

confiscated during searches), no information (for some time it had all been coming through to Kapitanchuk), would not be able to do anything. Then, in this apparently hopeless situation, help came. It came from those believers who saw in the Christian Committee and its work the defender of their rights. Many of them had previously helped in the work of the Committee, by sending information about violations of believers' rights to the members or printing their documents, and now they openly offered to become part of the Committee. So another ten people joined the membership of the Committee. They observed strict security, and so that the authorities would not be able to identify them and stop them working for the Christian Committee, it was decided not to reveal their names. The CCDBR revived: gradually letters began to appear from believers, new typewriters were bought with believers' donations, and the documents of the Committee began to appear in print.

On 29 June this year, since the authorities were subjecting him and his family to continual harassment, Christian Committee member Vadim Shcheglov was forced to emigrate from the USSR.

Before Shcheglov left the USSR, the members of the CCDBR jointly decided that he, as representative of the Committee, should turn to believers in the West with appeals for help to organise, as it were, a foreign branch of the CCDBR. This help

could take various forms: collected information about violations of believers' rights in the USSR (through letters from friends or relatives or accounts by citizens who have recently left the USSR); or simply membership of the Committee, each doing what he can for its work; and later, when it becomes possible, providing ways of publishing the CCDBR bulletin.

The Christian Committee believe that the wider and fuller the publicity given to the documentation of violations of believers' rights in the USSR, the better the West will be acquainted with the situation of believers in communist countries, and in turn the more active and effective its assistance will be. For this cause the CCDBR is denying itself the monopoly of published materials on the violation of the rights of believers in the USSR, and appeals to all publishers and organisations to do likewise. The Committee is willing to supply, through its representatives, the necessary copies of all its documents.

Taking the opportunity given to me, on behalf of millions of persecuted believers in the USSR, of the CCDBR, and of myself, I thank all religious people, all charitable people, organisations and individuals for their prayers and Christian help, and the press and radio of western countries for their activity and assistance in publishing and distributing the materials of the Committee.

VADIM SHCHEGLOV

Translated from Russian by Carolyn Burch

New Hard-Line Policy towards Catholic Clergy in Lithuania

In 1982 Soviet policy towards the Catholic Church in Lithuania seemed to be taking a turn for the better in many ways. In June 1982 eighteen seminarians were ordained as priests — the highest number permitted by the Soviet authorities since 1963. The Lithuanian Catholic Church was allowed to publish two religious works — a 152-page directory and liturgical calendar (the first since 1939) in September and a ten-volume Lithuanian translation of the Catholic missal in October. The latter made it possible for priests to conduct masses in Lithuanian regularly for the first time.

However, the high point of 1982 was un-

doubtedly the appointment of a new bishop (Antanas Vaičius) to the long-vacant diocese of Telšiai and permission for Archbishop Sladkevičius, exiled for 23 years, to return to his diocese of Kaišiadorys.* It appeared, even to the Vatican, that a period of "wider toleration by the communist authorities" might well have begun.

However, on 26 January 1983 such hopes were dealt a decisive blow. Fr Svarinskas, one of the five priests who founded the

*For a detailed account of this, see *RCL* Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 89-90 — *Ed.*

(unofficial) Catholic Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights, was summoned from his parish of Vidukle to the police station, supposedly in connection with a traffic accident, and arrested on criminal charges. On 3 May, after an unusually short police investigation, he was put on trial in Vilnius for "anti-Soviet slander" under article 68 of the Lithuanian SSR Criminal Code (corresponding to article 70 of the RSFSR Criminal Code). Three days later, on 6 May, he was sentenced to seven years in prison, followed by three years in exile. The trial was held in a virtually closed court, as no fellow-priests or members of the public were allowed into the courtroom. Only Fr Svarinskas's brother and sister obtained permission to attend, not without difficulty. Fr Svarinskas's supporters, who were waiting outside the courtroom, were loaded into buses by the KGB, driven out of town and abandoned in the woods. If they returned, they were arrested for "hooliganism", fined and jailed for ten days.

Fr Sigitas Tamkevičius, another founding member of the Catholic Committee, was summoned as a witness during the trial but on 6 May, after he had given evidence in defence of Fr Svarinskas, he was himself arrested before leaving the court, on the same charges as the accused. The following day TASS publicly announced:

It was decided during the court hearing that Tamkevičius, like Svarinskas, using his priesthood as a cover, had for a long time engaged in illegal and unlawful activities whose main purpose was to discredit the Soviet State and social system. He slandered the existing system and incited young people to take part in anti-social activities and to struggle against Soviet power and disobey Soviet laws.

Other members of the Catholic Committee have since been searched, interrogated and warned. It seems probable that a criminal case is also being prepared against Fr Jonas Kauneckas. The KGB has been trying to recruit schoolchildren and young people to state that Fr Kauneckas "does not speak about sin in the confessional but only about opposition to the Russians".

The sentence passed on Fr Svarinskas and the forthcoming trial of Fr Tamkevičius bring to an end the ten-year period since 1973 when the Lithuanian clergy seemed

immune to arrest. Priests have been fined for small offences, such as organising religious processions, but since the trials of Frs Seskevičius, Zdebkis and Bubnys in 1970-72 for teaching the catechism to children, no members of the clergy have been tried or imprisoned on criminal charges. Only laymen have been sentenced for producing the unofficial *Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church*, though letters, reports and petitions from the clergy formed a large part of its subject matter. The Catholic Committee survived intact for over four years after its foundation in November 1978, while the members of the corresponding Moscow-based Christian Committee were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.

Why were the Soviet authorities so reluctant to tackle the Catholic clergy of Lithuania? And why have they decided to do so now? The answer to both questions is probably the same.

The Lithuanian Catholic clergy have maintained an amazingly united stand against Soviet anti-religious legislation and in support of the Catholic Committee. This is demonstrated quite clearly in the numbers of priests prepared to sign petitions upholding the Catholic Committee's call for a change in the Laws on Religious Associations — 522 priests out of a total 711 (about three-quarters of the Lithuanian Catholic clergy). In July-August 1982, a petition to President Brezhnev and the Lithuanian bishops, calling for a change in the Laws, was signed by 484 priests from four dioceses (94 percent of the clergy in these dioceses). In Soviet circumstances this is an unprecedented act of defiance.

The Soviet authorities were undoubtedly taken aback by the extent of solidarity among the Catholic clergy and also by the amount of grass-roots support the campaign for religious rights has been able to muster since 1971, when a Memorandum calling for an end to anti-religious discrimination was signed by over 17,000 people. Since then, the numbers prepared to sign such documents in Lithuania have on one occasion reached 148,149 — in October 1979, on a petition for the return of the confiscated church in Klaipeda.* Smaller protests have regularly been signed by hundreds or thousands of ordinary believers — a phenomenon not to be seen in other parts

*Text in *RCL* Vol. 9 Nos. 3-4, 1981, pp. 137-39, photos facing p. 115 — *Ed.*

of the Soviet Union. The authorities have found it difficult to deal with this kind of mass religious movement without resorting to the Stalinist methods of the post-war years — large-scale petitions, for example, precluded the arrest of all the signatories, so in the end no one was arrested.

In addition, the authorities were disconcerted by the refusal of the Lithuanian bishops to condemn either the *Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church* or the Catholic Committee. The two exiled bishops even cooperated openly with the movement for religious rights, occasionally ignoring their exile orders to attend the funerals of religious activists. This was an example of a trend which the authorities found equally disturbing — in addition to protesting against state legislation on religion, the Lithuanian clergy in many cases began to act as if the laws did not exist. While calling for an end to the legal exclusion of priests from the parish council, priests began to act as leaders of their parish councils in negotiations with the authorities, despite the objections of the latter. While the clergy petitioned for abolition of state restrictions on admissions to the official theological seminary in Kaunas, an unofficial theological correspondence course was also established in 1972 for rejected candidates — the so-called “underground seminary”. Graduates of this unofficial seminary were ordained and employed as priests in parishes, despite the protests of the district authorities. In 1980 “priests’ councils”, which included members of the Catholic Committee, were elected in each diocese and approved by the Vatican, before applying for legal recognition by the State, and continued their activities while the State was making up its mind how to react. Both in this case and in general, the expressed and implied support of Pope John Paul II has been a morale-booster to the Lithuanian Catholics and a problem for the Soviet authorities. It is significant, for example, that the Catholic Committee was founded a month after the Polish Pope’s election.

The state authorities find themselves between two stools — they can neither give in and grant the requests of the believers in full nor completely crush the movement for religious rights. For the last ten years they have tried to follow a “carrot and stick” policy — persecuting some Catholic lay

activists with great severity, imposing fifteen-year sentences on such as Viktoras Petkus and Balys Gajauskas for their *samizdat* activity, while seeming to tolerate the actions of the clergy. In 1980-82 some of the recalcitrant clergy, for example Fr Laurinavičius of the Lithuanian Helsinki Monitoring Group, were “dealt with” unofficially, meeting their deaths in well-arranged “accidents” or attacks by criminals. The concessions of 1982, however, in addition to the agreed appointment of a Catholic Cardinal in Latvia, could not be left unbalanced — precisely because some of the demands of Catholic protesters in Lithuania had been met, it had to be demonstrated that nevertheless protest did not pay. The attack on the Catholic Committee was undoubtedly intended to deter other priests and break up the unity of the clergy, as well as to scare ordinary believers and inhibit public support for the clergy. (In this they were not successful — over 32,000 people signed protests against the arrest of Fr Svarinskas.) Catholic Lithuania is also being brought into line with the rest of the USSR, where a new campaign against religious dissent has been under way since 1979. The “carrot” has not been abandoned, however. In April 1983 Lithuania’s four officially-sanctioned bishops were allowed to pay an *ad limina* visit to the Vatican together — the first such visit since 1938. The possibility is being mentioned of a Papal visit to Lithuania in 1987, for the 600th anniversary of Lithuania’s conversion to Christianity, and the authorities are also making offers of permission for an official Catholic journal in the USSR — no doubt on certain conditions, as in the past, when such offers depended on liquidation of the *Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church*.

The surviving members of the Catholic Committee ask, in their Document No. 53, “Why have the most zealous priests been arrested? Is this the proclamation of an open struggle against the Church?” They remind President Andropov, to whom the document is addressed, that “in 1874 Engels said that open struggle against the Church was foolish and the best way to restore interest in religion”. The present revival in the Lithuanian Catholic Church began, as they point out, after the trials of three priests in 1970-72.