

The Introduction of Secular Rites of Passage in Lithuania – Communist Alternatives to Christian Rites

Straipsnyje nagrinėjamas sekuliarių perėjimo ritualų įvedimas Lietuvoje, jais Komunistų partija siekė sukurti alternatyvas religinėms krikšto, santuokos ir laidotuvių apeigoms. Aprašomos šių ritualų pirminės formuluotės, pastangos juos išpopuliarinti, šių ritualų turinys ir kliūtys, su kuriomis partija susidūrė įdiegdama šias apeigas. Straipsnyje taip pat tirama to meto visuomenės reakcija į šias sekulias apeigas, turėjusias padidinti takoskyrą tarp jos ir Bažnyčios.

The article examines the introduction of secular rites to replace Christian rites of Baptism, Marriage, and Burial of the Dead in Lithuania. It deals with initial attempts to formulate and popularize these rites, their content, and the obstacles which the Communist Party encountered in promoting their acceptance among the people. It also indicates the measure of popular resistance to these rites and ceremonies by the general population.

Introduction

The elevation of Nikita Khrushchev to the role of First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union resulted in a new wave of a state-sponsored anti-religious campaign in the Soviet Union. As a part of this general campaign the Lithuanian Communist Party, the Council of Ministers, and the Lithuanian Commissioner of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults of the USSR Council of Ministers developed a comprehensive program to neutralize the influence of the churches among the Lithuanian people. Recognizing the apparent need of the people to mark by ritual and ceremony the important rites of passage of human life the party determined to provide atheistic alternatives to the Christian ceremonies of Baptism, Marriage, and Burial.

The aim of this short study is to describe the earliest beginnings of the initiation and introduction of this program of atheistic ceremonies in Lithuania. Special attention is given to the rites as they came to be formulated and performed and their public and private evaluation by the commissioner and party officials. The paper examines developments between 1957 and 1965.

Source material consists of documents located in the Lithuanian Central State Archives (Lith. *Lietuvos centrinis valstybės archyvas* – LCVA) and the Document Department of the Lithuanian Communist Party at the Lithuanian Special Archives (Lith. *Lietuvos ypatingojo archyvo Lietuvos komunistų partijos dokumentų skyrius* – LYA LKP) in Vilnius. Included are reports of the Commissioner to the Lithuanian Communist Party and the Council for

the Affairs of Religious Cults of the USSR Council of Ministers in Moscow, as well as correspondence between party officials. Also taken into account is public printed material concerning the secular ceremonies and their public performance.

This study may be of value to students researching the secular use of religious signs and ceremonies in the Soviet era as well as students of the history of the church in Lithuania during the same period. It may also be of interest to general readers and those interested in the history of the Soviet Union and its atheistic campaigns.

1. Initial Inception of the Program of Secular Rites

As early as the 1920's those responsible for the inculcation of Soviet atheism among the populace had found that simple indoctrination in communist ideology was not sufficient to capture the hearts of the Soviet people. Although the social reasons for religion had been stifled by the elimination of the exploitative upper classes, religion had not lost its popularity as Karl Marx had so confidently predicted it would. Religion was no longer needed to satisfy man's need for social relationships and was no longer a part of the systematic exploitation of workers and farmers, yet the communists observed that the people remained religious. In his 1923 *Pravda* article "Vodka, Church, and Cinematography" Leon Trotsky suggested that what communists had overlooked was man's innate need for ritual expression. It was his belief that the Russian people were not deeply religious but that the church remained alive and active because it satisfied man's need for celebratory ritual. Propaganda, he stated, had not the power to effectively move the hearts of men. Secular rituals were needed which would delight the eye, fill the ear, and physically involve the people. He pointed to motion pictures by way of example. He noted that people were drawn to them and were fascinated by them. He declared that the same could be said for other cultural activities which entertain the masses¹.

The intensely rationalistic and realistic communists were very uneasy about creating alternatives to religious rituals for fear that they would be involving themselves in a god creating activity (Rus. *Богостроительство*) and implementing a new secular religion such as was anathema to Lenin. The real depth of Trotsky's perception would later find support in the use of rites and rituals by the German Nazi Party, as was evident in the film *Triumph des Willens* in which Hitler was identified as the bringer of secular salvation.

From the earliest days of the communist takeover in Lithuania in 1940, the communists staked everything on the so-called culture house, the workers' library, and cinematic documentaries. These were to be the tools by which atheistic propaganda would be propagated among the masses. Many churches were converted to movie theaters, dance halls, and entertainment centers. A "second front"² in war against the churches was opened with the prioritizing of the Sunday open air market as a sort of "Temple of Commerce", a gathering place of workers on their day off. However, none of these alternatives meant to discourage church attendance were successful in accomplishing their purpose. Cultural events more often than not ended with drunken stupors and hangovers. Leonas Pušinis, Lithuanian Commissioner of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults, could complain that cultural events were usually poorly organized, libraries had few materials

which supported atheistic communists interests, and many small towns had no movie theater at all. The people had nothing to do, except to go to the church and participate in artfully constructed rituals. The priests he called artistic performers³.

From his early days in office in 1957 Justas Rugienis who replaced Pušinis as religious commissioner engaged in a careful analysis of the observance of religion in Lithuania. He gathered materials from the central registry office and compared them with the statistics received from the churches and concluded that propaganda simply was not enough to draw the people to communism. He noted that of every 100 children born in 1957 82 were soon baptized, 61 percent of all marriages were contracted before Christian altars and blessed by priests, and 79 percent of all funerals were conducted by priests. He suspected that these numbers were probably untrustworthy, because the priests would characteristically paint a dark picture in order to avoid heavier taxation. It was clear to Rugienis that the number of Christian baptisms, weddings, and funerals was far higher than was being reported. If Marxism-Leninism was to capture the heart of the people, the state would need to provide alternatives to the church's rituals. He stated that man was a social creature by nature and needed to have rituals to celebrate the major events of his life and this must be done in a way which would relate the events to communism⁴.

By this time communists elsewhere in the Soviet Union were also coming to the same conclusion. It was the beginning of the realization that man does not live by intellect alone. Trotsky, though rightly despised, had hit upon truth which must now be put into action⁵.

Commissioner Rugienis was a key contributor to the discussions which led to the decree of the Central Committee of Lithuanian Communist Party *Shortcomings of the Scientific Atheistic Propaganda in the Republic and the Means of its Improvement*, which was issued on August 12, 1957. It was in this document that the realization of need to provide ritual expression for the secular man came to its first expression. The document stated that the church continued to draw people because the communist state had neglected to provide alternative rites to celebrate key rites of passage for atheistic man. As a first step attention must be given to the creation of a rite to take the place of the Baptism of infant children and provide a secular rite of initiation. A new and updated wall calendar of name days must be provided by the party to help parents select appropriate Lithuanian names for their children. A solemn rite of marriage must be attended by appropriate ceremony. It should include the signing of certificates and the turning over of the marriage certificate by the chairman of the local executive committee or one of his specially designated assistants. It should take place in an appropriately decorated hall with family and friends and other well wishers looking on, sharing in this time of joy and showering the couple with monetary and other gifts. This would give the rite of marriage ritual significance. The local executive committee and collective farms must become involved. The rite must be crafted in such a way as to employ traditional Lithuanian customs now put into the service of communist realism. In order to accomplish this, a careful study of religious rites must be undertaken so that the new rite could maintain the traditional structure of the old rite but eliminate all metaphysical and transcendent references. Special provision must be made also for the celebration of the 25th and 50th wedding anniversaries with special ceremonies and suitable certificates. A suitable solemn atmosphere

must be provided for the conferral of one's first internal passport and for the 15th, 20th, and 25th anniversaries of employment, including the conferral of valuable gifts, as well as the giving of membership certificates for young communists and pioneers⁶.

2. The Introduction of the First Secular Ceremonies

The implementation of this new secret directive was slow but steady. The first secular name-giving ceremony and solemn marriage ceremonies were held in Kaunas, shortly after the decree was enacted. Rugienis had hoped that the new program would spread rapidly but it did not. In Kėdainiai only one secular marriage ceremony accompanied by Lithuanian customs was celebrated in all of 1958, an indication that the directive was implemented only slowly and sporadically⁷.

Complaints were heard from within the party. The February 1, 1960 decree *Concerning measures to weaken the influence of the church and the violation of soviet religious laws by the clergy* stated in usual communist terms that young communists, trade unions, and even the party itself had not done enough to mark out and celebrate significant rites of passage but had mistakenly left these things to the Church. This situation would need to be corrected at once and rites would need to be implemented which would render ecclesiastical ceremonies superfluous. Now the party was beginning to go on the offensive⁸.

Aleksandr Jefremov, the commissioner for Russian Orthodox Affairs in Lithuania, sent encouraging news to Antanas Sniečkus, First Secretary of the Lithuanian Communist Party, on February 10, 1961 that much progress had been made during the year just passed. Young communists were celebrating secularized "baptisms," marriages, spring festivals, and other social rites. The popularity of these rites was growing primarily at the expense of the Roman Catholic Church. He was happy to note, however, that the new rites had also caused a decrease in attendance in Orthodox churches as well⁹.

There still were many questions being asked about the proper construction and performance of the new rites. The party stressed that these rites must be conducted with great solemnity in large and impressive halls, if necessary even in the board rooms of the executive committees themselves. Such solemnities could be achieved through the use of pipe organs, the king of instruments, Rugienis stated. He was concerned that the instrument formerly situated in St. Nikolaus Church in Vilnius had with the permission of the Committee on Building and Architecture now been moved to the Roman Catholic Church in Tauragė. Rugienis wrote to Sniečkus and Šumauskas, chairman of the Council of Ministers, on November 11, 1960 that this had to have been an error of the Committee. He stated that he did not know if the decision to give the organ to the church have been agreed to by the party, but it was clear to him that it was simply inconceivable that the Central Committee and Council of Ministers would ever approve such a foolish action. The organ must be moved to Kaunas at once and installed in the Registry Office to be used to accompany the new solemn rites conducted there¹⁰.

In 1961 a name came to be attached to the new secular rite which replaced Baptism. Henceforth it would be called "Vardynos" – the giving of the name. The first solemn observance of "Vardynos" took place in the "Aušra" collective farm near Garliava in the Kaunas

district (see Figure 1). The first candidate was the infant daughter of a mechanic and the librarian, both loyal communists. The report of the event stressed that it all happened spontaneously, as though the whole community had been struck by realization that here was a golden opportunity to celebrate this new birth in a wonderful and thoroughly secular manner. Without being asked or prompted one member of the community had decided to decorate the culture house, another had brought flowers, still another printed signs announcing the event. Children in the local kindergarten clamored to be a part of this wonderful event, school children of all ages and even a country brass band (Lith. *Kaimo kapela*) from the region, all spontaneously decided that they simply must participate.

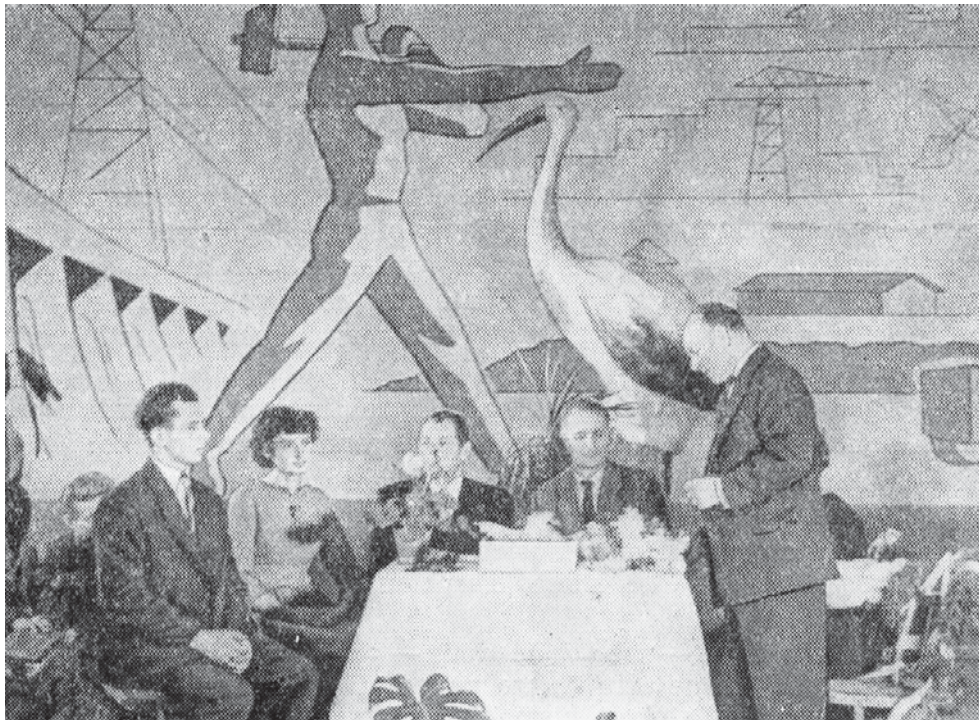


Figure 1. The first solemn observance of the secular name-giving ceremony in Lithuania at the “Aušra” collective farm near Kaunas // Gudelis D. Vardynos kolūkyje. Vilnius. 1962

The center of attention at the “Vardynos” was a man dressed in the costume of a stork leading a procession of children and the family of the candidate and the official witnesses (see Figure 2). The local executive committee provided two brand new soviet automobiles to transport the family and sponsors. An honor guard of children, school pupils, and young pioneers lined both sides of the plush carpet which led to dais on which the ceremony was to be performed. The stork led the family and witnesses to the dais where they were seated as local and regional communist leaders performed the ceremony.

The stork announced to the assembly that he had noticed that this collective farm was peopled by dedicated and loyal workers and that this family within it was lacking something. He had decided to come to them with a gift which would make their life complete. This little baby was his gift to them. He went on to say that in former days when he came to the community in spring time he would find only misery and sadness, but now all that



Figure 2. Stork leading a procession of children to a name-giving ceremony // Vyšniauskaitė A. Lietuvių šeimos tradicijos. Vilnius: Mintis. 1967

had changed. Now everywhere he looked he saw only happy faces, smiling faces, and he would happily return to the place where storks gather to share with others this good news of the rosy communist future.

J. Medelis, the chairman of the circuit communist party committee, then stepped forward to explain the meaning of this name-giving ceremony and the important work that the sponsors were taking upon themselves. They would assist the parents in raising this child as a proper communist, provide for her needs, and stand by her in sickness and in health, in good times and in times of hardship.

The stork then asked the parents and sponsors if they promised to live together in love and peace and to raise this child properly. He warned them that if they did not do so, he would take this child from them and give her to others willing to swear this oath. When they had taken their oaths the stork then instructed everyone to stand for the climax of the ceremony – the solemn giving of the name. When the name was announced by the circuit chairman, everyone applauded loudly in the typical Soviet manner. Then the parents and sponsors were invited to solemnly inscribe their names and the name of their child in the book of honor of the collective farm and they were then publicly given a certificate to mark the occasion. It was announced that this child had a bright future ahead of her, days of happiness as a loyal communist worker, free from poverty and exploitation. The local chairman announced that in order to encourage the stork to bring yet more infants to the community, he was now establishing a nursery. Predictions were then made about the future of the child, whether she would be a collective farm worker, a teacher, an engineer, perhaps even a cosmonaut. Following the ceremony the band played, the children danced and sang, and a good time was had by all¹¹.

3. The Initial Evaluation of the Rites and Recommended Changes

Present at this well managed event, which was coordinated by local officials and the Ministry of Education, was D. Gudelis, the representative of the *Scientific Methodical Cabinet of the Republic for Cultural Education Activity*, a division of the Ministry of Education of the Lithuanian Soviet Social Republic. His purpose in attending was to see the rite in action and to make recommendations for an official rite to be used throughout the country.

The Committee reviewed the report of the ceremony and decided that it was perhaps a little too theatrical. The stork, though important, should not be the center of attention. There should be less sentimentality and more socialist realism. Instead of using the dais the ceremony should be conducted on one level with the central participants perhaps in the center of the assembly. Pictures should be posted depicting mother love, happy childhood, and the glorious communist future. More attention should be given to the local traditions of the Suvalkians, the Aukštaitians, the Žemaitians, the Dzūkians, and the Klaipėdians.

A central act must remain the giving of the name by the most authoritative person present while all present stood giving solemn attention. At the birth of the first child special recognition should be given to the new grandparents marking their transition to this new and important status. The event must become a children's festival with nursery, kindergarten, and primary school children present to read poetry, etc. (see Figure 3). It should hardly need to be mentioned that the certificates must be of beautiful design and in addition a

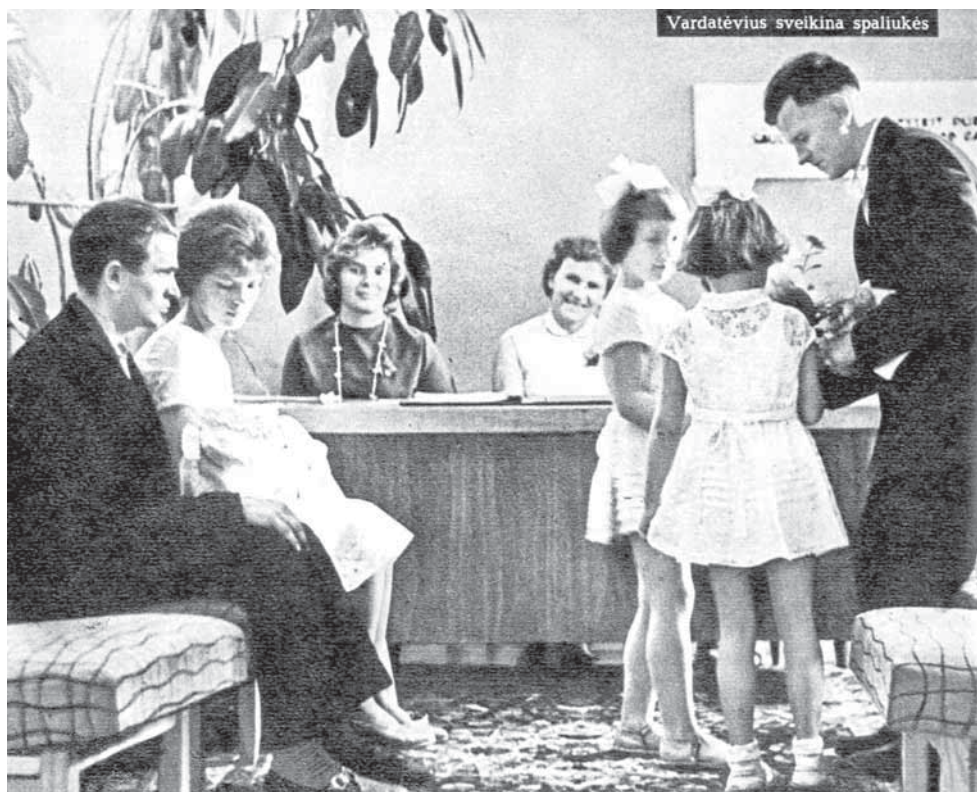


Figure 3. School pupils greet secular sponsors at the Civil Registry Office during the name-giving ceremony // *Vyšniauskaitė A.* Lietuvių šeimos tradicijos. Vilnius: Mintis. 1967

new ceremony should be added to the rite, namely the planting of a tree in honor of this new life. In this new society in which every man is a friend, a comrade, and a brother the sponsors are particularly important. They need not be blood relations, but from this point forward they must be always the closest of friends, like second parents to the child.

D. Gudelis stressed that the name-giving ceremony must be very different from the church's baptismal rite, for it represented the usurpation of the church's place in this important life event had now been accomplished. The church had always been the agent of exploiters, robbing the family of all its joy with the result that the birth of the child meant only more misery and another mouth to feed. Now the celebration was secularized, stripped of mystical significance, no longer a part of the church's commerce, but a true occasion of happiness and an expression of confidence in the communist future being created in Lithuanian society¹².

Although it spoke much about joy the methodical committee in its methodical examination managed to strain out and cast aside precisely those elements which gave joy to the occasion. In its opposition to any hint of mystical significance, it failed to take into account the important role of mysticism in the life of the people.

Continuing its anti-church offensive the Council of Ministers and the Central committee investigated closely the role of secular rites and the effectiveness of the work of the Central Civil Registry. From this investigation came the creation of a new organization in May 1963. It was called the Republican Council for Civil Registry Affairs. This committee of 15 artists, poets, architects, and other leading figures under the chairmanship of Juozas Banaitis, the minister of Culture, was charged to examine, create, and disseminate secular rites to be used throughout Lithuania in place of religious ones. Branches affiliated with the new committee were to be organized in all city and district executive committees throughout the country. Local branches were to consist of 5–7 members under the leadership of the local chairman. Among the official duties of this committee was to publish and distribute copies of a booklet written by D. Gudelis, entitled: *The Ceremony of Name-giving in the Collective Farm* (Lith. *Vardynos kolūkyje*). It was to be distributed with the directive that this ceremony was to be used everywhere and by all¹³.

4. The Local Variations in the name-giving Ceremony

The name-giving ceremonies were introduced into the heavily Roman Catholic regions at Telšiai and Panevėžys in 1963. The local official at Viešvėnai in the Telšiai region took the recommendations of the committee very seriously. All frivolity was to be banished when the stork led the solemn procession into the hall. As a part of the ceremony and in close connection with the giving of the name the candidate was solemnly exhorted:

You were born in an especially important time in which the free Soviet people are with their own hands creating a communist tomorrow. What lies in your future is majestic and joyful. A peaceful and friendly Soviet country will watch over your life and your sunny childhood. You must become a solid and faithful man who puts his hands, mind, and heart in the service of the people. Our country is waiting for your work, and we believe that you will not prove false.¹⁴

These words inscribed in beautiful red type on a special certificate were given to the parents to be kept and perhaps placed on the wall, as in earlier times baptismal certificates had been so placed.

At Velžys in the Panevėžys region the following words were read:

A man has been born. This is a cause for the greatest celebration in the immediate family and the larger family, for now into our community has come a new member of the communist society, a builder of communism. Whatever he may become, be it collective farmer, doctor, or engineer, our first responsibility is that he may be raised to be a fair and cultured man. Our generation is planting the foundations for the building of a magnificent communist structure. It is of great importance that the new masters of this building be a physically strong and beautiful people, people with a rich new worldview and a new attitude.¹⁵

In Velžys these words were printed in the book of honor, the registration journal which after the name-giving the parents were expected to sign. Although in the earliest period the child was not expected to be present in the name-giving ceremony in Velžys, it was later decided that he ought to be there because this would make the greatest impression of the assembly.

In order to see to the proper performance of the name-giving ceremony the Kėdainiai Committee of Civil Registry Affairs recommended that in each locality 5–9 members be appointed to plan the ceremonies and see that they were properly carried out. Only men of the highest reputation were to serve on this committee – among them the chairman of the local executive committee, the director of the culture house, the collective farm chairman, and party deputies. The committee was given the responsibility of publishing the new regulations concerning the name-giving ceremonies and to oversee their administration¹⁶.

5. The Evaluation of the Program by the Commissioner of Religion

In his 1964 report to Sniečkus, Chairman of the Council of Ministers Motiejus Šumauskas, and A. Puzin, chairman of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults in Moscow, Rugienis could report that people were now abandoning the church and religion and it was becoming necessary to provide them with suitable ceremonies which would celebrate and honor the author of all material and spiritual values. What resulted was a number of new ceremonies to fill the vacuum left by the abandonment of the ceremonies of Baptism, Marriage, Funerals, and the Remembrance of the Departed and their replacement with new ceremonies which celebrated socialist reality. Although these new ceremonies represented innovation, they were widely accepted in many places, Rugienis stated. As statistical support he noted that in the Kėdainiai region in 1958 there had been 1049 births and 1012 Baptisms, that is 96 percent of new born infants had been baptized. By 1963 the new traditions had taken root and of the 1191 births only 682 were baptized – a mere 57,5 percent. Although this was gratifying, it was not enough. It was only the beginning of work which still lay ahead. In 1965 a new edifice would be erected for the civil registry office in Kaunas in which a hall would be provided for the appropriate administration of the

new ceremonies. Included would be a cry room for babies fitted with sterile furniture and supplies and natural lighting. Artists were preparing special books for the inscribing of family genealogies and the adding of new names. Radio stations and newspapers would willingly see to it that the schedules of mothers and whole families would be rearranged to make their presence possible¹⁷.

In the wake of the appearance of the new name-giving ceremony came the development and introduction of a ceremony for the appropriate celebration of marriage in which God would play no part, as it was said. By the 1960's a large number of secularized Lithuanians, together with those who wished to receive special treatment and avoid job pressure, were being married in the registry offices of the larger cities. Now this secularized event would come to be ritualized. In his September 14, 1963 report Rugienis gave a detailed description of this new secular ritual. He stated that in Klaipėda 26 couples had been wed according to the new order. When the couple first arrived at the place where the marriage was to be performed, they were met by two girls in native costumes who greeted them cordially and escorted them to the spacious waiting room, decorated with flowers and mirrors. After a short wait they were escorted to another room where they were met by the head and assistant head of the department who politely asked them to give their names so that their documents could be found quickly. When the documents had been found they were quickly and efficiently prepared and asked to hand over their wedding rings so that they might be put on a special plate and taken to the place of the ceremony. When all was ready the young women in native Lithuanian dress escorted them into the nuptial hall. As they were led into the hall music could be heard in the background. Entering the hall they found it to be a light and airy place with no superfluous decoration. On one wall was the Lithuanian soviet coat of arms and the motto: "A strong family – the heart of soviet society." Before them was a long cloth covered table. On one side there was a vase of flowers with a woven runner of Lithuanian folk design. Before them stood a representative of the city executive committee and party deputies. The bride, bridegroom, and their attendants come forward and the bride and bridegroom repeated the solemn oath which was read to them by the representative of the local executive committee. They pledged their love, mutual respect, and faithfulness to each other and their hope for a long and successful life. The officiant now placed the rings on their fingers to symbolize their union. After the necessary papers had been signed the newly married couple and their party were escorted out again by the young ladies in native costumes. Rugienis described the ceremony as simple yet brimming with joy with smiling officials speaking encouraging words.

In Kėdainiai the ritual was made a bit more elaborate. Here the young ladies were accompanied by young man also in native costume. As the bridal couple was escorted into the nuptial hall several couples would precede them laying before them a festal runner which was then taken up so that when they left the hall after the ceremony it could be held above their heads. A special feature of weddings in Kėdainiai was the dancing of a Lithuanian folk dance called "Rezginėlė" to symbolize the coming together of the bride and her bridegroom. Rugienis reported that this special Kėdainiai service was very popular. It had been used only once in 1958, but in 1962 it was used 428 times. In that year only 47 couples married in Kėdainiai chose not to use the new service.

As a special feature the couple arriving to be wed were greeted by a brass band playing the wedding march by Lithuanian Composer Giedrius Kuprevičius. The hall was highly decorated by local designers and artists with a special lighting system and painted depictions of a wedding at a collective farm, a panorama of the city of Kaunas, and the bust of Lenin gazing down upon the oath takers. Rugienis remarked that this hall was such a success that young couples came from far and wide, even from far off cities to be married in Kaunas in this splendid wedding hall. He noted, however, that the situation was not yet perfect, since the shops often did not have what was needed to beautify the wedding hall and the taxi company was not always helpful in providing vehicles.

Rugienis also mentioned that many couples were coming also to renew their vows in this splendid palace, a practice which had been initiated in 1958. In one year alone 50 couples had come to renew their vows, many of them with their children and grandchildren while coworkers joined in the festive celebration bringing gifts to mark the occasion. It was usually recommended that the 10th, 15th, 20th, and 25th anniversaries should also be celebrated in this manner.

The next step was to take funerals out of the church and secularize them as well. Rugienis stated that this program had been a great success in Kaunas where 50 percent of the burials were no longer from the church. He provided one example, that of an 82 year old soviet farm worker from the Mažeikiai region. His funeral was not attended by celebrants with smiling faces offering best wishes for happy future. Instead, he noted, there was a brass band present which played sad songs as the mourners covered the grave with their floral tributes. Then those who had come repaired to a place where they could sit and discuss how important it was that there should be many more such services.

A somewhat irritated Rugienis had to admit later in this report that in some cases these atheistic funeral services did not go so well. In Pasvalys an aged communist who had repudiated religion died without the consolation of friends and there were few to follow his body to the grave and pay their last respects. Neither the chairman of the collective farm nor the local party secretary showed up. There was no brass band and few vases of flowers. His coffin was simply covered with dirt and the few mourners who had shown up left quietly. There were no organizations present to offer words of consolation. In fact the whole business was quite dismal. Local Christians could shake their heads and say “This is what happens when a man does not reverence the cross.”¹⁸ Rugienis had to admit that this was not an isolated incident in this region and that to his regret atheistic propaganda was suffering because of it. Of even greater concern to him was his discovery that in some places secular social organizations were not carrying out their responsibilities to provide proper services for the deceased and as a result Christians were jumping in and burying communists with Christian ceremonies. He reported several such intolerable situations stating that the church was using this as a ploy to counteract atheist propaganda.

He also noted that on All Saints Day and at cemetery feasts Roman Catholics and Lutherans respectfully remembered the departed. Here again the social organizations had failed to do their part by making any real effort to correct the situation. In 1962 advertisements appeared early in October in *Panevėžio Tiesa* noting that although the day of communist prosperity was dawning, the factories were working and the new buildings were

being constructed, still one thing was sadly lacking. Those who had gone to their graves after years of faithful service in the cause of communism, those who had built the factories and worked in them, those who had taught the young, and others like them who were now gone and were no longer a part of society, were being forgotten. It was not right that the dust of the ages should hide the memory of them. They must be solemnly remembered on the last weekend in October. On that weekend the whole community, factory workers, farmers, families, social organizations should gather in the cemetery to correct this situation. Rugienis reported that on that weekend the cemetery was swept, the graves were highly decorated, and large numbers of local citizens attended. On Sunday morning at 11 AM symphonic music could be heard on the loudspeakers. At 4:30 PM local communist dignitaries, including members of the executive committee and representatives of the young communists, gave speeches and led the throng in a moment of respectful silence. Rugienis claimed that this had a great impact on the whole community and that many more people participated than came a few days later to decorate the graves on the Christian feast. The fact of the matter was that the whole business had been carefully concocted by the local party and the attendance of workers was mandatory.

In those early days there was no common agreement as to when the communist remembrance of the departed should be held. It was commonly agreed that it ought not to be scheduled to coincide with Christian observances for fear that people would use the communist festival as an occasion to honor Christian dead. In Kaunas it was decided in 1964 that the observance there should be held on May 9, the Victory Day in the Great Patriotic War. Rugienis reported to Moscow that it had to be admitted that this was still a new idea and it still had not yet fully developed¹⁹.

6. Obstacles to the use of the Rites and the Commissioner's Reaction

The happy picture which he tried to paint depicting the substitution of simple sacral communist rites to replace Christian Baptism and other ceremonies lacked soviet realism. Within a few years even loyal communist authors were complaining in print about the dismal results of this secularization of rites of passage. The name-giving ceremony had become little more than an occasion for heavy drinking which often started in the hall but continued through the day and into the evening. Since the liqueur and glasses were not provided the people brought their own, and public officials and party deputies who refused to join in the celebration were not infrequently verbally abused and accused of lack of respect for the baby, the parents, the sponsors, and the celebrants. Marriage ceremonies were closely controlled, but after the signing of the certificates it was not always so easy for the officials to maintain control. Even the traditions often proved problematic. The person playing the stork was expected to act like one in the street clacking his beak and strutting about, but some of the storks decided to stay in character during the ceremony itself and even to start making jokes. Party officials had to issue stern warnings to remind the storks that their purpose was to entertain young children in the streets, not disrupt solemn ceremonies²⁰.

Much to the consternation of Commissioner Rugienis, the Roman Catholic Church went on the counter offensive. The church after all that had successfully resisted attempts

to russify the Lithuanian nation after the war. Now the priests began to dress young girls in native costumes. On January 28, 1963 Rugienis had to admit to Moscow and the Lithuanian Communist Party Central Committee that the Roman Catholic Church remained the greatest barrier to the party's work. It was the last remaining stronghold, bastion, and refuge of Lithuanian nationalism²¹. Now the cunning priests were even beginning to introduce Lithuanian costumes. Priest Vaclovas Grauslis of the Šiluva parish had managed to get a set of 12 of them, Priest Bulioka at Molėtai had no less than 20. Girls dressed in Lithuanian native costumes could now regularly be seen in church processions and in wedding ceremonies²². He had to do something about this and in his next report in January 1964 he declared that he had been successful²³. He threatened the priests with the loss of their registration if the use of such costumes continued.

In their decision to employ symbols and ceremonies usually associated with religious observances the communists had to move very cautiously lest they be accused of creating and sponsoring a new religion. Symbols and ceremonies might be useful in the transition to pure rational communism, but it was a dangerous transition because a people who were naturally religious could transfer to communism the kind of religious devotion they had previously given to organized religion. The communists took as dogma the words of Lenin warning against the creation of gods (Rus. *Богостроительство*). Some articles appeared in the early 1960's imputing to communism motives deeper than simply the creation of a better earthly life. This was quickly identified as a dangerous concession which would inevitably lead to the creation of a new religion²⁴. Building on the words of Khrushchev atheistic communism must eschew any positive value to religion. People did not need heaven, they needed sausages and communism would give them lots of free sausages. Man lives to eat and communism makes it possible for him to eat well.

The provision for alternative rites was by no means the major thrust of the attack on religion. Administrative control was still the principle force to be used against the churches. When Rugienis became commissioner in 1957 his inspectors reported to him that in many places even communist officials were secret Christians and received Christian rites behind closed doors away from public view. Their children were secretly baptized and they themselves were married before Christian altars. To Rugienis this was not merely puzzling, it was unfathomable. It simply could not be. In his 1959 report to Sniečkus and Puzin in Moscow he stated that in one place the wife of the head of the collective farm had died and had received Christian burial and to make matters worst young pioneers and young communists were told that they were expected to attend. To make matters even worse in many places party officials were not trying to counteract this but had assumed a neutral stance. This, Rugienis stated, was a major obstacle to the effective spread of atheistic propaganda²⁵. In 1964 he stated that what was even worse than reports of young communists practicing religion, was the report that many teachers had apparently lost their way and not only supported superstitious rites but even engaged in them themselves. It had been discovered that the teacher of music in the secondary school at Rumšiškės was also serving as the parish organist at Panemunė. When summoned to explain himself he stated that he did not believe in God, but what was important to him was his love of music. He did not want to admit that he had become a chameleon and that his "love of music"

was being used to spread religious propaganda, Rugienis stated. He went on to say that under no circumstances could a man who teaches in the school also serve the church in any way. To do so would be to give a bad example to his collective and to the children in his class. He reported also that 7 students in the Vilnius Pedagogical Institute had celebrated Christmas Eve together and as a result of their having been in church they came late to their lectures on December 25. He declared that such a report should make one's blood run cold. How could it be, he wrote, that when a young communist student at the Kaunas Polytechnic Institute died unexpectedly, his parents could not be persuaded to give him a secular funeral. To make matters worse, 18 of his fellow students, 15 of whom were themselves young communists, attended the Christian services and participated in the religious rites without raising any complaint. Have these men no principles? he asked. They should instead have supported the attempts of local teachers to insure that this would be a godless burial. Another young communist who was a student at the Agricultural Academy in Kaunas died and again in this case his classmates participated in the religious rites at his burial instead of protesting and insisting that there be only a secular ceremony. Again, in the Institute of Medicine in the State University of Kaunas, priests were allowed to mock freedom of conscience by burying two students with Christian rites. According to Rugienis all of these incidents showed that the freedom of conscience guaranteed by the soviet constitution was being violated. In 1964 he declared that such acts were ideological sabotage. Father Jonas Jatulis of Alizava parish lost his registration for 6 months for burying a student of the State University in Vilnius and preaching a sermon in which he slandered atheists, the Young Communist League, and secondary school teachers. Father P. Tavoras was given a reprimand for burying a young communist. In his case the penalty was not as severe because he had not preached a slanderous sermon at the funeral²⁶.

In his 1965 report Rugienis informed Sniečkus and Moscow what he thought to be the appalling failure of the education system to effectively indoctrinate the young. He went on to say that it was clear to him that the educators themselves were not sufficiently indoctrinated. In the eight grade school at Gedžiūnėliai the teacher Mozūra of the fine arts collective was also serving as organist in the local Roman Catholic Church. While it should be expected that his fellow teachers would dissuade him from such a rash and thoughtless action, what actually happened was most discouraging. When the school officials and teachers decided to put on a play in which a priest was portrayed as the chief villain, organist Mozūra announced that if this was done his fine arts collective would not participate in the production. He should have been removed from his position at once, but instead the administration and teachers caved in and the priest was written out of the play. Here, Rugienis said, there is indeed food for thought about the state of the Lithuanian schools²⁷. In his 1966 report he lamented that even the communists and young communists themselves were lacking in principles and had no stomach for a serious assault on religion. At the post graduation party of secondary school students at the school in Vilkija Priest Jonas Fabijanskas and his organist showed up at the party and spent the evening celebrating with the graduates and their friends. Rugienis was deeply disappointed that the teachers who were present at the party had not taken the opportunity to denounce the priest and insist that he and his organist leave at once²⁸.

As another glaring example of the failure of atheistic propaganda to stifle and extinguish the spirit of religion, Rugienis wrote on December 11, 1959 to Sniečkus and Puzin, that perhaps the time had come when it was necessary to carefully investigate all members of the collectives and others to determine whether they might in fact be religious people. Where followers of religion were found concerted effort would need to be taken to free them from the error of their ways so that they would become anti-religious. Furthermore, young communist organizations and trade unions must be examined and evaluated on the basis of how many people they had been able to dissuade from practicing religion²⁹. The party agreed. In a February 1, 1960 decree it declared that there had been far too little face to face confrontation with believers with the aim of converting them. Although there must be no outward force, persistence and cleverness must be the watchwords³⁰. This proved insufficient and by the end of the next year, on December 7, Rugienis wrote to Sniečkus that more a confrontational approach would need to be taken. The war against religion and religious people must be given more public attention both in party policy and in the public press. In workplaces the party must strive to develop negative attitudes toward religion and religionists. In other words, believers must be hounded and ostracized. By way of example when a school pupil is found to be a churchgoer, he should be held up to ridicule by his teachers and fellow students and publicly portrayed as a fool³¹.

Rugienis received statistical studies of the number of baptisms and marriages and found in them no source of comfort. In fact he became quite alarmed. In his January 1964 report to Sniečkus and Puzin he stated that there had been 33,883 baptisms in Lithuania. Since each one of those baptized children had two parents and two sponsors, one would need to multiply that number by 5. By this it could be seen that at least 135,532 Lithuanians were being influenced by religion and if that were not bad enough, 10,544 couples had recited their nuptial vows before Christian altars. Since each bridal couple consisted of both bride and a bridegroom, this number must be taken to be 21,088 and when one added to that a fact that there were at least four attendants to each bridal couple, that added up to no less than 84,352 people subject to the pernicious influences of religion. Clearly the battle against religion had not been won and efforts to stamp it out would need to be intensified (see Charts 1, 2, 3)³².

Although all official reports spoke in glowing terms of the great success of all efforts to secularize Lithuanian society, Rugienis had to admit privately that victory was a long way off. Statistics from Biržai region showed that of 112 pupils at the Suostas eight grade school, 25 attended church regularly. At Nemunėlio Radviliškis – 41 students, and at Papilys – 81 students attended church. Whether they attended only because their parents made them was neither here nor there. Whatever their reason for going to church, they were not becoming, active smiling pioneer and communist youths committed to the building of the new society. One could not say that the priests were failures. They were being successful in their efforts to cripple society. Teachers must work with parents individually to convince them that participation of their children in religious activities did great harm on every level. They must do everything in their power to correct this shameful situation³³. A year later Rugienis claimed that schools should strongly support the children who rejected religion against the will of their parents; he added the warning that

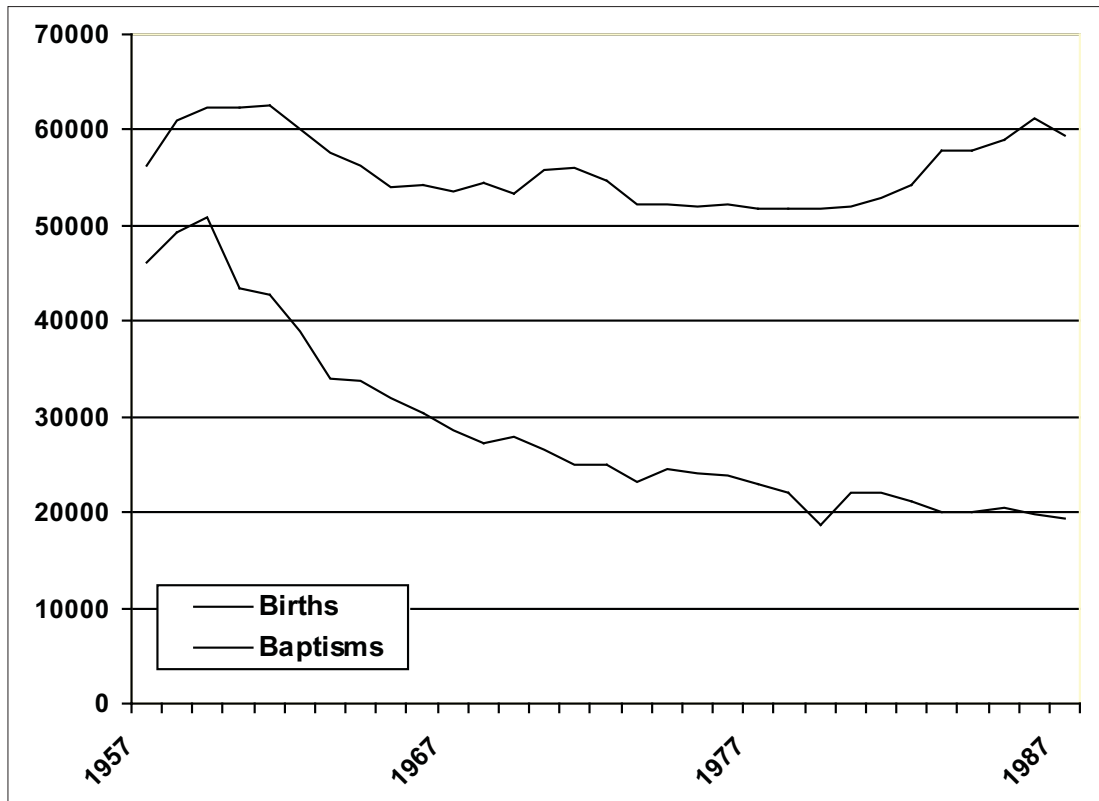


Chart No. 1. Lithuanian birth and baptisms compared, 1957–1987 (prepared by D. Petkūnas)



Chart No. 2. Lithuanian secular and Church weddings compared, 1957–1987 (prepared by D. Petkūnas)

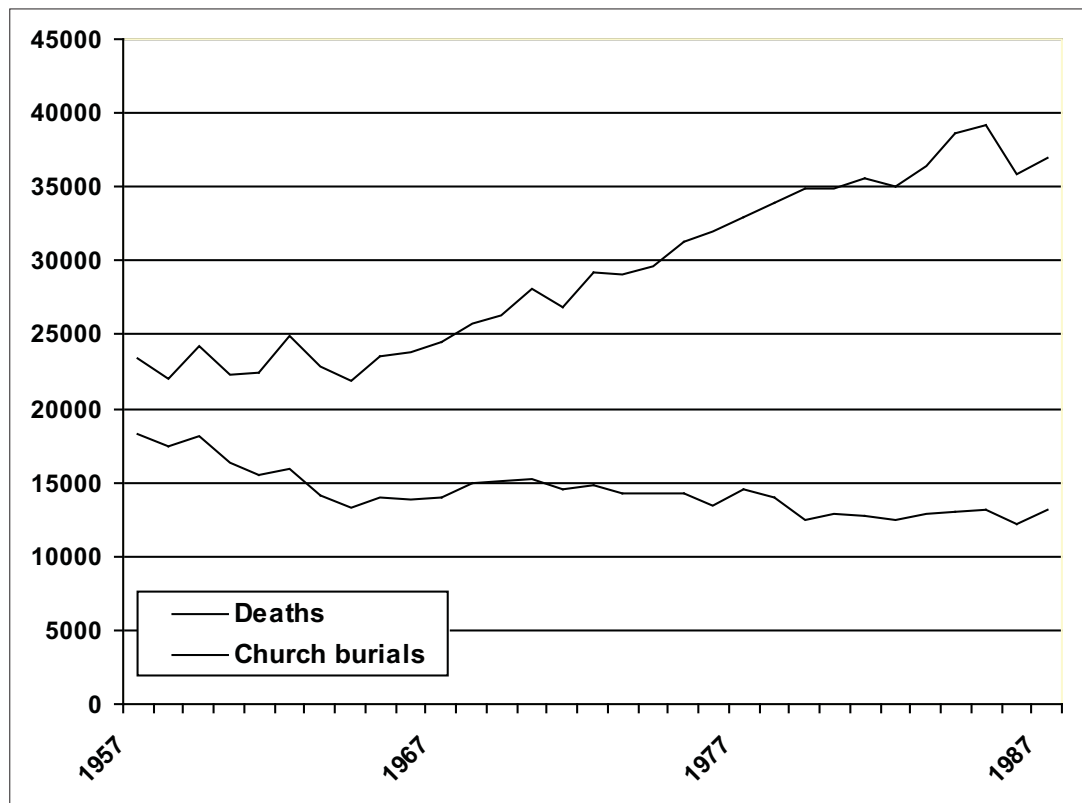


Chart No. 3. Lithuanian deaths and Church burials compared, 1957–1987 (prepared by D. Petkūnas)

religious leaders would not give up their power without a fight. They would do everything they could to keep their hold on men's minds and consciences³⁴.

The communists were looking for measurable success achieved in a hurry. Little thought was given to the erosion of character and disrespect for authority that would follow in the wake of their attempts to indoctrinate the young.

Conclusions

The introduction of the campaign to counteract the influence of religion by providing secular alternatives to the Christian ceremonies of Baptism, Marriage, and Burial was one among many elements in the second campaign of soviet communism against the Christian churches. After a period of relative calm following the death of Joseph Stalin, this second campaign began in earnest during the Khrushchev years.

Although the Lithuanian Communist Party was united in its understanding that such rites must be provided, it was not immediately clear how these rites should be constructed or performed. The soviets were not interested in providing metaphysical sanctions but did insist that the rites should assert and exemplify Soviet realism. What was important was the creation of a solemn mood through the considered use of inspiring art, evocative music, appropriately decorated halls, native costumes to provide continuity and national identity, and the culmination of the ceremony in the solemn giving of names, the taking

of oaths, and the giving of impressive certificates. As appropriate venues for such special activities, special Civil Registry Offices with spacious halls appropriately decorated for marriage ceremonies were constructed. It was understood that high local party officials and other authoritative figures should always make themselves available to participate in these ceremonies.

The success of this program was always limited. Many attended these ceremonies because they were forced to do so or feared confrontation. Others conformed outwardly because of the prospect of receiving some material reward for doing so. However, after dark or out of the public eye many of them remained Christians; in some cases even some party officials of lower rank had their children baptized in private ceremonies or were secretly married in the presence of priests, or requested the blessing of the graves of their loved ones by the Christian clergy.

The rites introduced during the Khrushchev years were constantly being adapted or reformulated. Through them some Lithuanians did indeed lose their connection with the Christian churches and accordingly it must be said that these rites did contribute to the achievement of some measure of secularization in a nation which continues to identify itself today as a Christian nation.

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SEKULIARIŲ PERĖJIMO RITUALŲ ĮVEDIMAS LIETUVOJE – KOMUNISTINĖS ALTERNATYVOS KRIKŠČIONIŠKOMS APEIGOMS

S a n t r a u k a

Nikitos Chruščiovo valdymo pradžioje Lietuvos komunistų partija suvokė, kad jos antireliginė programa nedavė greitų rezultatų, nes nepajėgė padidinti takoskyros tarp Lietuvos žmonių ir Bažnyčios. Pagrindiniu traukos objektu, siejusiu žmones su religija, partijos atstovai įvardijo religines apeigas.

1957 m. rugpjūčio 12 d. LKP CK biuras priėmė slaptą nutarimą „Apie mokslinės-ateistinės propagandos padėtį respublikoje ir jos pagerinimo priemones“. Be kitų antireliginių priemonių, nuspręsta išgyvendinti religines apeigas, sukuriant alternatyvius sekuliarus ritualus, turėjusius pakeisti bažnytinės krikšto, santuokos ir laidotuvių apeigas.

1960 m. vasario 1 d. LKP CK priėmė papildomą nutarimą „Apie priemones dėl bažnyčios įtakos silpninimo ir prieš dvasininkijos pažeidinėjimus tarybinių įstatymų apie kultus“. CK teigė, kad Bažnyčios įtaka visuomenei vis dar didelė, nes 1957–1959 m. bažnyčioje atliktų krikšto, santuokos, laidotuvių apeigų skaičius beveik nesumažėjo. CK kritikavo partines, tarybines, komjaunimo ir profsąjungų organizacijas, kurios šiuos svarbius žmogaus gyvenimo įvykius paliko Bažnyčios sferai, tad ragino kuo greičiau įdiegti alternatyvius sekuliarus ritualus ir ceremonijas.

1961 m. „Aušros“ kolūkyje prie Garliavos įvestos bažnytiniam krikštui alternatyvios apeigos. Jos pavadintos „vardynomis“, tai liudijo, jog vardo suteikimo ceremonija buvo ritualo kulminacija. Vardynose tėvai ir „kūmai“, vėliau vadinti „vardatėviais“, raginti dėti visas pastangas, kad kūdikis taptų visaverčiu komunistinės visuomenės nariu. Kartu įvestos sekuliaros santuokos apeigos, kurias siekta padaryti iškilmingesnes, pasitelkus liaudies tradicijas. Pagrindinė sekuliarių santuokos apeigų ceremonija – iškilmingos jaunųjų priesaikos. Sekuliaros laidotuvių apeigos nepasižymėjo ypatingomis ceremonijomis, bet svarumo joms siekta suteikti kviečiant dalyvauti komunistinių organizacijų sekretorius, kolūkių pirmininkus, pasitelkus gedulo melodijas grojusių pučiamųjų instrumentų ansamblius. Komunistinė pasaulėžiūra atmetė gyvenimą po mirties, todėl sekuliarose laidotuvėse buvo pabrėžiami velionio nuopelnai kuriant tobulesnę visuomenę. Šios sekuliaros apeigos ne visur pasižymėjo homogeniškumu ir pirmą dešimtmetį nuolatos tobulintos.

Religijų reikalų įgalotinio ataskaitos Religijų reikalų tarybai Maskvoje liudijo, kad šios apeigos ne visada praeidavo darniai ir iškilmingai. Kai kuriuose rajonų civilinės metrikacijos biuruose nusistovėjo paprotys po vardynų salėje vaišintis šampanu ir stipresniais alkoholiniais gėrimais. Pasitaikydavo net siūlymų išgerti ceremonijoje dalyvavusiems biuro darbuotojams ir partijos deputatams, o atsisakymas laikytas kūdikio tėvų bei vardatėvių negerbimu. Santuokos ceremonijos buvo griežčiau prižiūrimos, bet po jaunųjų pasirašymo jas kontroliuoti būdavo sunkiau. Per sekuliaras laidotuves retai dalyvaudavo pučiamųjų instrumentų ansambliai, partijos bei miestų vykdomųjų komitetų atstovai ar kolūkių pirmininkai. Laidotuvės praeidavo tyliai, be vietos komunistų moralinio palaikymo. Įgalotinis atvirai rašė Maskvai, kad tokiais atvejais „religininkai džiaugdavosi sakydami, jog tai laukia visų tų, kurie nenulenks savo galvos prieš kryžių“.

Iš sekuliarių ritualų Lietuvos komunistinėje visuomenėje populiarsnės tapo tik santuokos apeigos. Partija netgi pastatė ištaigingus civilinės registracijos skyrius, kuriuos visuomenė populiariai vadino „santuokų rūmais“. Vardynos taip pat tapo įprastu socialistinės visuomenės reiškiniu, bet neturėjo tokio pasisekimo, nes po vardynų tėvai dažnai slapta krikštijo kūdikius bažnyčioje. Nepopuliaros išliko sekuliaros laidotuvių apeigos. Nepaisant finansinės kolūkių ar miestų vykdomųjų komitetų paramos, jos netapo visuotiniu reiškiniu, nes sekuliaras laidotuvių apeigas tyliai smerkė krikščioniškas tradicijas išlaikiusi to meto visuomenė.

Įvedus sekuliaras apeigas dalis Lietuvos žmonių iš tiesų atitolo nuo Bažnyčios, bet, nepaisant visų Komunistų partijos pastangų, lietuvių tauta sovietmečiu neprarado savo krikščioniškosios tapatybės.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: Komunistų partija, sekuliarūs perėjimo ritualai, vardynos, krikštas, santuoka, laidotuvės, Bažnyčia.

KEY WORDS: Communist Party, secular rites of passage, name-giving ceremony, Baptism, Marriage, Burial, Church.

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