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Talonen, Jouko

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Йоко Талонен

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почетный профессор, доктор богословия
Хельсинский университет, факультет богословия
(Улриканкуйя, 6, Б, 41, Вантаа, Финляндия, 01400)
jouko.talonen@helsinki.fi

Положение Евангелическо-лютеранской церкви в Латвии и ее развитие с 1918 по 2018 г.: краткий обзор

В статье рассматривается история Евангелическо-лютеранской церкви Латвии (ELCL) за сто лет с 1918 по 2018 г. В период независимости (1918–1940) ELCL была церковью большинства населения, к которой принадлежало 55–57% жителей. Особенно отмечается период правления Карлиса Улманиса (1934–1940). В Советской Латвии в 1940 –1941 гг. и 1944–1987 гг. церковь охарактеризована как маргинальная религиозная группа, обладавшая только номинальной свободой вероисповедания. Отмечена роль епископа Густава Турса с 1946 по 1968 г. и его стремление сохранить церковь. Однако ELCL утратила свой статус: в 1987 г. церковь насчитывала всего 25 тыс. активных членов (около 1% населения Советской Республики). Автор отмечает проблемы, связанные с оценкой статистических данных. В последние годы правления коммунизма была реализована свобода вероисповедания, и с конца 1980-х гг. церковь получила новые возможности для своей деятельности. В плане богословия церковь заняла консервативные позиции, что выражено в прочных отношениях с Миссурийским Синодом и отказом от рукоположения женщин.

Ключевые слова: коммунизм, лютеранские церкви, рукоположение женщин-пасторов, конфессиональное лютеранство

Jouko Talonen

Professor (emeritus), Doctor of Theology
University of Helsinki, Faculty of Theology
(Ulrikankuja 6 B 41, Vantaa, Suomi, 01400)
jouko.talonen@helsinki.fi

Status and Development of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Latvia from 1918 to 2018. An Outline

The history of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia (ELCL) from 1918 to 2018 is analysed. During the first period of independence (1918–1940), the ELCL was the church of the majority of the population (55–57%). Quite positive was the period of the Kārlis Ulmanis's rule. In Soviet Latvia in 1940–1941 and 1944–1987, the church was a persecuted and marginalized faith community. Efforts of Gustavs Turs (1890–1973), the «Red Archbishop», didn't prevent the church decline. In 1987 the church had only 25,000 active members (about 1% of the population of the Soviet Republic). However, the straightforward estimation of the statistics if troublesome.

In the last years of communism, the church received new operational freedoms from the end of the 1980s onward. After Latvia became independent, the church's activities continued to develop. However, there was no return to the National Church. However, the ELCL's forms of work became more and more versatile starting in the 1980s. The Church's theological profile has been conservative. This has been seen, among other things, in its solid relationship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in America, and in the fact that the church has stopped ordaining women.

Key words: Eucharist, liturgy, reform, Bible, righteousness, Trinity

Introduction

My personal interest in the church history of the Baltic States lies in my undergraduate years. A student excursion into Soviet Estonia arranged by the Department of Theology at the University of Helsinki in the autumn of 1978 was my first visit to a Baltic country. It was in May 1984 that the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church came to my attention. A group of Finnish Lutheran pastors, who were members of the League of Finnish Ministers, visited Soviet Estonia and Latvia in order to gain insight into the ecclesiastical life of those countries. Our stay in Riga was a very brief one, constituting only the weekend of 12–14 May 1984. On Saturday evening, 12 May, Archbishop Jānis Matulis gave a lecture on the current situation in the Soviet-era Latvian Evangelical-Lutheran Church.

This visit to Riga sparked my interest in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Latvia (LELC). It eventually led to long-term research work on this subject. This article is very much a synthesis of many of my previous studies. It is practically the script of the presentation I gave in Riga in 2016, which was a compilation of the texts I published earlier. However, I have updated the article with small details and prepared notes so that the reader can also access the sources themselves.

My article is an overview of the main lines of development of the LELC from 1918 to 2018. As we know, Latvia became independent in 1918. In the following years, the Lutherans of the Latvian region broke away from the administration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia (Soviet Union). In 1922, the Church of Latvia received its own bishops.

My research goal is to create an overall picture of the status and development of the LELC in 1918–2018. I use the historical method and examine this problematic in a chronological context. My article is based on many kinds of printed sources, academic literature, and my own observations in Latvia which I have not identified separately. Basically, the article is based on my long research work concerning Latvian church history and on some of my previous publications[1].

[1] I wish to thank Ms. Eeva-Kaisu Törönen and Ms. Anna Ruokamo, who have in large part translated my texts from Finnish to English. I also thank Professor Mirko Hall (USA), who revised the introduction and summary.

Did Latvians have so-called People's Church in the 1930's?

The first period of Latvian independence (1918–1940) was characterized by the strong political, economical, and cultural political development of Latvian society. The post-war reconstruction work, together with a rising economy and living standard were combined with national fervour. Despite the fact that Latvian domestic policy was far from harmonious at the time, the country was experiencing the birth of a modern welfare state, at least in some respects. During its last years of independence (1934–1940) Latvia was ruled by President Kārlis Ulmanis but his totalitarian government did not interfere in the life of the majority of Latvians[2].

After the WWI the Latvian Evangelical-Lutheran Church (LELC) was established as the church of the majority in the newly independent republic. In 1930, 56 % of the Latvian residents were Lutherans, 24 % — Roman Catholics and 9 % — Orthodox. Lutheranism was particularly religion of the Latvians and Orthodoxy religion of Russians in Latvia. 92 % of the Lutherans were ethnic Latvians and 6 % — Baltic Germans. The majority, two thirds, of the citizens of Riga were Lutherans. The significant majority of the citizens in the largest Latvian cities were Lutherans: Valmiera (91 %), Cēsis (88 %), Jurmala (82 %), Tukums (80 %), Kuldīga (79 %), Jelgava (78 %), Ventspils (76 %) and Liepāja (65 %). Latgale province in Eastern Latvia was under the influence of Roman Catholicism. Consequently, only 11 % of the residents of Rēzekne and 14 % of the residents of Daugavspils were Lutherans.

Bishop Kārlis Irbe (1861–1934) was elected to lead the Church in 1922, whereas its German faction was led by Bishop P. H. Poelchau (1870–1945). Reconstruction work in the Church to overcome the devasation caused by the WWI was undertaken with great zeal, so that by the end of the 1930's altogether 26 church buildings had been built, 29 churches had been rebuilt and as many as 28 new

[2] Balodis A. Lettlands och det lettiska folkets historia. [Stockholm], 1990. 185–255; Mela M. Latvian historia. Helsinki, 1997. P. 57–87; Talonen J. Evangelical Lutheran theology in Latvia from 1920 to 1940. Rovaniemi, 2021. P. 8, 23, 107–108.

vicarages had been erected. New Lutheran congregations were founded in Latgale area, and also new churches were built for them[3].

The work of the Church was developed in all the sectors available to it throughout the period of independence. The internal development of the Church was not, however, free from conflict. One important cause of this strife was the inner conflict between the Baltic Germans and Ethnic Latvians. Many influental Latvian figures, the famous church-historian Ludvigs Adamovičs (1884–1942) being among the most outspoken, were in favour of stressing the national character of the Latvian Lutheran Church. In their opinion it was time to liberate the Church from the age-old image of the Church of the «overlords» resulting from the presence of the clergy of Baltic German origin. Another matter causing tension in the Church was its relations with the Catholics. When the Latvian government gave St. Jacob's Church to the Catholics in 1923, for use as their main church, the result was a pan-European Lutheran protest. The Catholic status was strengthened in some respects during Latvian independence, and in the province of Latgale the Catholic Church was the national church to a certain extent[4].

The third issue creating tension in the Church to a certain degree has to do with the teaching and research carried out in the Department of Theology. When the Department of Theology of the University of Latvia was opened in 1920, it lacked a chair in Practical Theology. The atmosphere in the faculty was strongly influenced by the liberal theology of German origin. The tension between the older ministers and those in favour of the new influence from Germany was evident. The Theological Institute founded by Bishop Irbe, which was also financially supported by the Church,

[3] Talonen J. From National Church to Ghetto. The development of the status and work of the Latvian Evangelical-Lutheran Church in 1938–1950 // Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift 2003. Uppsala, 2003. 157; Talonen J. Latvian kirkolliset vaiheet // Mela M. & Vaba L. (ed). Latvian historiaa ja kulttuuria. Helsinki, 2005. S. 150–151. On the life and work of Bishop Kārlis Irbe, see Lauciņš V. The right man in the right place. The role of Kārlis Irbe (1861–1934) in the formation and development of the Evangelical Lutheran church of Latvia, 1916–1928. Dissertation. [Helsinki], 2015.

[4] Talonen J. From National Church to Ghetto. The development of the status and work of the Latvian Evangelical-Lutheran Church in 1938–1950 // Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift 2003. S. 157–158.

was also training ministers to meet the needs of the Church in 1923–1933. Baltic German pastors were trained in the Theological Department of the Herder Institute in Riga. The result was that by the end of the 1930's the lack of pastors was diminishing because of the education of new clergy.

The policy of the Ulmanis government in 1930's was clearly in favour of the Lutherans, and it aimed at establishing their church as the National Church. Ulmanis himself was a member of the Bērze Lutheran congregation. In this respect, the attitude among the leaders of the Lutheran Church towards the State, as expressed by Archbishop Teodors Grünbergs (1870–1962) in an article published in the 1938 Church Calendar, speaks of sentiments favouring the State:

> God has blessed us wonderfully, guiding our State and nation, for which we are thankful for Him, not only in words, but also in our entire lives. God has given us State leaders and a government with foresight. The head of our State and the government support the Church and guarantee its autonomy...

During the Ulmanis period the role of the Church leaders, that of the Archbishop in particular, was strengthened. In legislation dealing with the Church passed in 1934 the power of the Archbishop was increased even further.

In this connection, one must bear in mind that many leading Lutheran theologians were strongly nationalistic. Adamovičs, mentioned previously, served as Minister of Education in 1934–1935 in the government led by Latvian Leader Kārlis Ulmanis. During Adamovičs' ministry, the position of the religious education strengthened in the national school system. A young and talented liberal theologian Dr. Alberts Freijs (1904–1968) was a devout supporter of the agrarian party and Ulmanis. Jānis Sanders (1858–1951) was a rather radical theologian of the older generation. Inter alia, Sanders was strongly pushing a certain reform of the religious cult, in which national elements were significant. He also considered the Old Testament as a «collection of the Jewish scriptures». Even though Sanders was sort of a lone wolf in the Latvian theologian circles due to his radicalism, the concept of the Latvian national church, related with strong nationalistic ideas, was vital. Especially young theologians, who had lately graduated particularly from the Department of Theology in Riga, were devout

supporters of the concept of national church. The Ulmanis' period boosted this concept for he wanted to build a government not only upon the pillar of strong leadership but also upon the ideals of home, religion and Fatherland[5].

Was then the LELC so-called People's Church (tautas baznīca) really in Latvia in the inter-war period? It is difficult, however, to evaluate the status of the Latvian Lutheran Church on the eve of the WWII. When 57 % of the 1.9 million inhabitants of Latvia in 1925 were members of the LELC, while 23 % were Catholic, the figures in 1935 were 55 % and 24 %, respectively. In 1938 41 % of the 36,386 Latvians born received a Lutheran baptism, 49 % of the 16,735 marriages were performed according to the Lutheran ceremony, and 45 % of the 26,703 who died were buried with the Lutheran rites. Thus, although a majority of the people were members of the Lutheran Church, less than half of the nation participated in the holy rites of the Church.

In some areas, however, such as in Courland, the participation of the people in Holy Communion was particularly strong. It is also noteworthy as far as the future of the Church was concerned that the Sunday Schools were quite well attended at the end of the 1930's. In 1939 Latvia had a total of 320 Lutheran Sunday Schools with 700 teachers and some 16,000 children in attendance. The religious instruction carried out in the state schools must also be mentioned. On the other hand one must not forget the fact that the Lutheran Church was defeated in the Latgale province, despite its new activism in that area. Most Latvians were participating somehow in the life of the church and its public image was favourable, especially during the Ulmaņis regime. I think, we can regard the LELC as People's Church of Latvian folk, also in the light of church statictics.

Great religious movements, such as the ones with large influence in Finland and Norway, were not strong in Latvia. However, the Herrnhutian tradition was still alive during the first period of Latvian independence. The old Herrnhutian tradition of Livonia was respected both in the LECL and in the Latvian society. This respect was related to a strong national ethos of the country, which had lately gained its

[5] Talonen J. From National Church to Ghetto. The development of the status and work of the Latvian Evangelical-Lutheran Church in 1938–1950 // Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift 2003. 159–160; Talonen J. Evangelical Lutheran theology in Latvia from 1920 to 1940. P. 102–103, 106–108, 110–117, 133–134, 146–148.

independency. For example, professor Ludvigs Adamovičs, the creator of the Latvian national church history, thought the Herrnhutian tradition had large influence on the birth of Latvian National Church[6].

Adamovičs emphasized that it was through Herrnhutism that the Livonian population became truly aware of Christianity for the first time; the movement was a crucial actor in Christianizing the people. The growth of Latvians into real Christianity (*īsta kristietība*) was the fruit of Herrnhutism. The superficial ecclesialism of the Baltic-German Herrenkirche and the sober doctrine of Lutheran Orthodoxy had not touched or moved the common folk[7].

The Church and Communism in the 1940's

The status of the LELC and the opportunities open to it were greatly diminished by the loss of independence in 1940 and also by the occupations of Latvia by the Soviet Union and Hitler's Germany. The period of the so-called First Soviet Occupation in 1940–1941 meant the introduction of Soviet policy on religion and the fight against religion in Latvia. The rapid withdrawal of the opportunities previously enjoyed by the Church was a «true shock treatment».

The German occupation from 1941–1944/1945 was easier for the Church, for the representatives of the Third Reich allowed the Church more freedom to carry on its work. The LELC took a position against the persecution of the Jews.

The Soviet policy on religion was put into action in Soviet Latvia immediately beginning in the autumn 1944. The Office for the Religious Affairs was first led by Voldemārs Šeškens and from 1948 onwards by Jūlījs Restbergs. The freedom of the cults, as they were called in Soviet legislation, resulted in significant restrictions imposed on the Church, which under German rule had not been restricted in doing its work. The situation that had prevailed during the «Year of Terror» in 1940–1941 returned, and the freedom of the Church was

[6] Ķiploks E. Dzimtenes draudzes un baznīcas. Lincoln Nebraska, 1987; Talonen J. From National Church to Ghetto. The development of the status and work of the Latvian Evangelical-Lutheran Church in 1938–1950 // Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift 2003. S. 160; Talonen J. Ludvigs Adamovičs as a Researcher of Livonian Herrnhutism // Letonica. 2016. Vol. 32. On Latvian Herrnhutism in the inter-war period, see Ceipe C. Latvijas brāļu draudzes vēsture 1918–1940. Dissertation. Rīga, 2010.

[7] Talonen J. Ludvigs Adamovičs as a Researcher of Livonian Herrnhutism Letonica. 2016. Vol. 32. P. 79–80.

stamped out with determination and extreme speed. While the German occupation authorities had allowed the Theological Faculty (College) in the University to work in 1943–1944, the Soviets chose not to allow any kind of theological research to be carried out in the University. The Lutheran Church did its best to protect its theological offspring by trying to promote the foundation of a Lutheran seminar, but these efforts were met with surprising difficulties. It was not until 1950's that the Lutherans were allowed to have a theological seminary of their own. The newspapers serving the Church were also shut down and the representatives of the Church were allowed to speak on the radio only if they proclaimed the political and social purposes of the State. The work on behalf of youth met with serious difficulties, and all missionary activities both in domestic and foreign mission fields were naturally out of the question. Active charity work (*diakonia*) was not any more possible in the society of the Latvian SSR.

The Church was able to continue its work in the church buildings and at the cemeteries, although this was strictly controlled by the authorities, the pattern being familiar also from other Eastern European countries. The forms of activity allowed to the Church were services, Bible teaching in the church buildings, holy ceremonies, visits by ministers to members of the congregations, and the cemetery gatherings charasteristic of Latvian Lutheranism (*kapu svētki*). The prohibition of confirmation classes in 1949 was a decisive blow, for despite the fact that the confirmation ceremony as such was not forbidden religious teaching directed at the youth faced severe difficulties. In addition, the Church was now forced to work in the middle of an anti-religious propaganda battle launched in the media, the theatre, and the school system. In the late summer and early autumn of 1949 for example, the battle against religion was fought by the authorities with particular forcefulness.

Besides these factors inherently resulting from the general Communist policy on religion, the status of the Lutheran Church in Soviet Latvia was furthermore influenced by other basic factors as well.

The German Latvians emigrated from the country almost entirely in 1939–1940, which led to the practical extinction of the German faction of the Lutheran Church. This meant that the Lutheran Church was, in fact, the Church of Latvians, when it was forced to face Communism. When the Russians began to flood into the country after 1944, almost all of the immigrants were not members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the proportion of Lutherans in the population declined.

The third circumstance paralysing the work of the Church was the flight of altogether 131 ministers (55 %) to Germany and Sweden at the end of the WWII. The Church lost its most distinguished leaders and the majority of the teachers in the Theological Faculty. Few ministers and theologians remaining in Latvia were constantly faced with imprisonment on the grounds of «anti-Soviet activity» and sentenced to prisons and concentration camps.Acting Archbishop Kārlis Irbe Jr. (1885–1967) refused to co-operate with the Communist authorities, and he, together with two other clergymen from the Consistory (Arturs Siļķe and Pauls Rozenbergs), were imprisoned in February 1946[8].

The «Red Archbishop» Gustavs Turs' church politics

Acting Archbishop Irbe and Deans Rozenbergs and Siļķe having been imprisoned, Rev. Gustavs Turs from the Alūksne Parish rose to the lead of the Church in March 1946. Turs, who had worked as the leading pastor in Bauska for a lengthy period of time, had a fairly conflicting public image from WWII times, but in this new situation he was a novel figure in the Soviet Latvia. A music lover and a bachelor with a relaxed manner in his private life, Turs was also a political opportunist and a determined personality with a lust of power. His lack of theological depth was compensated for by his acting talent, a gift sorely needed by a church in a perilous situation.

Turs was neither a Marxist nor a Communist, but basically a pragmatic Latvian nationalist with a realistic view of the situation and with an inclination for making the best out of difficult times ahead. His first and foremost actions in the leadership of the Church were to head the Church in the opposite direction in comparison to the

[8] Talonen, J. Church under the Pressure of Stalinism, the development of the status and activities of the Soviet Latvian Evangelical-Lutheran Church in 1944–1950. Dissertation [Oulu]. Rovaniemi, 1997; Zalite I. Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche Lettlands 1944–1990 // Junker J. (Hg.) Gelieben ist, was lebt und trägt. Stimmen aus der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche Lettlands. Lutherische Beiträge. 2000. Beiheft 2. S. 18–19.

policy Irbe had been following. Consequently, one of the first official tasks undertaken by the Consistory, which he led in the spring of 1946, was to organise a collection for the orphans of the Red Army soldiers at Easter in 1946. The circulars written by Turs expressed altogether different sentiments from those of Irbe, for he continually brought out his allegiance to the Communist state and deplored the destruction Latvia had suffered from Nazi Germany. Furthermore, under his leadership the Church initiated services on important Soviet holidays. Turs even subjected himself to be an implement of the Soviet policy termed «Fatherland Calling» (*Dzimtene sauc)* by publicly urging Latvians in exile to return «home». The liturgical attire Turs wore, a white alba with a red belt, created an impression of a «Red», left-leaning church leader, but the colours can also justly be seen to reflect the colours in the flag of independent Latvia.

Evidently, the image of the «Red Archbishop» which prevailed particularly in the West drew upon the «policy aimed at conquering the minds of the people» Turs adopted. This image was taken even further by the harsh administrative policy applied by him towards dissident pastors such as Hugo M. Grīvāns, the «Menace». Turs was, however, largely subjected under the line of action chosen by Voldemārs Šeškens in the goals of his policy on religion. These objectives resulted in a gradual weakening of the Church and in her being forced into a «ghetto», while the state, from the Communist point of view, simultaneously attempted to extract from the situation all possible political benefit, which could be gained.

The figures who gathered around Turs to form the new leadership of the Church were either «true Soviet men» or did not raise any objections against the official policy on religion, such pastors as Arvīds Kauliņš, Pēteris Kleperis, Gustavs Šaurums, and later, Alberts Vītols. One of Turs' aims was to ensure that the regional leaders in the Church, the Deans, were loyal to the System.

When he had gained his position as Acting Archbishop, Turs wasted no time in stabilising this place in the Church. He was supported in his efforts by Šeškens, as the Delegate on Religious Affairs was well aware of the differences between the policy adopted by Turs and those formerly followed by Irbe. Despite Turs'submission as an implement of Soviet power in the sociopolitical field, he did make, however, a continuous effort to seek more space for the

Church in the field of religious activity, while trying simultaneously to avoid open conflicts. His aim was probably the utilisation of his political image so that his political concessions, diplomacy and «political play» would gain as much as possible for the Church. Two of the directions took him are shown in his eagerness to establish relations with the Russian (Soviet) Orthodox Church and in his desire to present a smooth image of the situation in Latvia to the West.

1949 was a decisive year for the status of the Church. In 1948, the Synod had chosen an Archbishop and Consistory loyal to the Communists in an election, which had been manipulated by the Church leaders and the authorities. What is more, the secret police (NKVD, later KGB) had succeeded in forcing its way into the Church. The Soviet establishment had managed to subdue the Church politically and socially. In 1949 the Church was subjected to an exceptionally strong anti-religious propaganda campaign. The large-scale deportation of Latvians, involving large numbers of the farming population in particular, also dealt a death blow to the post-war partisan movement. Forced collectivisation of the countryside destroyed the independent farmers and owners of small farming estates. Clearly enough, all this was also detrimental to the status of the Church in countryside. Prohibition of confirmation classes in the summer of 1949 had also a significant effect on it.

The WWII had meant a thorough destruction of 42 church buildings, whereas 80 had suffered damages. The state appropriated churches for various purposes throughout the post-war era, but a surprisingly small number of churches and prayer houses were confiscated by the state immediately after the war. The Lutheran Church lost only 22 «cult buildings» from the autumn of 1944 to 1950.

Within a short period of time the factors mentioned above dealt a harsh blow to the status of the LELC and to its ability to function. The people remaining in the Church were now forced to act on their own in the difficult circumstances, for the new legislation on religion required all the congregations to reregister their members in the post-war period. Some of the former members who had been baptised before the war did not choose to register themselves, for active membership in the Church led quite often to social discomfort. The LELC had been forced into a ghetto, where it could exert very little political and social influence. Archbishop Gustavs

Turs even made an effort in the autumn of 1949 to defend the forced collectivisation of the land by resorting to phrases from the Bible.

The Cold War, the growing controversy between East and West, and the increased activity in the peace campaign of the Soviet churches did, however, give the LELC more latitude. Gustavs Turs began to lead the Church peace work with determination precisely in spring of 1950, when the situation of the Church may undoubtedly be characterised by the phrase «The times we are living in are troubled indeed!» the Church leaders spoke actively for the statement issued by the well-known Stockholm Peace Convention, which was also directed to the leaders of Lutheran churches in Finland and Sweden.

Although the peace work of the Church provided it with a certain kind of legitimate role in the society, all public and official recognitions was, naturally, out of the question. The National Church had been driven into a ghetto. The Communist authorities had not only managed to destroy its traditions: by disrupting the connection between the youth and the Church and by disturbing the work of the Church in various ways, the Communists were also hoping to destroy its future.

By the beginning of 1950 the Communists had achieved the goals they had set for their policy on religion in Soviet Latvia. The National Church had been destroyed, and the Lutherans were now, in fact, a small minority church, with a feebler effect on the nation and society in comparison to her previous potential. The Church had been forced into a fight socio-political corner, where she was no longer able to raise an open protest against the Communist rulers[9].

The Communist State fought fiercely against religion

Religious communities in Latvia were attacked strongly by the anti-religious propaganda orchestrated by the Communist State after the WWII. The battle was fought on many levels and open

[9] Talonen J. Church under the Pressure of Stalinism. The development of the status and activities of the Soviet Latvian Evangelical-Lutheran Church in 1944–1950; Talonen J. Gustavs Turs — Neuvosto-Latvian «punainen arkkipiispa» 1946–1968. Manuscript in the possession of Author. Sine anno; Zalite I. Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche Lettlands 1944–1990 // Junker J. (Hg.) Gelieben ist, was lebt und trägt. Stimmen aus der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche Lettlands. Lutherische Beiträge. S. 20–34.

public propaganda against the churches and the Christian faith was present in the papers, theatre, radio, and since the 1950's, in the television. Things reminding of Christianity were rooted out of the public scene. It is quite illustrative that the street near the Jesus Church in Riga that used to be called Jesus Church Street (Jēzus baznīcas iela) was renamed the Atheists' Street!

During the period of Stalinism (1944–1953), in particular, several clergymen were imprisoned and accused of anti-Soviet activity. Typically, they were sentenced to labour camps situated elsewhere in the Soviet Union, according to the well-known Article 58 in the Soviet Penal Code. The secret police also managed to enlist some Lutheran ministers as their informers. Despite the fact that some of the informers were double agents, trying not to harm the church, this grip that the secret police had on the church was particularly harmful for religious activities. As a result of the work of these agents, the trust the church had enjoyed among the nation as a religious organisation was damaged. Archbishops after the WWII were also in the close contact with the Communist state, as the church-politics of Turs showed. Especially in the West, there were allegations about the connections of Turs's successor, Pēteris Kleperis, to the country's security service. When Latvian KGB material was opened to the public in 2018, it became clear that the names of pastors Jānis Matulis, Ēriks Mesters, and even Kārlis Gailitis, who served as permanent archbishops from 1989 to 1992, were found on the agent lists. Of course, there is room for interpretation as to what this meant in practise at the time in question[10].

Great victories for the cause of the Communists were also the cases when some ministers of various denominations denounced their faith and proclaimed to be ideological followers of the only «true» party, giving the anti-religious activities weapons to work with. Still, many faithful Lutheran pastors served congregations with the Word and Holy Sacraments around Latvia. There were even cases that one pastor served seven congregations simultaneously, when two or three congregations were fairly typical of one clergyman's workload

[10] Talonen J. Risti sirpin ja vasaran puristuksessa -neuvosto-Latvian evankelis-luterilainen kirkko kommunismin vuosina // Mela M.(ed) Miehitetty Latvia. [Helsinki], 2007; Miezīte I. Arhibīskaps Ēriks Mesters // Lauciņš V. (ed) Luteriskā baznīca Latvijas simts gados. Rīga, 2012.

at the time. Some ministers were even forced to go from one congregation to another on foot, lacking all means of transportation.

The multi-level anti-religious battle in Soviet Latvia was fought particularly acutely in two waves after the WWII. I have mentioned before that a strong campaign against religion was launched in the late summer and early autumn of 1949.

After Stalin's death, in the middle of the 1950's, there was a short period, so-called «thaw», in the Soviet Union. When several of the deportees had returned to the Baltic countries from Siberia, both the Lutheran Church in Soviet Estonia as well as in Latvia began to experience new signs of activity. The small Lutheran Church in Lithuania was also rising to her feet to an increasing degree. Simultaneously, the winds of national Communism were blowing particularly in Latvia, and the reaction from Moscow came soon. Nikita Khrushchev, the new ruler of the Kremlin, terminated swiftly «the national Communism» in Soviet-Latvia in 1959. The Lutheran churches in the Baltic countries were national churches, and it seems the KGB had not been able to have them in its grip to the same extent as the Orthodox Church of Russia. This time, the Baltic churches were not ignored by the nation-wide atheist campaign.

Nikita Khrushchev's reign (1958–1964) was one of an exceptionally powerful battle against religion. The successes of Soviet space research as well as certain improvements in the living standards of the Soviet citizens gave the State more impetus in the battle. During the five year period of 1958–1962, a total of 35 anti-religious works were published in Soviet Latvia, with a combined number of the copies amounting to 220,000. The position of the church in society was also weakened by the fact that church holy days and festivals were no longer public holidays in Soviet Latvia, ever since the end of the 1940's. They were replaced by holidays with reference to the history of the Soviet Union. Christmas did, undoubtedly, remain as a public holiday still in 1944–1946, but from 1947 onwards it was only a festival of religious «cult communities». This meant that people could convene in the Christmas Night services but only after a normal workday. The strong Christmas tradition was, however, evidenced by the fact that churches were full to celebrate the most significant Christian festival. Youngsters and school children were taking a risk

if they went to the Christmas service, as teachers sometimes came to church to observe which of their pupils attended this «religious cult».

Ever since the end of the 1950's, a very important role in the battle against religion was played by the so-called alternative rites of passage in the transition stages of life. Communist alternatives were created throughout the Soviet Union, to replace Christian ceremonies. New mothers were given presents and they were also encouraged not to baptize their children. Instead, the mothers were invited to attend a «naming party». «Palaces for the new-born» were established in various parts of the Soviet Union, and «Youth Summer Camps» were meant to replace the confirmation. «Marriage Palaces» were erected throughout the vast realm. Ever since the first one of these buildings for registering civil marriages was opened in Leningrad in 1957, the position of the church marriage ceremonies was weakened also in Soviet Latvia. Church funerals were harder to replace, but it was also tried. Civil burials did gain some ground and plentiful vodka was common in the parties for the commemoration of the deceased.

One of the most significant festivals in the LELC was the so-called Cemetery Festivals held typically during the summer. The festivals gathered great numbers of people also from outside the parish activist circles particularly in the countryside. They could be seen as a kind of remnant from the old church of the Latvian nation and it is, therefore, no wonder that the authorities were keen to create a corresponding festival. A non-religious cemetery festival was, indeed, an occasion to commemorate the deceased but also one where poems were recited and Communist ideology was promoted[11].

During the Brezhnev era — from the mid-1960's until the beginning of the 1980's — the situation became settled. The religious communities in Soviet Latvia did not obtain any new room for maneuvre. Even though ministers were no longer persecuted to the same extent as before from the 1960's onwards, the battle against religion did continue, but now with a more subtle method. The new strategy was aptly described by Prolets Liepa, who led the Council of Religious Affairs in Soviet Latvia in the 1960's and 1970's. He commented to Hugo

[11] Talonen J. Risti sirpin ja vasaran puristuksessa-neuvosto-Latvian evankelis-luterilainen kirkko kommunismin vuosina // Miehitetty Latvia / Ed. M. Mela. S. 260–262.

M. Grīvāns, a vicar imprisoned on three separate occasions that «I am fighting against the church and religion in a manner that will not create any martyrs or raise too large an attention abroad».

The principles approved in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (the CSCE) in 1975, however, gave Soviet citizens hope of a better time. The well-known Soviet «era of stagnation» meant an increase in the international connections between churches. Exiled Latvian tourists and clergymen visiting Latvia, for example, brought not only consumer goods with them, but also spiritual and religious influences.

During the anti-religious battle of the Khrushchev era, a great number of churches were closed particularly at the end of the 1950's. At least 63 Lutheran churches were appropriated in 1958–1968. The symbol of Riga, the Cathedral, which had been the seat of the Archbishop, was confiscated by the state and changed into a concert hall in 1959. The 700-year-old St. Simon's Church in Valmiera was also made into a concert hall in 1964. Out of the approximately 300 church buildings that were used by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1944, less than a half (138) were in use in 1980. Altogether, approximately 90 Lutheran church buildings were closed during the years of Communism. From the point of view of building conservation, it was, in fact, fortunate if a «socialised» church, a «cult building», was turned into a museum or a concert hall, as was the case with the Riga Cathedral and the Valmiera Church. In those instances, these buildings had a chance of reasonable maintenance with the support of the state. Many churches were also under a special protection of the state as so-called architectural monuments (arhitehtūras piemineklis). The fate of several church buildings was, however, fairly tragic, as they were changed into restaurants, clubs, and museums of atheism, or even into factories.

Poor and ageing parishioners paid expensive rents and maintenance costs for the church buildings that the state had «relinquished» for them to use. Officially speaking, the churches of registered parishes were under the protection of state authorities, but they were also subjected to an astonishing amount of sheer vandalism. Young «fighting atheists» did not shy away from any means to show their aversion towards the Lutheran Church. It was sometimes the organ or the pulpit that was destroyed, whereas church windows were broken on other occasions. Even crucifixes and altar paintings could be vandalised. The official view was that these were criminal acts, but the exiled Latvians, at least, were of the opinion that such acts were committed under the direct protection of the state. The Communist society had many levels, and this is why one section of the society was unaware of what another section was doing.

Several churches also faced fires at the end of the 1960's and in the 1970's, for example the churches in Iecava (1968), Vārme (1968), Liepupe (1971), Rūjiena (1974) and Ģipka (1979). It is revealing that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sweden offered financial assistance for the restoration of the Rūjiena Church, but it was not allowed. The responsibility for the renovation and maintenance of churches was a burden for their parishioners throughout the Soviet era. Many of the churches in use were hard to renovate and their condition continued to weaken.

Pastor of Jaunjelgava parish Mārtiņš Kārtiņš (1866–1968) fought the current. His parish built a new Lutheran «cult building» in 1957, with a tower added to the building in 1960. Vicar Kārtiņš was a good construction worker himself and he actively participated in building the church. This church is presumably the only known Lutheran church building constructed in post-war Soviet Latvia. Kārtiņš, who lost his sight in his old days, was also, it is told, still able to conduct services without needing to resort to reading from the prayer book at the age of over 100 years[12].

The destruction of the national church

How did the Communist state succeed in achieving the targets of its policy on religion? It was able to demolish the national Lutheran church and to close it into a ghetto, but it did not succeed in destroying the Christian faith. When the pre-WWII Lutheran Church of Latvia had 55 % of the population as its members, and, thus, the church could be regarded as the national church, the situation was drastically changed immediately after the war. This resulted not only from the political

[12] Küng A. Lång väg till frihet. Örebro, 1979. 126–129; [Čuibe L.] Dessa ruiner anklagar. Stockholm, sine anno; [Čuibe L.] These Ruins Accuse. Stockholm, sine anno; Talonen J. Risti sirpin ja vasaran puristuksessa-neuvosto-Latvian evankelis-luterilainen kirkko kommunismin vuosina // Miehitetty Latvia / Ed. M. Mela. S. 262–265.

and religious-political factors, but also from the wide wave of refugees and particularly the deportations in March 1949. The forced collectivization, which was finalised in 1949, meant that the population and economic structure of the countryside traditionally loyal to the church was now changed, weakening the position of the national church immediately. The church had 200,000 registered members in 1948. The figure was 11 % of the entire population of Soviet Latvia (7 % in Riga). By 1950, the Communists had succeeded in destroying the national church and driving it into a social ghetto.

In 1962 — in the middle of Khrushchev's active anti-religious battle — there were a little over 38,000 members in the church, which amounted to less than a fifth of the number in 1948. When Turs resigned from office in 1968 the number of members was counted to have been 52,000. 77 % of them were residing in the countryside. The hold of the church on the population weakened also as a result of the industrialisation and population policy of the Kremlin. The industrialisation and construction of Soviet Latvia brought vast numbers of Russians, Ukrainians, and White Russians to Latvia, and these people were outside the Lutheran parish life. The church had no chances of responding to the challenge of the times in the big cities like Riga and Daugavpils. All evangelisation was forbidden and new churches could not be built in growing suburbs, whereas old churches were being appropriated continuously.

The youth was difficult, often impossible, to reach by the church, as a result of atheist education and the restrictions on confirmation school and youth work. Despite this, parents were able to raise their children in a Christian manner, but the chance to do this was mostly used by the «true believers» only, who also took the risk of becoming outcasts of society, to some extent. The prohibition of the confirmation classes issued in 1949 went into effect as early as in 1950, and the number of participants between 1948 and 1950 decreased by 49 %. Finally, the Lutheran Church in Soviet Latvia confirmed only 205 young people in 1968, when 30 years previously the figure in the Lutheran Church in independent Latvia had been 11,235 persons. Thus, the numbers of the confirmed had decreased by 98 % in thirty years.

Tabl. 1 presents the percentages of the baptized out of the births in Latvia and in Soviet Latvia in certain years, and the percentages

of Lutheran marriages out of all marriages, and those of Lutheran fune rals out of the numbers of all the deceased in 1938–1962.

Tabl. 1. The percentages of participants in Lutheran church ceremonies for each target group in Latvia (Soviet Latvia) in 1938–1962

Year	Baptisms out of birth	Lutheran marriages out of all deceased	Lutheran funerals out of all marriages
1938	41	49	45
1946	24	12	34
1947	22	16	29
1948	24	13	29
1949	20	10	27
1950	17	8	26
1952	10	4	19
1954	13	6	21
1958	14	7	21
1962	3	1	7

The direction of the development does clearly show the fierce anti-religiousness of the *Khrushchev* era as well as the effect of the Communist rites of passage. The direction of the development is known also elsewhere in the Soviet Union. The marriage ceremony was the church ceremony to weaken the most. Church funerals had the strongest position, for the dead had nothing to lose.

Thus, the Communist dictatorship left an active inner circle in the church, more or less «a church of true believers». At the end of the Soviet era, in 1987, only remnants of the majority of the people were now in the former church of a nation, 25,000 members. One joke of the Soviet era described a sardine as a whale that had undergone Socialism. «The Soviet Treatment» had formed the Lutheran Church of the Latvian nation into a tiny church of a minority of an approximately one percent[13].

The significantly empoverished sphere of the church is also evident from the fact that publishing activities could be only very

[13] Talonen J. Risti sirpin ja vasaran puristuksessa-neuvosto-Latvian evankelis-luterilainen kirkko kommunismin vuosina // Mela M. (ed.) Miehitetty Latvia. S. 267–269.

scantily carried out during the Communist era. The opportunities to publish religious literature for the use of the nation were quite limited until the end of the 1980's.

The only nearly regularly published item from 1947 onwards was the annual church calendar (*Baznīcas kalendārs*). The book was published for 1947, 1948, and 1951, and regularly from 1954 onwards. Together with a general calendar, it contained obituaries of deceased ministers, reviews of the church activities, and various religious-theological writings. Besides the calendar, the church was allowed to publish also a church wall calendar from 1947 onwards.

A new hymnal with 5,000 copies was allowed to be published in 1954. The hymnal was, however, renewed according to the spirit of the times. The hymn written by the reformer Martin Luther, «A Mighty *Fortress* Is *Our God*», no longer had the verses about the battle between God and the Devil. New hymns of «peace and work» had been added. A reprint of the hymnal appeared in 1961. The combined New Testament and the Books of Psalms were also published with 5,000 copies in 1960. To celebrate the 500th anniversary of the birth of Martin Luther, a 16-page issue of the Catechismus Minor was published in 1983. Besides these, before the turn that happened at the end of the 1980's, the church was able to publish the Archbishop's Circulars at Christmas and Easter, together with informative circulars and occasional hymn leaflets.

The numbers of the books printed for the use of the church were, naturally, entirely unadequate for the true needs. While the religious press and religious-theological literature had flourished during the era of Latvian independency, the situation was now quite different. The state tried to drive the church into a corner where it would be unable to influence the public opinion. The state media did not broadcast any particularly religious programmes[14].

International contacts of the church

I have already written that it was in the spring of 1950 when Archbishop Turs and the leaders of the Church of Latvia initiated a period of peace activism which was more determined than

[14] Luters M. Mazais Katķisms. Rīga, 1983; Talonen J. Risti sirpin ja vasaran puristuksessa-neuvosto-Latvian evankelis-luterilainen kirkko kommunismin vuosina // Mela M. (ed.) Miehitetty Latvia. S. 270–271.

previously. The World Peace Council established in 1949 and led by Communists was fairly active in the West, and it was meant to engage also Leftist intellectuals, «progressive» Bourgoisie, and naïve church activists to aid the Kremlin in its foreign policy goals. The anti-nuclear weapons declaration issued by the Peace Defenders Conference held in Stockholm in 1950 was a kind of flag, blazing in the wind, around which the Communists wanted to gather people. Turs appealed to the Archbishops of the Lutheran Churches of Sweden and Finland, so that they would sign the declaration. Turs also participated in a peace conference in Moscow in the autumn of the same year.

A great peace conference of all the churches and religious communities of the Soviet Union was arranged in Moscow in May 1952. Turs spoke there praising Stalin's peace policy and the accomplishments of the Soviet State, not forgetting to mention the Underground of Moscow. According to the Archbishop, the children in North Korea were suffering from the consequences of the aggression politics of English and American imperialists.

The Moscow Conference, held in 1952, was revolutionary in a way because in the conference Turs met Erwin Kock, a reverend of the Reformed Church in Austria. Via Kock, new possibilities of contacts were opened between the West and the Soviet Latvian Lutheran Church. Turs was also selected for a member of the Soviet Latvian Peace Committee, and peace services were held throughout churches in Latvia. Undoubtedly, the fear of an atomic bomb and the intensified Korean War spurred Soviet peace propaganda. And now the Soviet authorities wanted to harness churches into this propaganda work.

He was offered a particularly suitable forum for his efforts by the Prague Christian Peace Conference, which began its work at the end of the 1950's. As generally acknowledged today, the Prague Conference was a forum heavily flavoured by the Communist ideology, and as such, one representative of the long arm of the Soviet foreign policy.

The immediate post-WWII period was mostly one of isolation for the Latvian church from the rest of Christianity. The connections of Latvians to foreign churches were opening to a wider extent in the middle of the 1950's. The short period that followed Stalin's death enabled wider connections for Soviet church leaders, and even visits to the West. Thus, Turs visited Great Britain in 1955 and the United

States the following year. The attitude of the exiled Latvians towards Turs was very negative, particularly during the most intensive years of the Cold War. When Turs visited the United States for the first time in 1956, he was faced with demonstrations orchestrated against him by his fellow countrymen.

Delegations from foreign churches began to arrive in Riga. Relations were also created with the German states, Denmark, and Sweden. The delegation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland visited Riga for the first time in the winter of 1964.

The international connections made it possible that the LELC joined the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) at the beginning of the 1960's. From the very beginning the LELC also participated in the work of Conference of European Churches (CEC).

Archbishop Turs participated in the LWF conference in Helsinki in 1963. The exile church found it hard to take the fact that her sister church behind the Iron Curtain was the member of these international organisations, but the situation gave the Church in Soviet Latvia more room to breathe. Another matter is how the Soviet Union used these channels to promote its foreign policy and its «peace work». The role of the WCC in international politics in particular was fairly problematic and downright insulting from the point of view of the active Christians residing behind the Iron Curtain. It is interesting how easily the representatives of Eastern European and, naturally, Soviet, churches were able to influence the declarations of the WCC dealing with international politics and social issues specifically in the 1960's and 1970's[15].

[15] Konferenz aller Kirchen und Religionsgemeinschaften in der USSR zum schutz des Friedens. Zagorsk Troize-Sergijewo-Kloster 9.-12. Mai (Materialen). [Moskau], [1952]. S. 9, 22, 41–44, 192–200; Masītis M. A Half century of struggle for the Lutheran church of Latvia (1941–1991). A Treatise Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master of Theological Studies. Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary. St. Catharines, Ongtario. 1999. P. 60–62, 74–79, 123–127; Malkavaara M. Kahtia jakautuneet Baltian luterilaiset kirkot ja Luterilainen maailmanliitto 1944–1963. Helsinki, 2002. S. 119–120, 122, 126; Mankusa Z. Over the Iron Curtain. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia Meets the West // Journal of Baltic Studies. 2006. Vol. 3. P. 314–317; Talonen J. Risti sirpin ja vasaran puristuksessa-neuvosto-Latvian evankelis-luterilainen kirkko kommunismin vuosina // Miehitetty Latvia / Ed. M. Mela. S. 271–273.

Besides the international alliances of churches and the diplomacy of the great Western churches, there were also instances of east policies of a different kind in the West. Certain foreign parties with evangelical and free church backgrounds did try to support the religious life of the grassroot level of the churches in the East by, for example, smuggling Bibles to the Soviet Union. The International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC) was founded by small Protestant churches to be a counterpart of the WCC and the council lobbied for the situation in the churches in the Soviet Union and elsewhere in the Eastern Europe. As early as in the 1950's, its chairman Carl McIntire, Dr. Theol., from the USA, brought the connections that the Russian Orthodox Patriarch Nicholas (Nikolai) had with the KGB to the attention of the public. The exile church of Latvia began to have relations with the ICCC in the 1960's. Rev. Roberts Slokenbergs, an exiled Latvian theologian, was in his youth well-known from his exceptionally liberal attitudes, but later, after the WWII was active in the UK (England) feeling great interest towards the work of the ICCC.

It is clear that the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Soviet Latvia had little room for independent manouvres in these international connections. Peace work and the opening connections with foreign countries did, however, give the church some room to move in the grip of Communism. The theological price of the peace work was, of course, high. The church was not able to present independent viewpoints in the matters of war and peace. It did agree to sing the songs composed by Moscow. Theologically considering, the most problematic fact was, perhaps, that the church was forced to reject part of its missionary responsibility among the Latvian nation when it adapted to the religious-political limitations imposed upon it. We can call this realism in church policy, but it is probably unnecessary to belittle the religious and theological problems involved in the situation[16].

The heritage of Gustavs Turs

The era of Archbishop Gustavs Turs (1946–1968) meant heavy depreciation for the LELC, the national church of Latvia. The sta-

[16] Talonen J. Risti sirpin ja vasaran puristuksessa-neuvosto-Latvian evankelis-luterilainen kirkko kommunismin vuosina // Miehitetty Latvia / Ed. M. Mela. S. 273–274. On Dr Carl McIntire, see Ruotsila M. Fighting Fundamentalist. Carl McIntire and the Politicization of American Fundamentalism. Oxford, 2016.

tistics presented earlier illustrate that Church had lost its connection with people and especially with the youth even more and more, when coming to the 1960's. However, Turs was able to maintain the organisation of the Church and create international connections.

How should one evaluate Turs' actions, personality and survival strategy? First of all, based on my research, I'm convinced that despite all of his appearances and speeches, Turs was neither a Marxist nor a Communist. He was «the Red Archbishop» due to his liturgical outfit. Deep down he was a nationalistic Latvian bourgeois man who tried to save what there was to save with his own strategy avoiding martyrdom and open conflict with Communists. He was an extreme diplomat, a talented actor and perhaps a sly fox of some sort.

As a guiding light for Turs was the attempt to maintain and save what was possible in the prevailing circumstances and avoid open conflict with Communists. He tried to make the most of every single opportunity, which might have brought even slight new opportunities for the Church. However, when exploring new opportunities, Turs was extremely careful because he was also a realist who was able to see the realms of possibilities. He couldn't have afforded to end up in an open conflict. Because politically he had no sovereignty, he agreed to act as a puppet for Communist propaganda to have at least a little bit greater self-determination. However, the grip was choking all down the line. Of course, Soviet authorities saw through this church-political game, and they were not fully satisfied with his actions. The description about Turs, dated 1963 and written by Prolets Liepa, who led the Council of Religious Affairs in Soviet Latvia, is enlightening:

An active Church employee, a known bourgeois nationalist by his background, a clever person. Playing a political game against Soviet Government aiming to extend and strengthen the Church...

To his surprise perhaps, Turs encountered open opposition also within the Church, in the Consistory. The opposition rose up against Turs, and he was forced to retire in 1968; though when retiring in 1968, he was already 77 years old.

When studying Turs' actions from the theological point of view, the hardest issue is to what extent Christian church can restrain her own missionary duties and in the meantime agree to act as an instrument of totalitarian ideology when it comes to political issues. Pastor Hugo M. Grivāns, the three-times-imprisoned opponent of Turs, was in the opinion that Latvian Church should not obey the commands of «the ones who denied God». If Church acted as a brave and sincere church, Communists would have been left without scope for action, because in reality they wanted to avoid martyrs. As for Turs, he was in the opinion that going against the Communists in power was no use because eventually it could lead to an opposite result: to closing down all churches. According to Turs, Church should have been satisfied with being able to hold services. The theological differences concerning to the fundamental basis of the Church can be seen in these divergent attitudes between pietistically oriented Grivāns and Turs[17].

Why were the Soviet authorities able to erode the Latvian National Church?

When Turs retired from office in 1968, the LELC was living in a ghetto. His first successor, «a man of the system» called Pēteris Kleperis, was in the office in the spring of 1968 for a short time. After Kleperis, Vicar Alberts Freijs, a former professor, filled the post as a temporary Archbishop. Freijs had been a member of the opposition against Turs' church regime in the 1940's, and he had also been imprisoned. Freijs was one of the most significant philosophers of religion in Latvia, but he died soon, at the end of 1968. He was succeeded in office by Jānis Matulis in 1969–1985, and Ēriks Mesters in 1986–1989[18].

Jānis Matulis succeeded Pēteris Kleperis in the office of Arcbishop. Compared to bohemian Turs, Matulis received a better reputation in the West. Matulis expanded international connections of the Church and developed the education of pastors. However, church-

[17] Küng A. Lång väg till frihet. Örebro, 1979; Küng A. Latvian vainottu pappi. Helsinki, 1979; Talonen J. Gustavs Turs — Neuvosto-Latvian «punainen arkkipiispa» 1946–1968. Manuscript in the possession of Author. Sine anno; Zalite I. Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche Lettlands 1944–1990 // Junker J. (Hg.) Gelieben ist, was lebt und trägt. Stimmen aus der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche Lettlands. Lutherische Beiträge. S. 29–31.

[18] Mesters Ē. Latvijas evaņģēliski luteriskās baznīcas vēsture (1944–1990), Rīga, 2005. S. 163–201; Talonen J. Risti sirpin ja vasaran puristuksessa-neuvosto-Latvian evankelis-luterilainen kirkko kommunismin vuosina // Miehitetty Latvia / Ed. M. Mela. [Helsinki], 2007. S. 260.

politically he didn't deviate — and due to political reasons wasn't even able to deviate — from the policy of his predecessors. The Church was still tightly in the grip of the Soviet system[19].

It is the future church historians' task to analyze elaborately *why* the Soviet government was able to cripple the Latvian National Church. I will highlight some points, which can be explored by the future critical church historians. Firstly I would pay attention to the fact I have already mentioned: from the very beginning of the 1940's, the development of Latvian population and infrastructure stopped serving the means of the Lutheran Church. Secondly, anti-religious propaganda was exceptionally heavy especially in the turn of the 1950's and 1960's. The anti-religious propaganda, launched by the government, used the black spots of the church history, the Crusades, the Inquisition and Galileo Galilei, for example, to slander the Church. It was hard for the pastors to defend the past actions of the Church. It is also notable that the Communist regime made shameless use of the results of the historical-critical exegesis to propagate their anti-religious ideology. Considering the theological thinking represented by most of the exegetes of the University of Latvia in the inter-war period, it may be so that even some pastors were receptive for this type of propaganda[20].

Docent *Ugis Sildegs* has researched on the most influential dogmatician of the post-war Soviet Latvia, Nikolajs Plāte (1915–1983). *Sildegs* has paid attention to the fact that there was resistance in the Church against using the material tinged with liberal theology in the seminaries during the Soviet era. Some thought using this material rather rolled back the religious-theological status of the Church in the Soviet society than boosted it. Teacher of dogmatics in the LELC Seminary, pastor Plāte, for example, was worried about the biblical-theological

[19] Masītis M. A Half century of struggle for the Lutheran church of Latvia (1941–1991). 1999. S. 148–150; Ohff-Mancusa Z. Erzbischof Jānis Matulis — ein Leben für die Kirche und die Ökumenie im Sowjetischen Lettland // Wittram H. (Hrsg). Kirchliches Leben und die Theologie in den baltischen Gebieten vom 16. bis 20. Jahrhundert. Zwölf Beiträge zum 21. Baltischen Seminar 2009. Lüneburg, 2011. S. 350–353, 359–363, 373–374; Miezīte I. Arhibīskaps Ēriks Mesters // Luteriskā baznīca Latvijas simts gados / Ed. V. Lauciņš. Rīga, 2012. S. 115.

[20] Talonen J. Historical perspectives to the development of the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church untill today. The presentation in the fifth Theological Conference under the Porvoo Agreement in Riga (Latvia) on 19 Oct 2016. Un-printed presentation in the possession of Author.

development of the Church. Instead of traditional liberal authorities, he based his way of thinking upon Karl Barth, among others.

Due to Docent *Ugis Sildegs* I have paid attention to two other important points, which are supported also by my own studies. From the viewpoint of the population, the continuous giving in and adapting to the Soviet system made the Lutheran Church look like a Soviet Church. The Lutheran Church started to seem unreliable among the people, unlike the Baptists, who were religiously more independent, for example.

The Latvian National Church had built its identity upon pillar of national ethos. So, it must be also noted that it was mentally hard for the Latvian National Church to suddenly adapt to the Soviet system in the first place first in 1940 and yet again in 1944–1945. Theological identity of the Church had been built upon the pillars of the independent Latvian nation and being a Latvian. The Communist system, for its part, was built upon the pillars of the multinational state and the Soviet Union. The national church ideology didn't work anymore the way it had once worked. If in the 1930's the Church had kept the theologically more independent course selected by her first bishop Irbe, she might have been able to face the Soviet system as confessing Christian (Lutheran) Church in Latvian SSR instead of as the Latvian National Church. Even though the status of the National Church was destructed surprisingly fast, the Church still operated as they had operated in the pre-war situation. In this connection it must be highlighted that as far as is known, there was no so-called underground church among the Lutherans. Thus, unlike many Baptists and Pentecostals in the Soviet Union in general, Latvian Lutherans did not favour active resistance[21].

On the other hand, the development proved that the majority of the members of the Church have not found the personal Christian faith, after all. For them the Church had represented a national, cultural and social institution without any deeper avowing themselves to Christian faith. To compare, one could also ask why

[21] Sildegs U. Theology in the ghetto. The life, work, and theology of Nikolajs Plāte (1915–1983), pastor and theologian of the Evangelical Lutheran church of the Latvian SSR. Dissertation. Helsinki, 2017; Sildegs U. Padomju luterāņu baznīcas teoloģija // Luteriskā baznīca Latvijas simts gados / Ed. V. Lauciņš. Rīga, 2021. S. 89–98. On this problematics I have discussed with Docent Ugis Sildegs as well.

did the Catholic Church manage to retain its status in Latvian SSR while the Lutheran Church was not able to maintain its status.

Wings of changes in the 1980's

Electing Mihail Gorbatšov to the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985, led to reform policy, perestroika, and to new kind of publicity and openness, glasnost. The difficult questions of the Stalinist era, e.g. ecological problems and the Russification of the area, were brought up in the Baltic States. During the years of the so-called the Third Latvian National Awakening, in 1986–1991, the Soviet Latvia went through the great domestic, national and cultural revolution. The national roots and certain cultural peculiarities could finally be publically shown in the Soviet Latvia. Even the old-timers started to smell the scent of fresh spring. The forceful «west wind» breathe new life into the Latvian traditions and values, which had been within an inch of their lives. Many members of the Communist Party realized they were actually burghers or Social Democrats! They did not want to repress their own national history anymore. The desires of freedom and independence came out profusely. Religious revival increasingly began to go hand in hand with the national awakening. To some level these phenomena also mixed with each other. Some Latvians showed interest visiting church only to protest against Communism. Churches were the only legitimate institutions in the society beyond the ideological control of the Communist Party. In many respects, the leaders of the churches had given in but the institutions had not given up.

The freedom of religion was also implemented in Soviet Latvia. Marginal churches stepped out to the centre. New attraction for religious questions surged to the area like a huge wave. But as the later development proved, at the end of the day, it did not mean going back to a deeper understanding of Christianity.

There was also Lutheran spiritual revival among the youth in the 1980's. As a result of the revival, academic and active young people took part in the Church's life. An essential spiritual leader in this movement was professor, pastor Roberts Feldmanis (1910–2002). The most vital nest of the revival was Mežaparks Lutheran Church. This Lutheran church located on the edge of town in Riga, and Feldmanis served

there as a pastor. New students came to theological seminary from this group non-stop. Soon, «the Brothers of the Forest» became a concept in the Latvian Church. Another vital breeding ground for religious revival was the Church of Jesus at the centre of Riga.

Glasnost, openness, also radiated to the relations between the state and the Church. There had been latent conflicts within the Church. The conflicts erupted into the schism, which was at its strongest in 1987–1989. *Rebirth and renewal movement* (*Atdzimšana un atjaunošana*) demanded greater independence for the Church. The movement reflected the general, the less restricted atmosphere of the times, and supported the goals of the Popular Front of Latvia (*Tautas fronte*), which had gained a significant political status and which kept strengthening. The internal conflicts of the Church erupted in 1987. In the centre of the schism were pastors Modris Plāte and Maris Ludvigs. Plāte was originally a nuclear physicist, who had studied theology in the LELC Seminary and ordinated later into pastor's office. He and many other young pastors of the LELC demanded Church to act more independently in relation with the government. A young pastor Juris Rubenis was also involved in the movement.

Roberts Akmentiņš and Roberts Feldmanis, the professors of the Theological Seminary, supported the goals of the movement. Archbishop Ēriks Mesters and some other pastors working in the lead of the Church represented cautious church politics demanded by the state. *Rebirth and renewal movement* won this internal, ecclesiastical battle, and Kārlis Gailītis, a representative of the movement, was elected as an Archbishop instead of Mesters in the synod of the LELC in spring 1989. During his short term, Mesters had managed to create several foreign connections, improving its relations to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, for example. During his term, the Church had already received financial support from abroad. But the days of Communist church politics were gone because the whole Soviet Union was near collapsing. Kārlis Gailītis, who was appointed as an Archbishop at the critical point, died in a car accident in the autumn 1992[22].

[22] Dreifelds J. Religion in Latvia. From Atrophy to Rebirth // Lutheran Theological Review 1–2 / Fall/ Winter 1995 — Spring/Summer 1996. 52–73; Zalite I. Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche Lettlands 1944–1990 // Gelieben ist, was lebt

New boom for the Church activity at the end of the Communist era

New winds in Soviet Latvia were also shown in the fact that churches got noticed in the media. The spirit of the times can be seen in the fact that yet in 1988 priests were allowed to visit in public schools and teach religion. In 1991, a special Christian school started to operate in Riga. The renovation of the rundown church buildings was started. It was possible to receive foreign support for the renovation of the churches. The resurgent publishing also promoted the Church's stepping out to the public. In April 1989, the Lutheran Church recommenced publishing its weekly paper, *Svētdienas Rīts* (Sunday Morning). In 1988, the printing of *Celš* (The Way), a theological journal, which had been issued in the 1930's, was recommenced. At early stage, translations of the writings of several theologians, who were well-known in the West, were published in the journal.

The Lutheran congregations were born rapidly. In 1990, the amount increased from 200 to 241. At the end of the year 1991, there were already 271 congregations. The Church started to invest in the activities, which had been forbidden during the years of Communism. Sunday school activity began in 1988. Sunday schools provided new possibilities for passing on the Christian tradition to future generations. Until the spring 1990, Sunday school activity had already started off in 103 congregations. The missionary work in prisons started during the year 1990. The number of the services increased rapidly. The pastors became prominent figures in their local congregations. They were asked to baptize children, join couples in holy matrimony and bury dead. At this point some of the Latvian youth had the courage to take part in the work in parishes. Confirmation schools and confirmations were considered to be positive elements in the lives of the youth. Many young people had not ventured to take part to confirmation in the 1960–1980's. In the 1990's, the number of the confirmands increased intensely. The pastors consecrated many Latvian flags and gave speeches in the unveil-

und trägt. Stimmen aus der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche Lettlands. Lutherische Beiträge / Hrsg. von J. Junker. 2000. Beiheft 2. S. 36–43; Talonen J. Risti sirpin ja vasaran puristuksessa-neuvosto-Latvian evankelis-luterilainen kirkko kommunismin vuosina // Miehitetty Latvia / Ed. M. Mela. S. 274–275.

ing ceremonies of different kinds of monuments. Suddenly, it seemed like the old National Church of the 1930's had risen but the truth was not this unambiguous, after all. It wasn't about the new coming of the National Church. It was rather people's reaction to the possibilities of freedom, provided by the post-Communist society. The national awakening was more crucial factor than the religious revival.

In this connection it is interesting to acknowledge that in the years of Communism, the Lutherans had actually lost more than the Catholics in Latvia. The Catholic Church had succeeded in maintaining its organisation and its touch with the people at many places. The Catholic Church had been a minority church (23–24%) during the era of independence. After the Communism collapsed, the Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church became fairly equally balanced rivals. During the Communist era, the Catholic Church had maintained its status better than the Lutheran Church. The Lutheran Church received a potential rival from the Catholic Church for the years to come. Due to historical reasons, the status of the Latvian National Church belonged to the Lutherans but the work in the Catholic Church was more active.

New situation meant an enormous challenge for the pastors because their workload increased heavily. In 1987, more than half of the Lutheran pastors lived in Riga. Many of them took care of the small countryside parishes while living in the capital of the Latvian SSR. At the end of the year 1991, the situation had not changed notably; 41 % of the clergy still lived in Riga. It is obvious that local parish work suffered with this situation. Yet a bigger problem was the age range of the clergy. It has been counted that in 1987 the majority of the clergy (46 priests out of 85) had reached the retirement age. Therefore, only 39 acting priests were in the normal working age. Rapid ecclesiastical and societal changes at the end of the 1980's and the youth revival in Mezaparks, Riga, improved the situation rapidly. The clergy became younger fast. In 1991, already 38 % of the 114 acting priests (emeriti included) were born in 1952 or after.

One signal of the shift in the policies concerning science and culture was a new kind of openness when it came to theological studies. Juris Zaķis, Rector of the University of Latvia, decided to support returning the Faculty of Theology to the university.

In January 1990, the university administration unanimously accepted the motion concerning the returning the Faculty of Theology into the University of the Soviet-Latvia. Thus, the Faculty of Theology of the University of Latvia opened its doors in September 1990 without any noticeable quarrels or special intrigues. It was not about establishing a new education unit as such; the seminary of the LELC was just transferred under the subordination of the University and into the system of the government's budget financing. The aged professors of the seminar, who reached the ripe old age of 80 years in 1990 at the latest, were transferred to service of the University. In addition to the aged professors, some younger Latvian theologians, who had taught in the seminary, became also part of the teachers of the University. The students of the seminary were automatically transferred to the students of the University.

In the final years of the Soviet system, the operational preconditions of the Church improved, when compared to earlier stages. After Latvia had become independent, the Church met new challenges yet again. Even though the Church had lost plenty of its resources and its possibilities during the years of Communism, it had survived. Some pastors, who had worked in the Church already in the 1930–1940's, were still in the service of the Church. In the new situation their working experiences from their youth were a great resource because they knew what it was like when the Church had been in the position of the national church.

So, when Latvia became independent in 1991, the freedom of religion had already been implemented. Churches had stepped out from the margins to the middle of the society, which was struggling with pressures of change. Theology was taught in the state university. The Lutheran Church had been able to bring back many of its diverse activities. When it comes to policies concerning religions, in the final years of the Communist era, Latvia had returned to square one, which meant the situation of the first period of independence (1918–1940)[23].

[23] Zviedre M. Cerība. Hoppet sjunger I gryningen. Helsingfors, 1994; Dreifelds J. Religion in Latvia. From Atrophy to Rebirth // Lutheran Theological Review. 1996. Vol. 1–2. P. 52–73. 63–70; Talonen J. Risti sirpin ja vasaran puristuksessa-neuvosto-Latvian evankelis-luterilainen kirkko kommunismin vuosina // Miehitetty Latvia / Ed. M. Mela. [Helsinki], 2007. S. 276–280; Wittram H. In der

New challenges of the Lutheran Church in re-seceded Latvia

For the church historian, it is hard to construct a detailed overall picture of the development of the LELC after 1991. Critical study of the subject has not been made much yet. Hectic progress of the events and the fact that all factors under the surface does not break, makes constructing the overall picture more difficult. Therefore, in the following, I will pay attention to only few developmental lines, which have been notable when evaluating the foreign relations of the Latvian Church.

In the following, I will therefore discuss the latest development of the LELC, which is still scarcely researched. My presentation is primarily based on the presentation I gave in Riga at the Porvoo Church Community Conference on 19 October 2016. The sources are my own observations about Latvia, the press, Church calendars, and conversations with Latvian theologians and pastors. In this context, I use comments in the footnotes quote freely.

Relative to the general development of the Church, one must notice that unlike the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, the LELC has expanded during the newest era of the autonomy. In 1987, there were only 25,000 active members in the parishes. In 2013, the number of members of the registered parishes was already 41, 222. According to the statistics of the LWF, in 2008, there were 250,000 (11 % of the population) Lutherans in Latvia. The corresponding number of Estonia has been estimated to be 162,000. The growth can be considered remarkable but return to the pre-WWII national church has not happened. The number of members has grown especially in the capital where as many rural parishes in particular are still quite small. In most of the congregations there are only hundred members at the most. Latvia is a part of the Eastern Europe countries, in which pro-religious cultural and societal climate has remained at some level after the development stage of the 1980's. In 2003, even 4 % of the residents told they read Bible almost daily. In 2017, the number of members of the LELC parishes was 40,577. In 2016, there were altogether 286 parishes in the LELB[24].

freiheit bestehen. Evangelische Kirchen in den baltischen Ländern zwischen gestern und morgen. Leipzig, 1999. S. 62.

[24] Baznīcas gadagrāmata 2015. Rīga, 2014. S. 255; Baznīcas gadagrāmata

The new diocese division, which was implemented in 2007, has affected to the development of the LELC. The Church was divided into three dioceses. Archbishop continued as a Bishop of Riga and Livonia. Liepāja and Daugavpils became the locations of new bishops. In this connection, I will mention only briefly that the Church activities have diversified. The youth work has re-started little by little. The diaconal work (diakonia) has been developed. Naturally, the Church's finances have been a continuous challenge and not least during the economic crisis of the Latvian state in 2009–2012.

All in all, it must be stated that the Church has not gained the status of the national church it used to have in 1930's. Most of all, the idea of the national church can be seen in the national services and in the cultural and societal significance of the valuable Riga Cathedral. The Russian population in Latvia does not mainly belong to the Lutheran Church, which also affects to the status of the Latvian Church. The activity of the Russian population is canalized to Orthodoxes and Old Believers. The new perceptible and expansive activity of the Catholic Church, right after the Communism had collapsed, must be also taken into account.

Earlier I have mentioned Roberts Feldmanis, the pastor of the Mežaparks Congregation, who influenced the development of the LELC in his old days from the beginning of the 1980's. The youth revival, which sparked in his congregation in the beginning of the 1980's, brought academic people to Church and also to theological studies. Later, the activity of these «Brothers of the Forest» has been an essential part in reconstructing the LECL. But later, the religious legacy left by Feldmanis has been diffused to many directions.

Since the beginning of the period of Archbishop Jānis Vanags in 1993, the old Lutheran (or Evangelical) thinking has taken a back seat. The trend supporting High Church, liturgy, episcopate and ecumenical co-operation with other bigger churches has strengthened. The legacy of Communism reflects in this development. When the congregations were forced to act within the limits of the restricted cult freedom, it naturally transferred the emphasis of the operations to service and inside the church buildings. The office

2018. Rīga, 2017. S. 246, 252; Baznīcas gadagrāmata 2019. Rīga, 2018. S. 240, 248; Talonen J. Historical perspectives to the development of the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church untill today. 2016.

of the pastor was emphasized because he acted as a cult employee. In this respect, the theological-religious profile of the LELC is quite a lot different than the profile of the «Latvian National Church» during the years between the World Wars.

Generally speaking, a quite strong anti-Communism has run through the Church and the whole Latvian society all along after 1991. The remembrance days for victims of the «Communist terror» have been important for Lutherans too. The Lutheran Church has commented actively social conditions and performed together with Catholics and Orthodoxes, for example, in front of the government and the authorities[25].

The internal variety of the Latvian Lutheranism turned up also in the fact that Lutheranism-based theological schools were born to counterpoint the Faculty of Theology at the University of Latvia. At the early stage, the Faculty of Theology of the University in Latvia was in close relations with the Lutheran Church. The faculty was also supported by exile theologians and by several different foreign quarters. The theological tensions led to the point, in which the Church decided to have monopoly on the actual educating of pastors. In 1996, the Consistory found Luther Academy, Church's own institution for educating pastors. It started to operate in September 1997.

After his retirement in 1996, a German systematic theologian, professor Reinhard Slenczka (1931–2022) answered positive to the invitation of Riga. He led the Academy for several years. Slenczka was a systematic theologian from the Heidelbeg University and a student of Professor Edmund Schlink. The arrival of the theologian, who was distinguished throughout Europe, to the leadership of the Luther Academy, was naturally a great triumph for the LECL. After Slenczka, Doctor of Theology, William Weinrich was appointed as the rector of Luther Academy. Weinrich was a former Vice President of the Missouri Synod and an expert of the Early Church. Weinrich led the Academy in 2007–2010. Since, the Academy has been led by Latvian theologians.

[25] Zviedre M. Cerība. Hoppet sjunger i gryningen. Helsingfors, 1994. S. 6–34, 88–108; Baznīcas gadagrāmata 2008. Rīga, 2007. S. 279, 316; Rubenis I. Misionārs Roberts Feldmanis. Rīga, 2007. S. 126–129; Talonen J. Historical perspectives to the development of the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church untill today. 2016.

Luther Academy is Church's own academic training centre. Besides educating pastors, the Academy is responsible for educating teachers of religion, training of the church musicians and the laity of the Church. After establishing the Luther Academy, the Faculty of Theology of the University has more and more formed to be a centre of the so-called scientific theology. The so-called scientific theology and ecclesiastical theology have separated more clearly in Latvia because also Catholics, Orthodoxes, Old Believers, Baptists and some other religious communities have their own seminaries for the clergy[26].

The LELC has received financial support from many foreign Lutheran Churches since the 1980's. Besides the Exile Church, the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany has been a significant supporter in this respect, for example. The arrangement is absorbing because theologically the North Elbian Church and the LECL are pretty far from each other. For the future church history research it would be useful to examine the bearing of the support for the reconstruction of the Church. Of course, the foreign support is always bipartite. The foreign support can also lead to pressuring the financially less independent party by the financial supporter. In the worst-case scenario, the pressure can affect to ideological issues or religious and theological solutions. The big brother mentality, which was acquired by the major Western churches in relation to Eastern European churches, occurred especially in the years right after the collapse of Communism. Sadly, in the relief action provided by the North Elbian Church, there were also elements, which can be considered even as pressuring the LECL. One of the biggest issues — if not the biggest one — between the major Lutheran churches and the LECL, has been the issue about women's ordination.

The issue concerning the women's ordination was already discussed before the WWII due to there were many female theologians studying in the Faculty of Theology in Riga. Influenced by the Western examples, Archbishop Jānis Matulis ordained first female pastors of the LECL in 1975 without the resolution of the Synod. His follower Ēriks Mesters did not ordain new female pastors but the women's ordination was allowed in the Synod in 1989. So, during his short Archbishop period, in 1989–1992, Kārlis Galitis ordained women. Before the election of the Archbishop in 1993, Jānis Vanags announced he would not ordain women anymore, if he was about to be elected. The Synod elected Vanags as the Archbishop, which sealed the position of the Church. Yet, the female pastors ordained prior were allowed to remain in their offices. Since, many so-called evangelists (*evaņģēlists*) have started to work in the Church. Most of the evangelists are female theologians. In the autumn 2015, the Pastor's Conference accepted a clear definition to be amended to the Church Code. The amendment stated that a person to be ordained must be male. When accepting the amendment, the Pastor's Conference cemented the bone of contention, which had sparked off more or less conversation within the Church ever since 1920. In June 2016, the synod the LELC accepted by 77 % majority this definition into Church Code as well.

[26] Talonen J. Evankelis-luterilainen teologikoulutus Latviassa // Teologinen Aikakauskirja . 2007. Vol. 7. S. 258–262, 266–269; Talonen J. Historical perspectives to the development of the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church untill today. 2016.

The women's ordination in the LECL has caused strong emotional reactions in some Western Churches, in the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Exile Church and in the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church, for example. For its part, it has distanced the Latvian and Swedish Churches from each other but then, it has also furthered the co-operation with the LECL and the Missouri Synod. In this connection, it is necessary to correct the misinterpretation, by which the solution relative to women's ordination would have resulted from the co-operation with the Missouri Synod. In my view, the Missouri Synod activated and became more interested in the LECL in earnest *only after* Jānis Vanags, who fulminated against the women's ordination, was elected as the Archbishop in 1993. Principally, the traditional view on the ordination was highly supported in LECL, and not only for the fact that above-mentioned Roberts Feldmanis and supporters did not depart from the traditional view. In any case, LECL is probably the first fairly large Lutheran Church, which has abandoned the women's ordination after being in favour of it.

So, the issue concerning the ordination has also divided LECL and the Exile Church apart from each other. The Exile Church supported the Lutherans of its mother country during the Communism and especially in the years of reconstructing the Church,

since the middle of the 1980's. However, the co-operation of the Churches has not led to the reunion, unlike in the Estonian and Lithuanian Lutheranism. The theological gap between two Latvian Churches was emerged, in 2015, for example, when the first female Archbishop, Lauma Zušēvica, was elected as the leader of the Exile Church. As I already have told, the synod the LELC accepted in June 2016 by 77 % majority the definition the gender/maleness of the pastor to be explicitly amended to the Church Code. Theologically, these two Latvian Lutheran churches are going more and more to different directions.

The fact that the American confessional Lutheran Church, the Missouri Synod, has become active in the Eastern Europe since the beginning of the 1990's has drawn attention widely in the international ecclesiastical conversation. Doctor of Theology, *Kalle Kuusniemi* published his dissertation at the University of Helsinki in 2015. The subject of his thesis is the influence of the Missouri Synod in the Baltic and Ingrian Lutheran churches in 1991–2001. In his groundbreaking study Kuusniemi examined type of redistribution of Lutheranism in the Eastern Europe.

The Missourian small-scale activity in Latvia began already in 1992 but truly activated only in the following year. The diaconal work (diakonia) and the education work made by the Missouri Synod and the literature work made by the Lutheran Heritage Foundation has influenced the development of the Latvian Lutheranism without a doubt. The Missouri Synod supported LECL also at the end of the 1990's when the LECL was renovating the property of the Luther Academy. At first, the seminary operated in the Old Town of Riga, in the property of the Consistory (*M. Pilsiela* 4). In the following years, the premises for the Luther Academy were renovated from the property, which was restored to the Church and which was located opposite Riga Cathedral. The property is probably one of the most expensive ones in the centre of Riga.

In practice, the Missouri Synod paid the renovation of the premises because the support planned by the LWF was cancelled after the Assembly held in Hong Kong in 1997. The church political intrigues launched by the LWF National Committee of Germany disabled the inter-ecclesiastical supporting project. And so, the Missouri Synod took care of the renovating the property. In this connection, it is necessary to mention

that later, the LECL was forced to give away the property due to financial troubles. Since, the Academy has operated in the premises of the lower profile, but yet in the Old Town of Riga.

The Missouri Synod has declared the so-called altar and pulpit fellowship with the Latvian, Lithuanian and Ingrian Evangelical Lutheran Churches. It means that the pastors of these churches are allowed to perform sacraments and preach in the churches, which have declared the fellowship. The Missouri Synod and the LECL declared the fellowship in 2001. It is interesting that the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church, which had provided substantial support for the LECL, pressured the LECL not to declare the fellowship with the Missouri Synod. In his thesis, Doctor *Kalle Kuusniemi* describes the reactions of the Latvian party to the pressuring made by the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church, which had adopted the big brother mentality towards the LECL. The final, explicit ultimatum, given by the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church for the LECL, was given in the middle of the Synod, which was gathered in Riga on 11–12 June 2001. In the morning of the 12th June, Henning Kramer, the Vice President of the North Elbian Church, sent a strong e-mail to the Synod of the LELC and Archbishop Vanags. Nevertheless, the majority of the Synod supported contracting the altar and pulpit fellowship with the Missouri Synod. The foreign pressure rather irritated many delegates, especially when the pressure came from the West. Inter alia, Reverend Rolands Eimanis stated that the German Church had no reason to teach nor tell the Latvian «Martyr Church» what to do. In this conversation Elmanis also played the Nazi card by saying: «You can ask the Dean of our Academy, Mr. Slenczka, — which Church was it that survived Hitler's attacks and pressure?»

In this connection, it must be noted that the Church of Sweden (*Svenska kyrkan*), which is known as quite liberal church, reacted to the fellowship of LECL and the Missouri Synod with higher composure, as Dr. *Kalle Kuusniemi* demonstrates in his thesis. On the other hand, the issue concerning homosexuality has led to the point where the Swedish and Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Churches have diverged even further from each other. In practice, the LECL has cut off intercommunion with the Church of Sweden but she applies the practice selectively.

It must be admitted that in the international church politics, the role of the Latvian, Lithuanian and Ingrian Lutheran Churches is unique. They participate to the pursuit of the International Lutheran Council (ILC) but in the meantime they are also member churches of the LWF. The German sister church of the Missouri Synod, the Independent Evangelical-Lutheran Church (*Selbständige Evangelische Lutherische Kirche*, SELK), has also co-operated with the Latvian and Lithuanian Churches. Even though, the Missouri Synod has spreaded to east, de facto, its influence might not be as dramatic as the phenomena has been considered as. Primarily, it has not striven for establishing new independent sister churches to the area but mostly focused on supporting the churches already existing, just as the churches of the LWF have done[27].

When we contemplate the reception of the Missouri Synod in Latvia, we must consider that within the Lutheran Church there was receptive attitude for the theology, which emphasized the authority of the Bible and traditional Christine doctrines, to start with. Earlier I mentioned the youth revival of the Mezaparks, Riga, as an example. Similarly, it must taken into account that liberal Bible theology had worried some pastors, Nikolajs Plāte, for example, already during Communism. Throughout the Communist years, the old tension dating back to the years of the inter-was period between liberals and conservatives remained. As I see it, the Missouri Synod found a niche in the Latvian ecclesiastical climate, and its theology spoke to many. It is hard to think that religious and theological conviction or consideration could be shaped with money or mental violence.

Since the 1990's, certain kind of Luther's come-back to the theological and religious publication market has characterized especially Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Hungary and also Slovakia at some level. The Lutheran Heritage Foundation, a missionary organization developed from the Missouri Synod, has produced a significant

[27] Pyhäranta T. Latvian kirkko rajasi pappeuden vain miehille // URL: https://www.kotimaa.fi/latvian-kirkko-rajasi-pappeuden-vain-miehille/ (9.01.2024); Wittram H. In der freiheit bestehen. Evangelische Kirchen in den baltischen Ländern zwischen gestern und morgen. Leipzig, 1999. S. 62–64, 66–67; Kuusniemi K. The Voice of Confessionalism and inter-Lutheran relations. The influence of the Missouri synod in the Baltic and Ingrian churches, 1991–2001. Academic dissertation. Helsinki, 2015; Talonen J. Historical perspectives to the development of the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church untill today 2016.

amount of books written by Luther and the texts of other denominational Lutheran theologians, translated into several languages. Since 1993, it has produced numerous books in Latvia, inter alia, Luther's postils and the edition of *The Liber Concordiae*. It is obvious that, in the long run and at the level of the laity, this kind of literature is going to affect by boosting the Lutheran identity[28].

Ecumenical intercourse was typical for the Latvian denominations already during the Communism, and it has continued yet more intensively after 1991. The state recognizes five denominations (the Lutherans, Catholics, Orthodoxes, Old Believers and Baptists) as the so-called traditional denominations. Good co-operation has prevailed among these five denominations. They have also sometimes joined to take stands on the issues concerning society and moral.

The interdenominational doctrinal conversations, began in the 21st century, also prove the increasing connection between the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran and Catholic Churches. The Cardinal of Riga has also taken part in these conversations. Of course, the relationship between the Churches is not unambiguous.

So, what kind of religious life can we find from the LECL in the 2000's? Different so-called Low Church activities can be seen in the LELC. Some sort of the old Latvian Lutheranism and relics of old «People's church» is a basic feature at grassroots' level in many congregations. There have also been some attemps to revive the old Livonian Herrnhutian tradition from 1990's. Also, we can see some activities of Evangelical and Charismatic revival spirituality. Finnish First-born Laestadian preachers have visited regularly in Latvia from 1999.

However, ecumenically centred High Church orientation appeals to many pastors. Inspired by the very Missouri Synod, confessional Lutheran orientation is also mainly shown in the everyday life of Church. Certain-level Biblicism and traditional Christian doctrines have also connected different groups. In the meantime, there has been mental alienation from the Exile Church. Within the Church, this development has not happened without tensions.

[28] Uļģis J. Luterisma mantojuma fonda 25 darbības gadi // Lauciņš V. (Ed.) Luteriskā baznīca Latvijas simts gados. Rīga, 2021; Talonen J. Historical perspectives to the development of the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church untill today. 2016.

It seems that the tension between theologically mostly Liberal Exile Latvian Lutheranism and the LELC is bigger after the resolution on women ordination of the LELC synod in June 2016. The exile church has more and more activity in Latvia as well as also the LELC works among Latvians outside the Republic of Latvia.

The most radical liberals and charismatics may have been removed from the priesthood. The church split in the mid-1990s. So, in 1996, the Church ended up removing Ilars Plūme from the priesthood. Plūme had started to follow the practice of so-called closed communion, which was in use in the Missouri Synod. Closed communion is a practice in which Communion is let to be received only by the members of the «right» Lutheran denomination or other Lutherans, if they assert understanding the religious meaning of Communion. Plūme was one of the confessional-wing priests, who had gathered around the Augsburg Institute, established in the previous year. This group became a small, separate religious community, which later joined to the world-wide fellowship of Wisconsin synod. The Augsburg Institute doesn't work anymore. Instead, parishes of this religious community still continue to bring activity[29].

A different question is the connection of the LECL with the Roman Catholic Church of Latvia. When the leaders of the churches are working in closer co-operation with each other, the confessional Lutheran wing reflects her own role in the country, where people's ideological and political choices have traditionally been individual. How the activity of the Missouri Synod and the wide spreading literature, which strongly emphasizes Lutheranism, will gradually affect on the religious mentality of the area, are also pretty big questions. My own assessment is that Lutheranism is going to be more and more diverse, in any case in the whole Europe.

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