
Interview: 'Monsignor M.'

Russians tried to kill the Pope, after Poland got out of control

by Maria Cristina Fiocchi

The interview below was granted by a monsignor who has been in the diplomatic service of the Holy See for many years. He is the author of numerous texts on the subjects touched upon here. Given the delicacy of the revelations contained in the interview, he preferred to remain anonymous.

The recent ethnic upheavals in the U.S.S.R. have called world attention to the repression of human rights and religious freedoms in the countries subjected to Moscow's dictatorship. Msgr. M. traces the last 30 years of the dramatic history of Lithuania, and describes the harsh conditions of the Catholic Church in the Soviet bloc countries, refuting the claims of "openness" under glasnost and perestroika slogans, as they are understood in the West.

Of particular interest is this expert's analysis of the much-touted possibility of a papal journey to Moscow.

Conducted in Italian in Rome, the interview has been translated by EIR staff.

EIR: On Feb. 16, Lithuania celebrated the anniversary of its independence, proclaimed in 1918, an independence which was brutally canceled by the Soviet occupation of 1940. In the capital of Vilna, and in other cities, there were demonstrations which were broken up by the KGB. Can you comment on these events?

Msgr. M: The events are joyful on the one hand, and almost tragic on the other, because, for the first time since the 1940 occupation, this holiday, this remembrance of independence was officially celebrated with demonstrations that held a meaning of protest against the continuation of the occupation. Participation, especially in Vilna, was quite numerous, reckoned at around 10,000 persons, who first went to Church to pray and then gathered in the streets and squares to demonstrate. The police acted with a certain violence, perhaps not as much as other times because there were no victims, but many people were arrested and interrogated, threatened, and then released. Hence perestroika is being felt in a certain sense in the Soviet Union, and if these demonstrations took place this year, it is because people feel a little safer about being able to protest and not be subjected to violence, or at

least heavy violence. For example, today, we all know about the demonstrations held in Armenia.

But all this makes me a little bit afraid, because it could push the Soviet government to take steps backward.

EIR: For fear that the situation might get out of hand?

Msgr. M: Yes, out of fear, because besides the Baltic countries there are 20 other nationalities which are under Soviet occupation—the Muslims, the inhabitants of Karelia, a part of Finland which was occupied. This will certainly bring on the desire to stop this kind of freedom, or at least the possibility to express dissent. And I recall what happened right after Stalin's death, when power was taken over by Malenkov and Beria. Beria, who was not a Russian, started giving certain freedoms to groups and ethnic nationalities and perhaps this was why Beria got killed. Then came Khrushchov, who denounced Stalinism, and so forth. Let's hope it goes well today. It is a reawakening of resistance.

There has always been resistance in Lithuania, but passive and rather hidden, for example, during the basketball and soccer games. When the Lithuanians play against the Soviets, there is a national demonstration. At the last soccer match in Vilna there were even tens and tens of arrests, because they started to sing Lithuanian songs and to insult the Russians. As for the most recent demonstrations, we shall see how they go. I fear that the Comintern will start rethinking things, to consider that if they keep on this track they could provoke substantial changes in the Soviet Union. To give back freedom or independence to these so-called republics. . . . I don't think the Red Army can accept that.

EIR: It is well known that from the entry of Russian tanks into the country on June 15, 1940, a resistance was organized at the cost of considerable sacrifice: The priests and religious associations were persecuted, many of the leaders were arrested and detained, and there is even talk of an attempt by the Soviet authorities to undermine the Church from within and to try to lead the Catholic hierarchy into positions similar to those of the Russian Orthodox hierarchy, which is noto-

riously subservient to the regime. Can you explain this situation better?

Msgr. M: I remember the occupation of 1940 very well, because I was present during those tragic events. They immediately began with terrorism, violence, and practically actual genocide: Almost all the best elements, all the political and cultural figures of the country were arrested and interrogated, and many died in jail. As to the Church, the Russians probably were well informed on the religious situation in Lithuania, and they did not think immediately about destroying it, but they sent in KGB agents to negotiate with the Church hierarchy and propose the following solution: "We will tolerate you if you distance yourselves from Rome, creating an independent Catholic Church, even if not Orthodox, a national church, and then we will treat you better." There were negotiations. I recall well that the bishops delegated a priest whom I knew very well—he was very skillful. He discussed with these gentlemen, and the answer on the part of the Church was: We cannot accept.

The person entrusted by the bishops to conduct these negotiations was a priest, but he had also been minister of agriculture and had carried out agrarian reform, expropriating the latifundists and distributing the land to poor people, to the peasantry, and thus he was in a certain sense acceptable as a negotiator to the gentlemen from Moscow.

At the end of the discussions there was a dinner. One of the Soviets raised his glass and offered a toast: "To the new Lithuanian Catholic Church." The priest replied: "No! We drink to our Church, always old and always new." And naturally the negotiations ended right there.

They did not dare to directly strike at the clergy, because they were afraid that people would organize an insurrection. But they secretly interrogated, they captured priests. It was an intolerable situation. One would disappear for three or four days, then reappear but not say a word; we did not know if he had been engaged as an agent or not. And then they also took seminarians; almost half of the seminarians were forced by tortures and threats to follow and tattle on their teachers, to spy on them.

Me, they offered a job in Moscow. I said, "But I am a priest." They said, "It doesn't matter as long as you do what we need on the radio and in the Foreign Ministry, because you know a lot of foreign languages." Of course I turned it down, but that year, 1940-41, was really tough; in the end the mass deportations began, in rail convoys, like beasts; they put women, children, and men in. Of course, the lists were prepared, and more than 40 million people were deported, of whom very few survived.

It was our good luck that in 1941, on June 22, war broke out between Germany and Russia, and then the German occupation came. We were almost enthusiastic that this war had broken out. . . . Today everyone wants peace, but we, at that time, prayed for war. When war broke out we were delighted, we thought we would be liberated, but the German Nazi occupation came. . . . It was slightly better than the

Russian one, but the Church was very badly treated. Priests and educated people were deported to Dachau and Stutnof. Then in 1944, we had the Soviet occupation again, and this occupation has lasted from 1944 to the present. It has done enormous damage, because a part of the population, almost 90,000 people, above all the intellectuals, escaped to Germany to then emigrate to various parts of the world. Those who stayed back, the youth, already knew the Soviet regime and they preferred not to surrender, but to escape into the woods and fight. This partisan struggle, which lasted from 1945 until almost 1954, lost us almost 200,000 young people, among them my older brother and my father, and four of my first cousins, who all fell.

As for the clergy, the situation was different. In 1941, in a certain sense they put up with us. But from 1945 to 1954, until the advent of Khrushchov, almost half the priesthood was tortured and forced to act as agents—or wound up in Siberia. Among these there were even bishops—only 1 bishop in 12 remained in Lithuania. One died in prison in Moscow, the famous Vladimir. One was in jail for nine years, and then got sick. The Russians, when he was about to die, took him back to Lithuania, because they are afraid of martyrs. Another came back after 10 years, and then died 10 months later. One was executed by firing squad without a trial in 1946. Others died upon their return.

The Church was put in an impossible situation to survive and act, because everything was State-controlled, all property, including the churches was nationalized and confiscated, and enormous rents had to be paid to have any church open for worship. A third of the churches were closed down and still remain closed. The clergy was put under control, and some of them were forced to accept cooperating with the State. And practically right down to the present we cannot name a bishop that we choose ourselves: He must be someone the government likes. And if the government likes him, he serves two masters: not just Rome, but Moscow, too. Those who come here, to the Vatican, not just from Lithuania, but from other countries, from Hungary, from Czechoslovakia, from Latvia, have to pass through Moscow, where they get their instructions on how they are not supposed to talk with the Vatican, and then on their return, they have to report back. They never come by themselves but always in company, and one spies on the other.

EIR: Are you talking about bishops or also priests?

Msgr. M: Bishops, but also priests. The ones that have a certain possibility and freedom to go abroad are those who serve the State. No one can receive a concession, a favor that is not repaid. Now, what do you think of these bishops? Even if they are candidates of the government, and hence subject to blackmail, they are not necessarily bad or traitors. The Soviet *modus operandi* is so clever and diabolical that by using blackmail, they force people to collaborate against their own will.

The Holy See is always reluctant to name bishops because

Moscow demands bishops that it likes, and the Holy See cannot name the ones it would want.

You have to have pity for those who collaborate in a certain sense, not aversion, because they, too, are victims; they have no defense.

Nonetheless, despite all that, the Church is alive, and I would say rather strong. Certainly the clergy is divided into three groups: the ones who run it and are true to the regime, those who resist and are persecuted and end up in Siberia, and those who are less dangerous, because they are more passive. Those who resist never have positions of responsibility. Now as to the resistance on the part of laymen, I think that the Church in Lithuania is everything for them. Even those who did not believe at first, now attach themselves to the Church, which gives them moral strength to resist.

The resistance will never cease: It is a cultural fact, too. The Russians are, in fact, considered to be of an inferior culture by our people: real barbarians.

EIR: Konstantin Kharchev, the chairman of the Soviet Council on Religious Affairs, in a recent article published in *Izvestia*, states that the Soviet State is "examining with greater clarity the role of the Church in a socialist State and that it is liquidating all the obstacles which block the citizens' freedom of conscience." Does this discussion hold also for the Catholics in Lithuania and the Ukraine?

Msgr. M: Yes, surely. The Russians have made many promises, but they have not put them into effect. They have said they would return the monumental church of Klaipeda, which had been turned into a concert hall, but so far nothing has been done. There has been talk of giving back the Cathedral of Vilna, a stupendous church which has been a museum since 1945, but up to now nothing has been done; the church of St. Casimir, which is Vilna's most beloved church, is a Museum of Atheism. The priests Svarinskas and Tamkevicius are still in Siberia, and many Catholic laymen are still in prison.

The Soviet Union wants to appear acceptable to the West; while Stalin thought he would arrive at communist dominion through a violent revolution, now all are convinced, Gorbachov, but not just him, that violent revolution is no longer possible, that they will not win dominion over the world through revolution but through other strategies. To this end they show the charming smiles of Gorbachov and Raisa, to show a Western "style." But the real intention of the Soviet Union today is to separate Europe from the United States, and for this they want to conquer the sympathy of the Western world, and in a certain sense, I hate to say it, they are getting results, because the whole Italian press, including the anti-communist press, talks about Gorbachov and Raisa all the time, creating the illusion that something has changed in the Soviet Union.

Even the politicians in Italy have fallen into this trap, and now they even talk about going arm-in-arm with the Communists [in the government—ed.] because they are suppos-



St. Peter's Square in Rome, scene of the attempted assassination of the Pope in May 1981.

Chaudia Amis

edly changed.

This perestroika is also reflected in the Communist parties of other countries, and creates embarrassment for them.

EIR: But it also helps them.

Msgr. M: Yes, to distance themselves from the past, because they are losing votes. It is known that Stalin was wrong, that [Italian Communist Party founder Palmiro] Togliatti was wrong, and so what is communism, what promise can communism offer?

From Czechoslovakia, from Hungary, and also from East Germany protests are raised: "What are you Russians doing? Because if you give a little bit of freedom, here in East Germany everything will blow up." The Soviet Communists are communists, but they are above all imperialists and as imperialists, they have to pay attention to not losing what they have occupied.

The Russians always have the idea of getting to West Germany. The Soviets say: "If you detach yourselves from the Americans, we'll make things easy for you." Now they talk about tearing down the Berlin Wall, but the Soviets never give something for nothing. So Kharchev's promises are merely promises. After his *Izvestia* article there was another article in *Pravda* which said: "Watch out and don't say the Church is right, because the Church has not made us conquer anything, it is the people who have conquered everything."

EIR: Don't you think the Soviet regime is using the occasion of the thousand-year anniversary of the baptism of the peoples of ancient Rus, to give greater credibility to Gorbachov's "new course"?

Msgr. M: Even this is rather problematic, not clear. The

Kremlin is in a very embarrassing situation. On the one hand, it would be great public relations for them to have the Pope in the Soviet Union. On the other hand, however, there is the danger that what happened in Poland would happen, when the Pope went there, which is that Solidarność was born, there was a demonstration of over a million people on the streets of Warsaw, and they all carried crosses and chanted: "*Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat.*" They fear that the situation in Poland slipped out of their control and it is for this reason that they tried to kill the Pope. Now Kharchev says: "The Church has to be the one to invite the Pope," but we know what Kharchev is, he's the commissar of worship, who should give the Church the permission to invite the Pope. But would they get political advantages?

Even when the Pope wanted to go to Lithuania, in a certain sense the Soviet Union had an interest in allowing him, provided that the Pope went to Moscow. That would be like bowing to Moscow, like recognizing the occupation and the incorporation of the Baltic countries into the Soviet Union. But the Holy See does not recognize it, and so returning from Australia, the Pope said loud and clear: "I have no interest in going to Moscow, I have the intention of going to Lithuania, to make a pastoral journey." He ruled out the stopover in Moscow and also the political significance of the trip. But for Moscow the political significance is the most important thing. There is another problem. In the Soviet Union, Ukrainian Catholics of the Byzantine rite are prohibited. The Ukrainian Catholic Church does not exist officially. There is only the Patriarchate of Moscow, to which all those of Byzantine rite are supposed to be subordinated. Moscow would invite the Pope if the Holy Father recognized that the Ukrainians of the Byzantine rite are no longer Catholics, but belong to the Orthodoxy. This, the Pope will never be able to do.

EIR: In May 1983, the Lithuanian bishops invited the Pope to visit their country for the 500th anniversary of the death of St. Casimir. In August 1984, the Pope revealed that not only had Moscow not authorized him to go, but it had not even recognized his own representative. In June 1987, Lithuania celebrated its 600 years of Christianity, and again the desire expressed by the Pope to be able to visit his own faithful was not fulfilled. Today there is talk of a possible trip to Moscow by the Pope on the occasion of the thousand year anniversary of the Christianization of ancient Rus. Do you think this will be possible?

Msgr. M: Possible, yes; probable, no.

The main reason is that they fear that the coming of the Holy Father to the Ukraine and to Lithuania, and other Catholic regions would arouse an enormous enthusiasm in the population. To see the Pope would be something unimaginable for people, and would reinforce the Church in an incredible way. They cannot allow this.

The Communists will never "reform" their hatred toward Catholicism and toward Christianity.

Afghan refugees: a danger to Pakistan

by Ramtanu Maitra

Whether the Soviet troops begin to withdraw from Afghanistan on May 15 or not, Pakistan's problems concerning Afghanistan seem far from over. Even if the direct threat of a Soviet invasion recedes, the difficulties associated with the influx of some 3 million Afghan refugees since 1979 remain, and could in fact worsen.

In the face of an overwhelming national security threat, Pakistan extended a generous hand to the Afghan refugees, despite a long history of troubled relations between the two nations. It is that troubled history, and the Pakistani government's apparent inability to surmount it, that defines Pakistan's current dilemma.

The crisis created by the presence of 3 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan requires Pakistan to seek a comprehensive settlement to the Afghan conflict, establishing a stable Afghan government permitting the refugees' return—an obvious condition the U.S. State Department has appeared to overlook in its zealous drive for a "regional settlement" with the Soviet Union.

A predictable result

In contrast to Iran's strict control of its Muslim brothers fleeing from the north, the Pakistani government adopted a propitiatory attitude toward the refugees, extending special favors and granting them a free run of the country.

The size of the refugee influx into sparsely populated North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Baluchistan, the two provinces of Pakistan that border Afghanistan, was enough to cause demographic changes with direct political repercussions. Pakistan's total population is in any case only 85 million; in many areas of the border provinces, the refugees outnumber local inhabitants.

With an infamous irreverence for law and order, the Afghans soon enough established a base for the cash- and gun-based prosperity the situation offered. With rare exceptions, the Pakistan government turned a blind eye to these developments—a fact that has evoked bitter hostility against the government from the local inhabitants.

Compounding the problem further, the authorities allowed the refugees to travel east and south into the provinces