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WARTIME DECISIONS LEAD TO PEACETIME PROBLEMS: LEADERSHIP OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCHES IN BALTIC STATES, 1944–1949

This paper is dedicated to a brief but crucially important period for Lutheran Churches in the Baltic states during the 20th century that set into motion religious processes for almost half a century. During World War II, the Baltic states – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were occupied by the Soviet army, later taken over by Nazi Germany and then again reoccupied by the Soviets in 1944/45. During this period and shortly after the war, Lutheran Churches in the Baltic states experienced a whirlwind of totalitarian power, different state policies towards religion, significant loss of the clergy and church members, and faced the demolition of churches as institutions and places of worship.

In these times of changes, the members of Lutheran leadership of Estonia and Latvia in 1944 were forced to leave their states and churches, never to return, as the Iron Curtain descended between the Soviet Union and the Western world after the war ended. A similar situation occurred with Lithuanian Lutherans.

The author seeks to explore the changes in Baltic Lutheran Churches and their leadership from 1944–1949 by analysing the situation in each church separately and seeking similarities in the process of leaving the church in the hands of other church members, – those, who stayed behind in the occupied territories. Through persons and their attitude towards the new role as the church leader(s), the author investigates the sovietisation process of the Lutheran Church (and overall – the religion) that was

aggressively carried out by the Soviet state in the Baltics in the last months of war and the first post-war years until the mass deportations in March of 1949, which frame the chronological period of the paper.

Sources from the archives in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are used to describe and illustrate this process, the existing research on the changes of leadership of the churches has largely omitted all three Baltic states due to the language barrier or academic research tendencies.

The author presented a short version of this topic in the spring of 2023 during the University of Latvia's annual conference, Faculty of Theology section "War and Peace". Due to the specific circumstances and organisation of Lithuanian Lutherans, which differs from the two other churches, the part concerning Lithuania was not presented at the spring conference. However, the current paper will introduce the role of Lithuanian Lutheran Church Consistory in the Stalinism period. Theologians and church historians such as Jouko Talonen¹, Riho Altnurme², Valdis Tēraudkalns³ and others have analysed the history of archbishops of Latvia and Estonia. Archbishop Gustavs Tūrs (1946–1968) of the LELB is amongst the leading academic interests of the author of this paper.⁴ Lithuanian Pastors Erikas Leijeris and Jonas Kalvanas, and their service during WWII and in the Soviet Lithuania have been the subject of several studies by Darius Petkūnas.⁵

In this paper, the author tries to analyse the relationships between the state and newly appointed substitutes by using two theories of sovietisation – Olaf Mertelsmann's overall sovietisation theory⁶ and an adapted version of Nadežda Beļakova's theory on the sovietisation of Orthodox Church in the Soviet Union.⁷ In situations, where the state or church shows a behaviour that inclines toward these theories, the author points out

1 Jouko Talonens, *Baznīca staļinisma žņaugos. Latvijas Evaņģēliski luteriskā baznīca padomju okupācijas laikā no 1944. līdz 1950. gadam* (Rīga: Luterisma mantojuma fonds, 2009).

2 Riho Altnurme, "Soviet Religious Policy towards the Lutheran church in Estonia (1944–1959) and its Consequences", *Latvijas Vēsturnieku komisijas raksti. Padomju okupācijas režīms Baltijā 1944.–1959. gadā: politika un tās sekas. Starptautiskās konferences materiāli, 2002. gada 13.–14. jūnijs* (2003), 269–277.

3 Valdis Tēraudkalns, "Kaulēšanās par padomju reliģisko organizāciju dalību Pasaules baznīcu padomē, 1948–1962", *Latvijas vēstures institūta žurnāls. Speciālizlaidums* 116 (2022): 117–136.

4 Diāna Hristenko, "Evaņģēliski luteriskās baznīcas sovietizācija: Latvijas un Igaunijas piemērs (1946–1949)", *Ceļš* (2021): 62–80.

5 Darius Petkūnas, *The Repression of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Lithuania during the Stalinist Era* (Klaipėda: Klaipėdos universiteto leidykla, 2011).

6 Olaf Mertelsmann, "How to define Sovietisation?", in *Sovietisation and Violence: The Case of Estonia. Eesti Malu Instituudi toimetised 1* (Tartu: University of Tartu Press, 2018), 17–37.

7 Nadežda Beļakova, "Pareizticīgā Baznīca sociālistiskā valstī: "sovjetizācija" un tās "eksports" pēc Otrā pasaules kara", in *Reliģiski-filozofiski raksti* (Rīga: LU Filozofijas un socioloģijas institūts, 2015), 155–187.

to what stage (Mertelsmann) or vector (Beļakova) of sovietisation this could contribute, and what are the peculiar characteristics or specifics of the church or persona that affect the religious sovietisation process. This paper intends to explore and explain that the states' policies and reactions of churches to these policies differed depending from a person or a place. However, the general elements of sovietisation were observed in all the states, involving each newly appointed individual.

This paper begins by characterising the situation in church leadership during WWII and the circumstances of the initial changes, then proceeds to consider the first substitutes, as well as their relationships with CARC – The Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults. The paper continues with an analysis of the new, Soviet-approved leadership of Latvia and Estonia. Next, the Lithuanian case study yields an analysis of Erikas Leijeris' and Jonas Kalvanas' attitude against the Soviet policy. Finally, the author outlines the problems encountered by Lutherans in the Soviet Union and in exile because of the initial leadership change.

Church leadership leaving the states and churches

Johan Kõpp⁸ was a bishop of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELK) from 1939, and during the interwar period was known for his influence and credibility both as a theologian and a rector of the University of Tartu before becoming the primate of the Lutheran Church. Teodors Grīnbergs⁹ was in his position as the first archbishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia since 1932. Before that, he served in various congregations and taught as a professor of practical theology at the University of Latvia. Both Kõpp and Grīnbergs received honorary doctoral titles in theology from the Faculty of Theology at the University of Latvia at the same event on 11 October 1926.¹⁰ During the interwar period, Jonas Kalvanas,¹¹ the youngest of the three primates, studied theology at Vytautas Magnus University (1933–1936) and at the University of Latvia in 1939. Ordained in 1940, he faced the occupation powers

8 Born in 1874, in Holdre, Livonia Governorate, Russian Empire (contemporary Estonia) – died in 1970, in Stockholm, Sweden.

9 Born in 1870, in Ģibze (Valdgale), Courland Governorate, Russian Empire (contemporary Latvia) – died in 1962, in Esslingen am Neckar, Federal Republic of Germany.

10 Ludvigs Adamovičs et al. *Latvijas Universitāte divdesmit gados, 1919–1939. 1. daļa* (Rīga: Latvijas Universitāte, 1939): 821–822.

11 Jonas Viktoras Kalvanas senior, born in 1914, Ruobežai, Kaunas Governorate, Russian Empire (contemporary Lithuania) – 1995, Tauraģe, Lithuania. His son, Jonas Kalvanas Jr. (1948–2003) became an archbishop of Lithuanian Lutheran Church after his father's death in 1995.

and terrible events of WWII as a priest in various congregations in Taurage county¹² and serving at Latvian-speaking congregations, being born in a Lithuanian Latvian family.

The leadership of the Lutheran Churches – Johan Kõpp in Estonia and Teodors Grīnbergs in Latvia – remained the same during the first Soviet occupation in 1940–1941 and during the invasion of Nazi Germany in 1941–1944. However, in the last months of German occupation and the early reoccupation of Baltic states by the Red Army, the people, including Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Orthodox clergy, fled Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to Germany and Sweden. In case of Latvia and Lithuania, some people were forced to leave the state with German troops as a possible leverage policy. As a result of this migration, the leadership of the churches was seized by people who might have never acquired this position in peaceful times. They had to manage churches during the war, as well as during the difficult post-war years, which were psychologically violent and ideologically severe, and they faced repressions from the Soviet regime.

Latvian Archbishop Teodors Grīnbergs was forced to leave Latvia from the port of Liepāja, together with Catholic Primates Jāzeps Rancāns and Boļeslavs Slokāns, and Orthodox Church Metropolitan Augustine.¹³ T. Grīnbergs arrived to Gdynia, Poland, on 11 October 1944, and later travelled to Eisenach, Germany, and other places.¹⁴ Grīnbergs had left Riga precinct Chief Executive Edgars Bergs in charge, but he also went to Germany a few days after the archbishop. The only one who remained in Latvia from the deputies approved by the General Board in the autumn of 1944 was Pastor Kārlis Irbe. According to Linards Rozentāls, such a list of substitutes was made in 1940 but was not needed, as the archbishop remained active from 1940 to 1944.¹⁵

A total of 144 Latvian Lutheran pastors emigrated, the largest number to Germany, starting their new lives in various congregations, DP camps and later in multiple places in Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia and other permanent places of residence.¹⁶ Some refugees returned for personal reasons, but the life that awaited them in Soviet Latvia was not easy.

J. Kopp left Estonia in the autumn of 1944, when the Red Army returned to the Baltic states. He went to Sweden, Stockholm, where he remained active and headed

12 Aida Prēdele, “Miris Lietuvas luterāņu arhibīskaps”, *Neatkarīgā Cīņa*, Nr. 17 (21.01.1995.).

13 Jouko Talonens, *Baznīca stāļinisma žņaugos. Latvijas Evaņģēliski luteriskā baznīca padomju okupācijas laikā no 1944. līdz 1950. gadam* (Rīga: Luterisma mantojuma fonds, 2009), 21.

14 Red. Edgars Ķiploks, Arnolds Lūsis. *Archibīskaps Dr. Teodors Grīnbergs. Rakstu krājums 100. dzimšanas atcerei* (B. izd: Latvijas Ev.-lut. baznīca un Latviešu Ev.-lut. draudžu apvienība, 1970), 137–138.

15 Linards Rozentāls, *Izdziņošana. Sinodālais pārvaldes princips Latvijas evaņģēliski luteriskajā baznīcā 1948.–1984. gadā* (Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds, 2017), 90.

16 Ineta Didrihsone-Tomaševska. *Mācītājs Richards Zariņš (1913–2006). Dzīve divās pasaulēs: Dzīves gājums un svētrunas* (Rīga: Latvijas Universitātes fonds, 2016): 19.

the Estonian Lutheran Church in exile until 1964. Seventy-two clergymen, including the bishop, twelve candidate ministers and theology students left for Sweden or Germany, – most feared recurrence of the Soviet terror of 1940–1941, targeted towards religion. Before leaving, the bishop had pointed out his potential substitutes and the church was left in the hands of Anton Eilart, Tallinn county deputy dean.¹⁷

Lutherans of Lithuania faced different problems than their northern counterparts. The territory of Lithuania until WWII had two Lutheran Churches – the Evangelical Church of the Old Prussian Union and the Lithuanian Lutheran Church. Most of Prussian-Lutherans were Germans. During the interwar period, they lived in the Lithuania Minor (Klaipėda and Karaļauči regions) and emigrated to Germany during the first occupation by Soviet Union, along with the repatriation process of Nazi Germany, and in 1944/45, when it was clear that the Soviet army's return to Lithuania was inevitable, emigration continued. As some of the Lutherans of this region stayed behind because they could not evacuate in time or for other reasons, they joined the Lithuanian Lutheran Church that now existed in the united Lithuania by 1945. From 1941 to 1944, Lithuanian Lutherans lost most of the clergy – 27 of 32, members of the church were deported, had evacuated or fled to the West to escape the occupation regimes, especially the Soviet rule.¹⁸

Due to the situation in WWII – repatriation, lack of clergy and reign of occupation powers, Erikas Leijeris was designated as the senior clergyman of the Lithuanian Lutheran Church on 31 January 1941 and remained in the post until 1949. Jonas Kalvanas was elected to the consistory of the Lutheran Church in 1942, making him a vice-chairman at the age of 28, only two years after his ordination and obtaining his licentiate degree.¹⁹

The first encounter with the Soviet rule and religious policy

The Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC), commissars started their duties in the territories of Baltics. In Latvia, it was Voldemārs Šeškens, who was elected in 17.08.1944, followed by Jūlijs Restbergs in 1948. In Estonia, Johannes Kivi was placed in that office from 25.01.1945, in Lithuania, – Alfonsas Galevičius, from 07.09.1944.²⁰ All of them were approved and appointed by Ivan Polanski;

17 Anton Eilart, *Nõmme hingekarjane*, <https://www.nommuseum.ee/artikkel/anton-eilart-nomme-hingekarjane/> (last viewed 09.08.2023)

18 Holger Lahayne. *Lietuvos Evangelikų Liuteronų Bažnyčia*, <https://www.vle.lt/straipsnis/lietuvos-evangeliku-liuteronu-baznycia/> (last viewed 15.10.2023)

19 Darius Petkūnas. *Jonas Viktoras Kalvanas – Faithful Christian and Church Leader*, <https://liuteronai.lt/2013-18/liuteronai/Jonas-Viktoras-Kalvanas-Faithful-Christian-and-Church-Leader-5.htm> (last viewed 10.08.2023)

20 Riho Altnurme, “*Eesti Evangeeliumi Luteriusu Kirik ja Nõukogude riik 1944–1949*” (PhD thesis, University of Tartu, Faculty of Theology, 2000), 35–36.

they reported to the CARC in Moscow, answered to this institution, executed its policy and tasks, orders were given mostly in secret and not in writing. In the first years, officials often struggled with assigned tasks, as they did not have enough equipment or human resources, and were unfamiliar with local religious circumstances. For example, V. Šeškens was strongly encouraged to improve his methods and strategy while working with various religions, to “widen his horizons and see past the higher level of religious organisations, to be more attentive to grassroots, as well.”²¹ In the first months in his office, Johannes Kivi had a note from I. Polanski that he was incorrectly implementing the re-registration of the congregations (they were given an overly short deadline) and he was instructed to report back when communication with the believers was back on track.²² In answer to this letter, J. Kivi said that “certain part of the communication mistakes is a fault of the [Estonian] translator.”²³

During the final period of the war and the second half of 1945, Kārlis Irbe and Consistory had already been acquainted with CARC and its official Voldemārs Šeškens. The relationship between the official and LELB leadership commenced (and continued) under hostile conditions, as one of the first letters about LELB and Kārlis Irbe to Moscow was that Irbe was highly unpleasant and non-collaborative. According to Olaf Mertelsmann’s theory, one of the approaches of sovietisation is the local people taking the “let’s wait and see what happens” stand, which later might turn either into collaboration, or downright refusal to work with Soviet power. Kārlis Irbe realised what the Soviet religious policy meant to the church and believers, as well as Latvian society overall, hence, the waiting phase was short. This approach can be explained by the fact that Kārlis Irbe being a man of principles and God, he retained the hope in Latvia and the Baltics – that, much like in WWI, the West would come and liberate them. V. Šeškens wrote about this to Moscow, saying that the replacement was promptly needed, because the “working conditions” were impossible. In the spring of 1945, Šeškens had advised Irbe to resign on a voluntary basis, Irbe responded that he was waiting for Grīnbergs and Bergs to return.

After several heated discussions amongst K. Irbe, his allies and V. Šeškens, the official decided to arbitrate this substitute leadership for unwillingness to collaborate with the Soviet state in early 1946. Meanwhile, the official already had been seeking

21 Letter from CARC in Moscow, signed by Ivan Polanski substitute Yuri Sadovski to Voldemārs Šeškens in 14.01.1947, 32–33, folder 1448, box 1, item. 241. Latvijas Nacionālais arhivs Latvijas Vēstures arhivs (LNA-LVA).

22 Letter to Johannes Kivi from CARC in Moscow by Ivan Polanski. In Russian. 16.04.1945. P-23, R-1989 folder, box 2, item 2. Eesti Rahvus Arhiiv (ERA).

23 Letter from Johannes Kivi to Ivan Polanski in Moscow. In Russian. 26.05.1945. P-24, R-1989 folder, box 2, item 2. Eesti Rahvus Arhiiv (ERA).

a Soviet-approved substitute for months and, through manipulation of the Church Constitution,²⁴ he found Gustavs Tūrs, who was willing to start the career as a member of the Consistory and substitute for the archbishop. On 21 February of 1946, the “old guard” was arrested, including Kārlis Irbe; on 8 March, Gustavs Tūrs was elected as the consistory member and an acting archbishop, which marked the end of the period, where the leadership of the church was taken by someone whom Teodors Grīnbergs had approved. The information about Kārlis Irbe and other Church board members being arrested and put on trial was already known to Latvians in exile within the same year, reflecting the Soviet attitude on deporting people to inner USSR territories.²⁵ Later, as Gustavs Tūrs was visited by the Anglican delegation in October of 1946, when asked how he had acquired the position of archbishop’s substitute, he used the same arguments that CARC applied in their scheme of manipulating the constitution of the Church, but omitted the service or faith of Kārlis Irbe as an acting archbishop.²⁶

The election later caused problems due to the evident influence of sovietisation and the succession question, because Gustavs Tūrs did not receive a blessing of another bishop. Before this, it was clear that Kārlis Irbe was a substitute and never claimed any ambitions towards the position of archbishop, especially when the legitimate archbishop was alive and in exile. This caused a fraction between the Lutherans in Latvia and Lutherans abroad, although Teodors Grīnbergs himself showed a neutral or diplomatic attitude when talking about Gustavs Tūrs – “living in homeland under a cross is much harder than in the free world”²⁷.

Anton Eilart, being assigned by J. Kopp, did not remain in the office of acting bishop of Estonian Lutheran Church for long. On 25 November 1944, he ran away with his family, hiding in various places in Estonia until he was found and trialled by Soviet officials in the spring of 1948. Not much is usually written about Anton Eilart’s position in EELK leadership, as he decided to leave it after a few months. However, the curious thing is that in Anton Eilart’s time, no endorsed CARC official was appointed yet, it was only done on 25 January 1945. When it happened, Estonian CARC official Johannes Kivi evaluated all denominations (except Russian Orthodox Church) and religious movements in Estonian SSR and their impact on Soviet citizens. One of the main conclusions in the first quarter of 1945 was that the Estonian Lutheran Church had suffered immense

24 Linards Rozentāls, *Izdzīvošana. Sinodālais pārvaldes princips Latvijas evaņģēliski luteriskajā baznīcā 1948.–1984. gadā*, 90–91.

25 “Latvijas notikumi.” *Latvju domas: Nedēļas laikraksts kultūrai un izglītībai*. 31. aug. 1946: 3.

26 Report from Voldemārs Šeškens to Ivan Polanski, 16.10.1946. P-13, folder 1448, box 1, item 241. (LNA-LVA). In Russian.

27 Red. Edgars Ķiplokšs, Arnolds Lūsis. *Archibīskaps Dr. Teodors Grīnbergs. Rakstu krājums 100. dzimšanas atcerei*, 141.

losses during the war – most of the pastors had left, and around 50 church buildings had suffered damage or had been destroyed, “only six pastors were arrested for collaborating with Nazis and being involved in anti-Soviet actions”²⁸.

As noted by Riho Altnurme, this substitution period was only a brief fragment in Eilart’s life, rather unfortunate and not of his own choosing.²⁹ The period when someone was approved for substitution by a previous primate was even shorter in Estonia and more tragical in a personal sense, as Eilart was in hiding with his family and small children. This timeline suggests that CARC official Johannes Kivi did not have to deal with Eilart, at least officially, this instance did not resemble the case of Kārlis Irbe, where the first legitimate substitute conflicted with the official; CARC’s position was presumably better right from the start.

A meeting of the Church’s Board was convened a few days after Eilart’s disappearance. On 17 January 1945, they elected August Pahn as the next substitute bishop³⁰, and he remained in that position until 12 April 1949. The first year of Pahn in the position of substitute bishop was peaceful, at least according to J. Kivi’s reports to Moscow about the life of Lutheran Church. For example, in the first half of 1945 “there was no friction or claims from the church about Soviet state on religious matters” and “there are no questions about religious publishing”.³¹ However, as time went on, Pahn showed opinions on church matters that did not conform with the Soviet church policy, for example, the consecration and nationalisation of the church property.

One of the systematic methods that were used by the Soviet state in almost every sphere of work relationships was the so-called “cadre policy”. The process was often messy, and by seeking more collaborative candidates for particular positions, a lot of people were tested, their histories and personalities checked, their place in the community was often compromised in case of collaboration. Serious checks and balances were carried out concerning one’s character in order to acquire or retain a position, making sure that the “cadre” would serve well. The preferred approach in this period was bringing “cadres” from the outside – from the pre-war Soviet republics, as they were considered more compliant, nevertheless, as this was such a specific organisation and position, CARC had to work with what they had – August Pahn.

28 Report on religious affairs of Estonian SSR from 1.0.1945–31.03.1945 by Johannes Kivi to Ivan Polanski. P-2, R-1989 folder, box 2, item 2. Eesti Rahvus Arhiiv (ERA). In Russian.

29 Riho Altnurme, “*Eesti Evangeeliumi Luteriusu Kirik ja Nõukogude riik 1944–1949*” (PhD thesis, University of Tartu, Faculty of Theology, 2000), 145–146.

30 Church board list of EELK by Johannes Kivi, 17.01.1945. P-9, R-1989 folder, box 2, item 2. Eesti Rahvus Arhiiv (ERA). In Russian.

31 Report on religious matters of Estonian SSR until 1.07.1945, by Johannes Kivi to Ivan Polanski, 3.07.1945. Pp. 2–26, R-1989 folder, box 2, item 2. Eesti Rahvus Arhiiv (ERA). In Russian.

In August Pahn's case, the author assumes that both the CARC official and substitute bishop made a mistake. J. Kivi was mistaken by assuming that Pahn would be a puppet bishop and that sovietising the church in form (constitution, property) and nature (sacraments, priests, popularity of Lutheranism among Estonians) would be easy. Pahn made an error by feeling too comfortable (if that was even possible in post-war Estonia and being on the KGB's radar) in his position and, with time, increasingly showed attitude on religious matters that did not go hand in hand with the Soviet policy. Pahn's actions and relationship with CARC officials, combined with the instructions from Moscow to start working on the Church's Constitution to make it more controllable, therefore, sovietised, led to the eventual fallout of the previously functioning Church leadership.

Church historian Nadežda Beļakova, in her theory of sovietisation, explores the introduction of the "Soviet-model" Orthodox Church in new republics of the USSR. State's religious policy is being revealed in this model, showing how the state and church should manage their relationship and how the church, in fact, any church, could be sovietised. The author of this theory explores "vectors", along which the church was sovietised – by changing the church structure,³² using the "cadre policy",³³ and adapting church orienteers or ideological stance.³⁴ The tension between Pahn and CARC grew, to consider it through the prism of the theory proposed by Beļakova, the reasons are easy to understand. In CARC reports, Kivi writes to Moscow that Pahn is not using the word "Soviet" when talking about the state, and is only pretending to be patriotic.³⁵ Although this is one small example, it is clear that Pahn fails to adopt the "lingo" of a decent Soviet-approved working man and refuses to adapt to a more Soviet appearance while in office.

The other two vectors were even more critical to Pahn's demise – CARC was preparing changes in the Church Constitution, and a similar process already had been done with LELB starting from 1946, reducing the leadership clergy and, when officials approved them, then they were elected or appointed. With Pahn apparently not meeting CARC's expectations, he was partly left out of adapting the new constitution and elections of the new Church board during 1947–1948. In April of 1949, he was quietly arrested after failed negotiations with CARC and Soviet officials about helping to bust the armed national resistance (often called "forest brothers") in Jarva and Viljandi

32 Nadežda Beļakova, "Pareizticīgā Baznīca sociālistiskā valstī: "sovjetizācija" un tās "eksports" pēc Otrā pasaules kara" in *Reliģiski-filozofiski raksti*, 162.

33 *Ibid.*, 167.

34 *Ibid.*, 172.

35 Robert F. Goeckel, *Soviet Religious Policy in Estonia and Latvia: Playing Harmony in the Singing Revolution* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2018), 44.

counties.³⁶ Pahn experienced a similar procedure that his successor would face 20 years later – all kinds of genuine and imaginative accusations of betraying the Soviet State while in position, and even before World War II.³⁷ On 2 February 1949, Jaan Kiivit sr. was appointed to undertake the duties of bishop, starting a new chapter of EELK leadership under the Soviet rule.

Erikas Leijeris and Jonas Kalvanas in the Lithuanian Church leadership

It is well known that Lithuania is mainly a Catholic state, but during the 20th century, various religious groups were present in the interwar and after-WWII Lithuania. In his report on religious matters in the first and second quarter of 1945, the Lithuanian CARC official Alfonsas Gailevičius wrote that without Catholics, there were Old Believers, Judaists, Evangelical-Reformers, Evangelical Lutherans, Old Catholic Church of Mariavites, Muslims and others.³⁸ Gailevičius pointed out that every religious group in Lithuanian SSR was decreasing in count, even the Catholics.³⁹ Regarding Lutherans, CARC official described the situation in Klaipėda county – during WWII, most of the German speaking Lutherans fled Lithuania and therefore their remaining number was small, “one church building is left for them, which should be sufficient”.⁴⁰

At this point, the author must outline the different approaches that Soviet officials took towards religious groups during the sovietisation process. The three main denominations in Baltics – Russian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Lutheran – experienced different approaches because of their different nature, theology, and meaning

36 Riho Altnurme, “*Eesti Evangeeliumi Luteriusu Kirik ja Nõukogude riik 1944–1949*”, 156.

37 Robert F. Goeckel, *Soviet Religious Policy in Estonia and Latvia: Playing Harmony in the Singing Revolution*, 33. This was a common practice, to “forget” the past of the “cadre”, when he or she was needed for the position and “remember” it, when it was convenient. For example, Kopp, Eilart and Pahn all were members of the Estonian student organization EUS (Eesti Üliõpilaste Selts), as they studied theology in Tartu. However, only when CARC needed to get rid of Pahn, they brought out the “nationalistic sins of the past” committed in prewar Estonia and the national activities during WWII and Nazi occupation.

38 Report on religious matters from 1.01.1945–30.06.1945 from Alfonsas Gailavičius to Ivan Polanski in Moscow. Pp. 13–14, R-181 folder, box 1, item 3. Lietuvos Centrinis Valstybės Archyvas (LCVA). In Russian.

39 Report on religious matters from 1.01.1945–30.06.1945 from Alfonsas Gailavičius to Ivan Polanski in Moscow. P. 14, R-181 folder, box 1, item 3. Lietuvos Centrinis Valstybės Archyvas (LCVA). In Russian.

40 Report on religious matters from 1.01.1945–30.06.1945 from Alfonsas Gailavičius to Ivan Polanski in Moscow. P. 15, R-181 folder, box 1, item 3. Lietuvos Centrinis Valstybės Archyvas (LCVA). In Russian.

in state society and history. Russian Orthodox Church has often been oversimplified as the Soviet State mouthpiece, – an opinion which the author does not believe in. Russian Orthodox Church was not the most prominent church to sovietise in the Baltics, in comparison to the Russian SSR and other orthodox territories. However, sovietisation was *easier* because of the theology, rites and history. The Roman Catholics were a significant group in Latvian SSR and the most prominent in Lithuania; again, a different approach was needed in this case, furthermore, the sovietisers had to reckon with the papal influence from outside the USSR. Most of the attention in Gailevičius' reports to Moscow was targeted towards Catholics and their problematics. Officials considerably concentrated on Judaism and the religious life of this denomination after the crimes and destruction inflicted during the Nazi occupation.⁴¹

Lutherans dominated Estonia and Latvia before the war, but in Lithuania, it was mostly a minor religion for minorities – Lithuanian Germans – that did leave the country. In case of Lithuania and Lutheranism, one needs to look at the processes from the perspective of CARC dealing with a relatively small denomination, if compared to the situation of CARC of Latvia or CARC of Estonia.

Even though the Lutheran community in Lithuania was smaller than in the northern Baltics, it drew special attention from CARC, as the Lutheran Church among Lithuanians and Soviet occupiers was considered “German”, as in “German church” “German buildings”, Darius Petkūnas mentions that “German” and “Lutheran” in several instances were used as synonyms.⁴² Everything linked to Germany was considered suspicious, the high of defeating fascism was still present and used for propaganda; later, a citizen census was carried out, and Lithuanian Lutherans were at high risk of being written off as Germans for adherence to Lutheran Church or having ties with anyone who fled to West during 1941–1944.

The situation of Lutherans in Lithuania in this chronological frame is different due to various reasons; one of these reasons was not going through a Soviet-curated leadership change. The chairman Erikas Leijeris remained in the office during the Nazi occupation and, when the Red Army returned, Leijeris continued to serve in Žeimelis congregation until his arrest in 1949.⁴³ Jonas Kalvanas was assigned to the Lutheran Church Consistory in 1941, became a vice-chairman in 1942, and held this position until April of 1950. Curiously enough, Lithuanians were the first to establish the Soviet Lutheran Church in their territory, calling it “Evangelical Lutheran Consistory in Kaunas” on daily

41 Instruction to Alfonsas Gailevičius from N[ikolay] Tagiev about forbidding to sell kosher meat and matza bread under the counter in Penza county. 07.03.1947. P. 31, R-181 folder, box 3, item 10. Lietuvos Centrinis Valstybės Archyvas (LCVA). In Russian.

42 Darius Petkūnas, 21.

43 *Ibid.*, 156.

basis, while its official legal title was “Evangelical Lutheran Consistory of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic”. For Latvians and Estonians, this process was characterised by a strong influence of Soviet and CARC officials aiming to sovietise the churches and, after the war ended, it was as one of the vectors described by Beļakova. For Lithuanians, this happened voluntarily in 1941 with the forming of a new Consistory, using the rights that the USSR Constitution provided – every citizen had right to believe in God or not to believe in it⁴⁴ – thereby forming the Soviet Lutheran Church. Notably, by all means it still was a Lithuanian Lutheran Church without the contamination that took place during the restructuring of the Latvian and Estonian Churches; CARC describes this process “by using the rights that USSR constitution provided, Lutherans [consistory] are re-establishing their congregations, activating pastors and gathering strength [of organisation] from their believers.”⁴⁵ Colonel Shlyapnikov described the actions of the Lutheran Church, especially Pastor Jonas Kalvanas and his initiatives, as anti-Soviet and illegal, working with young people and raising them in a religiously nationalistic spirit, while misusing the rights provided by the Constitution.⁴⁶

The problems encountered by the Lithuanian Church stemmed from the specific Church situation before the war, during the War in Nazi occupation and the aftermath of mass evacuation, leaving only approximately 8000 Lutherans in Lithuania (as stated in the 1948 census). This number can be higher,⁴⁷ as some did not want to be openly religious in the new Soviet Lithuania, and there was still some migration between the LiSSR and Germany in the context of re-repatriation. Lutheranism was still highly associated with Germans and could mean proving a “clear history” of one’s persona during the interwar period and Nazi occupation. So, in this case, Lutherans were the suspicious minority, characterised by proximity to German ties and Lithuanian nationalism.

Together, Leijeris and Kalvanas oversaw the Lithuanian Lutheran Church, trying to weather the tough times of Stalinism, keeping it as calm and diplomatic as they could. Darius Petkūnas writes: “Never did Leijeris follow the example of Lutheran bishops and higher officials in other Baltic states by publicly pledging his complete solidarity with the regime. [...] His opposition to the regime was not open and dramatic. Nevertheless,

44 Diāna Hristenko, Valdis Tēraudkalns, “Reliģisko organizāciju kontrole Latvijas PSR (1944–1985)”, *Ceļš* 73, (2022): 63–64.

45 Report about the Lutheran Church, by LSSR MGB colonel Shlyapnikovo, 16.06.1953. Pp. 10–11, 19th folder, box 1, item 35. Lietuvos Ypatingasis archyvas (LYA).

46 Report about the Lutheran Church, by LSSR MGB colonel Shlyapnikovo, 16.06.1953. P 11, 19th folder, box 1, item 35. Lietuvos Ypatingasis archyvas (LYA).

47 According to reports from 1940–1947, there could have been around 10 000 Lutherans, if both Lithuanian and German individuals were counted together. Report about the Lutheran Church by LSSR MGB Colonel Shlyapnikovo, 16.06.1953. Pp. 10–11, 19th folder, box 1, item 35. Lietuvos Ypatingasis archyvas (LYA).

quiet and diplomatic.”⁴⁸ Erikas Leijeris chose an interesting strategy for dealing with CARC and MGB officials – he knew that he was a marked man, so he convinced others to point fingers at him if ever needed, “just in case” to help brothers who were caught in some anti-soviet actions. If he were arrested, he would take the entire responsibility for his actions and would not betray anyone.⁴⁸ At the end of 1949, he was indeed arrested for possession of anti-soviet material and failure to report it, put through the trial in the spring and the early summer of 1950, and considered “an especially dangerous criminal who should be placed in a special corrective environment.”⁴⁹ In October 1950, he arrived at GULAG in Krasnoyarsk, but continued correspondence with those who stayed in Lithuania, including Jonas Kalvanas. Leijeris’ death on 31 December 1951 can be attributed to his poor health and living conditions.

Jonas Kalvanas, on the other hand, more actively expressed his attitude concerning the occupation power, but even after a long surveillance by the MGB, agents coming and going, he never was put on trial, unlike Erikas Leijeris,⁵⁰ Gustavas Rauskinas,⁵¹ Jonas Mizaras and others. Kalvanas, just like Leijeris, was Lithuanian-Latvian (today, they might be called *skersis* or *šķērslatvietis*),⁵² which meant that he served congregations that were Latvian-speaking Lithuanian Lutherans, but during this period he served at Taurage congregation, which was the biggest Lutheran congregation in LiSSR, and many other congregations, thus gaining influence among the members of religious community. During the period from 1944 to 1949, Kalvanas was often provoked by MGB agents to speak ill of the Soviet power in order to gather material on him and arrest him for his evident influence on Lutherans and Lithuanians. Kalvanas, according to documents of CARC and MGB officials, remained neutral, using phrases that agents could not shape into a material that would be sufficient for an arrest. The overall material that was collected about Jonas Kalvanas concerning his whereabouts, service and communication with other pastors was so considerable that today it can be used as one of the main sources of Lithuanian Lutheran Church history during the Soviet times. Jonas Kalvanas became the bishop of Lithuanian Lutheran Church in 1976, and his son Jonas Kalvanas Jr. became the bishop after his father’s death in 1995.⁵³

48 Darius Petkūnas, 161–162.

49 Ibid., 169–170.

50 In Latvian – Ēriks Leijeris.

51 In Latvian – Gustavs Rauskiņš, Latvian pastor and officer of Latvian Armed Forces (1927).

52 Aukse Norekaite, “Lietuvas latviešu tēls Lietuvas un Latvijas pierobežā”, *Latvijas vēstures institūta žurnāls* (2019: 2), 132.

53 Darius Petkūnas, “Jonas Viktoras Kalvanas vyresnysis”, *Visuotinė Lietuvių enciklopedija*, <https://www.vle.lt/straipsnis/jonas-viktoras-kalvanas-vyresnysis/> (last viewed 15.10.2023)

Despite the differences, the first years in the Lithuanian Church were just like those of the Lutherans in the north – the main tasks of the church leadership were to help with the physical and psychological damage incurred by war, re-registration of congregations, and serving, or finding pastors for congregations. CARC officials often denied the *dvacatka* their rights because there were not enough pastors or the churches, and most of the buildings were not sustainable for congregation life. Church property was seized by the Soviet state and church buildings were transformed for secular use, often brutally adjusted to the Soviet perspective. The documents regarding the ownership of the property were often destroyed, which caused difficulties for the Lutheran Church to regain the buildings (or what was left of them) after regaining independence.⁵⁴

Other problems that all the Lutheran Churches encountered to various degrees were the psychological and physical contamination of the religious citizens' environment – various restrictions at work and school, polarising and splitting the religious communities, prohibiting and destroying religious books and literature, physical and moral repressions of clergy and believers.⁵⁵ Ties between those who stayed behind and those who fled were unstable – any unsanctioned communication to the West could lead to problems and accusations from CARC and MGB. However, Soviet-supervised communication between the Lutherans on both sides of the Iron Curtain often led to uncertainty and a lack of trust in the “free world”, weakening the ties between churches and congregations, isolating Soviet Lutherans, therefore making them more vulnerable and prone to sovietisation.

In conclusion

The process of transferring the leadership of the Lutheran Churches was similar in Latvia and Estonia – the (arch) bishop of the interwar period, leaving his country, left the church in safe and legitimate hands, but the initial substitutes did not remain in their offices for long. The entrusted responsibilities were a substantial burden on individuals and their families, resulting in the repressions suffered by Kārlis Irbe, Anton Eilart and August Pahn.

The case of the Lithuanian Lutheran Church and its leaders – Erikas Leijeris and Jonas Kalvanas – were more specific, as the changes of the leadership were made during the occupation but were unsupervised by the Soviet state and introduced as a reaction

54 Darius Petkūnas, “Resurgence of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Lithuania after the Soviet Era” (Lutheran Heritage Foundation, 2008), 13–14, <https://liuteronai.lt/2013-18/liuteronai/Resurgence%20of%20the%20Evangelical%20Lutheran%20Church%20in%20Lithuania%20after%20the%20Soviet%20Era.pdf> (last viewed 15.10.2023)

55 Vello Salo (ed.) et al. *Estonian State Commission On Examination Of The Policies Of Repressions. The WHITE BOOK. Losses inflicted on the Estonian nation by occupation regimes. 1940–1991* (Estonia, 2005), 68.

to the changes caused by war, migration and overall Lutheran Church situation during the interwar period of independent Lithuania.

Jonas Kalvanas, despite being observed by many agents for a long period of time and various provocations, managed to outlast the primate of the church twice in comparison to the so-called collaborators – Gustavs Tūrs and Jaan Kiivit Sr. “Tauragian”⁵⁶ as the essential link between interwar Lithuania and throughout WWII until regaining independence, held the Lithuanian Lutheran Church alive and “uncontaminated”, which can be explained both by the overall religiousness of the Lithuanian people and Kalvanas persona itself. The Soviet state, Lithuanians and Lutherans tested his persistence during the uncertain times, but the Church survived the sovietisation reasonably untouched.

On the other hand, the second batch of officials of Latvia and Estonia were already elected by the Soviet power according to cadre policy and pursuant to repressions against the previous substitutes. Actions and policies of the archbishops resulted in the slow sovietisation of the Churches, and eventually turned the whole process into a more *quid pro quo* policy, serving as the groundwork for religious stagnation in the 1960s and 1970s.

As most archival sources reflect the Lutherans from the Soviet point of view, the author wonders whether it is possible to obtain any previously unseen sources, for example, notes or diaries of Kārlis Irbe or Anton Eilart, – in that case, one could see more clearly why and how the “fight or flight” mode was turned on. The diary of Jaan Kiivit Sr. is known to exist, but it has yet to be analysed, at least in this context. The photo collection of Žanis Ate (Gustavs Tūrs) could also reveal some previously unknown information about the stance of Gustavs Tūrs without the Soviet censorship.⁵⁷ The correspondence analysis between Erikas Leijeris and Jonas Kalvanas could bring more context to the motivation of the Lithuanian leadership during this period.

Some of these men have previously been praised for being righteous or accused of plain collaborationism, still others are often forgotten as small in-between links, not particularly worthy of attention. As Lithuanian historian Aurimas Švedas points out,⁵⁸ the 20th-century history of the so-called blood lands (nod to Timothy Snyder) stands out of the “good-bad”, “heroic-villainous” binary way of thinking. Instead, it gives rise to another set of questions about whether the greatest disaster of the 20th century – World War II – is really over and its shadows are entirely gone, even in organisations that deal with eternity as a given.

56 Darius Petkūnas, 175.

57 Used on the front cover of Jouko Talonens, *Baznīca staļinisma žņaugos. Latvijas Evarņģēliski luteriskā baznīca padomju okupācijas laikā no 1944. līdz 1950. gadam.*

58 Aurimas Švedas, How to Reflect on 20th Century Man Facing Dramatic Situations and Hard Choices? *Lietuvos istorijos studijos* (2023), 83–84.

Raksts ir veltīts Baltijas evaņģēliski luterisko baznīcu dzīvei un attiecībām ar padomju reliģijas politiku staļinisma periodā. Analizējot katras baznīcas vadību maiņu Otrā pasaules kara laikā un īsi pēc tam, autore atklāj Igaunijas, Latvijas un Lietuvas luterāņu apstākļus sovietizācijas kontekstā. Pētījumā izmantoti visu trīs Baltijas valstu arhīvi un atbilstošā literatūra.

Luterāņu baznīcu vadības nodošanas process Igaunijā un Latvijā bija līdzīgs – starpkaru perioda baznīcu vadītāji, pametot savu valsti, nodeva baznīcu drošās rokās, taču sākotnējie aizstājēji amatā ilgi neatradās, tika pakļauti represijām un vēlāk ar padomju atbalstu tika iecelta jauna vadība. Lietuvas evaņģēliski luteriskās baznīcas vadības maiņa tika veikta pēc vairāku mācītāju iniciatīvas un bez padomju ietekmes, kas arī noteica baznīcas attieksmi pret padomju varu pēckara gados. Neskatoties uz amata ieņemšanas atšķirībām, pirmajos gados visu baznīcu vadību galvenie uzdevumi bija palīdzēt draudzēm ar karā nodarītiem fiziskiem zaudējumiem, pārreģistrēt draudzes, kalpot pašiem vai atrast mācītājus draudzēm. Īpaša nozīme vadību darbībā bija Reliģijas kultu lietu pārvaldei un tās pilnvarotajam, kas uzraudzīja baznīcas. Baltijas luterāņi šajā periodā saskārās ar intensīvu sovietizāciju, piedzīvoja atklātas un slēptas represijas, novērošanu, izmeklēšanu u. c. ar padomju reliģijas politiku saistītas darbības.

Autore secina, ka rakstā aplūkotajās hronoloģiskajās robežās tika aizsākti procesi, kas noveda pie Igaunijas un Latvijas evaņģēliski luterisko baznīcu lēnas sovietizēšanās un vēlākās reliģiskās stagnācijas 60.–70. gados. Lietuvas evaņģēliski luteriskā baznīca, pateicoties tās vadības darbībai un vadošo personu nostājai, netika pakļauta sovietizēšanai tādos apmēros, kā tas notika Igaunijā un Latvijā.



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