

impeded and to hold services for fellow-believers throughout Moldavia. We ask Catholics in the free world to pray for us and we ask for your blessing on our priest Vladislav Zavalnyuk and on us, his flock. (In Moldavia there are about 15,000 Catholics.)

We ask you to send your blessing in writing to the address of our spiritual pastor, Vladislav Zavalnyuk: Moldavian

SSR 277020 Kishinev 20, ul. Pavlodarskaya 20a, so that your authority may defend our priest from our authorities who threaten not to allow him to work as a priest, and so that we may not remain orphans without a spiritual father and spiritual aid.

With deepest devotion,

THE CATHOLICS OF THE MOLDAVIAN SSR

## Lithuanian Rector of Seminary Interviewed

*An interview with Dr Viktoras Butkus, rector of the Roman Catholic seminary in Kaunas, Lithuania, was printed in Moscow News (produced in the USSR) on 12 June 1976. The seminary at Kaunas is the only remaining one in Lithuania and is considered by the Roman Catholic faithful to be vital for the survival of the Church in Lithuania. There have been many protests about the restriction on the number who can train at the seminary, about the dismissal of many applicants and the pressures placed on those few who gain admission (see RCL Vol. 1, Nos. 4-5, pp. 50-1). Dr Butkus finished his theological education abroad (1959-60) — a sign of his political "reliability" — and became rector of the seminary in 1962. He is not, however, trusted by many of the Lithuanian faithful, and when it became known that he might be made a bishop, many appealed against such a decision. Dr Butkus's interview was reproduced in the Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church No. 24 (a samizdat periodical) and severely criticized for its misrepresentation of the Church's past and present situation in Lithuania.*

Q: Hostile propagandists have spread many stories about the status of the Church in Soviet Lithuania. What is the real position?

A: There is full freedom of conscience in Soviet Lithuania, as all over the Soviet Union. It is guaranteed by Article 96 of the Constitution of the Lithuanian SSR. Every citizen is free to worship in any church or in his home, to adorn his own dwelling with crucifixes and holy images, to have prayer books, the Bible and other religious books. Soviet law guarantees the rights of believers.

Q: Has the number of Catholic dioceses, archdioceses, churches and Roman Catholic priests become smaller in Lithuania in the years of Soviet government?

A: Only the number of priests is somewhat smaller; some of them left Lithuania during the war.

In bourgeois Lithuania many priests were doing other work — as administrators of Catholic organizations, chaplains in schools, prisons and hospitals or holding official posts. Since the Church was separated from the State and the schools turned secular, priests exercise only their immediate religious functions.

The Catholic Church in Lithuania has the right to set up its own governing bodies. Thus, there are the Vilnius and Kaunas archdioceses, and the Kaišiadorys, Panevezys, Telšiai and Vilkaviškis dioceses which were founded in bourgeois times. The government of Soviet Lithuania does not interfere with bishops in their dioceses or in their religious work in the Republic. Nobody interferes with religious assemblies. After the Second Vatican Council, the local ordinaries assembled in Telšiai and set up a College of Ordinaries. The present chairman is Juozas Labukas, the apostolic administrator of the Kaunas Archdiocese and the Vilkaviškis diocese. The College of Ordinaries, which has issued several appeals to priests and to believers in Lithuania, also set up a Commission on Lithuanian Liturgy.

In the three years after the Second Vatican Council this Commission prepared the Latin-Lithuanian ceremonial that is now compulsory in the Lithuanian Catholic Church in and outside Lithuania. In 1968 a full translation of the decisions of the Second Vatican Council was published. The mass was

published for the believers and later in the same year – the psalter and the New Testament.

Q: What funds were used to restore and repair the churches that were destroyed or damaged in the war?

A: Many towns and villages in our country were reduced to ruins in the war, and our churches were not spared. The Cathedral of St Paul and St Peter in Siauliai, and churches in Raseiniai, Kudirkos-Naumiestis, Kuršenai and many other places were destroyed – 40 in all.

Though building materials were badly needed for the rehabilitation of the war-ravaged economy, the government allocated the materials needed for rebuilding our churches.

In the Telšiai diocese the churches in Kretinga, Taurage, Kuršenai, Papilė, Kruopiai, Kvedarna, Leskava and Mazeikiai were repaired – in this diocese we had to arrange temporary churches in ordinary houses for five congregations whose churches had been burnt to the ground.

There is not one church in bad repair in this diocese, nor indeed anywhere in the Republic.

Q: Can the Catholic Church in Lithuania educate its own priests?

A: There is the seminary in Kaunas, whose heads and teachers are appointed by the Lithuanian ordinaries. The course lasts five years and tuition is free.

The curriculum is fully in line with the Charter of the Vatican Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith and is not very different from the curriculum at other Roman Catholic universities.

Q: Does the Catholic Church in Lithuania maintain contacts with Catholics in other countries?

A: Our priests are in contact with the Vatican, with Catholic churches and Catholic organizations in other countries. They attended the Second Vatican Council and every Synod of Bishops convened by Pope Paul VI, and they work in the Pontifical Commission for the Revision of Canon Law, take part in conferences of Catholics in Europe, make pilgrimages and visit Catholic churches in various countries. Lithuanian Catholics also invite Catholics from other countries to the Soviet Union.

*The interview also appeared a year later in a number of West European and American newspapers, for example the Evening News of 30 May 1977. At this point Dr Butkus publicly denied the authenticity of the interview: it was a forgery, he claimed. His letter of denial, dated 13 June 1977, is printed below.*

To: Comrade K. Tumenas, Representative of the Council for Religious Affairs of the USSR Council of Ministers for the Lithuanian SSR.

Copies to: HE Bishop J. Matulaitis-Labukas; HE Bishop L. Povilonis; HE Bishop R. Krikščiūnas; Administrator Mgr Č. Krivaitis; Canon J. Andrikonis; the Rev. A. Vaičiūs.

#### STATEMENT

of Professor Dr Viktoras Butkus,  
President of the Kaunas Interdiocesan  
Theological Seminary

The 12 June 1976 issue of the English-language weekly *Moscow News* and the 31 July 1976 issue of the French-language *Les Nouvelles de Moscou* published an interview with the Rev. Viktoras Butkus, Director of the Kaunas Theological Seminary, about the situation of the Roman Catholic Church in Lithuania.

Subsequently, this interview was reprinted in a number of West European and American newspapers (see *Evening News*, No. 124, 30 May 1977); it was also broadcast by the Vatican Radio, with a rather angry commentary. Accidentally, I heard this broadcast myself.

I must declare the following with regard to this interview, published in my name:

I have never given any interviews either to the English or French editions of the weekly *Moscow News*; I have not even had any contacts with this weekly. So far, I have not been able to find out who wrote this so-called interview of mine. Unfortunately, I have had no success in finding either the English or the French edition of the *Moscow News* and was unable to check the original text of this interview. However, the text broadcast by Radio Vatican contained a number of errors, which could not have been made by a priest, and even less so by a director of a seminary.

In view of all this, I would appreciate

a clarification of this matter: who wrote this interview in my name without my consent. Please also revoke it and do all that is necessary to avoid such occurrences in the future.

PROFESSOR DR VIKTORAS BUTKUS

Kaunas, 13 June 1977

*The Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church (No. 29) published Dr Butkus's denial, but commented that such a statement would not have been written without the approval of the Council for Religious Affairs.*

We cannot believe that Dr V. Butkus would have written this statement without the knowledge and approval of the Representative for Religious Affairs. This is the almost universal opinion of the priests of Lithuania. Only the most daring of priests have hitherto written and circulated such statements which are unfavourable to the government – not those priests who obediently carry out the wishes of the atheist government.

By his statement Dr V. Butkus has greatly compromised the Moscow weekly paper. For committing much less important "sins" against the Soviet government, offending priests have been dismissed from high-ranking church posts. The future will show where the truth lies: if Dr V. Butkus continues to direct the seminary and keeps on travelling to peace conferences, it will mean that his statement was only a political manoeuvre by the atheist government, possibly to compromise the *Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church* and Vatican Radio which had commented on the seminary rector's interview.

If the statement by Dr V. Butkus is indeed sincere, we should also like to have a refutation of other interviews which contained falsehoods or kept silent about the true position of the Catholic Church in Lithuania, interviews given by him or perhaps only published in his name, for example, the one published in the communist newspaper *Laisve* [*Freedom*, published by Lithuanian communists in the United States] on 31 December 1965.

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