

and giving it a filial kiss – and then he hurried home.

A light wind was whirling dust over the new grave-mound and flying up into the branches of the bird-cherry bush. The wind would grow stronger and wilder towards night, perhaps a snowstorm was blowing up? ...

So the story of the exiled pastor came to an end ... But though the storm blows over the new and old grave mounds, covering them with snow,

though the snowstorm whirls over the distant cemetery, wrapping it in a mantle of white snow, though time goes by and years disappear, though no-one comes there any more and the small cross with its worn inscription falls off its base and collapses onto the ground ... still the bird-cherry tree will go on arraying itself anew in its wedding colours every spring, and the path of remembrance, prayer and veneration, which leads to such graves, will never be overgrown ...

## Moldavian Catholics Appeal to Pope

*Polish and German Roman Catholics living in the Moldavian SSR (a republic of the USSR) have appealed to the Pope for help. This appeal was probably written in early December 1977.*

We, German and Polish Catholics living in the Moldavian SSR, affirm our deep devotion to the Roman Catholic Church and to You, as the Regent of Jesus Christ and the successor of the Apostle Peter.

However, as children of the great Catholic family, we appeal to you for help with sorrow in our hearts. When Soviet power was established in Moldavia, there were Catholic churches and priests in many towns and villages; the Soviet authorities have closed all Catholic churches, demolishing many and leaving only one chapel in the cemetery of Kishinev, the capital of the Moldavian SSR. There was a spacious, beautiful church in Kishinev, but it was closed and there is not enough room for people in the chapel; on Sundays they stand out on the street, often in the rain and cold, unable even to see the altar.

We have only one priest, Vladislav Zavalnyuk, who graduated from the Riga Theological Seminary in 1974. Although he is a young man (27 years old), he suffered from serious meningitis as a student, and as a result of this illness he gets severe headaches. He lives at the other end of town – about 7-8 km. from the cemetery where the chapel is. The authorities have not only refused to allow him to change to a flat nearer to the chapel, but also have recently confiscated the number plates and licence of his car. Now the priest has to waste

over an hour getting to the church on public transport, while Catholics from all over Moldavia have come there and are waiting to confess; often they are unable to make their confession.

The priest, seeing the difficulties of his fellow-believers, tried to attend to their needs, especially by visiting the old and sick at their places of residence in answer to telegrams from Catholics. In many towns and villages, mostly where churches existed before, for example in Beltsy, Bendery, Tiraspol, Grigorovka, Rashkovo, Andryashevka, the Catholics meet together for prayer even daily. When the priest began to travel round from time to time, hearing confessions and holding Mass, the faith revived in Moldavia; not only old people, but children and young people began to attend prayer-meetings on Sundays and feast days, both when the priest was there and even when he was not. The authorities could not help noticing such a revival of faith. They began to persecute us Catholics and especially the priest, detaining him on the road, often fining him, and a priest summoned by a sick person needs five permits: from the doctor, the local authorities, the executive committee of the district *soviet*, the executive committee of the town *soviet* and the official for Religious Affairs, Vikonsky, to whom the priest must apply for permission to visit the sick person after obtaining all the other permits. None of the Catholics have succeeded in obtaining these permits, as each official sends them to another and so on endlessly; meanwhile people are dying without confession or spiritual aid. It would be impossible to list all

such cases. We are troubled by such mockery of the believers, but the authorities not only pay no attention to our pleas and requests, but threaten to confiscate the priest's permit to serve as a priest.

In the town of Rashkovo - 170 km. from Kishinev, Polish Catholics had a prayer-house where they kept the Sacrament, meeting every evening for prayer. Once a month they were visited by the priest and many believers, children, young people and old, who came to confess. Catholics from the neighbouring towns and villages came, so that Valentina Oleinik's house, which she had given up to be the prayer-house, could not accommodate all the believers. People then began to build a church, with their own hands and means. Everyone worked, even children helped to carry the cement and bricks. They worked at night; in the day-time they worked in the fields of the collective farm. The authorities, seeing that the Catholics were engaged in friendly and self-sacrificing labour to build a modest house of God, began to persecute them. They tried Valentina Oleinik three times, putting all the blame on her. She and Vladislava Pogrebnyaya were kept in prison for one and a half days. Recently V. Oleinik is being called a madwoman and is being threatened with forcible treatment in a psychiatric hospital.

The priest was stopped on the road to Rashkovo; his car was turned back and he himself was ordered back to Kishinev on foot - 170 km. Of course, he would not agree to this and the authorities condescended to let him pass the night in Rashkovo, without holding a service for the believers. This sort of thing happened many times.

On 25 November 1977, the authorities demolished the church in Rashkovo. On that day, three to five policemen stood round each house, not allowing people to come out so that they could not hinder the destruction of the building. The children were told to come to school at 8 o'clock instead of 9 o'clock as usual, on that day. About 15 policemen were on duty in the school, preventing the children from going out into the street. That morning, Valentina Oleinik and seven other women, who constantly guarded the church, were forcibly pushed into a car and driven

70 km. away from Rashkovo - to Ukraine.

Many cars, trucks and bulldozers worked to destroy the church. Police were summoned from four districts of Moldavia. Even soldiers were summoned. They worked hard from about 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. A ploughed-up field remained in place of the church. The entire contents of the church were thrown in a heap in the stable, the censers and icons were hung on posts in the stable. The Sacrament was thrown on the ground and the chalices taken to the collective farm office. It was most painful for us to see the Holy Sacrament scattered about and we picked up the Body of Jesus on our knees, weeping, but we could not find one piece of the Host from the monstrance, which had been broken up. It is impossible to express in words this pain or the sight of people coming in the evening to fall down in the shape of a cross on the place in the empty field where the altar had stood, weeping and praying to God for His mercy.

The priest tried to obtain permission to come and bring a gift of the Sacrament, but he is strictly forbidden to do so. The authorities are afraid that a visit from the priest will strengthen the spiritual life of the believers. After demolishing the church, they are trying with all their might to demolish the spiritual church as well, so that the words of Jesus will be fulfilled: "I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered." (Matt. 26:31)

We are presenting Your Holiness with only one or two cases out of the countless insults to our priest and ourselves. More than once we have gone to Moscow to complain, but in Moscow they approve the behaviour of the local authorities and threaten the priest, promising to talk to him and deal with him separately, telling him not to imagine that any revival of the faith will be allowed in Moldavia, and saying he will pay dearly for what he has already done.

We beg Your Holiness to make use of your high authority to influence the Soviet authorities to observe freedom of conscience, freedom of religion and freedom of worship with regard to us, Catholics living in the Moldavian SSR. Let our priest be allowed to travel un-

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