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 Tamás Bulkai, engineer  
 Ferenc Dombi, priest  
 András Ferenczi, electrician  
 András Gromon, priest  
 Mrs Márton Gyombolai, teacher  
 Károly Hampel, engineer  
 Ignác Király, carpenter

László Kovács, priest  
 Teréz Kovács, linguist  
 Dr József Merza, mathematician  
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 Éva Vadas, social worker.

## Lithuanian Catholic Priests in Mass Protest

*The following petitions from the clergy of two Lithuanian Catholic dioceses, addressed to the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachov and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Lithuania, were published in the most recent issue of the samizdat journal The Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church (No. 71).*

*They are in the tradition of mass petitions by the Catholic clergy in Lithuania which has been established over the last ten years and is unique in the Soviet Union in that the signatories represent an overwhelming majority of the priests in each diocese. In this case, the first petition is signed by 127 priests of Panevėžys diocese out of a total of 130 (1985), while the two petitions from the diocesan clergy of Vilkaiviškis diocese are signed by 72 and 79 priests respectively, out of a total of ninety (1986).*

*The request made by the petitioners for the return of three well-known churches confiscated by the Soviet authorities is undoubtedly linked with the official request to the Soviet authorities made by Bishop Preikša for the return of the same churches on the 600th anniversary of Christianity in Lithuania — a request which was refused. The call for the release of three imprisoned priests reiterates the appeal made to the Soviet authorities in 1983 by over*

*123,000 Lithuanian Catholics — a petition which was also turned down.*

Declaration: To Mikhail Gorbachov, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. From the priests of Panevėžys diocese of the Lithuanian Catholic Church.

In 1987 the Catholics of Lithuania will celebrate the 600th anniversary of the establishment of Christianity in Lithuania. Over those six hundred years, Christian teachings have become deeply rooted in our nation. The Constitution of the USSR guarantees freedom of conscience, but atheist activists render this constitutional guarantee null and void.

1. The children of religious believers are victimised at school and morally terrorised for openly going to church; they are forced to join atheist organisations against the will of their religious parents. Those who do not join are threatened with exclusion from institutions of higher education. Those who do join are forbidden to carry out religious obligations or to take part actively in services, while some school-leavers have even been prevented from taking the final examinations. Those who wish to take part in religious activities have to conceal this fact, and so, from their youth, are forced to dissemble.

This rubs salt into our society's wounds.

2. Various state employees and teachers cannot openly take part in religious activities as their consciences and convictions demand. In order to attend religious services, they are therefore forced to travel to distant places, where no-one knows them, or to get married, or christen their children at night, when no-one will notice. Religious teachers have to speak against their conscience, as if they were atheists, although Article 50 of the Constitution of the Lithuanian SSR guarantees freedom of conscience. When a man in a responsible position leaves his wife and children and establishes a new family, that is considered his personal affair and he is not penalised for it, but if a state official openly performs religious rituals, he is demoted.

3. The USSR Constitution guarantees the equality of all citizens. But how is this implemented in real life? Atheists have access to everything — the press, the radio, television — while religious believers are not allowed to make use of these means of communication. Since the Second World War, only some believers' families have managed to acquire prayer-books and catechisms. Atheists have the whole education system at their service, from the kindergartens to the universities, while the children of religious parents are forbidden to learn the catechism even in church, and priests who teach it are fined and put on trial. It is impossible for believers to organise excursions, to hire a bus, or even a taxi, or to travel on holiday to such shrines as Šiluva or Žemaičiu-Kalvarija (Varduva).

Religious believers in hospital are not always permitted to summon a priest when they are dying.

It is not permitted to hold religious services for believers at funeral

parlours, as would be normal practice for Catholics.

4. According to Article 50 of the Constitution of the Lithuanian SSR, the church is separated from the state, but in real life it is a different matter: when bishops or diocesan administrators appoint priests to parishes, or remove them from parishes, the Commissioner of the Council for Religious Affairs — as the representative of the atheist authorities — interferes with the church's welfare, as it is he who has the final word in the appointment or dismissal of parish priests, in the choice of candidates for the post of bishop or diocesan administrator, in the choice of lecturers at the priests' seminary, and the selection of applicants to the seminary. He does not permit enough of these to be selected, so that there is a great shortage of priests. The CRA Commissioner also interferes in the activities of the priests' councils and the consultative boards. This amounts to interference in the church's internal affairs. Representatives of the secular authorities interfere even in religious services, asking "Why does this priest hold services?"; "Why does he pray for priests who are suffering imprisonment?" They interfere even in the family, and in the activities of church committees.

5. Christianity was first introduced into Lithuania in Vilnius, so Vilnius Cathedral is the cradle of Christian Lithuania, but this holy place has been taken away from the believers. St Casimir is Lithuania's patron saint, but the church dedicated to him in Vilnius has been turned into an atheist museum, while the church built with money given by believers in Klaipeda has been turned into a concert-hall. This amounts to mockery of the believers.

6. The USSR is pledged to observe the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18 of which states:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to manifest one's religion or belief, either alone or in community with others, in public or in private, in teaching, and in the practice of worship and observance.

The USSR has also promised to carry out the agreements of the Helsinki Conference, Part VII of which states:

The participating states will observe human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief:

while Part X states:

The participating states will in all good faith fulfil their obligations under international law — both those obligations arising from the generally-recognised principles and rules of international law, and those obligations arising from treaties or other agreements, in conformity with international law.

Therefore, the above-mentioned wrongs suffered by believers are a violation of international obligations.

7. When priests and believers publicise the wrongs suffered by them and the way in which they are slandered, they are accused of slander against the Soviet Union and are put on trial. For example, Fr Alfonso Svarinskas, Fr Sigita Tamkevičius,<sup>1</sup> Fr Jonas Matulionis,<sup>2</sup> and

<sup>1</sup>Svarinskas and Tamkevičius are both founder members of the Catholic Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights. They are at present serving sentences of, respectively, seven and six years in strict-regime labour camps with three and four years' exile.

<sup>2</sup>Matulionis completed theological training in the Lithuanian underground seminary and is regarded by the authorities as an impostor. He is

some Catholic laymen have been sentenced merely for defending believers' rights. If the government is to observe the constitution and its own pledges, they should be released.

We appeal to you, as head of the government, to see that the above-mentioned unconstitutional injustices and forms of discrimination against believers are eliminated or rectified.

Signed by 127 priests.

To the Bishops and Diocesan Administrators of Lithuania. From the priests of Vilkaviškis diocese. A declaration.

We, the undersigned priests of Vilkaviškis diocese, concerned that the 600th anniversary of Christianity in Lithuania should be suitably celebrated, request the bishops and diocesan administrators of Lithuania:

1. To invite the Holy Father, John Paul II, to visit Lithuania in 1987;
2. To ask the Holy Father to mark the anniversary of Christianity in Lithuania by beatifying the Servant of God Archbishop Jurgis Matulaitis<sup>3</sup> and by officially deciding the matter of the cult concerning the blessed Mykolas Giedraitis<sup>4</sup>;
3. To ask the government of the Soviet Union:

a) that priests who hold catechism classes for children, according to the church's laws, should no longer be harassed;

b) that believers, especially young people and children, should not

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due to be released from camp later this year.

<sup>3</sup>Appointed Archbishop of Vilnius in 1918 — *Ed.*

<sup>4</sup>Translator of the New Testament into Lithuanian, 1596-1611 — *Ed.*

be persecuted for practising their religion openly or forced to join atheist organisations;

c) that the Cathedral of Vilnius and Klaipeda Church should be returned to the believers and that permission should be given for churches to be built in new towns, and also in the new suburbs of Vilnius, Kaunas and other large towns;

d) that the exiled Apostolic Administrator of Vilnius archdiocese, Bishop Julijonas Steponavičius, should be allowed to return to his duties;

e) that believers should be allowed the same freedom of speech and of the press as atheists;

f) that the appointment of priests by the church authorities should not be interfered with;

g) that suitable candidates for the priesthood should not be prevented from studying or being ordained;

h) that the cases of Frs Alfonsas Svarinskas, Sigitas Tamkevičius and Jonas Matulionis, as well as religious laymen, who have been sentenced for defending the church and believers' rights, should be reviewed and that they should be set free;

4. To make more widely known to the community of believers the life, virtues, and deeds of the Servant of God Archbishop Jurgis Matulaitis. Also to publicise some of our nation's noblest personalities: <sup>3</sup>Fr Andrius Rudaminas, Fr Jurgis Pabrežas, Fr Alfonsas Lipniunas, Archbishop Mečislovas Reinys<sup>5</sup>, Bishop Vincentas Borisevičius<sup>6</sup>, Professor Stasys Salkauskis, Professor Pranas Dorydaitis<sup>7</sup>, the children's teacher Marija Pečkauskaite, and others.

5) To take care that the leaders and lecturers of the priests' seminary should at all times express themselves as enlightened examples of the spirit of the church and that this spirit should be passed on to their students. Not to ordain as priests theological

students who have not acquired the church's spirit while at the seminary;

6. To continue the excellently begun campaign for temperance. To make sure that in all dioceses and parishes temperance days are organised at least once a year.

1 April 1986

Signed by 72 priests (named), followed by the names of 14 priests who did not sign.

To the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachov. Copies to the bishops and diocesan administrators of Lithuania. From the priests of Vilkaiviškis diocese in the Lithuanian Catholic Church. A declaration.

This year the priests Sigitas Tamkevičius, Alfonsas Svarinskas and Jonas Kastytis Matulionis, as well as other rank-and-file believers, are suffering the punishment of imprisonment or exile.

It is clear to the religious community and to ourselves, the priests of Lithuania, that they were sentenced because of their fidelity to God and the church.

In this context, we priests of Vilkaiviškis diocese ask you to release the imprisoned priests and other believers.

Signed by 79 priests. 11 who did not sign are also named.

<sup>3</sup>Deported in 1946, and died in Vladimir prison in 1953 — *Ed.*

<sup>6</sup>Shot in 1946 — *Ed.*

<sup>7</sup>Founder of the Lithuanian Catholic youth movement *Ateitis*. He was deported in 1941 to Siberia, where he died — *Ed.*