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Army 777: Gospel in(sub)culturized

SUMMARY. In this article the Lithuanian movement Army 777 is presented and analyzed. The movement unites Christian members of various “youth subcultures” (metal fans, goths, punks, bikers and the like). The movement has no formal leadership, and is based entirely on non-formal participation of members in Army 777 internet spaces, and associating themselves with ideas and symbols of the movement. The article presents main ideas of the movement and their visual representations, interpreting them in the context. Two main contextual fields for this Christian movement are indicated, namely – the situation of Christian youth during the Soviet times, and the reality of Western youth subcultures. The former created an urgent need for a translation of Christianity into more youth-like language and imagery, the latter provided visual and musical elements for Army 777. Thus in the movement subcultural elements (often stereotypically understood as having anti-Christian meaning) serve as genuine means of expression for the Christian values and views. In this way Army 777 is not just a paradox, but also a meeting space, where Christianity is in-sub-culturized, and subcultures are Christianized.

KEYWORDS: subcultures, Christian movements, Christianity, Lithuania, youth, Army 777.

During the Soviet regime Christian churches in Lithuania were able to carry their mission in a very limited way. Main reasons of this limitation were restrictions put on Christian churches in the country by the Soviet government, the aggressive stance of militant atheism in institutions of education, and multiple acts of oppression applied on Christians by the Soviet governmental bodies.

Behind the “iron curtain”, Lithuanian Christians were cut off from the rest of Christian world. The immense impact that the Vatican II Council (1962–1965) had on Catholic life and mission worldwide went almost unnoticed in life of Lithuanian Catholic Church (which historically and statistically is the biggest religious community in the country¹). Some external changes were implemented in liturgical and

¹ According to the last population census in 2011, 77,2 % of Lithuanian population are Catholics (The Lithuanian Department of Statistics: https://osp.stat.gov.lt/documents/10180/217110/Gyv_kalba_tikyba.pdf/1d9dac9a-3d45-4798-93f5-941fed00503f).

administrative life of Catholic dioceses (i. e. new order of Mass and vernacular language were introduced into liturgy), yet because of the opposition and constant harassments from the atheist government main efforts of Catholics could not be directed to the implementation of the decrees of the Council in life of the Church. Rather than focusing on the open dialogue with the society and appreciating the value of culture, Lithuanian Catholics were struggling for survival.²

On the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union two age groups could be observed in traditional Christian Churches in Lithuania (Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Reformed), as being most actively involved: the elderly and children. Numbers of participants of the middle generation were considerably smaller. Two main factors accountable for this situation seem easy to point out. Any adult willing to reach for a carrier had to be a member of the ruling communist party, and to confirm (at least formally) to the atheist stance. Otherwise opportunities to reach successful professional carrier were practically absent. Also, persistent atheist propaganda inevitably influenced views and values of that part of population which could not avoid being involved in the anti-religious discourse – mostly students and active representatives of middle aged citizens. Because of absence of the middle generation in life of the Church, the elderly (most of them from country areas) were carrying the task of communicating Christianity to younger generations.³ Thus straight after collapse of the Soviet Union the predominating image of Christianity in minds of young people was that of rural, outdated, culturally inadequate, and driven by tradition rather than reasoning. Church activities were associated mostly with funerals, weddings, and summer vacation time.

Such situation called for improvement. Churches had to represent Christianity anew, break stereotypes created by the unfavorable historic circumstances, when given possibility. Cultural bridges between Christian idiom and younger generation had to be built. Many youth pastoral initiatives were started with attempt to communicate Christian message in more adequate language for the young minds right after Lithuania regained independence. Yet, with a few exceptions, pastoral work with youth never stepped into the area of subcultures (metal fans, goth, punk, bikers, and similar), where more radical attitudes of younger generation prevailed.⁴ Most Christian youth organizations, summer camps, and music events in the country were neutral from a

² More on the situation of Catholic Church in Lithuania during the Soviet occupation see: A. Streikus, „Krikščionybė okupuotoje Lietuvoje“, in *Krikščionybės Lietuvoje istorija* (Vilnius: Aidai, 2006), 439–557; D. Liutikas, „Jaunimo religingumo problema sovietinio ateizmo metais“, in *Jaunimo vertybinės orientacijos* (Vilnius: Socialinių tyrimų institutas, 2003), 124–133; V. Spengla, „Lietuvos Katalikų Bažnyčios padėtis sovietmečiu“, in *Objektas „Intrigantas“: Kunigo Broniaus Laurinavičiaus gyvenimas ir veikla* (Vilnius: Katalikų akademija, 2002), 36–67.

³ M. Ališauskienė and I. Samoilova, „Modernizacija ir religija sovietinėje ir posovietinėje Lietuvoje“, *Kultūra ir visuomenė*, 2(3) (2011), 74–75.

⁴ Some exceptions must be mentioned. For example, Lithuanian Franciscans have been attracting members of various youth subcultures even during the Soviet times. Right after the Soviet Union collapsed, Franciscans put a conscious effort to create a friendly environment to the subcultural youth and encouraged it by organizing youth camps and festivals.

subcultural viewpoint. The possibility of including expressions of youth subcultures into the communication of Christianity was taken diversely, with negative opinions always strongly expressed. During the first decade of independence (1991–2001) majority of evangelical Churches hardly tolerated unconventional looks and musical tastes of their subcultural members.⁵ Critique of subcultural expressions was also present in Catholic circles, mostly as a reaction to the performances of subcultural music bands in Catholic youth events.⁶ In the last decade new wave of criticism was aroused by the newly founded “National exorcist association” which expressed sharp criticism about the symbolism and practices of non-Christian religions and subcultural groups.⁷

In the next few pages “Army 777” movement will be presented. So far this movement is the first and only systematic attempt to concentrate exclusively on building bridges between Christianity and youth subcultures in Lithuania. Method chosen for this research is a participant observation (author being actively involved as member and one of the main inspirators of the movement), content analysis (forum discussions, visuals, articles and commentaries, radio broadcasts), and unstructured (non-formal) interviews. Despite of numerous academic works on subcultures in Lithuania, there is almost no literature on “Army 777” movement.⁸

“Army 777” is Lithuanian movement of Christian representatives of various youth subcultures. The movement’s most active period of existence was 2010–2016. After 2016 the movement somewhat diminished with number of most active members experiencing new developments in their lives (creating marriages, entering jobs and universities, leaving the country, etc.). The movement originated in 2009 with creation of

⁵ There were numerous cases of members leaving these churches because of them being criticized for their subcultural expressions. It is also possible to notice some fluctuations in churches’ view on subcultural music, starting with moderate or even enthusiastic, and ending with hostile. For example, “Word of Faith” charismatic church (not to be confused with an American “Word of Faith”) was among the first to introduce Christian heavy metal tapes for rent to church members in early 90’s. Shortly after that, inspired by an article of famous American evangelist, “Word of Faith” church withdrew all metal tapes from its rent service and criticized heavy metal genre. Later “Word of Faith” leaders’ views became moderate again.

⁶ Eg., the first Christian metal band in Lithuania “Quest Rising” formed in 1993, and was constantly criticized for their looks and harsh musical expressions. See: Mindaugas Peleckis, *Lietuvos rokas: ištakos ir raida* (Vilnius: Mintis, 2011), 308–309.

⁷ See the Exorcist National Association website for examples: <https://www.egzorcistas.lt>. Robert Walser in his book “Running with the Devil” provides examples of misunderstandings about heavy metal subculture in biased academic and popular works (R. Walser, *Running with the Devil* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 23–25, 137, 143. Subcultures are often believed to induce suicidal or satanic thoughts to their members. However, there is no scientific data to prove it (Paul Hodkinson, *Goth: Identity, Style and Subculture* (Oxford, New York, 2002), 113).

⁸ Kristina Grigonytė wrote about humour on the army777.lt website: Kristina Grigonytė, „Krikščioniškos tematikos humoras internetiniame forume army777.lt“, *Grupės ir aplinkos: tarpdisciplininis mokslo darbų leidinys*, 3 (2012), 93–113. Tomas Pabedinskas and Rasa Pranskevičiūtė dedicated ten pages to testimonies and photos of five members of Army 777 movement in: Tomas Pabedinskas and Rasa Pranskevičiūtė. *Subculture* (Kaunas: Lietuvos fotomenininkų sąjungos Kauno skyrius, 2012), 16–27. Army 777 movement is also briefly described in context of a discussion about the phenomenon of Christian metal in: Mindaugas Peleckis. *Lietuvos rokas: ištakos ir raida*, 311.

Army 777 internet space (www.army777.lt), and is based on the views and symbolism, presented there. The website remained the main basis for movement members until very recently, when most of communication of the movement migrated to Facebook group and page (today group has more than 800 members, page counts more than 700 “likes”). The most important segment of Army 777 internet space is a forum where topics vary from discussions about music to topics on morality, politics and society. In spring of 2012 (after almost three years from the start in autumn of 2009) 537 members registered to the forum, 1342 topics were created, 69364 messages were written.⁹ Naturally, some members are more active than others. There are also those who never participate in discussions after the registering. Still there were enough active members to keep forum busy for most of the time.¹⁰ The website includes Prayer service intranet, photo and video gallery, merchandise, links to foreign sites of Christian subcultures and Christian music bands, and the like. The team of two administrators and eighteen moderators were working together to keep forum going. Both administrators have degrees in theology and are experienced participants of youth subcultures. They are often invited to youth events as speakers, their personalities are quite well known among youth in Lithuania. This helped to draw attention of young people to the movement. The movement and its website were periodically presented to the public via special workshops at Christian youth events (e. g. Lithuanian Youth Days, Christian music festivals, and the like), occasional radio broadcasts and articles.

There were no attempts to form a permanent community with formal leadership and membership for the movement.¹¹ Initiators of the movement stress repeatedly that Army 777 is the set of symbols and views, launched on the internet for everyone to use. So it is through association with the symbols and values, stated in the “code of Army 777” that one becomes a “member” of Army 777.¹² The requirements for such members are simple: they have to be Christian or at least sympathetic to Christianity; they have to represent subculture or to be sympathetic to one; they have to observe ecumenical stance while participating in the Army 777 discussions. Usually those who do not perfectly fit this description are tolerated, yet if they insistently communicate ideas, which conflict with the code of the movement, they are banned from participating in forum. Conflicts may arise in all three mentioned areas. It is well known that different subcultures do not necessarily get along (e. g. metal fans may “hate” hip-hop culture, and both may “hate” emo kids, etc.), whereas under the flag of Army 777

⁹ In 2020 July there were 824 registered members, up to 3000 topics and 90000 messages created in the forum. Data is reflected on the forum page. Viewed July 17, 2020, <http://www.army777.lt/forum/index.php?sid=2119e707c6affe1bb3a9a57d11d62656>.

¹⁰ In 2013 average amount of new posts per day counted 59, average amount of new topic started counted 1 per day (January 30, 2013 data).

¹¹ Some members expressed a wish for more defined structure of the movement, formal leadership, and more precise rules concerning the right to represent publically the movement and wear Army 777 attire. In all cases administrators rejected the idea.

¹² See “The codex of ARMY 777”. Viewed July 24, 2020, http://army777.lt/apie_mus/.

they are all united by common Christian faith.¹³ Also, the question of “true” and “pretend” participation is usually very important to youth subcultures, whereas it is almost absent in Army 777.¹⁴ Similarly the code of the movement strictly forbids disrespectful remarks about different Christian denominations. Stressing the theological differences is discouraged, and dialogue is encouraged. Discussions in theology section of the forum reveal that such ecumenical peace is not easily achieved and require additional disciplinary measures from side of administrators.¹⁵ Lastly, time and again non-Christians or atheists enter the forum. They are encouraged to freely express their views in the “Army 777 dialogue table” section where they may discuss, as long as polite tone is kept.¹⁶ Some members appreciated this possibility and became non-Christian friends of the movement. Others were banned from discussions for disrespectful remarks. These facts show that it is only through the subtle balance of identity and openness that fruitful forum discussions are possible.¹⁷

The sole purpose of the movement and forum is to make known the possibility of dialogue and symbiosis between Christianity and subcultures. It encourages Christian representatives of subcultures to be Christians not *despite* their subcultural expression but *through it*. It is believed by most participants that Christianity gives new meaning to their subcultural context and vice versa – subcultural content provides Christianity with fresh and adequate expression.¹⁸ According to Army 777 metal fans, “strong message needs strong music.”¹⁹ Participants deny the existence of any substantial connection between their subculture and negative attitudes, destructive behaviour, suicidal tendencies and the like.²⁰ Rather, any subculture can be redeemed by the Gospel. With this view we find ourselves on the grounds of the inculturation idea, which is known to Christianity since its very beginning, and is brought up with a new force by Vatican II Council. Figuratively speaking, Gospel can be viewed as a salt, which is intended to be put into meal (Mt 5:13). Salt is never served alone, and even can be harmful if

¹³ Hodkinson, *Goth: Identity, Style and Subculture*, 69–70. Occasional cases of enmity between subcultures may still be observed in Army 777 forum space. See attitudes expressed in “Emo” forum, where separate topic is also dedicated to the question of intolerance among the subcultures. Viewed June 13, 2020, <http://www.army777.lt/forum/viewforum.php?f=48>.

¹⁴ Hodkinson, *Goth: Identity, Style and Subculture*, 73–76.

¹⁵ Good examples are discussions in forum section dedicated to theological topics on the role of Mary and saints in Christianity, liturgical practices, and interpretation of Scriptures. Viewed July 15, 2020, <http://www.army777.lt/forum/viewforum.php?f=45>.

¹⁶ Viewed June 26, 2020, <http://www.army777.lt/forum/viewforum.php?f=43>.

¹⁷ Strong opposition to religion (especially Christianity) among some subcultures is well documented. See for Lithuanian examples in: Neringa Liubinienė, „Metalo muzikos gerbėjų fanzinai: subkultūrinės grupės tapatybės kodai“, *Grupės ir aplinkos*, 1 (2009), 211; Agnė Petrusevičiūtė, „Metalistų subkultūros bruožai“, *Grupės ir aplinkos*, 1 (2009), 278–280.

¹⁸ T. Pabedinskas and R. Pranckevičiūtė, *Subkultūros*, 18.

¹⁹ M. Peleckis, *Lietuvos rokas*, 310. One of main characteristics of music of many subcultures – “distortion” is associated with “power”: Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 25–55.

²⁰ It is well documented fact that members of subcultures have a very different interpretations of their subcultural symbols than outsiders (Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 21).

consumed without a meal. Similarly, Gospel is never “served” or found in pure form, outside of a particular culture. It is designed to “salt” the “meal” of whatever culture (or sub-culture) it finds. Any culture or subculture is ready to receive the benefits of this “salt”. Gospel does not eliminate the cultural expression; rather, it brings out whatever is good in it and destroys whatever is bad. What is “good” or “bad” may be discerned by using the criteria of love and truth. According to Army 777, this “good” or “bad” of culture or subculture is never directly connected with musical styles or personal looks.

Army 777 members point out the features of their subcultures, which in their opinion are in full harmony with the message of Christ. Moreover, these features may empower and enrich Christianity with cultural and aesthetic expressions that are more adequate than feeble suggestions, provided by mainstream culture.²¹ For example, black colour, typical choice for many subcultures is considered right alternative for “pink or blue”, which may be understood as standing for indulgence in flesh desires and shallow way of life; heroic or harsh sound of metal music reflects well the spiritual battle and seriousness of Gospel; Goth style and death romanticism corresponds better to the Christian view of life than shallow attitudes of mainstream society; bikers’ view of life as a journey figuratively parallels the idea of “pilgrim Church”²²; punk idea of anarchy calls us to hold up God’s authority above every worldly power and also draw attention to the social structures of injustice.²³

These examples reveal the stance of opposition and rebellion that inevitably is one of moving forces behind every youth subculture.²⁴ In this respect members of Army 777 do not differ from their non-Christian counterparts. The values and fashions of mainstream society are sharply criticised by members of the movement with only difference: Christianity is rehabilitated by relocating it from enemy camp to the very centre of subcultural rebellion. This is accomplished by dissociating the revolutionary message of Gospel from its stereotypic understanding formed by mainstream

²¹ Strongly expressed opposition to mainstream taste and strong anticommercial sentiment among subcultural music bands are one of reasons subcultural music is rejected by popular magazines and mainstream TV channels. Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 21. Stacy Thompson, *Punk Productions: Unfinished Business* (State University Of New York Press, 2004), 81.

²² Dogmatic Constitution of the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 48. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

²³ Especially metal and punk subcultures are known for a harsh criticism of social injustice and capitalism (Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 163; Thompson, *Punk Productions*, 4; Reda Šatūnienė, „Pankų subkultūrinės tapatybės bruožai Lietuvoje ir Vakaruose“, *Grupės ir aplinkos*, 1 (2009), 145.

²⁴ For rebellion as a driving force behind subcultures see: Craig O’Hara, *The Philosophy of Punk: More Than Noise* (London, Edinburgh, San Francisco: AK Press, 1999), 70–101; Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 15, 17, 111, 151, 163; Thompson, *Punk Productions*, 4; Hodkinson, *Goth*, 76–77. On the other hand, some members of subcultures resist association of their subculture with rebellion (Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 19; Hodkinson, *Goth*, 63). Reda Šatūnienė in her study on punk subculture in Lithuania notices that punk movement’s rebellion in Soviet Union was directed against the Soviet regime, whereas in Western countries it was directed mainly against capitalism (Šatūnienė, „Pankų subkultūrinės tapatybės bruožai“, 148). Examples of explanations of causes of rebellion among Lithuanian metal fans are presented in: N. Liubiniėnė. „Metalo muzikos gerbėjų fanzinai“, 213; A. Petrusėvičiūtė, „Metalistų subkultūros bruožai“, 285–288.

culture. Jesus, John the Baptist and other great biblical figures are viewed by Army 777 as “non-formals” – *neformalai* (Lithuanian slang for all representatives of subcultures), who were not accepted by mainstream society of their time.²⁵ Thus Christianity in its essence has much more in common with subcultures than with mainstream attitudes: both provide a critique of the vices of its time, both reject illusory comforts provided by conventional customs, both choose “narrow road”, “narrowness” of which is defined by the “broadness” of the “way” of mainstream society (Mt 7:13).²⁶ Hence, we can state that such “relocation” of Christianity in the societal schema puts up an alternative ideal of Christian life and identity. This ideal determines the strategy which is used in a dialogue both with the non-Christian subcultures and mainstream Christianity. In first case the quality of “non-formality” of Gospel is employed, thus locating Christianity alongside with subcultural movements; in second case procedure is reversed: by demonstrating non-formal attitudes inherent to Christianity, Christian representatives of subcultures present themselves as true Christians who should be accepted by other Christians without suspicion.²⁷

It is noted that visuals play very important part in self-identification and understanding of youth subcultures.²⁸ Army 777 is not an exception. Since the movement includes representatives of more than one subculture, most universal elements of subcultural images are employed in creation of movement’s visuals (black color, peculiar style, bold expressions and the like). The purpose is to create “brave, crazy, and shocking imagery” (“shocking” being common element of youth subcultures), and also to rediscover Christian symbols by presenting them through fresh unconventional subcultural means.²⁹ As a result new (i.e. subcultural) Christian symbolism emerges. It is expressed through slogans “Rockin’ for Christ”, “Metal for Christ”, “Goth 777”, “Rockin’ for the true Rock”, “Strong in God” and the like. Such undertaking of blending Christian ideas with subcultural slang and visual expressions is not new in Christian world – it has been done by numerous Christian subcultures before. For instance, in eighties multi-platinum Christian metal band “Stryper” popularized number of symbols, used today by many subcultural Christians and Christian rock bands: “777”,

²⁵ T. Pabedinskas and R. Pranskevičiūtė, *Subkultūra*, 21.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁷ There is a great amount of notices about subculture’s opposition to everything mainstream in academic researches on subcultures. See: Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 21, 151; Thompson, *Punk Productions*, 4; Hodkinson, *Goth*, 73, 79.

²⁸ Hodkinson, *Goth*, 37, 41. On visual aspects of Lithuanian metal subculture see: N. Liubiniėnė. „Metalo muzikos gerbėjų fanzinai“, 204–209; A. Petruševičiūtė. „Metalistų subkultūros bruožai“, 282–283.

²⁹ Benas Ulevičius, „Krikščionybė roko ritmu“, *QuestRising*. Viewed July 22, 2020, https://s3.amazonaws.com/content.sitezoogole.com/u/126800/867c4d09fba10aef868f50946cea1c02c6ad8a07/original/b-ulevi-ius-krik-ionyb-roko-ritmu-2009-m.pdf?response-content-type=application%2Fpdf&X-Amz-Algorithm=AWS4-HMAC-SHA256&X-Amz-Credential=AKIAJUKM2ICUMTYS6ISA%2F20200902%2Fus-east-1%2Fs3%2Faws4_request&X-Amz-Date=20200902T212824Z&X-Amz-Expires=604800&X-Amz-SignedHeaders=host&X-Amz-Signature=6b26038f44cf4b15cd5e0d657b915cf92018ad9aa32e5fba8f2a4a7e1ab3579f.

crossed over “666”, triangle as a symbol of Trinity, and the like.³⁰ By finding ambiguities based on coinciding biblical and subcultural meanings of words, and also playing with similarities of pronunciation, Christian representatives of subcultures created their own slogans. Thus in era of heavy metal Christian metal magazine “Heaven’s Metal” appeared; later Christian goth magazine was called “Gothpel”; Christian black metal was renamed into “Unblack metal” or “Holy unblack”; Christian death metal could be entitled “Death of death” and so on. Because of biblical connotations, the very term “rock” was employed in countless ways (e. g. “He is the Rock that doesn’t roll”, “I am on the Rock!”, “rockin’ the world for the Son”, “rockin’ for the true Rock”, etc.). Similarly in biker subculture “sun” could be interchanged with “Son” (e. g. “riding to the sun, riding for the Son”). Even so called “vampire subculture” could be reconciled with Christian idea of salvation through the blood of Christ. In latter case it is not just symbolism which is “rediscovered”, but the whole theological concept is reasserted and provided with new (sub)culturally relevant interpretations.³¹

Military style embraced by Army 777 is another thematic common ground where biblical metaphor consonates with subcultural imagery. References to war are abundant in expressions of some prominent subcultures (e. g. metal, punk, biker).³² For instance, military images (from medieval to modern) appear in almost every subgenre of metal music. They are often demonstrated by metal magazines and bands. Lyrics, visual arts and images of many metal bands are permeated with military themes that are elaborated in various contextual settings. Christian subcultures also embraced this warlike imagery. However, they used slogans and images of war to convey the idea of spiritual warfare, which is described by the apostle Paul as “struggle with the evil spirits in the heavens” (Eph 6:12). Prime examples can be seen in Christian metal world, where warlike imagery quite often provokes sharp critique from mainstream Christianity. Aforementioned multi-platinum band “Stryper” used military images excessively. One of band’s album covers depicts band members armed with machine-guns standing near an armored car. The logo of another band – “Demonhunter” includes an image of demon’s skull pierced by bullet.³³ Countless Christian metal bands show the same adherence to military style and imagery.³⁴ Army 777 follows the trend.³⁵ The very title of the movement together with reference to Ef 6:10–18 (i. e. the famous New

³⁰ Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 55.

³¹ While vampire genre was still popular because of role playing-games and famous TV series, administrators of ARMY 777 forum were invited more than once to Catholic and secular youth events to present topic “Theology of Vampirism: Why Christians Drink Blood?” In the presentation Christianity was explained using the terms and concepts of vampire genre.

³² On importance of external image (including militaristic imagery) among Lithuanian metal fans see: A. Petrusevičiūtė, „Metalistų subkultūros bruožai“, 283.

³³ *DemonHunter*. Viewed July 22, 2020, <http://www.demonhunter.net/>.

³⁴ Eg. Many Christian metal bands choose militaristic titles: “Sacred Warrior”, “Guardian”, “War of Ages”, „Demon Hunter” and like.

³⁵ Administrators of Army 777 describes the power of Gospel and subcultural music styles in militaristic terms (T. Pabedinskas and R. Pranskevičiūtė, *Subkultūros*, 17; B. Ulevičius, „Krikščionybė roko ritmu“).

Testament passage about spiritual armor and weapons) betray the commitment to the theme of spiritual warfare. To mention just a few examples: Army 777 merchandise (tags, scarves, logos, etc.) closely reminds of military insignia, forum rank system is organized according to the military rank system, all posters directly refer to the war thematic, internet prayer ministry is called “Prayer Forces” and is full of military images.³⁶ It should be stressed though that militaristic imagery conveys the message of spiritual battle (i. e. the battle against evil spiritual powers and sinful inclinations) and is in no way aimed at any social group or individuals. Overall pacifistic stance of members of Army 777 is easily noticed. As it was mentioned above, the movement has high level of tolerance to those with different tastes and views.

Conclusions

This short analysis of Army 777 movement allows us to draw some conclusions about its significance in Lithuanian religious landscape. Paradoxically the movement represents a challenge both to mainstream Christianity and fundamentalist Christian communities. The former finds ideas of spiritual battle impertinent and for the second subcultural expressions appear unacceptable. Yet it seems that the movement provides fresh possibility for the Church to carry a dialogue with those members of society who often are the most harsh critics of mainstream religiosity and Christianity as such.³⁷ In itself Army 777 indicates a need for an alternative expression of Christian faith and practice. This need is answered by integrating Christian message with subcultural views and expressions. Thus Army 777 is a “bridge movement”, which allows two perspectives and experiences to meet. In this the symbolic value of the movement becomes evident. Theoretically, need for the dialogue and inculturation is admitted by main Lithuanian Christian communities. Yet in practice mainstream attitudes in churches often suppose rejection of sometimes unusual expressions of less known groups. And so it can be concluded that by spreading the idea of “subcultural Christianity” in Lithuania, and also by “inverting values” of both subculturists and Christians, Army 777 performs certain “shock therapy” to the Church and society. It is a movement of paradox and a tangible example of Christianity in dialogue. From the theological point of view the movement can be perceived as an attempt to follow the divine principle of incarnation which was fully realized in Christ. As God revealed himself through the concrete humanity and culture of Jesus, so by Army 777 Gospel is revealed to the society through concrete subcultural expressions. By embracing the task of reconciling what is seen like opposites by the mainstream society, Army 777

³⁶ See Army 777 merchandise page: Viewed 11 07 2020, <http://army777.lt/ekipuote/>.

³⁷ T. Pabedinskas and R. Pranskevičiūtė, *Subkultūros*, 24.

proclaims the radical openness of the Gospel to the world and makes the true nature of the genuine evangelization known to the Lithuanian Church and society.

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ARMY 777: Į(SUB)KULTŪRINTA GEROJI NAUJIENA

S a n t r a u k a

Straipsnyje pristatomas krikščionybę išpažįstančius subkultūrų atstovus vienijantis *Army 777* judėjimas Lietuvoje. Judėjimas neturi oficialios vadovybės ir neformaliai vienija narius, dalyvaujančius *Army 777* interneto erdvėse ir siejančius save su judėjimo vizija bei simboliais. Straipsnyje apžvelgiama judėjimo statistika, aptariamos pagrindinės jo idėjos bei jų įkūnijimas *Army777.lt* interneto svetainėje, taip pat judėjimo vartojamoje vizualikoje. Straipsnyje apžvelgiamas platesnis judėjimo kontekstas – jaunimo santykio su krikščionybe situacija Lietuvos Nepriklausomybės atgavimo išvakarėse ir jaunimo subkultūrų Vakaruose požūriai bei praktikos. Straipsnyje atskleidžiama, jog *Army 777* semiasi įkvėpimo tiek iš vakarietiško subkultūrų, tiek iš evangelinių krikščionybės maksimų. Taip *Army 777* judėjimas ne vien įkūnija pasaulėžiūros paradoksą, bet ir atveria jungties galimybę tarp, rodos, skirtingų (sub)kultūrinių krantų. Išlikdamas autentiškai krikščioniškas judėjimas, *Army 777* krikščionybę į(sub)kultūrina.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: subkultūros, krikščioniški judėjimai, Lietuva, jaunimas, *Army 777*.

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