

Research Project Description

Christianity in Lithuania: between the totalitarian experience and the contemporary democracy

Idea of the project

During the Soviet totalitarian regime Christianity and the Christian faith was one of the most solid basis for resistance against demoralization of human life and the dehumanization of the society. Totalitarian regime persecuted Christian Churches as the “alternative ideologies” that made people protected against the “brain wash” of the totalitarian ideology. Today Christianity in contemporary democratic Lithuania faces another challenge.

Contemporary democracy seeks to develop to a universally valid non-religious state order and is not openly hostile to Christianity. It is nevertheless true that the Christian position is often not welcome in public discussions about moral and legal matters of a particular democratic society and its future.

Democracy has an inclination to place Christian life outside the public sphere: it is pushed into the private realm or can safely take the honourable role of a kind of cultural heritage that is interesting for tourists, cultural scientists and historians. Mistrust toward Christians in the democratic state can take many different forms. First, Christianity may be accepted as a nice decorum for weddings and funerals. It is felt to be somehow important for personal life and the life of the society, but this importance is not reflected and takes grotesque or even dramatic forms.

The interior of the church may not satisfy one’s demands as too modest, and the priest may not be very famous for her or his wedding ceremony. There are cases when people feel resentment, when priests refuse to serve at the funeral of a relative whom they cannot avouch for being a Christian. In a society of consumption there is a tendency to believe that the Christian Church is a kind of service sector that should be available to everyone who pays.

In Lithuania this was very obvious during the recent discussions on the national conception of family politics. The explicit position of the representatives of Christian churches in Lithuania and even of individual Christians was estimated by some members of Parliament as an anti-democratic wish to impose Christian values upon society. Even the right of Christians to participate in public discussion on the topic was strongly opposed.

Christians in Lithuania may draw parallels between totalitarian and democratic state’s attitude towards Christianity. The democracy may seem even more dangerous to Christianity, because its ways of operation may be evaluated as “soft” and hard to resist.

Objectives

The questions to answer:

Does Christianity have its place in today’s democratic state? What are the cultural artefacts of Christianity today? Should contemporary Christian take responsibility for the state of democracy in his country, or should he try to protect himself from the democratic public life? What challenges meets a Christian that is actively involved in the public and political life?

I am going to analyze public discussions in Lithuania that concerns Christianity (the discussion on the family policy, the “crucifix at school” discussion etc.) to find the role of Christianity in the life of contemporary Lithuania.