuania had been reoccupied by the Red Army, and incorporated back into the Soviet Union. Lithuanians fought back for their independence: an organized guerrilla resistance, at times involving up to 40,000 fighters, lasted into the early 1950s. However, it was crushed down, and harsh repression as well as deportations – 220,000 Lithuanians were deported to Siberia – followed. Lithuanian people have never given up their hopes to be independent again. Resistant attitudes towards communistic regime were cherished almost in every family and ripened by the late 1980s. It was by that time that *Sąjūdis* – ‘The Movement’ for independence – consolidated the whole nation, and on March 11, 1990 the Parliament issued the declaration of independence stating that Lithuania had been annexed by the Soviet Union against her will. In March 2004 Lithuania was admitted to NATO, and one month later joined the European Union.

Ethnological Structure of Lithuanian People

Evidently, knowing the vicissitudes of Lithuania's history helps enormously in trying to understand Lithuanian people. Yet, it is but one of several factors forming national character. As A. Maceina has pointed out in his dissertation *National Character*, the formation of a nation is predicated on race, landscape, historical destiny and ethnological structure. According to him, the national culture is the objectification of national individuality. In other words, identity is something deeper, related to the spirit, and thus it is not only shaped by history, but it reveals itself in history and even makes history. Another observation to keep in mind, as we do the analysis of national character, is that it is not static but at flux as German geographer and ethnographer Friedrich Ratzel observed, ‘A nation is the body in constant change.’²⁵

In broad strokes, Lithuanians, as more or less all Indo-European peoples could be characterized

firstly as Nomads or cattle-breeders, and secondly as Matriarchs.⁶ Both elements have been expressed in our history and culture. The former prevails much more in the earlier phase of Lithuania's history, while the latter comes to the foreground during the subsequent phases.

It is said that Nomadic aspect manifests itself in social life by a desire for expansion. In the case of Lithuanian people, anthropologists argue, this has been most seen in war-expeditions of king Mindaugas to the Slavic territories, as well as the conquest of king Vytautas during whose reign Lithuania's borders have reached the Black Sea. It is noteworthy that German and Russian annals from 13th and 14th centuries depict a Lithuanian as an aggressive and ruthless warrior gifted with political talent. Especially the valor of Lithuanians manifests against crusades of Teutonic knights. For 200 years Lithuania was capable of defending herself against crusaders. She was the last pagan nation in Europe to accept Christianity: Aukstaiciai (marked by a dialect spoken in central-east part) accepted it in 1387, Zemaiciai (marked by a dialect spoken in the northwestern part) only in 1418. In comparison, Lithuanian neighbors, Germans and Slavs, accepted it four centuries earlier.

The same determination with which Lithuanians were fighting invaders could be observed in later history too, for instance, organized guerilla resistance against Soviet Russia in 1950s. J. Girnius argues that Lithuania's warlike attitude springs from the love of freedom. Lithuanians honor and cherish freedom. Therefore, even when the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was at her zenith, her policy was very democratic in terms of religion and culture. This explains why Jews persecuted in Christian Europe had found a safe haven under the wings of pagan kings of Lithuania. It is remarkable to read the letter written by the king Gediminas to Pope John XXII, in which he explains why Lithuanians resist Teutonic knights, ‘Holy and honorable Father! We are fighting with the Christians not so that we could destroy the Catholic faith, but in order to resist the harm done to us...this could be seen from the fact that we have brothers from Franciscan and Dominican orders, who have full freedom to baptize, preach and to administer sacraments.’ In the same letter, he gives an example of how his predecessor, king Vytenis, invited Franciscans to Lithuania and even built the church for them; yet, Teutonic Knights upon getting hold of this invitation came from Prussia and burned it! Thus, bravery needed for expansion as

well as to defend themselves from invaders, was balanced with tolerance and appreciation of freedom. According to Kavolis, because Lithuanians did not oppress the people of conquered nations, when oppressed themselves, they kept the independent spirit and would not allow to be enslaved by others.⁷ Lithuanian folklore and especially lyrics of songs are far from being militant. Lithuanians do not glorify militancy; on the contrary, a Lithuanian maiden sings, 'I do not need a warrior, I need a ploughman.'

Another characteristic feature in the ethnological portrait of Lithuanians is supposedly matriarchic in nature. It is suggested that Europe was inhabited by matriarchic peoples before the Indo-European immigration to Europe. The European cultural progress was made possible by the fact that the Nomads had to settle down as agriculturists. Tilling of the ground is said to be the characteristic of only matriarchic peoples – neither Nomads nor Totemic people cultivate the land. The agriculturist is deeply rooted in the soil he tills. He loves his fields and meadows. His patriotism shows itself in the love of his native-place. Speaking about Lithuanians, that is definitely true – Lithuanians have been agriculturists from time immemorial and they have a very deep affection for their motherland.

A farm in Matriarchic society is the property of a family, not of a clan. The family life is characterized by the superiority of woman and strict monogamy. The most salient figure in Lithuanian consciousness is mother. Kavolis points out that a white-headed mother has deep and subtle sentiments of Lithuanians.⁸ She has become a pivot of emotional life. In Lithuanian folk songs only a bride gets as much attention, and only until her marriage. Then, she is in the background again. A portrait of the mother, however, is always charming. There is no relationship deeper than that of a son or a daughter with their mother in Lithuanian folklore. A father is a provider of bread, somewhat incidental and in most cases almost obscure. The bond of a child with his father is never intense, and serves as a means to underline the significance of a mother in the shaping of individuality of her child. It is love of the mother that inspires and nurtures a child. Other family relations are much more negative. A husband, as a rule, is frequently a drunkard and becomes disappointed with his wife, even to the point of becoming aggressive towards her. She is quite frequently referred to as 'a bitch' in Lithuanian folklore. Yet, when she grows older, aggression subsides, and she again, as in the child-

hood, becomes an object of love and veneration. No doubt, that the rise of Mariology has deep roots in this divinization of a woman. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is a common object in Lithuanian religious art, and nominal Catholics pray to her, not Jesus, because supposedly, as a woman she is a better mediator between the angry God and a sinner. To this day Catholics call Lithuania the land of Mary or Maryland.

Finally, we should mention that the role of a brother has some significance in Lithuanian folk songs. For instance, a maiden always seeks her brother's protection instead of turning to her lover. A brother is his sister's honor and she turns to him with confidence. No sacrifice is too great to help a sister in need.

Thus, according to cultural anthropologists, these two ethnological elements, namely nomadic and matriarchic, lay at the heart of Lithuanian individuality. Other characteristics that express Lithuanian outlook in a more practical way stem from them. To this examination we now turn.

National Character of Lithuanian People

Eduard Spranger, a student of Wilhelm Dilthey, discerned six distinct types of humans, depending on what values are given the priority, namely political, economical, theoretical, esthetical, religious and social. J. Girnius applied his theory to different nations and concludes that Lithuanians should be classified as the 'social' type. According to him, the highest value for a Lithuanian is the living human being.⁹ Respect which Lithuanians show to a human is evident both in everyday life and in cultural trends. There is a Lithuanian saying, 'It is necessary for a human to see a human.' Therefore a village is as a big family. After work, one goes to rub shoulders with his neighbor. For Lithuanians, time spent in fellowship has the same meaning as entertainment for people from other nations. Lithuanians enjoy and value fellowship. From this springs another characteristic feature, namely Lithuanian hospitality. To treat another well is not an obligation, but an opportunity for a time of fellowship. Lithuanian guests are treated with abundance of food. Yet, Lithuanians would love to get something in return, namely sincere and guileless conversation. Shallow and superficial communication will not satisfy a Lithuanian who has spent hours in preparing table for his guest. However, it would be wrong to call a Lithuanian utilitarian or opportunist. Friendship he seeks is for the sake of

friendship, not gain.

Secondly, a Lithuanian is inclined to individualism. However, Lithuanian individualism is not as obvious, for instance, as that of Scandinavians or Germans. Kavolis names this feature 'a historical protective shell of Lithuanian individuality'.¹⁰ Outwardly, Lithuanians are rather social, yet inwardly, at the nucleus of Lithuanian individuality lies the yearning of personal connection. Therefore, anthropologists prefer another word, namely *personalist* to define this characteristic. For Lithuanians the concept of friendship has connotations of intimacy. Girnius rightly points out that Lithuanians are not open anonymously to everybody, but to each one individually.¹¹ Not humanity collectively, but this or that personality unlocks the heart of a Lithuanian. He cannot love faceless humanity; he needs a particular person to extend his love. This could vividly be demonstrated by the way Lithuanians participate in social charity. Anonymous benevolence does not work among Lithuanians as it does in other countries, for instance in Germany or the US. Lithuanian philanthropy reaches out not to humanity or a nation, but to a single individual.

Girnius is convinced that comparative approach helps to accentuate these two features of the national character. As humanist, who values friendship and fellowship, a Lithuanian differs from a German, his Western neighbor; and as personalist, he is definitely different from a Russian, his Eastern neighbor.¹² The latter loves humanity collectively. Confession from a character in Dostoyevsky's novel vividly illustrates this feature: 'I love humanity so much that I could die for it, yet I find it difficult to bear with a person in my living room for a day.' Conversely, a Lithuanian seeks a person to whom he could open his heart, and who would be willing to open his. A Russian could be open with everyone in a crowd. Not a Lithuanian. Communality is much more characteristic of Russians than of Lithuanians. Some argue that precisely because of this national feature, Communist ideology was able to take deep roots in Russia. A Lithuanian perceives community as the sum of genuine inter-relationships that take place among different persons. Thus for a Lithuanian, just obeying orders means the devaluation of the benevolent action per se. Charity should proceed from a heart. Yet, unlike a Russian, he cannot open his heart to everybody unless he develops personal relationships with another person. He needs some personal connection, some inward clicking before he is able to happily volunteer for some social action. For this

reason, he seeks a person to whom he would be able to relate to, extend his own humanity and share in that of the other. Lithuanian outlook could be defined as *personal humanism*.

J. Brazaitis assumes that Lithuanians are not intellectual theoreticians as Germans, who are concerned with and always looking for 'das Wesen' ('the nature'); neither are they rational practitioners as French, known for clarity and elegance of thought, as expressed in 'l'esprit' ('the spirit'). Lithuanians retain balance between mind and sense, intellect and emotions.¹³ Maceina is of the same mind, stating that Lithuanians are inclined to keep the synthesis of balance. Yet, both authors agree that emotional side is more expressed than the intellectual. Lithuanian sensibility is passive. It is not dramatic, not born out of the conflicts or dualities of life. Danish anthropologist, Age M. Benedicctsen, one of the few foreigners to explore Lithuanian folklore, writes:

Lithuania hardly possesses a trace of epic poetry, no historic deed, not a single man is mentioned by name, lauded or condemned. It possesses like other countries its festive lays, together with multitude of everyday poetry, that poetry which springs from the craving of the poetic mind itself, without outer causes, a song, where children of another nation would only say alas, a song, where another would only laugh, a song for every pretty maiden, for every beautiful summer morning, for a field blue with flowering flax, for a sleek and glossy horse. There are songs for a dead brother, a lost sweetheart, the child's love for its parent is transposed into song; wonder and joy, sorrow and fear, all the emotions of the soul, lasting long enough for the tone to form itself into melody. All this distinguished the poetry of Lithuania even from that of its nearest sisters, the Slavic peoples, it is a poetry of the moment and the mood – often simple and monotonous, as it is bound to be when emanating from simple little-experienced people, but never without truth, rarely without beauty.¹⁴

Lithuanian sensibilities are elegiac and deeply poetic. A Lithuanian writer, Vaizgantas, depicts an old trunk of the tree naming it *Mould* in the following way: 'Mould, a thousand year giant, the king of growth, the tree of gods, has piled a mound for himself... The nature of Lithuania – the spirit of Mould, slow, harming no one at night – will mourn and will murmur for thousands of years in secret

voices, awakening yearning of poetry, directing to the path on which a traveler will not be lost.' Such elegy dominates Lithuanian literature. Perhaps for this reason Lithuanians have many more brilliant and creative poets than prose writers. Even our novels are lyric and usually melancholic. One will not find intriguing plot or even many adventures. Lithuanian novels contain many vivid and detailed narrations of nature as well as deep reflections on human characters.

A Lithuanian is a contemplative beholder. He gently processes the outside world, avoiding square expressions. It is almost impossible to translate lyrics of a Lithuanian poem into English because of frequent use of diminutives and diminutive suffixes. Lithuanian outlook may be felt in the following verse of a song, 'I had a small horse, although small, yet comely.' Brazaitis observes the differences of the same fairy-tales as told by Russians and Lithuanians. The style of the latter is sublime and much more moderate. Lithuanians value meekness and even the horrible realities of life express gently. Evil must be lamented over, not fought with. Perhaps, the best illustration of how this melancholy finds its place in Lithuanian art is *Rupintojėlis*, a wooden sculpture or carving of *Worring* or *Pensive Christ*.

Derived from the Lithuanian word *rupestis* 'concern', it can be translated as concern, anxiety and solicitude. The image of *Rupintojėlis* is seen in a variety of settings, ranging from forest chapels to tree trunks. While each statue is unique, all portray the same figure: Christ sitting on a rock or stool, bent over, supporting his head with his right hand, the left hand on his knee; sometimes a crown of thorns on his head showing drops of blood, but always his face is full of worry, looking pensively and sadly at passers-by. All emphasis is placed on the facial expression of deep thought and infinite sorrow. Although the *Pensive Christ* is not an authentic piece of Lithuanian art – the image was known in other European countries and originated in the 15th century – yet it has become the personification and the mirror of Lithuanian character. I would call it the *Passion of the Christ* according to Lithuanians. Of course, it is not a depiction of historical Jesus, but of the one Lithuanians can most relate to – Christ the Man of Sorrows pondering all the ills of humanity. Finally, the form of the sculpture reveals a lot about Lithuanian art in general. *Rupintojėlis* is very simple, even simplistic because Lithuanians value idea more than form. Lithuanian culture does not attract by outward forms. In fact,



Pensive Christ (*Rupintojėlis*)

Lithuanian traditional folk dresses are less colorful than those of our neighbors. The same is true about Lithuanian literature, and even, as Brazaitis points out, about Lithuanian cemeteries.¹⁵ They are much more formless than those in Scandinavia or Germany. Lithuanians do not give prominence to form. The value is found deeper, in one's heart and humanity.

Missiological implications

I would like to conclude these reflections on the national character of Lithuanian people by considering some missiological/evangelistic implications.

First of all, I believe that the above-analyzed characteristics should not be neglected or undermined when planning to reach Lithuanians with the gospel of Jesus Christ. On the contrary, the anthropological insights, when properly applied, will make missiological and evangelistic endeavors more fruitful. The attitude of the apostle Paul expressed in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22 should be ours too: 'Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the

law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.⁹ The Apostle Paul was aware of national and cultural differences that exist among diverse nations. It is clear from this passage that these national identities could prevent the people from hearing the gospel preached. To eliminate these hindrances, the apostle Paul would put all his efforts to identify with the culture in which he was ministering. One missiological strategy did not fit all. For this reason, when preaching to the Greeks, he would become like a Greek; when preaching to the Jews, he was again a Jew. How does the process of 'becoming' look like? Practically it meant that the apostle was sensitive to the beliefs and value systems, manners, customs and worldviews of different cultures and was ready to sacrifice those of his own. In modern missiological terms he believed in contextualization of the gospel. Thus, the missiological paradigm of the apostle Paul is that of incarnational ministry. We will be wise to follow his example.

Now, engaging Lithuanians with the gospel has not been an easy task for missionaries. As already said, Lithuania was the last European nation to accept Roman Catholicism. Yet this, in my opinion, was not a flaw, but rather a merit of our forefathers. Pagans, as they were, understood that religion that comes with a sword is false, and therefore they resisted. As king Gediminas explains to the pope, 'We are fighting with the Christians not so that we could destroy the Catholic faith, but in order to resist the harm done to us.' These words, in my opinion, have very strong implications for modern missionary activities in Lithuania too. Lithuanians do resist any attempt to impose something from the outside. Historically, even when those attempts of the outsiders were successful, as in the case of Communistic ideology, that provoked both open and hidden resistance. Therefore, a minister of the gospel should come not as a crusader but as a friend. Lithuanians intuitively resist outward enforcements, yet if their hearts are won, they become earnest followers as in the case of Catholicism. There is no space here to analyze how Lithuanians from stiff-necked pagans have become ardent Catholics. Suffice it to say that Catholic mysticism has a strong appeal to a poetically introverted Lithuanian.

Secondly, most of the missionaries that came to Lithuania after the independence of 1990 did not have any intentions to learn Lithuanian language. Because in the past many attempts have been made to denationalize us by Germans, by Poles and by Russians, Lithuanians are very diligent to preserve their language. Lithuanians are conservatives in many respects, but especially in this one. Anyone who dares to learn our language earns the highest respect. I personally knew an Armenian who had learned Lithuanian and came to live here already knowing the language. He was highly esteemed among Lithuanian friends. Unfortunately, very few missionaries follow such an example.

Thirdly, the poetical inclination of Lithuanians requires that the gospel presented would have not only cognitive but affective elements too. One of the reasons why Catholicism was more appealing than Protestantism to simple folks could be the more cognitive approach of the latter. On the other hand, among the most outstanding Lithuanian poets, we have Catholic priests, such as Maironis (1862 – 1932) whose poems set the basic standards for modern Lithuanian poetry. As analyzed in this paper, the emotional side of Lithuanian people is more expressed than the intellectual. Therefore, the dogmatic approach to the spreading of the gospel has a lesser appeal to their consciousness. Lithuanians need more than just rational exposition of the gospel. Their hearts have to be warmed and their souls ignited. Perhaps, for this reason, the charismatic churches today have the highest rate of membership among evangelicals. I think that the worship ministry that seeks to be authentic, that builds on the rich heritage of Lithuanian song tradition and innovatively implements some of its elements will be a very effective tool in reaching Lithuanians with the gospel. I suggest that contemplative and inspirational dimensions of the gospel are to be practiced and developed in Lithuanian churches. This is not to suggest that cognitive and rational aspects are not important or should be abandoned all together. On the contrary, integration of both contemplative and cognitive dimensions of the gospel should be pursued.

Fourthly, because Lithuanians value fellowship more than entertainment, and friendly talk more than bombastic show, pastors and missionaries should be seeking to develop church structures that will have place for friendly interactions among believers. Home groups or specifically oriented clusters/clubs, such as 'Mothers of Preschoolers,' or 'Christian Family values' could become sought-

after and refreshing places for Christians as well as their unbelieving neighbors. Because Lithuanians value intimacy, even smaller units, such as mentor-student should be encouraged. There is some truth in the saying that a Lithuanian feels at home in the confessional! Some have suggested that precisely for this reason Lithuanians were not willing to accept Protestantism, which canceled the obligatory sacrament of penance. The place of intimacy where one can open the deepest corners of his heart is very important for the Lithuanians.

Finally, it must be mentioned that some features of the Lithuanian character will be challenged by the gospel and should not be held onto. Among them are passivity and nostalgia. Although these characteristics per se are not evil or sinful, yet they often become the hindrances for normal Christian growth. Passivity could very easily become an excuse for not obeying the explicit commands of Christ. Sometimes laziness tries to disguise itself as meekness, or cowardice as gentleness. Lithuanians are prone to these sins. Yet even more we should beware of nostalgia, which ends up in depression. At present the suicide rate in Lithuania is the one of the highest (if not the highest) in Europe. In this appalling sin we surpass all our neighbors. When confronted with diverse challenges and injustices of life, Lithuanians often turn to drink. Some become so nostalgic that they do not find strength to stand for themselves. Then, suicide seems the easiest way out. Personally I believe that even Lithuanian *Pensive Christ* has given the false portrait of Christ. He is not only too Lithuanian and too human, but this is most importantly in no way reflects the Jesus from the gospels. *Pensive Christ* can only lament over but not save from the oppression and sin. Therefore for many Lithuanians the gospel ends with crucifixion, not resurrection. This hopeless and powerless gospel fails to give regenerating and life-changing faith. This sad picture and false message should be challenged by the true, hope-giving, strength-empowering gospel of the One, who has all power in heaven and on earth. His kingdom is a matter of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17). In order not to be overcome by melancholy, Lithuanians especially need the latter!

Instead of Conclusion

The first trip to Lithuania has taught Karen T. Olson, the writer for *Chicago Tribune*, a lot about the land of her ancestry. She did not have enough

information to find her great-father's hometown, but she is convinced that she found the source of his spirit. Olson ends the article by describing a Lithuanian driver, 'On the surface, he was an unremarkable man, but his values clearly reflected determination to complete even the most menial tasks with dignity. Watching him, it occurred to me that this man epitomized the fabric of Lithuania's soul – proud, gallant, hard-working and independent.' As a first time visitor she came very close to getting the gist of Lithuanian spirit. In the subtitle Olson names Lithuania as *a small nation with a big soul*. And I think she is right...

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Notes

- 1 Karen Torme Olson, 'Lithuania: An Adventure in Independence' in *Chicago Tribune*, sect. 8, October 24, 2004
- 2 Juozas Kudirka, *The Lithuanians: an ethnic portrait of Lithuanians*, (Lithuanian Folk Culture Centre, 1991), 15.
- 3 Kiaupa, Zigmantas, Jūrate Kiaupienė and Albinas Kuncevičius, *The History of Lithuania before 1795*, (Vilnius: Lithuanian Institute of History, 2000), 71-72.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 162.
- 5 Friedrich Ratzel, *Anthropogeographie* (Stuttgart, 1921), 84.
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