

Official Soviet Documents on Religion Appear in Lithuanian Samizdat.

An insight into official Soviet thinking on religion has been provided by a special supplement to the *Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church* (No. 66, 7 April 1985). This consists of four reports by the Council for Religious Affairs (CRA) in the Lithuanian SSR about official surveillance of religious associations. Two of the reports are marked "secret" or "not for publication", which probably accounts for their relative honesty in admitting the failures of state atheism in this largely Catholic republic.

The two "secret" documents — a set of local government regulations on religion, and a report by CRA official Petras Anilionis on the compliance or non-cooperation of religious groups in the republic with the Laws on Religious Cults — were probably given this classification because they contain references to the role of "surveillance commissions" attached to local *soviets* to "observe the activities of the clergy and religious associations". These are the first known references by Soviet state officials to the existence of such commissions, whose stated aim is to "monitor breaches of the Law on Religious Cults", such as religious ceremonies for children, excursions to "holy places" and church services conducted by unregistered clergy.

The documents mention the growing tendency in Catholic parishes for the priest to assume leadership of the parish committee. This is denounced as illegal, as the priest is, according to Soviet law, merely the employee of the parish committee.

Parish committees are perfectly well aware of the requirements of government organs, but they "grovel" before priests with extremist views, and do not demand that they comply with Soviet law.

The document emphasises that members of the parish committee who allow priests to direct their affairs will be regarded as "collaborating with extremism".

Statistics put forward in these documents show clearly that in Lithuania the Catholic Church is the largest religious denomination — with six out of every

seven "prayer-houses" — and that it is regarded as the most troublesome and uncooperative.

Catholic churches are allegedly not being used for their correct purpose, which is to satisfy the religious needs of believers.

In some churches, films and slides are shown; during Masses the believers are urged to sign declarations, letters and petitions, as well as so-called "protests" prepared by religious extremists. Such incidents should not be allowed to recur.

The ways in which Catholic clergymen are said to be "manifesting extremism" range from recruiting altar-servers and choirboys and holding Christmas tree parties for children, to "praying for state criminals" (the imprisoned priests Frs Alfonsas Svarinskas and Sigita Tamkevičius). In a report on sermons preached by 43 priests, including the exiled Bishop Steponavičius, there is more than one reference to these two priests. Fr Z. Navickas "... invited people to pray for the martyrs of Lithuania, Tamkevičius and Svarinskas", while Fr B. Antanaitis referred to the arrest of "... a priest who is not a thief or a drunkard — all he did was to proclaim religious truths".

Such "religious extremists" are said to be encouraged by the Vatican and its "anti-Soviet broadcasts". Pope John Paul II, referred to as a supporter of the Solidarity trade union, is said to issue sinister "instructions" to the administrators of Lithuanian dioceses when they make their regular visits to him. His support for the "extremists" is attested by a sermon in which he expressed his love for "... all our brothers and sisters in Lithuania, especially those suffering for the faith".

Catholic priests are also attacked for their attempts to teach children religion, and their appeals from the pulpit to parents to instruct their children in prayer. Some priests are said to preach sermons specifically directed at children and to prepare children for First Communion, thus trying to avoid Soviet laws against the religious instruction of

minors. A quarter of the priests surveyed had preached sermons on the importance of religious instruction for children and had also criticised the moral education given in state atheist schools, denying that atheism could solve moral problems. The CRA report also alleges that some priests had preached sermons attacking the teaching of the Russian language, and had urged their parishioners to pray for "a free Lithuania". Official warnings had been issued by the local authorities to a sixth of the Catholic clergy in a year, as well as to 44 lay "activists".

Among those condemned by Anilionis as "extremist clergy" — those who organised catechism lessons or processions to the cemetery, or travelled to various parishes giving "anti-social sermons" — are ten "illegal Catholic priests", ordained after completing an unofficial theological course sponsored by the Catholic Church. Although Anilionis accuses these men of "not knowing who ordained them", he contradicts himself by blaming "dissident clergy of the Catholic Church" for their training. The ten graduates of the "secret seminary" are described by the CRA as "unemployed", although at least one of those named, Fr J. Matulionis, was known to be working as an assistant priest in the parish of Kybartai before his arrest and imprisonment in 1984.

The reason for the existence of unofficial theological courses and secret ordinations becomes clear from the statistics given by Anilionis himself. Officially permitted ordinations are too few to replace the number of elderly priests who die — 144 Catholic churches are now without a priest of their own. However, Anilionis is also forced to note that "church attendance is not low", that even minority sects like the Jehovah's Witnesses have gained in membership, and that (contrary to public statements by the authorities) large numbers of pilgrims

attend the "so-called" shrines of Šiluva and Žemaičiu Kalvarija (Varduva) — up to 37,000 people on Catholic feast days.

The CRA documents are severely critical of the local district authorities' failure to achieve success in anti-religious work. The surveillance commissions are said to be "failing to work as they should", quoting "anti-social sermons" without giving the preacher's name, and sending imprecise and inadequate reports. Some even fail to send in reports on the local clergy's sermons. The district authorities are further criticised for failing to hold regular "group discussions" with the local clergy (possibly because some such "discussions" have been reported in detail in Lithuanian *samizdat*). Priests are registered without being fully investigated or having their credentials checked by the CRA. Too many priests are allowed to hold religious ceremonies in private homes (while visiting the sick, for example) — the proper place for "cult activities" being, according to Soviet law, a church building.

Those who refuse to recognise this are, in the view of the CRA, "hardened criminals", who should be first fined and then imprisoned.

However, the "stringent punitive measures" mentioned with approval in this report are insufficient to control the relatively independent Lithuanian clergy, as the report itself shows by its complaints about the shortcomings of atheist officials and its admission that there are relatively high numbers of Catholic believers. The only points at which the report expresses some satisfaction are the sections concerning the trials of Catholic activists for *samizdat* activities and the reduction in the number of "anti-Soviet" sermons preached by the clergy after the imprisonment of Frs Svarinskas and Tamkevičius.

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Russian Orthodox Archbishop Denounces Ukrainian Catholic Church.

A recent issue of *News from the Ukraine*, the English-language weekly newspaper

published by the USSR's Association for Cultural Relations with Ukrainians