

Research Project Description

Christianity in Lithuania between the totalitarian empires and the contemporary democracy

Idea of the project

During the Soviet totalitarian regime, Christianity and the Christian faith were one of the most important elements of the Lithuanian identity and the Christian faith was one of the most important elements of the Lithuanian identity. Totalitarian regimes 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 Lithuania is a democratic state 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 sphere, where it takes the honorable 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 decoration 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 satirical forms.

The interior of the church may not satisfy one's demands as too modest and the priest may 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 criticized by some members of Parliament as an anti-Christian attitude. This attitude was strongly opposed.

Christianity in Lithuania is now caught between totalitarian and democratic states' attitude towards Christianity. The democracy may seem even more dangerous to Christianity, because its views on religion may be evaluated as "anti" and hard to resist.

Objectives

The questions to answer:

I am going to analyze public discussions in Lithuania that concern 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.