

## Destroying Religious Life in 1940-1941

By Arūnas Streikus

### Bibliography and historiography

The first attempt to characterise and appraise the anti-religious policies of the Soviet authorities pursued in Lithuania in 1940-1941 dates back to the next year after the withdrawal of Soviets from Lithuania. First and Second volumes of *The Lithuanian Archive* issued by the Research Bureau set up to investigate the crimes of bolshevism in Lithuania, contained several articles by Bishop V. Brizgys and Rev. A. Biliūnas on the situation of the Catholic Church in 1940-1941.<sup>1</sup> Apart from certain praise of the rhetoric of Nazi propaganda and estimations springing from emotion, they present a lot of important factual data on the destruction of religious life perpetrated by the Soviets. Rev. A. Biliūnas for the first time publicised the lists of priests deported into the distant parts of the Soviet Union, kept in prisons and killed, which, however, were incomplete. Authors of the articles to a large extent relied on their own personal experience, although not solely. For the same issue J. Žilvitis prepared for publication two trophy documents discovered in the former Soviet Security peripheral headquarters and comments on them. They were the instructions of the LSSR NKVD leadership of 2 October 1940 and 21 January 1941 circled among the county structures on how to control and restrict the activities of priests and what type of information about them should be collected. In addition, back in the autumn of 1941 the bishops of Lithuania have instructed the parish priests to submit information on the damage inflicted by the Soviet bodies of power on religious life. It is known that in certain dioceses overviews were prepared based on the responses of parish priests.

Brochure by A. Trakiškis issued in New York in 1944 was a similar publication in terms of its contents and the type of sources used.<sup>2</sup> After ten years it was included in the protocol generated by the Committee of the US Congress (led by Ch. V. Kersten) set up to investigate the incorporation of the Baltic States into the USSR as an item of material evidence. On 5 December 1953 Bishop V. Brizgys and a witness of

---

<sup>1</sup> V. Brizgys, Seminary in Kaunas During the Years of Bolshevism, *The Lithuanian Archive*, Vol.1, Kaunas, 1942, p.56-65; A. Biliūnas, Lithuanian Catholic Church under the Yoke of Bolshevism, *ibid.*, p.66-73; V. Brizgys, My Relations with the NKVD, *ibid.*, t Vol. 2, p.249-260.

<sup>2</sup> A. Trakiškis, *The situation of the Church and religious practices in occupied Lithuania*, New York, 1944.

Cherven slaughter Rev. Pr. Petraitis gave their evidence to this committee.<sup>3</sup> They described the persecution of priests and believers perpetrated by the Soviet authorities.

In the beginning of 70's one of the ideologists of atheism in Lithuania J. Aničas released a study on the *Catholic Clericalism in Lithuania in 1940-1944*, which featured an approach characteristic to the Soviet historiography concerning the policies pursued by the Soviet authorities with respect to religion and the attempts of priests to resist them. Restrictions on religious life in 1940-1941 here are interpreted as the efforts of Soviet authorities to implement the principle of the freedom of conscience and reduce the influence of priests in society, majority of whom were hostile towards the regime. A number of sources were used to ground such an interpretation, however, it fails to refer to those which ran counter it and undermined it. These aspects have been highlighted in the publication by Bishop V. Brizgys *Catholic Church in Lithuania in 1940-1944*, which was published in Chicago five years later than the release of the above mentioned work by J. Aničas. Bishop V. Brizgys tried to demonstrate that in 1940-1941 the Soviet authorities were attempting to forcibly create an atheistic society in Lithuania.

Research and archival documents publicised in the Soviet Lithuania and by the émigré on the situation of Catholic Church in Lithuania in 1940-1943 have been described in the monograph by V. Vardys,<sup>4</sup> which in terms of sources of reference and the level of theoretical analysis distinguishes itself from among the other works in the West on the given topic. Although the author focused his research on the convergence of nationalism and Catholicism in the dissident [national] movement in the 70's, he also analysed the evolution of church under the conditions of Soviet regime during the earlier years, which are instrumental in order to explain the processes of the 1970's. A separate chapter is dedicated to the first period of Soviet occupation, in which the author revealed how the practice of the Soviet regime policies concerning religion was altering as it gained strength in Lithuania, and how from a moderate

---

<sup>3</sup> See. *The Case of seizure of the Baltic States. Documents of the US Congress Ch.J. Kersten Committee*, Vilnius 1997, p.627-639.

<sup>4</sup> V. Vardys, *The Catholic Church, dissent and nationality in Soviet Lithuania*, New York, 1978.

secularisation of society it evolved to the first attempts to forcibly impose an atheistic society.

It should be noted that the anti-religious policies pursued by the Soviets in the post-Soviet period under research - 1940-1941 - deserved much less attention than did the events in the post-war period. We can single out only one publication by D. Stancikas on the NKVD plans with respect to the Catholic Church in Lithuania in 1940-1941.<sup>5</sup> He introduced a very important document for the research of the anti-church activities of the Soviet authorities – *Proposal* drafted at the end of January 1941 *on the type of Secret Service and operative measures to be employed in order to destroy the Lithuanian Catholic Church*.

Identification of the main trends in the anti-religious policy in 1940-1941 was the prerogative of the Communist Party, while its enforcement was the duty of the Soviet security service. Very few policy documents on the LCP CC policy concerning religion have survived from this period. Much more can be said about the plans and activities of the Soviet security structures. The Lithuanian Special Archive, which stores the archives of the former Soviet security branch in Lithuania, contains two cases on the activities of the LSSR NKVD against the Catholic priests. They include plans on the work of secret services and operative work, information certificates and other documents of correspondence. An important historical source for the research of anti-religious policy perpetrated by the Soviets in Lithuania in 1940-1941 is a diary which from 1 January – to 13 August 1941 was kept by the Kaunas Metropolitan Archbishop J. Skvireckis and which currently is stored in Lithuania's National Museum.

## **Conclusions**

### **1. Theory and Practice of Soviet Anti-religious Policies**

At the foundation of the Soviet regime's ideology was, of course, K. Marx's philosophy, whose central axis of logic is historical materialism, i.e. presumption that the matter and social relations predetermine consciousness and not vice versa.

Therefore, according to K. Marx, religion, too, as one of the forms of consciousness, is the result of certain social relations. It presumably legalises social injustice and at the same time is the “opium” which intoxicates those who have been maltreated and who in turn are hoping for a reward in heaven for their suffering on earth. V. Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders interpreted in their own way a winged phrase of K. Marx: “religion is the opium for the people”. They maintained that the ruling classes were purposefully using religion as a means to fool the workpeople and that religion was an element of their ideology. Therefore, under the conditions of class struggle, attempts to forcibly limit the possibilities for hostile social groups to spread their ideology are understandable. Pursuant to the 1929 amendments to the USSR Constitution, the freedom of religious propaganda was abolished, only the freedom to perform the religious cult was retained. In addition, the Bolsheviks, taking into account the non-existence in the backward Russia of preconditions leading to socialist revolution prophesied by K. Marx, claimed that revolution could be carried out “from the top”, without waiting for the preconditions leading to the change of mindset and resulting from the development of social-economic relations to materialise. As their theory holds it, those who know the true recipe of human “fortune”, may, given the favourable circumstances, on the basis of that recipe to build up a social reality, which is supposed to change the consciousness of people. Once the social structure is changed and if the anti-religious propaganda is being pursued, religious beliefs should disappear alongside. Although this was not the case in practice, “the most scientific theory” could not have been erroneous, therefore, the regime, in order to preserve its legitimacy, had to resort to forcible treatment of the institutional forms of manifestation of religion. Force was often concealed under the “people’s will” imposed from the top.

However, coming into contact with practical reality was calling for a specific policy on relations with religious communities, and differentiated application of general provisions in specific cases. The Bolsheviks could not ignore and recklessly attack religion. They were forced to look for ways to create an atheistic society efficiently and cause no harm to the regime’s stability. A prominent researcher of Soviet anti-religious and antichurch policies Bohdan Bociurkiw has identified the

---

<sup>5</sup> D. Stancikas, *Methods of the NKVD Fight against the Church 1940-1941*, *Archive of the Freedom*

“fundamentalist” and “pragmatic” versions of this policy. According to him, the pragmatics “being less of optimists as a result of the impact of anti-religious propaganda, sought to ‘Sovietise’ the religious organisations and thereby attain legitimacy for the regime and consolidate its internal security”.<sup>6</sup> The fundamentalists, on the other hand, believed that repression and indoctrination was an efficient way to address the problem of building up of an atheistic society. The anti-religious practices of Soviet regime in 1917-1939 demonstrate, that these trends did complement each other.

## **2. Soviet Interpretation of Separation of Church and State and Evaluation of Policies pursued by the People’s Government with respect to Religion**

On the next day already after the formal legalisation of the Communist party in Lithuania, on 26 June 1940, a press body *Tiesa* of this party issued a demand to separate church and state. On the same days the People’s Government promulgated a relevant decree. In the civilised world the principle of separation of church and state meant that the religious institutions are loosing any sort of assistance whatsoever from the state bodies to their pastoral activities. However, Soviet interpretation of this principle was fundamentally different. According to it, separation of church and state meant that religion was pushed outside the limits of public life, that it was marginalised as the Soviet totalitarian system sought to leave not a single area of life uncontrolled by the authorities. This task was to be fulfilled by the puppet People’s government controlled by the Soviet Union. Thus, although its actions with respect to religion in formal terms only reflected the efforts to secularise the society, however, in fact they laid the groundwork for the future campaigns of aggressive anti-religious policy.

Pursuant to the will of real owners of political power, the People’s Government in the first place unilaterally terminated the 1927 Concordat between the Republic of Lithuania and the Vatican, which not only secured the state aid to the Catholic Church, but also protected it against the ungrounded interference of secular authorities

---

*Fights*, 1996, vol.16.

<sup>6</sup> B. Bociurkiw, The Shaping of Soviet religious policy, *Problems of Communism*, 1973, Issue No 3, p.41.

in the internal life of church. Later other rules were abolished which regulated relations between the religious denominations and authorities, and which were in force in the independent Lithuania. This way the legal mechanism for the protection of religious communities was destroyed and the doors were opened for the future arbitrary behaviour of the Soviet regime.

Other resolutions of the People's Government can also be seen as attempting to marginalise religion: on dismissal of chaplains of all denominations from the army, schools and prisons, on the closure of the Faculty of Theology and Philosophy in Kaunas Vytautas Magnus University, and on prohibition of activities of religious organisations. On 15 August 1940 the Law on the Obligatory Civil Registry was promulgated which from the first glance seemed only to take away from religious communities the formal right vested to them to register births, marriages and deaths, without denying the possibility to them to administer religious sacraments. However, the principle of obligatory civil registry in an artificial way imposed a double registration of the most important events in life and laid down the preconditions to exert the pressure later to discard the religious part [of the procedure].

Expulsion of religion from the public life was completed after the formalisation of Lithuania's annexation. According to the Order of 11 October 1940 of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the LSSR on the National Holidays of the Lithuanian SSR, all religious festivals lost their status of national holidays. Religious denominations were placed in an even more adverse situation when on 1 December 1940 the Civil and Criminal Codes of the RSSFR entered into force in Lithuania, which did not recognise the rights of legal person to them.

### **3. Restricting the Possibilities to Spread the Religion.**

Although the Soviet Constitution formally guaranteed the freedom of conscience, in reality only one outlook was tolerated – the so-called marxism-leninism. This is confirmed by the restrictions imposed on the spread of religious beliefs in society, which was one of the key goals of Soviet anti-religious policies. The LSSR Constitution adopted by the People's Seimas on 25 August 1940, which in essence was only the Lithuanian translation of the Soviet Union Constitution, recognised only

the freedom to perform a religious cult. The so-called People's Government initiated restrictions on religious propaganda. The Ministry of Education abolished classes on religion in primary and secondary schools, and teaching and nursery establishments owned by the religious organisations were expropriated. In addition, 5 printing houses which were owned by the Catholic Church or secular organisations of believers were nationalised, while the Interior ministry did not issue licences to and this way closed down 57 religious periodicals<sup>7</sup>.

Following formalisation of Lithuania's annexation, the possibilities to spread religious beliefs were reduced even more. Publication of relevant literature was prohibited, remaining religious publications, for which the payment was already made and which were stored in the nationalised publishing houses, were seized, during the "purging" of bookstores and libraries a number of religious publications were taken out. After the teaching of religion was abolished in the secondary schools, unofficial teaching of religion for youth outside the school was at first tolerated. Majority of schoolchildren attended classes on religion in sacristies and churches. However, in the spring of 1941, local authorities received an instruction to force all the local priests into signing of a promise not to give religion classes to children.

#### **4. Looting of Religious Organisations**

In order to limit the activities of religious organisations, the Soviet regime sought to limit as much as it could their material resources. This was initiated already during the period of the People's Government. In the summer of 1940 payment of salaries to priests was terminated as were any other types of financial subsidies to religious communities. On 22 July pursuant to the decision of the People's Seimas the entire land ownership was nationalised. Although the former owners were entitled to retain for use a plot of land not exceeding 30 ha, however, even this provision was not applicable to religious denominations. Only 3 ha of land were left at the parish churches, in addition, this plot took into account the land area occupied by the church building and the churchyard. All the land that belonged to convents and monasteries and other religious organisation was nationalised. In total, in 1940 the Catholic

---

<sup>7</sup> This figure does not include the religious periodicals of other denominations.

Church in Lithuania lost around 19 000 ha of land, i.e. 92 per cent of its former land ownership.

According to the Law of 31 October 1940, practically all dwelling premises owned by religious organisations were nationalised. This became an efficient instrument for limiting the activities of religious denominations. On the grounds of sequestering surplus dwelling premises, a mass resettlement of priests from parsonages, bishops and staff from curia was launched; priests had to pay a higher rent for the lease of dwelling premises and a higher income taxes; parish houses whose construction was financed from donations of believers and other assets which were owned by the religious communities were nationalised. Although officially only the land owned by the monkshood was nationalised, however, in fact almost entire movable and real property was taken away from them, monks were driven from the monasteries, and deprived of the possibility to work in the institutions of education and social care.

## **5. Motivation of the Repression against the Clergy**

The Soviet regime considered the entire clergy dangerous *a priori* political enemies. A proof of this is the Order, signed on 2 October 1940 by P.Gladkov, Deputy Commissar of Internal Affairs of the LSSR, which requests the chiefs of county divisions to collect data about the clergymen of various religious denominations residing in their relevant counties and to keep their activities under close control. Traditional post-Christmas visits of priests to their parishioners were regarded to constitute a particular menace, since according to Soviet security services, “reactionary church leaders were attempting to use these visits as a broad-scale anti-Soviet campaign” (cf. Document No. 1). On the other hand, it was within the interest of the security services to have as many as possible clergymen criticise the communism and the soviet regime. Had there been more instances of this kind discovered, the statement of the Soviet propaganda that “the clergy were accomplices of the exploiters and enemies of the working people” would have been confirmed. In fact, the leaders of the Catholic Church tried to openly demonstrate that the social teaching of the Church could be compatible with the social-economic reforms pursued by the Soviet regime, and agreed to declare political loyalty to the new regime provided the freedom of religion was not restricted.



Absolute persecution had to be ensured by recruiting priests and seculars close to them to serve as security agents. From time to time, moral blackmailing was employed to make them co-operate with security bodies, i.e. they were threatened with exposure of some real or fake facts about their behaviour that was considered irreconcilable with the service for the Church, with imprisonment or other types of force. There are no precise data about the numbers of clergymen recruited by the Soviet security services in 1940 and 1941.

The persecution of the clergy was more than a preventive measure against their unwanted influence on the public. According to Soviet security officials, the acts of repression were meant to intimidate the clergy or to make them more obedient. In the beginning of April 1941, Kliucharov, chief of Unit 3 of the Secret Political Division of the NKGB LSSR, motivated the repression against the clergy as follows: “stronger repressive pressure on the reactionary clergymen should encourage the hesitating ones to become more moderate”<sup>8</sup>. Even the most ordinary terrorism was used as a means to this end: very often priests were detained straight on the street and taken for interrogation or to prisons, frequently without any official accusation. For instance, a prominent missionary father J. Bružikas SJ, detained on 19 September 1940 and imprisoned in Marijampolė prison, was officially interrogated only twice: on the date of detention and on 21 June 1941.<sup>9</sup>

The whole NKVD stock of interrogation measures was used to collect evidence against the detained ones in order to prove that they had committed serious political crimes: spied for the Gestapo or founded counterrevolutionary organizations. This

---

<sup>8</sup> Note by Chief of the 3<sup>rd</sup> division of SPO NKGB LSSR Kliucharov issued in April 1941 concerning arrests, LYA, fund K-1, inv.3, file.200, p.88.

way, following a month-long interrogation, on 25 June 1941, Rev. Petraitis, Dean of Kaunas St. Trinity Parish, was arrested and forced to admit to arranging, through his brother A.Petraitis, Dean of Eržvilkas, and S.Buteikis, his vicar, illegal border crossing of some “anti-Soviet minded persons”, and to contributing to the organisation of the anti-Soviet underground<sup>10</sup>. According to the preliminary data, before 6 June 1941, 47 clergymen and monks were imprisoned for a long or short period, 35 were deported or taken to lagers between 14 and 18 June 1941, 17 were executed in Lithuania during the withdrawal of the Soviet troops<sup>11</sup>. In conclusion, the repression was a way to shrink the clergy in Lithuania.

## **6. Hindrances to the Training of New Staff for the Clergy**

One of the most effective Soviet actions against religion was the restriction of the training of new staff for the clergy. In 1939, the Soviet Union had not a single school to educate the clergy. To reduce the number of clergymen in Lithuania, the activities of clerical seminaries were limited from the very outset of the occupation. In summer 1940, the premises of the clerical seminaries in Vilnius, Vilkaviškis and Telsiai were nationalized. Following the 12 January 1941 elections to the Supreme Council of the USSR, the Soviet Army troops occupied the premises of the Kaunas Inter-Diocesan Seminary, as well. Bishops V. Borisevičius and V. Brizgys appealed to N.Pozdniakov, the authorised representative of the USSR People’s Commissars Council and the Central Committee of the AUCP(b) to Lithuania, concerning this issue, and the latter explained to them that this action of the government was inspired by the leaders of the seminary who had not urged the clerics to vote in the elections. Moreover, he stated that “things that took 20 years to be accomplished in Russia, in Lithuania would be implemented in two or three years”<sup>12</sup>, therefore, it was unreasonable to educate new priests, as they would have no employment. Finally, on 21 May 1941, the bureau of the CC of the LCP(b) passed a resolution to close all clerical seminaries functioning officially or unofficially for all religious

---

<sup>9</sup> Criminal Case against J. Bružikas, LYA, fund K-1, inv. 58, file P-10521.

<sup>10</sup> Interrogation protocol of Rev.Pr. Petraitis of 26 May 1941, *ibid.*, file 9460/3, p.114-120.

<sup>11</sup> Lietuvos gyventojų genocidas (*Genocide against People of Lithuania*), Vol. I (1939-1941), 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, V., 1999, p.64.

<sup>12</sup> V. Brizgys, *op.cit.*, p.

denominations<sup>13</sup> (cf. Document No. 4). Thus, the eradication of “religious prejudices” was expected to last very short.

## 7. Objectives of the Plans to Antagonise the Lithuanian Catholic Church

To facilitate the destruction of religious organizations, the Soviet authorities took to inciting internal conflicts. The transitional period created a necessity to ensure an open support of religious organizations to the policies of the regime. In the end of January 1941, Soviet security bodies drafted a Proposal of secret operational measures to be taken with a view to destroying the Lithuanian Catholic Church (cf. Document No. 2). The authors of the draft urged to support moderate clergymen, unwilling to go into conflicts with the regime, to counter the clergy openly opposing the regime. Moreover, the draft pointed out the need to identify other weaknesses of the Church and use them to incite discord between Poles and Lithuanians concerning annexation of Vilnius Archdiocese to the Lithuanian Church Province, between individual clergymen concerning career motivation, and between innovators and conservatives. The tactics of dividing religious institutions was a key anti-religious method tried by the Soviet security more than once. It illustrates the tactics of temporary agreement and complex manipulations of the clergy itself.

## 8. Indifference towards Religions of the Soviet Regime

In 1940 –1941, the Soviet regime in Lithuania was equally negative about all religions existing there. The propagandist statements of J.Žilvytis in the *Lithuanian Archive* are absolutely false, as he says that Soviets did not persecute Jewish religious organizations at all, because this religion “could be practised to the extent and in the ways the believers desired, in a fully acceptable sense”<sup>14</sup>. On the opposite, the rabbis as well as Catholic priests suffered the most intensive attacks by the Soviet authorities, and several synagogues were nationalised. A relatively greater persecution of the organisations of the Catholic Church and the Jewish religion was preconditioned by the fact that these creeds were the largest in Lithuania in terms of

---

<sup>13</sup> L. Truska, Lietuva 1938-1945 m., (*Lithuania in 1938-1945*), V.

<sup>14</sup> Lietuvių archyvas (Lithuanian Archive), vol. 1, p.35

the number of believers, therefore, the regime considered them as posing a graver threat.

## 9. Plans to Develop a Massive Atheist Movement

Officially, the public was constantly told that the Soviet government was implementing the will of the people only. The anti-religious policies, too, officially were meant to fulfil the wishes of the majority of the population that were non-believers. To corroborate these statements, in the 1920s, a massive movement of infidels was founded in the Soviet Union, an institutional expression of which was the Union of Agonistic Infidels. The believers' houses of prayer were closed upon the request of the local population, the official position said. In the first months of the Soviet regime, the main bastion of the anti-religious propaganda in Lithuania was the Society of the Freethinkers' Ethic Culture, founded yet before the Soviet occupation and publishing the newspaper "*Laisvoji mintis*" ("*The Free Thought*"). However, the actions of this Society were not sufficient for the Soviet regime, which was determined to detach the people of Lithuania from the God very quickly. K.Preikšas, Secretary of the CC LCP for propaganda and agitation demanded to reorganize it into a "massive organization of the working people – a union of agonistic infidels"<sup>15</sup>. This means that a unit of the notorious organisation which became particularly known in 1920s and 1930s in the Soviet Union, was to be opened in Lithuania. Some of the methods employed by this Soviet organisation were taken over, as well. On 15 February 1941, the editorial of the "*Laisvoji mintis*" urged to "take the initiative to win premises for the cultural institutions of the working people, by making use of the buildings of churches, synagogues, orthodox churches and other houses of prayer"<sup>16</sup>. The spring of 1941 saw quite a few instances of barbarous handling of the religious cult objects by the representatives of the Soviet government and their supporters. After the German repatriation, the functioning of the Lutheran churches in Vilnius and Kėdainiai was brought to an end, and they were devastated, the monuments of religious art being desecrated. The soldiers of the Soviet Army and members of the Young Communist League started massive devastation of crosses and chapels. On 7

---

<sup>15</sup> J. Aničas, *Katalikiškasis klerikalizmas Lietuvoje 1940-1944 m.*, (Catholic Clericalism in Lithuania) V., 1972, p.93.

May 1941, the plans for the reorganization of atheist activities were endorsed by the bureau of the CC LCP(b), however, due to the outbreak of the war, they were not implemented, and during the war, the Union of Agnostic Infidels was closed down throughout the entire Soviet Union.

#### **10. The First Top-Down Attempt to Annihilate Religion. Obstacles to the Aggressive Anti-religious Policy.**

Closure of seminaries, reinforced repression against the clergy, attempts to isolate priests from the education of youth, and drafting of plans to establish a massive atheist movement indicate that in spring 1941, the Soviet regime in Lithuania was making preparations for a radical anti-religious campaign. That was an important part of the plan to “decontaminate” territories annexed in 1940, drawn up prior to the war with Germany. J.Stalin’s and other Soviet leaders’ extreme distrust in the Catholic Church made them constrain its activities as soon as possible in order to ensure a calmer rearward. A firm and unified stance of the episcopate, priests and the believers, a fear to provoke resistance prior to firm enforcement of the regime made the new regime to abstain from some exceedingly drastic anti-religious actions. For example, in 1940-1941, they still did not dare to close churches, as this was the most evident proof of the restriction of religious life, usually leading to huge public dissatisfaction. On 21 May 1941 (the same day when the resolution to close the seminaries of all religions was adopted), the bureau of the CC LCP(b) passed a resolution prohibiting county and city executive committees to solve issues related to religious communities and nationalization of their property by themselves, while CP committees were obliged to see that no arbitrariness occurred in the solution of these questions. Thus, besides hardening of anti-religious policies, the centre wanted to have a firm control of its implementation.

In 1940-1941, the Soviet regime in Lithuania still did not control the internal life of religious institutions scrupulously and persistently. The public authorities failed to create mechanisms that would have enabled them to interfere with the affairs of

---

<sup>16</sup> Opus ir neatidėliotinas reikalas, (*An urgent and immediate business*) *Laisvoji mintis*, 1941 02 15.

diocese management and appointment of clergymen. Though the believers were already treated with mistrust, the cases of their open discrimination were rare.

## Brief Conclusions

Since the very outset of the occupation, the Soviet regime in Lithuania started implementing its ideological ideas regarding religion. To create the illusion of the lawfulness of anti-religious policies and other destructive actions, the puppet People's government was used to make preparations for the final destruction of the legal mechanism for the protection of religious communities and for the expulsion of religion from the public life. Soviet anti-religious policies were mainly focused on the restriction of the spread of religion. As early as in 1940 and 1941, in Lithuania, the publishing of all types of religious literature was prohibited, religious literature was withdrawn from libraries, teaching of religion was left out of school curricula, and from spring 1941, the efforts of religious education outside of schools were restricted, as well. The activities of religious organisations were constrained by practical measures, when their entire movable and immovable property was nationalised and a large share of it sequestered. This was, first of all, plundering of the believers, because most of the accumulated property originally was donated by them to churches voluntarily.

As the Soviet ideology treated the clergy as representatives of a hostile social group, thus, politically unreliable people, the restriction of their activities was one of the most important tools of the anti-religious actions. The repression served not only as a preventive measure, but also as a part of anti-religious propaganda, as it was used as a proof of the illusive harm the clergymen caused for the people's government. In 1940-1941, the clergy in Lithuania was more often destroyed not in formal "lawful" manner (trial for political crimes), but rather by uncontrolled terror (arrests, physical coercion, execution during the withdrawal of the Soviet troops). This was meant to intimidate the Lithuanian clergy. The radicalism of the anti-religious political plans of the Soviet regime is demonstrated by the decision adopted in May 1941 to close down the seminaries of all religious denominations. Had the Soviet occupation not been terminated by the outbreak of the USSR-German war, the clergy would have disappeared from Lithuania in a very short time. To facilitate the destruction of the most influential religion in Lithuania, the Catholic Church, as an institutional structure, the Soviet security services devoted a particularly great effort to the internal

antagonising of the Church, and drafting of the plans for its splitting up. The clergymen, who were more willing to co-operate with the regime, had to contribute to the enforcement of the legitimacy of the regime, as well.

Differently from the post-war period, the 1940-1941 anti-religious policies of the Soviet regime were equally stringent towards all religious denominations, nonetheless, the largest ones – the Catholic and the Jewish creeds – experienced the toughest persecution. To justify the aggressive anti-religious policies of the Soviet regime by “people’s will”, in spring 1991, the creation of a massive infidels movement was launched in Lithuania – the Lithuanian Unit of the Agonistic Infidels Union. This was a feature indicating the development of a radical anti-religious campaign in Lithuania. However, the fear to provoke a resistance without having a firmly established regime made the new regime abstain from exceedingly drastic and easily perceptible anti-religious actions: massive closure of houses of prayer and insistent control over the internal life of religious communities.



## Bibliography

### Publications:

1. J. Aničas, *Catholic Clericalism in Lithuania in 1940-1944*, Vilnius, 1972.
2. B. Bociurkiw, *The Ukrainian Greek Catholic church and Soviet state (1935-1950)*, Toronto, 1996.
3. M. Bourdeaux, *Land of crosses. The struggle for religious freedom in Lithuania 1939-1978*, Devon, 1979.
4. Brizgys V., *Catholic Church in Lithuania in 1940-1944*, Chicago, 1977.
5. B. Cywiński, *Ogniem probowanie: z dziejów najnowszych Kościoła katolickiego w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej*, Warszawa, 1994, t. 1-2.
6. R. Dzwonkowski, *Kościół katolicki w ZSSR, 1917-1939*, Lublin, 1997.
7. *Christianity in Lithuania*, ed. V. Vardys, Chicago, 1997.
8. R. Laukaitytė, *Lithuania's Monkshoods: 20<sup>th</sup> century history*, V., 1997.
9. A. Luukkanen, *The party of unbelief*, Helsinki, 1994.
10. A. Luukkanen, *The religious policy of the Stalinist state*, Helsinki, 1997.
11. Savasis J., *The war against God in Lithuania*, New York, 1966.
12. H. Stehle, *Tajna dyplomacja Watykanu: Papiestwo wobec komunizmu (1917-1991)*, Warszawa, 1993.
13. H. Strods, *Latvijas Katolu Baznīcas vesture 1075-1995*, Ryga, 1996.
14. Sužiedėlis S., *The Sword and the Cross. A History of the Church in Lithuania*, Huntington, 1988.
15. J. Talonen, *Church under the pressure of Stalinism: the development of the status and activities of the Soviet Latvian Evangelical Church during 1944-1950, ?*
16. A. Trakiškis, *The situation of the Church and religious practices in occupied Lithuania*, New York, 1944.
17. Vardys V., *The Catholic Church, dissent and nationality in Soviet Lithuania*, New York, 1978.
24. Д. Поспеловский, *Русская православная церковь в XX в.*, Москва, 1995. (*Russian Orthodox Church in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*)
25. И. Осипова, „В язвах своих скрой меня...” *Гонения на католическую церковь в СССР*, Москва, 1996. (*Oppression of the Catholic Church in the USSR*)

26. М. Шкаровский, *Русская православная церковь при Сталине и при Хрущеве*, Москва, 1999. (*Russian Orthodox Church under Stalin and Khrushchev*)
27. Т. Чумаченко, *Государство, православная церковь, верующие 1941-1961 г.*, Москва, 1999. (*State, Orthodox Church and Believers in 1941-1961*)

Articles:

1. A. Biliūnas, *Lithuanian Catholic Church under the Yoke of Bolshevism, The Lithuanian Archive*, vol.1, Kaunas, 1942, p.66-73;
2. V. Brizgys, *Kaunas Seminary during the Years of Bolshevism*, *ibid.*, p.56-65;
3. V. Brizgys, *My Relations with the NKVD*, *ibid.*, vol.2, p.249-260.
4. D. Stancikas, *Methods of the NKVD Fight against Church in 1940-1941.*, *The Archive of Freedom Fights*, 1996, vol.16.

List of document sources used in the research:

1. Special report of 23 November 1940 of the LSSR People's Commissar of the Interior A. Guzevičius addressed to the USSR Deputy People's Commissar of the Interior V. Merkulov concerning the foreseen measures to control the process of Christmas celebration (Lithuanian Special Archive, doc. fund. K-1, inventory schedule.3, file.200, l.11-13).
2. Proposal drafted on 26 January 1941 by the LSSR NKVD *On the type of Secret Service and operative measures to be employed in order to destroy the Lithuanian Catholic Church.*  
(*ibid.*, l.96-105).
3. Minutes of the meeting of Telšiai County Executive Committee on 26 March 1941 and the Official Letter of 1 April 1941 from the LSSR LKT concerning the Take-over of Telšiai Synagogues (Lith. Central State Archive, doc. fund R-754, inv. sch.3, file.535, l.12,14).

4. Resolution of the LCP CC Bureau of 21 May 1941 to close down seminaries of all denominations functioning officially and unofficially (Archive of Lithuanian Organisations, doc. col. 1771, inv. sch.2, file.117, l.12).