

INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE EVALUATION OF THE CRIMES OF THE NAZI
AND SOVIET OCCUPATION REGIMES IN LITHUANIA

Destruction of Religious Life in 1940-1941

CONCLUSIONS

(Approved on June 19, 2002)

1. The Catholic community consisted of nearly 90 per cent, the Jewish community, some 7 per cent, of the population of Soviet-occupied Lithuania. The Soviet regime began implementing in Lithuania its ideological views concerning religion. In order to create an appearance of legitimacy for its anti-religious policy and other destructive actions, the puppet People's Government carried out anti-religious preparatory work, which destroyed the legal protection enjoyed by religious communities and commenced the exclusion of religion from public life. In accordance with Communist ideology, priests were considered part of a hostile social class and therefore politically unreliable. The restriction of the activity of priests was one of the major tools of anti-religious activity. The major task of Soviet anti-religious policy was restricting the possibilities for propagating faith by the methods outlined below:
 - a) The publication of all religious literature was banned and withdrawn from libraries;
 - b) The teaching of religion in schools was abolished and religious education outside the schools was restricted;
 - c) All the real estate and other property of religious organizations was nationalized and confiscated;
 - d) It was decided to close the seminaries of all faiths;
 - e) To justify the aggressive anti-religious policy in the name of the "people's will", the creation of a mass atheist movement, Lithuania's branch of the Militant Atheist Union was initiated;
 - f) In 1940-1941 priests were dealt with in Lithuania not by formally "legal" methods (trial for political crimes) but rather by unrestrained terror (arrests, physical violence, killings), especially at the outbreak of the Soviet-Germany war.
2. Since the regime feared provoking resistance during a time when it had not yet been sufficiently established, it was forced to restrain from drastic and conspicuous methods of anti-religious activity such as the mass closures of houses of prayer and consistently detailed control of the internal life of religious communities.
3. The anti-religious policy of the Soviet regime in 1940-1941 was equally harsh towards all religions, but the members of the two largest religious denominations, Catholicism and Judaism, were persecuted most severely.
4. The Commission recommends continued research on the persecution of the other (non-Catholic) religious communities.

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