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RELIGION IN LATVIA AFTER THE FALL OF SOVIET SYSTEM: FRAGMENTATION AND POSTSECULARISM

By Valdis Tēraudkalns

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The purpose of this article is to analyze changes that religions in Latvia have experienced since the collapse of the USSR. This is too broad of a topic, therefore I will concentrate on only two aspects, fragmentation of religious groups and postsecularism. A lot has happened since the beginning of the 1990s. Latvia has joined the EU, NATO, and the euro zone. Some of us still remember an overflow of emotions that accompanied the political changes. For me personally, it meant the realization of my dream that in the Soviet era sounded unrealistic--studying church history. I went to the United States for some period of time, like many young people. "Freedom" was a catchword, but only few of us then recognized that freedom is a space that should be filled with a positive context, and its values should be constantly sought and maintained. Now with a rise of political populism in Europe, we are in danger of giving up some of these freedoms. Old enemies are gone, like Soviet ideology, but the process of constructing dichotomies continues. Migration, ethnic and sexual minorities--these are hot topics and ready-made material for those politicians who like easy ways of gaining political capital.

Likewise, churches also have experienced changes, such as freedom of religion after many years of persecution and marginalization, getting back church buildings, and a welcomed rebirth of theological education,¹ increased public role, state support, etc. Openness to a globalized world brought in new styles of worship and a wider range of missionary approaches.

¹ The Faculty of Theology was re-established at the University of Latvia in 1990. It has two major fields of studies, theology and religious studies. It is ecumenical and offers students a free space for critical thinking and self-development. Some churches have established their own institutions of training, some of which are not accredited (for example, the Baltic Pastoral Institute which is a Baptist institution) because of reservations about academic theology and the practical orientation of these schools.

For example, since 2003, many churches in Latvia have started Alpha courses, an introduction to the basics of the Christian faith through a series of talks and discussions originally started at Holy Trinity Brompton (a charismatic Anglican parish in London). The style of outreach programs ranges from performances with contemporary music and dance in the Charismatic Church “New Generation,”² to the version of “high culture” offered by Orthodoxy.³ The latter often refer to the “Orthodox culture,” a vague umbrella term for various expressions of Russian culture associated with Orthodox faith.⁴

At the same time, churches are also experiencing secularization that is developing in line with similar tendencies in Western Europe. Religious revival expected by many did not take place. Not much research has been conducted to analyze the local religious landscape. However, the data we have provides enough information to make some conclusions. On the one side, since the independence of Latvia, the number of registered religious congregations has increased twice. There were 693 congregations in 1990 and 1,163 in 2017. The largest number of congregations are Lutheran (286), then Roman Catholic (249), followed by Orthodox (125) and Baptists (95).⁵ A public poll done in 2009 shows that 42.3% of respondents believe in God and consider themselves Christians, 31.5% believe in God but do not define themselves as Christians. Research done in 2012 reveals that 63.8% think that Christianity is a desirable religion for Latvia and 24.6% are not sure which religion would fit for the people of Latvia.⁶ Large numbers of people professing Christianity, at least formally, are not a proof that their beliefs are what churches would expect them to be. A sociological survey, done in 2003 by SKDS (center for sociological research), shows that 46% of respondents believe in sorcery and astrology, 38% in telepathy, and 18% in UFO’s activities on earth.⁷ Similarly to many European countries, a rather large

² ”Projekti Alekseja Ledjajeva,”

http://www.ng.lv/rus/cerkov/pastori_aleksei_i_ol_ga/proekti_aleksea_ledaeva/?doc=435

³ Orthodox media informs about traditional Christmas ball for Orthodox youth organized by Daugavpils diocese. Dimitrij Stavros, “Rozdestvenskij bal v Daugavpilsē,” *Vinogradnaja Loza* 1 (2020), p. 11.

⁴ Mihail Tjurin, “Nasledije pravoslavnoi kulturi,” *Dobroje slovo* (May, 2020), p. 3.; Inclusion of secular Russian authors in the framework of Orthodox culture is not a new development. Missionary priests and others in the Russian Orthodox Church (the ROC) did it already at the end of 19th century. Pushkin was included in spite of the fact that he was not a very fervent member of the church. Dostoevsky’s visions of a national destiny in which Orthodox faith was a guiding force appealed to educated clergy. John Strickland, *The Making of Holy Russia: The Orthodox Church and Russian Nationalism before the Revolution* (Jordanville: Holy Trinity Publications, 2013), p. 60

⁵ Ģirts Kasparāns, ‘Latvija skaitļos. Kristīgā Latvija,’ <https://www.la.lv/la-lv-63>

⁶ “Latvija reliģiskā dažādība visaugstākā starp postpadomju valstīm,” <https://nra.lv/latvija/169832-latvija-religiska-dazadiba-visaugstaka-starp-postpadomju-valstim.htm>

⁷ “Latvijas iedzīvotāji joprojām tic pārdabiskām parādībām,” <https://www.apollo.lv/4677047/latvijas-iedzivotaji-joprojam-tic-pardabiskam-paradibam>

percentage of the population (in the Czech Republic and Belarus 20 percent, in Bulgaria, Latvia and Slovenia 30 percent) consider God an inconceivable spirit or impersonal power.⁸

Latvia has a very high score of religious diversity index, according to the information published by the Pew Research Center and based on data from 2010.⁹ Anticultists often have been talking in mass media about the “danger of sects,” but this view is biased; for example, the Committee of Combating Totalitarian Sects is mentioned among four dangerous groups, as is the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.¹⁰ Statistics do not show that numbers of adherents of new religious movements which are rising. In 2018, there were 158 members of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness in Latvia (the same in 2017), 32 Baha’ites (in 2017, 25), 37 followers of Vissarion (the Church of the Last Testament, in 2017, the same).¹¹

We should bear in mind that statistics about religious groups in Latvia are not accurate. The largest churches (Lutheran, Catholic, and Orthodox) provide huge annual figures of membership that are criticized by media and experts as ‘unrealistic.’¹² Statistics provided by religious minorities are often more precise (partly because they are smaller) and some denominations (like Baptists and Seventh-day Adventists) have strict membership criteria due to their ecclesiology. Investment in evangelism does not always result in increased numerical outcomes; Baptists who, as an evangelical denomination, are missionary-minded and in recent years—under influence of Church Growth Movement—have talked a lot about church planting, are an example of that. In 1999, the total number of Baptists increased by 107 persons, in 2000 by 83, in 2002 by 20 persons.¹³ In comparison, the 1992 membership in Baptist churches increased by 660 members.¹⁴ In 2019 there were 6,372 Baptists in Latvia (in 2018 – 6,449). There were more churches with decreased membership (38) than churches where it increased (24) or stayed the same (31).¹⁵ Total number

⁸ Miklós Tomka, “Religiosity in Central and Eastern Europe. Facts and Interpretations,” *Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe* 3 (2010): 8.

⁹ “Table: Religious Diversity Index Scores by Country,” <https://www.pewforum.org/2014/04/04/religious-diversity-index-scores-by-country/>

¹⁰ “Eksperts brīdina: Latvijā ir četras sektas, no kurām jāuzmanās,” <https://jauns.lv/raksts/sievietem/3840-eksperts-bridina-latvija-ir-cetras-sektas-no-kuram-jauzmanas>

¹¹ “Ziņojums par Tieslietu ministrijā iesniegtajiem reliģisko organizāciju pārskatiem par darbību 2018.gadā,” <https://www.tm.gov.lv/lv/ministrija/gada-parskati/2018-gada-publiskie-parskati>

¹² According to the official statistics in 2011 there were 708,773 Lutherans even if a year ago the figure was 431,000. See annual reports of the Ministry of Justice: <https://www.tm.gov.lv/lv/ministrija/gada-parskati>; The ELCL website states that there are 43,000 active Lutherans who take part in the life of congregations. “LELB misija - būt Kristus klātbūtnes vietai sabiedrībā,” http://www.lclb.lv/lv/?ct=par_lelb

¹³ Arbijs Lauva, “Laiks, cilvēks, Kristus. LBDS kongress – 2001,” *Kristīgā Balss* 72:3 (2001), p. 3.; Arbijs Lauva, “LBDS 2003. gada kongress,” *Kristīgā Balss* 74:2 (2003), p. 38.

¹⁴ “Draudzes Latvijā,” *Kristīgs Draugs* 1 (1998), p. 12.

¹⁵ “Kā bultas stipra vīra rokās. LBDS pārskats 2019/2020,” https://www.lbds.lv/uploads/resources_files/419/pa-lapam-lbds-kongresa-buklets-2020.pdf

of Seventh-day Adventists also has decreased a little, from 3,875 in 2017 to 3,818 in 2018. At the same time, there are religious groups that are growing, such as Pentecostals (3,379 in 2018, and 3,274 in 2017), Latter Day Saints (997 in 2018, and 992 in 2017), Salvation Army (448 in 2018, and 306 in 2017), and some others.¹⁶ However, growth is not dramatic and from statistics available, it is not possible to say what the percentage of unchurched people was among new members and what was the percentage of those who have changed affiliation.

Fragmentation: A Case of Lutherans

Fragmentation of religious groups is not a new phenomenon; rather it is a side effect of the ongoing process of defining and redefining religious identities. Beginning with the period of the early church, it would be more correct to talk about Christianities, namely Christianity as a plurality rather than a single entity. Globalization has intensified this process. In this article, I will concentrate on Lutheranism in Latvia—but it is important to note that the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia (ELCL) is not the only religious organization that has experienced a split. In October 2019, after a decision of the Constitutional Court, the government finally registered the second Orthodox Church in Latvia, The Latvian Orthodox Autonomous Church, under jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople (LAOC) headed by Victor Kontuzorov. He was excommunicated by the Latvian Orthodox Church (LOC) in 1997, and joined the Free Russian Orthodox Church. The LAOC often refers to the Ecumenical Patriarchate and says that it prays for the patriarch, however formally it has no status within the Patriarchate. The LOC immediately rejected rumors that it has switched jurisdictions and announced that LAOC is a completely new organization.¹⁷

Seventh-day Adventists also have experienced a tension, but so far it has not resulted in a split. Rather, it is possible to talk about diversification of views and religious practices among Adventists in Latvia, a process similar to what happened in other countries, especially in the United States. During the second half of 20th century, the younger generation of Adventist intellectuals in the U.S.A. started to re-evaluate their tradition. They started to meet informally to discuss various issues and eventually formed the Association of Adventist Forums that in 1967 was approved also by the denomination's North American Division.¹⁸ *Spectrum*, the

¹⁶ “Ziņojums par Tieslietu ministrijā iesniegtajiem reliģisko organizāciju pārskatiem par darbību 2018.gadā,” <https://www.tm.gov.lv/lv/ministrija/gada-parskati/2018-gada-publiskie-parskati>

¹⁷ “Latvijskaja Pravoslavnaja cerkovj: mi neuhodim pod Konstantinoplj,” https://lv.baltnews.com/Saeima_elections/20191107/1023483818/Latviyskaya-pravoslavnaya-tserkov-my-ne-ukhodim-pod-Konstantinopol.html

¹⁸ Laura L. Vance, *Seventh-day Adventism in Crisis: Gender and Sectarian Change in an Emerging Religion* (Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), p. 76.

group's journal officially not controlled by Adventist leadership, is still a leading progressive Adventist voice. *Spectrum* has published an article by Aidis Tomsons, well-known journalist in Latvia, and a member of the Adventist Church who runs an independent website, "*Vēstis Adventistiem*" (Message to Adventists). He wrote how his views on Ellen G. White's (founder of Seventh-day Adventism) writings have changed.¹⁹ Some Adventist churches in Latvia present themselves as part of a broader Evangelical culture. For example, the website of "Corinth" (a new, "café-style" Adventist church in Riga that aims attracting young, unchurched people) does not point to specific Adventist doctrines, but advertises itself as a friendly community who would like people to find Jesus.²⁰ There is an influence from Lutheranism in accepting some visual forms that make Adventism to look more like a mainline denomination. Some churches have installed altar tables with candles and an open Bible at the front of their church halls. Many Adventist pastors wear clergy shirts and the president of their Union is called *bishop*. In some Adventist churches, changes in preaching, worship style, and a more ecumenical approach created tensions. In 2016, the Council of the Union of Seventh-day Adventist Churches suspended pastor Ivo Roderts, who served at the First Adventist Church in Riga, which is considered a central Adventist church in Latvia. It happened after receiving a written complaint of 47 members of the church who mentioned, among their objections, his departing from some Adventist doctrines, and having during a Christmas service a secular song by "Līvi," a famous Latvian rock group. Roderts later emigrated to England where he has a secular job. He said in an interview that he disagrees with a perspective of some of his former sojourners in faith that other churches are "fallen."²¹ In the 1990s, Baptists had similar debates about ecumenism and limits of contextualization; however a loose structure of the Baptist Union, which gives to local churches large autonomy, precluded disciplinary measures. Global divide between liberals and conservatives on the LGBT issue within Methodism²² has influenced the United Methodist Church of Latvia (UMCL), a Methodist congregation in the

¹⁹ Aidis Tomsons, "Ellen G. White and Me," <https://spectrummagazine.org/views/2020/ellen-g-white-and-me>.

²⁰ <https://churchkorinta.weebly.com/#>

²¹ Elmārs Barkāns, "No baznīcas padzītais mācītājs Roderts emigrējis uz Angliju un tagad remontē mājas," <https://jauns.lv/raksts/zinas/238969-no-baznicas-padzitais-macitajs-roderts-emigrejis-uz-angliju-un-remonte-majas>

²² In January 2020 all fractions within world Methodism agreed on a protocol of separation. This action came amid heightened tensions in the church after the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference failed to resolve differences. Next General Conference has been postponed until 2021. <https://www.unitedmethodistbishops.org/newsdetail/united-methodist-traditionalists-centrists-progressives-bishops-sign-agreement-aimed-at-separation-13133654>

city of Jelgava in 2020 which decided to leave the church. The UMCL is on the conservative side on ethical issues but it has not decided yet how to react to global changes.²³

Currently, there are four Lutheran churches active in Latvia: ELCL, the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad (LELCA), the German Lutheran Church in Latvia (there are negotiations about this church possibly becoming an autonomous structure in the ELCL), and the Confessional Lutheran Church (CLC).²⁴ After the Second World War, two separate Latvian Lutheran churches existed: one in Soviet Latvia, one in diaspora. Cold war tensions influenced religious life and both organizations labelled each other as illegitimate. Latvian Lutherans abroad criticized international structures like the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the World Lutheran Federation (WLF) for admitting churches from the Socialist block into membership. The Lutheran Church in Latvia did the same when the LELCA joined WCC (in 1971) contemptuously calling it a “grouping in emigration” (expression used by archbishop Jānis Matulis in Soviet radio broadcast for Latvians abroad).²⁵ LELCA for decades used the pre-war name which was in use also in Latvia (even though Soviet authorities spoke of the Lutheran Church in Latvian SSR). The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia thus underlines that it is the only legitimate successor of that church. With the end of the Soviet era this conflict ceased, LELCA archbishop Arnolds Lūsis consequently refused to have any official contacts with the Soviet system even at the end of the regime. In 1989, he did not accept an invitation to visit Latvia and to attend the historical General Synod where the ELCL archbishop Ēriks Mesters was outvoted. Lūsis said in interview that Latvia is still an occupied state and he would have to fill out an application for a visa in the Soviet embassy in Russian.²⁶ Later the same year, Lūsis and newly elected ELCL archbishop Kārlis Gailītis signed a common declaration stating that “both churches—in exile and in Latvia—confirm that their special mission is to proclaim the Gospel to the Latvian nation and with God’s help, they both will serve her within given possibilities.”²⁷ Both churches hoped to merge. The hymnbook common for all Latvian Lutherans published in 1992 was one of the signs of this hope. However, soon the situation got

²³ Already in 2016 the UMCL announced in the resolution that it does not support practicing homosexuality and that practising homosexuals cannot be ordained. “Latvijas Apvienotās metodistu baznīcas 2016. gada apgabala konferences rezolūcija,” <https://www.umc.lv/lamb-rezolucija>

²⁴ The CLC is more conservative than the ELCL. It is a member of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference. Beginnings of the CLC were in 1996 when two separate Lutheran congregations emerged. In 1999 nine congregations of the same persuasion united in one church. Since that, there also have experienced a split.

²⁵ A.A.L. “Jācinās pret trimdas baznīcu,” *Latvija* (06.02.1971.), p. 6.

²⁶ “Archibīskaps Arnolds Lūsis atbild. Māras Trapānes saruna ar archibīskapu Arnoldu Lūsi,” *Latvija Amerikā* (01.07.1989.), p. 17.

²⁷ “Latvijas evaņģēliski luteriskās Baznīcas Latvijā un Latvijas evaņģēliski luteriskās Baznīcas trimdā kopīgā deklarācija,” *Svētdienas Rīts* (03.09.1989.), p. 2.

complicated. It became clear that both churches, who at the first glance are similar (both of them adhere to Lutheran confessional documents, they have a common past, and they serve the same ethnic group), differ significantly from each other. Latvian Lutheran clergy in diaspora were educated outside Latvia and influenced by versions of Lutheranism that existed in countries they had lived. The cultural memory of people who returned to Latvia after decades clashed with the reality they faced.

It would be simplistic to say that the conflict between the two churches is essentially the tension between Latvians in diaspora and Latvians in their homeland. Liberal/Conservative divides that historically could be traced in the history of Latvian Lutheranism, dating back to the 19th century, should be taken into account. During the Soviet time, a majority of ELCL leadership and academic staff teaching at the Theological Seminary could be characterized as moderately liberal, if by that we understand it as an acceptance of textual criticism and adherence to theological ideas prevailing in German theology in 19th century and during the first part of 20th century. Roberts Akmentiņš, Rector of the Seminary and later the first Dean of the re-established Faculty of Theology (University of Latvia), expressed comprehensiveness of that tradition and caution against taking a strict, exclusive view, saying “fanaticism in whatever way it shows itself always has been a cause of evil.”²⁸ After the election of Jānis Vanags as archbishop (in 1993), the ELCL gradually moved towards more conservative positions. The new ethos is uncomfortable for more liberally minded clergy. The case that attracted the attention of media was the resignation of Juris Rubenis, well-known minister and theologian, from pastoral office in 2018. Many in the church viewed his interest in various spiritualities too eclectic and there was a pressure on church leadership to discipline him. Rubenis himself pointed to the tradition to allow a spectrum of broad and diverse theological views that helped Lutheranism to survive during the Soviet period.²⁹

As often in contemporary church conflicts, it is not the basics of the faith but secondary issues that are main identity markers. If in the diaspora the Latvian Lutheran church could be characterized as a form of cultural Protestantism, which positions itself as “soul of the nation,” for many of those in Latvia who have joined the LELCA theological issues often are of primary importance.³⁰ Attitude towards women’s ordination is an issue that divides both churches. The

²⁸ Roberts Akmentiņš, “Dzīvība paliek mūžīga,” *Svētdienas Rīts* (21.01.1991.), p. 4.; However, there were exceptions among Latvian Lutheran theologians – for example, Roberts Feldmanis was on conservative side. He influenced many pastors of the younger generation at the end of Soviet era and in 1990s.

²⁹ Linards Rozentāls, “Par Juri Rubeni un kaislībām baznīcā,” <https://www.sieviesuordinacija.lv/par-juri-rubeni-un-kaislibam-baznica-mac-linards-rozentals?pcversion=ok>

³⁰ In spite of trying to find a middle ground between opposite views and leaving a lot of freedom in hands of local churches, the LELCA also has not been able to avoid splits. In 2003 the Sydney Latvian Lutheran Church decided

LELCA pastor V. Bitenieks has made a list of the LELCA core aspects. ‘Yes’ to women’s ordination is the first on the list. The other points are ‘yes’ to academic theology and ecumenism.³¹ Ecumenism would be characteristic also of the ELCL, which is a member of WCC and WLF, and therefore it would be more precise to ask what kind of ecumenism the ELCL professes. In the case of the ELCL, these are partnerships with Roman Catholics and the Missouri Lutheran synod.³² These otherwise very divergent religious groups are united by their conservatism. The ELCL also contributes to the consolidation of conservative Lutherans in other countries. In 2017, archbishop Vanags installed in office Torkild Masvie, bishop of the Lutheran Church in Norway, one of Missouri Synod’s partner churches.³³ This church was established as an alternative to the Church of Norway. In 2016, the ELCL consecrated as a new bishop of Liepāja, Hans Jönsson, who was refused ordination in Sweden because he did not accept its policy on gender equality on theological grounds. He was a member of a Swedish Lutheran traditionalist group called the “Church Coalition for the Bible and Confessions.”³⁴

After collapse of the Soviet system, the scope of international partnerships of churches changed dramatically. If in the past, every contact with the West was a window to the West, now contacts are chosen more carefully and are based on ideological closeness. The ELCL has not signed the Porvoo agreement (it has status of an observer). It was discussed already in 1996 at the conference of Lutheran pastors where pro- and contra- arguments were presented. Then archbishop Vanags said that ELCL is not ready to sign because does not know enough about the complex history of the Anglican Church.³⁵ The counter-argument would be that this view

to leave the LELCA. Its pastor Colvin MacPherson said that he never received from the LELCA leadership clear answers to theological questions, one issue that was especially highlighted by him was homosexuality. Eigis Timermanis, Board Chair of the local church, added that in his view the LELCA spent too much money for unnecessary activities like membership in WCC and WLF that “are more political than spiritual.” “Mācītāja ziņas,” *Sidnejas ev. lut. latviešu Draudzes Vēstnesis* (September 2013), pp. 5-8.; Eigis Timermanis, “Padomes paziņojums,” in *ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

<https://www.sydneylatvianchurch.org.au/Bulletins/Vestnesis%20september%202013%20vs%20202.pdf>

On the other hand, it would be oversimplified to say that all those who in Latvia have joined the LELCA are theologically liberal. Some of clergy who left the ELCL did so because of other reasons, like divorce.

³¹ “Archibīskapes Laumas Zušēvicas uzruna atklājot LELBĀL Latvijā Sinodi. 2016. gada 31. maijā,” <http://latvianchurchinoregon.org/news-and-notes/2016/7/22/archibskapes-laumas-zuvicas-uzruna-atkljot-lelbl-latvij-sino.html>

³² Consecration of Zbigņevs Stankevičs, as the new Catholic archbishop in Latvia, at the Lutheran Cathedral in Riga in 2010 has been presented as one of signs of close relationships between Lutheran and Roman Catholic Churches in Latvia. Another view was expressed by the Riga Deanary of ELCL. According to that opinion this occasion exceeds borders of “usual” friendship. Elmārs Barkāns, “Luterāņu mācītāji protestē pret katoļu arhibīskapa ievēšanu amatā,” <https://jauns.lv/raksts/zinas/211019-luteranu-macitaji-proteste-pret-katolu-arhibiskapa-ievšanu-amata>

³³ Mathew Block, “Norwegian Lutherans consecrate bishop,” <https://ilc-online.org/tag/bishop-torkild-masvie/>.

³⁴ “Latvian Lutheran church makes Swede a bishop,” <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/society/latvian-lutheran-church-makes-swede-a-bishop.a195964/>.

³⁵ Jānis Zīrups, ‘Evaņģēliski luteriskās baznīcas dzīve Latvijā,’ *Londonas Avīze* (17.06.-23.06.1996.), p. 7.

does not take into consideration co-existence of various views within Christian churches and complexity of ecumenical relationships. There are churches that are members of the Leuenberg Agreement and Porvoo (for example, LELCA). In 1970s the ELCL was among churches that signed the Leuenberg Agreement. In 2001, Archbishop J. Vanags wrote that “from the theological viewpoint this decision is difficult to defend because it implies ‘table fellowship’ with churches that do not teach Christ’s real presence in body and blood in the Holy Communion.”³⁶ He also added that participation in the Leuenberg Concord moves Latvian Lutherans away from future communion with Catholics and the Orthodox, but these two churches, not the Reformed, are large communities in Latvia. However, this view is difficult to justify in the face of pluriformity of Lutheranism (as any other Christian denomination) abroad and in Latvia. In many ecumenical dialogues, partners agree on generalized “core beliefs.”³⁷ There is another model advocated by, for example, Catholic Cardinal Coch who argues that Protestants have the abundant goal of visible unity for mutual recognition and table fellowship.³⁸ The problem with these objections is that they propose “ecumenism of return,” which practically means a conversion to the view dominant in one religious group.

The ELCL is more hierarchical than the LELCA. It is partially linked to the High-Church Movement that has grown in influence in the ELCL.³⁹ Some churches have been influenced also by the Orthodox faith.⁴⁰ In contrast, the LELCA churches often are pointing to pre-war Lutheran traditions in Latvia. The Riga Evangelical Church is advertising itself as the church that “keeps traditions that were characteristic to the Latvian Lutheran church before the Second World War and still are kept in Lutheran churches of Western Europe.” It mentions that it practices a custom to pray standing (not kneeling).⁴¹

³⁶ Jānis Vanags, “Aizbērsim plaisas un būvēsim tiltus,” *Svētdienas Rīts* (13.09.2001.), p. 6.

³⁷ For example, The Bonn Agreement of 1931 between the Church of England and Old Catholics (the Union of Utrecht). It states: "Intercommunion does not require from either Communion the acceptance of all doctrinal opinion, sacramental devotion or liturgical practice characteristic of the other, but implies that each believes the other to hold all the essentials of the Christian Faith." "The Bonn Agreement of 1931," https://www.willibrord.org/bonn_en.html.

³⁸ Evan Kuehn, “The Anglican Covenant and *Anglicanorum Coetibus*,” *Pro Communion: Theological Essays on the Anglican Covenant*, ed. Benjamin M. Guyer (Eugene: Picwick Publications, 2012), p. 169.

³⁹ If not forced “conservation” of the tradition during the Soviet occupation, alternatives to the “Prussian liturgy” would develop sooner or later. In the 1930s some Latvian pastors during study trips were introduced to liturgies different from what they have been accustomed to. Alberts Freijs who in 1939 travelled to U.K. was highly positive about Anglican worship as religious experience he never had before. Alberts Freijs, “Pieredzējumi un pārdomas,” *Ceļš* (September/ October, 1939), p. 315.

⁴⁰ Liepāja St. Anne Church celebrates The Dormition of Our Most Holy Lady the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin, Orthodox feast celebrated on 15 August.

<https://www.facebook.com/1865914630399817/posts/2438237813167493/?d=n>

⁴¹ “Par mums,” <http://www.redraudze.lv/par-mums>

At the beginning, the ELCL and the LELCA each had their own territories of jurisdiction. Later the ELCL established congregation in Ireland and in 2008 sent a pastor from Latvia (Uģis Brūklene) to serve there.⁴² Soon after that the LELCA congregations emerged in Latvia. There are six congregations that belong to LELCA in 2020.⁴³ One church is still not a member of the LELCA but is served by a pastor from the LELCA. There are also five missions established in some places like the town of Valmiera. The first congregation (Riga Evangelical Church) that became member of the LELCA was established in 2009, mainly by Latvians who returned to Latvia after living abroad. At the beginning, it used one of the ELCL churches in Riga, but when in 2014 a woman (Ieva Puriņa) was ordained as assistant pastor of this congregation, it had to move to the near-by Methodist church.⁴⁴ Methodists in Latvia are supportive of women ordination, and for some years had a female Superintendent (Gita Medne). In 2006, after the ELCL synod voted to amend its by-laws and legally strengthened a ban to ordain women that *de facto* existed for some time (during archbishop's Vanags' leadership), Liepāja Church of Cross left the ELCL. Its pastor Mārtiņš Urdze announced in front of the synod that his church would leave in case the proposed amendment should pass. After the general meeting of the synod, the church voted to leave.⁴⁵ There are also some churches that have been independent from ELCL since the 1990s and joined the LELCA later.

Relationships between the ELCL and the LELCA are in tension, and there are court cases over properties of local churches in Latvia that are part of the LELCA. During a clash of arguments, some representatives of both churches have been too polemical and one-sided; there were those who argued that the ELCL is the church created during Soviet period and thus it is not a legitimate successor to the church that existed before the war; there were others who said that only the church governed by those who stayed in Latvia has the rights to be a successor of that church.⁴⁶ Debates intensified when the ELCL initiated amendments in the existing law on the ELCL. Succession was mentioned in the new preamble of the law. However in the

⁴² "Latviešiem Īrijā savs luterāņu mācītājs,"

<http://www.lalb.lv/?p=news2arch&fu=sh&id=317&month=1&year=2008>

⁴³ <http://www.lalb.org/lv/?ct=draudzes&ic=9&sr=>

⁴⁴ An article about ordination of I. Puriņa- Antra Gabre, "Luterāņiem – mācītāja, spītējot aizliegumam," <https://nra.lv/latvija/111068-luteraniem-macitaja-spitejot-aizliegumam.htm>

⁴⁵ "Luterāņu draudze Liepājā izstājas no LELB," <https://www.la.lv/luteranu-draudze-liepaja-izstajas-no-lelb>

⁴⁶ Official opinion of the LELCA was balanced and recognized as successors three Lutheran churches in Latvia - ELCL, LELCA and the German Lutheran Church in Latvia. Kārlis Žols, "LELBĀL Viedoklis par izmaiņām LELB likumā," <https://www.draudzes.se/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/LELBAL-Viedoklis-par-izmainam-LELB-likuma.pdf>; Historically both churches are continuation of the Lutheran Church that existed before the Second World War. And after the war they both worked in situation where legal framework developed during inter-war period did not work anymore.

meantime, a new parliament was elected and in November 2018 parliamentary Human Rights and Public Affairs Committee decided to stop working on the amendments.⁴⁷

Postsecular Wave of Neo-Conservatism

Post-secularism is a term that has emerged in various disciplines, including sociology, to reflect religion's move back into the public sphere and the need to take into account the voice of religious actors in any contemporary analysis of society. José Casanova has identified four main catalysts that shifted religion from the private to the public sphere: the 1979 Iranian Revolution; the rise of Solidarity in Poland; the political engagement of Catholicism in Latin America; and the growth of the Christian right in US politics. Jürgen Habermas refers to postsecularism in association with de-privatization of religion and the current dialogue about the management of the presence of religious groups in the public sphere.⁴⁸ Public theologies developed by Christians are diverse and spread across political left/right spectrum. However, in Eastern Europe Christian churches are more likely to be associated with politically conservative perspectives. This situation mirrors general tendencies in post-Soviet countries. Three decades after the fall of Soviet system, as shown in a Pew Research Center survey (2019), few people in the former Eastern Bloc regret the changes. Yet, neither are they entirely content with their current political or economic circumstances. One factor that stimulates dissatisfaction with the way democracy is working is frustration with political elites, who are often perceived as out of touch with the real life of citizens. Most respondents embrace democracy, but the intensity of people's commitment to specific democratic principles is not always strong. On social issues like homosexuality and the role of women in society, opinions differ sharply between West and East.⁴⁹

When in 2003 before a crucial referendum on membership in the European Union (EU) Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, state president of Latvia, met with Lutheran archbishop Vanags, he said that there is no other alternative for Latvia.⁵⁰ However, it was not without reservations about the liberal attitude the EU has on the LGBT and other issues where conservative Christians have strong opposing opinions. The Catholic Cardinal Jānis Pujats similarly encouraged his

⁴⁷ "Cilvēktiesību komisija neturpinās darbu pie LELB likuma grozījumiem," <https://bnn.lv/cilvektiesibu-komisija-neturpinas-darbu-pie-lelb-likuma-grozijumiem-305846>

⁴⁸ Adam Possamai, 'Post-secularism in multiple modernities,' *Journal of Sociology* 53: 4 (2017): pp. 824-825.

⁴⁹ Richard Wike, Jacob Poushter, Laura Silver, Kat Devlin, Janell Fetterolf, Alexandra Castillo, and Christine Huang, "European Public Opinion Three Decades After the Fall of Communism," <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/10/15/european-public-opinion-three-decades-after-the-fall-of-communism/>

⁵⁰ 'Tiekoties ar Latvijas Evaņģēliski luteriskās baznīcas arhibīskapu,' *Latvijas Vēstnesis* (22.08.2003.), p. 9.

fellow-believers to vote ‘yes.’ His reasoning was that Eastern European countries could be an example to other countries where “Islam is spreading” and could show them Christian values.⁵¹

Homosexuality has been one of central issues of concern for churches in Latvia, much more than social injustice, corruption, or political populism. In 2007, after pressure from churches Oskars Kastēns, Special Assignments Minister for Social Integration, made a decision to exclude reference to discrimination based on sexual orientation in the program for promoting tolerance from 2009-2013, prepared under auspices of Secretariat of Special Assignments Minister for Social Integration.⁵² Views about social inclusion often have been simplistic and based on rumors. For example, at the Baptist Congress of 2006, Bishop Andrejs Šterns in his report referred to information he got from *Tikšanās* (Meeting), a local Christian journal, that the EU has a special fund to support infiltration of homosexual clergy in churches.⁵³ Churches have disciplined pastors who have defended LGBT rights in public. In 2005, the Chapter of the ELCL removed pastor J. Cālītis (then serving in two congregations, one belonging to the ELCL and another one to the Church of England) from the office. It was caused by the fact that he led the Gay Pride worship service and gave communion to homosexuals during the service. Besides, Cālītis was charged with participation in the event organized by the Unification Church.⁵⁴ Some ELCL pastors disagreed but abstained from criticising the church leadership. For example, Modris Plāte, popular clergyman who used to be member of “Rebirth and Renewal,” a group of dissident pastors who at the end of Soviet era opposed collaborationism and stood for change in ELCL, admitted that he is afraid of sanctions. He already was warned that he could be dismissed if he proceeded, as he had communicated to the media, to take part in the Gay Pride worship service.⁵⁵

The important role that churches attach to the “right” version of sexuality has influenced also ecumenical relationships where pro- or contra- opinion is the main factor in forming alliances. In 1990s, Charismatic churches conflicted with majority churches. Registration of the “New Generation” church in the town of Ludza was deferred by state authorities because of what was defined by the state as blasphemy against Catholics and Orthodox.⁵⁶ Later, relationships improved because, in spite of theological and other differences of all these groups, they united against liberal values perceived as the threatening ‘Other.’ In 2006 a website of the

⁵¹ Anna Rancāne, Ilze Grīnuma, ‘Kardināls Pujats katoļus Aglonā aicina balsot par ES,’ *Austrālijas Latvietis* (20.08.2003.), p. 1.

⁵² Laura Dzērve, “Reliģiska cenzūra,” *Diena* (28.04.2008.), p. 3.

⁵³ “LBDS bīskapa A. Šterna ziņojums LBDS 2002. gada kongresam,” author’s private archive, p. 4.

⁵⁴ Kapituls no mācītāja amata atļaiž Juri Cālīti,’ *Svētdienas Rīts* (26.11.2005.), p. 2.

⁵⁵ Ilze Grīnuma, “Klusu!”, *Diena* (24.11.2005.), p. 5.

⁵⁶ “Ministru atbildes,” *Latvijas Vēstnesis* (19.05.1995.), p. 4.

Roman Catholic diocese of Kurzeme quoted Alexey Ledjajev, “New Generation” senior pastor, alongside with Catholic Cardinal J. Pujats in the news article on the manifesto on family values signed by church leaders of Latvia. Ledjajev used military language in talking about war between death and life.⁵⁷ Since 2018, most of new and historical churches in Latvia participate in an annual Prayer Meeting of the Nation usually organized in a large hall. A. Ledjajev and other leaders of Charismatic churches gather on stage together with bishops of historical churches. The idea to have these rallies belongs to Neo-Pentecostal pastor Mārcis Jencītis.⁵⁸ The event has political goals of mobilization of Christians: “All churches in Latvia should unite in order to raise their voice in the government of Latvia about its essential decisions that concern the nation of Latvia, and they should stand for Christian values.”⁵⁹ Jencītis’ own political theology shows that, in spite of similarities, local political theologies are not always identical to the Christian Right in the United States. Jencītis criticised right-wing Christians in USA, stating “no politician could solve problems of the church. The same about forcefully solving Islamization. The church should grow and develop and it should not blame Mexicans, Islam, gays or politicians.”⁶⁰ Further he said that if in the USA Christians should vote for Trump, believers in Latvia in similar hypothetical elections should be voting against because according to Jencītis’ reasoning, Christians should vote for somebody who would ensure that the church would be able to develop without hindrances. In Latvia the politician who is sympathetic to the regime in Russia would not do well.

In 2019, many church leaders signed a letter of thanks to the government. It is interesting because it shows priorities of churches; among “good works” of the government are listed for the rejection of the draft of the Partnership Law, the refusal to decriminalize smoking of marijuana, and non-ratification of the Istanbul Convention.⁶¹ The Convention, according to the letter of leaders of four churches (Lutheran, Catholic, Orthodox, Baptist), was a threat because it could open the door to “ideology of genderism.” However, this was not the view of all; in another open letter, members of various Lutheran (ELCL, LELCA), Baptist, Seventh-day Adventist, and Anglican churches expressed their support.⁶² Anglicans have been viewed

⁵⁷ ‘Kristīgās konfesijas aicina saglabāt ģimenes,’ <http://www.katedrale.lv/index.php?id=6521>

⁵⁸ ‘Tuvojas ikgadējā Starpkonfesionālā Tautas lūgšanu sapulce „Dievs, svētī Latviju!”’, <https://dievssvetilatviju.info/preses-relize/>

⁵⁹ ‘Mērķi,’ <https://dievssvetilatviju.info/merki/>

⁶⁰ ‘Kristietis un politika,’ <http://www.marcisjencitis.lv/publikacijas/svetrunas-2/kristietisunpolitika>

⁶¹ ‘Pateicības vēstule Latvijas valsts vadītājiem,’ <https://parlatviju.lv/peticija/pateicibas-vestule-latvijas-valsts-vaditajiem>

⁶² ‘Baznīcas pārstāvji atklātā vēstulē pauž atbalstu Stambulas konvencijai,” <https://satori.lv/article/baznicas-parstavji-atklata-vestule-pauz-atbalstu-stambulas-konvencijai>

especially negatively in inter-confessional discourse. In general, Anglicans in Europe and outside have invested a lot in a dialogue with Roman Catholics and Orthodoxy, but at the local level, the situation differs from place to place depending on what kind of Anglicanism one or another chaplaincy in Continental Europe represent, and what its constituency and local ecumenical context remain. The times when Anglican churches in Europe looked like an extension of a local British club are gone. In Riga, the Anglican community is partly formed by locals who did not find their place in “traditional” churches. They find it easier to have fellowship with more liberally-minded Lutherans and other Protestants.

In the period since Latvia’s independence, churches in Latvia have been visible in politics in various ways. Many pastors have become politicians themselves, for example, Lutheran pastor Jānis Šmits who was a parliamentary deputy and deputy at Riga City Council and one of the founders of the First Party of Latvia; Baptist pastor, Ainars Baštiks, was Minister of Special Assignment on Children and Family Affairs, who has been a parliamentary deputy and is currently a deputy at Riga City Council from the municipal party “Honour to Serve Riga.” Some church leaders have expressed their support or criticism of a particular political force. For example, Archbishop Vanags associated the leftist party “Progressives” with “postmodern neo-Marxism.”⁶³ Former Baptist bishop, Jānis Sproģis, for a short period of time, was a candidate to the state presidency from the party “Harmony,” but after public pressure declined to stand as a candidate. Since “Harmony” is labelled as a Russian party, in eyes of Latvian nationalists for Latvian to associate himself with that party was regarded as⁶⁴ In 2002, the party “New Era” organized in the Lutheran Cathedral a highly performative event with a solemn vow of its candidates for deputy in parliament in the presence of Baptist, Catholic,⁶⁵ The center-right New Era party lead by Einars Repše, the former chief of the Latvia's central bank, was the biggest vote-getter in the Latvian parliamentary elections in October 2002; it won about a quarter of all votes, securing 26 seats in the Latvian parliament. One of the reasons for its success was the lack of a clear-cut ideological structure and a stable balance between

⁶³ Elita Veidemane, “Arhibīskaps Jānis Vanags: Sabiedrībā notiek mulsinošas pārvērtības,” <https://nra.lv/latvija/274204-arhibiskaps-janis-vanags-sabiedriba-notiek-mulsinosas-parvertibas.htm>; This interview reveals also one of the sources of inspiration for the archbishop; he refers to Jordan Peterson, Canadian psychologist who has become a right-wing celebrity.

⁶⁴ For Sproģis’ own statement called “The confession of a traitor” on this issue see: “Pēteris Sproģis: Es piedalīšos – varat arī turpmāk uzskatīt mani par nodevēju,” <https://skaties.lv/zinas/latvija/viedokli/peteris-sprogis-es-piedalisos-varat-ari-turpmak-uzskatit-mani-par-nodeveju/>

⁶⁵ “Jaunais laiks’ Dieva priekšā sola kalpot tautai,” <https://www.delfi.lv/news/national/politics/jaunais-laiks-dieva-prieksa-sola-kalpot-tautai.d?id=3626091>

right-wing and left-wing political parties in Latvia. However, soon the party experienced decline and mass exodus of its members before merging with another party.

In 2004, six “traditional” churches and the Jewish religious community signed agreements with the state, which was later followed by a law on each of these religious organizations. The idea to make these agreements appeared parallel to the negotiations about the Concordat with the Holy See. Other churches also wanted to have something similar, even if their agreements would never have the same weight as agreement between two states (Latvia and the Vatican). One of the arguments for agreements between “traditional” churches and the state was that recognition given by the law that would guard these churches and the state from conflicts that could arise if alternative churches were registered and would start to demand their rights.⁶⁶ The Latvian political elite, with its slogan that “Latvia belongs to Europe,” does not like comparisons with Russia. However, some of the arguments behind these agreements remind similar, only more radical developments in the territory of Latvia’s Eastern neighbor.⁶⁷ The Baptist Union has been among religious organizations that signed an agreement, even though Baptists traditionally stand for the separation of state and church.⁶⁸ In 1990s, when an offer was made to the Baptist Union, proposing an agreement with the state alongside some other religious communities, Baptists agreed at the same time stating that there should be no privileged church in Latvia.⁶⁹ In practice, the situation looks more complicated. Law on the Baptist Union (like laws with other “traditional” churches) states that “the church can demand an end to the illegal use of its name”(§ 3.6)⁷⁰ This is problematic because Baptists globally and locally are very diverse and debates in the court in other institution about possible illegal use of name “Baptist” would end nowhere, or would become an expression of power exercised by one version of Baptist faith. The purpose of these agreements, at least in mind of their supporters, clearly moved beyond the principle of equality of all religious groups and neutrality of the state in these matters. According to a statement made in 1997 by Aivars Maldups, the State Secretary of the Ministry of Justice, the purpose of agreements was to help people to “understand true spiritual and ethical values that—against some non-traditional religions and

⁶⁶ Ringolds Balodis, “Par tradicionālajām reliģiskajām konfesijām un esošajām reliģiskajām organizācijām,” *Latvijas Vēstnesis* (28.05.1999.), p. 17.

⁶⁷ Scholars in Latvia have pointed to similarities in state-church policies of both countries. See Laima Geikina, “Apziņas brīvība un reliģisko organizāciju likums: Latvijas un Krievijas gadījumi,” *Ceļš* 69 (2018), pp. 45-60.

⁶⁸ Bishop Jānis Šmits listed freedom of consciousness as one of eight basic aspects of Baptist identity;— state and church should be separate. The state has no right to intervene in the internal affairs of the church and to judge religious beliefs.’ Jānis Šmits, ‘Baptistu identitāte un pamatziņas,’ *Baptistu Vēstnesis* 26:2 (2005), p. 1.

⁶⁹ LBDS bīskapa A. Šterna ziņojums LBDS 2000. gada kongresam,” author’s private archive, p. 4.

⁷⁰ “Latvijas Baptistu Draudžu Savienības likums,”

<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/157893-latvijas-baptistu-draudzu-savienibas-likums>

sects promote those religious confessions that have historically developed in Latvia and are considered traditional.”⁷¹ In 2001 in the letter to Prime Minister Andris Bērziņš signed by leaders of several churches, including Baptist bishop Andrejs Šterns, proposed among things to be discussed with the state was instruction in the Christian faith in schools.⁷²

The problem of the Latvian Orthodox Church (LOC) in the political sphere is more delicate because it is part of the Moscow Patriarchate, whose leadership is known for close ties with government of Russia and for promoting the ideology of *Russkij Mir* (Russian world). Membership of the LOC is mostly Russian, but there are also Latvian congregations and the LOC continuously expresses its loyalty to the state of Latvia.⁷³ During the 2012 referendum about Russian language as possible second state language, Metropolitan Alexander, the leader of the LOC, was more restrained than the leadership of the Old Believers (they sent a letter to the Chair of the Parliament about growing ethnic tension) and did not express a clear opinion on this issue. Local Orthodox publications were full of photos in which the LOC hierarchs stood together with the political elite of Latvia. In 2019, the LOC initiated an amendment in the law that now states that bishops of the church must be only citizens of Latvia who permanently have lived in Latvia not less than 10 years.⁷⁴

There have been unbalanced statements like the one made by Normunds Mežviets, Director General of the Security Police (now renamed the State Security Service), who stated in an interview, “Since the Orthodox Church of Russia is very connected with the state power, loyalty to Russia is automatically built.”⁷⁵ This is an overstatement if we take into account what was stated earlier: Churches that are outside Russia and are part of the Moscow Patriarchate are not passive role-players; they diplomatically try to move between sides in this complex situation. Metropolitan Alexander has always been cautious in his statements. In his speech at the First Congress of the People’s Front in 1988 (prior to his becoming the head of the LOC), he spoke in general terms about renewal of society and expressed the wish that the church

⁷¹ Dita Arāja, “Top līgums starp valsti un baznīcu,” <https://www.diena.lv/raksts/pasaule/krievija/top-ligums-starp-valsti-un-baznicu-10002253>

⁷² Ināra Egle, Ilze Grīnuma, Dace Plato, “Tradicionālo konfesiju bīskapi aicina premjeru uz kopīgu rīcību,” *Diena* (21.12.2001.), p. 5.

⁷³ For a more detailed analysis of the LOC and politics see Andis Kudors, “Orthodoxy and politics in Latvia,” <http://appc.lv/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Orthodoxy-and-politics-in-Latvia.pdf>

⁷⁴ “Grozījums Latvijas Pareizticīgās Baznīcas likumā,”

<http://titania.saeima.lv/LIVS13/saeimalivs13.nsf/0/4B9B43EEAFB1DDE5C225841200220854?OpenDocument>

⁷⁵ “DP šefs atklāj, ka nopietni savu ietekmi Latvijā izvērs pareizticīgo baznīca,” <https://www.apollo.lv/5894555/dp-sefs-atklaj-ka-nopietni-savu-ietekmi-latvija-izvers-pareizticigo-baznica>; It is especially one sided if we keep in mind that, to the knowledge of author of this article, nothing similar has been said by the same official about Latvian nationalist parties and their role in failures of integration.

would be allowed to work in charity.⁷⁶ In comparison, Kārlis Gailītis, Archbishop of the ELCL, was much more outspoken in criticizing Soviet leaders. In the open letter to the KGB and the Central Committee of the Latvian Communist Party (in 1991), he criticized Alfrēds Rubiks, the first secretary of the party, stating that the nation and the church is striving to build an “independent, democratic, developed state.”⁷⁷ But we should keep in mind that Gailītis as the head of Latvian-speaking church was in a different situation. The LOC does not criticize the politics of Russia (for example, aggression in Ukraine or Georgia) or ideological position of the Russian Orthodox Church leadership, but the same can be said also about its attitude towards politics in Latvia. It positions itself more generally as a preserver of Russian culture and language and joins other churches in the culture war against “genderism.”⁷⁸ The LOC avoided making comments also in matters of such importance to Orthodoxy as Kirill’s visit to Latvia postponed by the state of Latvia in 2014.⁷⁹ These negotiations about the visit have not been resumed.

In the eyes of the LOC the worst scenario would be the one that happened in Estonia and Ukraine, namely the legal recognition of an alternative Orthodox church. There are some people in the society that would like to see this happening. There are articles like one in *Latvijas Avīze* (Newspaper of Latvia) where the author expresses the opinion that the LOC should switch jurisdiction from Moscow to Constantinople. “I am Orthodox but I am not able to force myself to go to Stalin’s Church.”⁸⁰ However, the local context in Latvia is different. There is no political will to give strong support to alternative structure and the LAOC as an alternative church so far has not played a “nationalist card” and is small. In 2018, the then still unregistered

⁷⁶ Aleksandrs Kudrjašovs, “Runa LTF 1. kongresā,” <https://www.barikadopedija.lv/raksti/947042>

⁷⁷ Kārlis Gailītis, “Atklāta vēstule Latvijas Komunistiskās partijas Centrālajai komitejai, Latvijas PSR Valsts Drošības komitejai,” <https://www.barikadopedija.lv/raksti/903454>

⁷⁸ In making alliances to fight for “traditional values” the LOC does the same what the ROC does on the international level. It means also involving partners that otherwise would be theologically remote. For example, in 2014 Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev visited Billy Graham and also delivered a speech to a group of Evangelical leaders and talked about the ROC cutting ties with liberal churches like the Episcopal Church. Rod Dreher, “An Orthodox-Evangelical Alliance?,” <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/christianity-orthodox-evangelical-alliance/>; In 2011 in Latvia Baptist Bishop Jānis Sproģis was among church leaders invited by Metropolitan Alexander to the meeting where spiritual values and morals in society were discussed. “Latvijas kristīgo konfesiju pārstāvju tikšanās ar Rīgas un visas Latvijas Metropolītu Aleksandru,” <http://www.pareizticiba.lv/index.php?newid=3832>; However a group photographs from this and other meetings shows ecumenical priorities of the LOC – to the right and left from the Orthodox Metropolitan stand Lutheran and Catholic bishops.

⁷⁹ “Latvijas Pareizticīgā baznīca klusē par patriarha Kirila vizītes atcelšanu,” <https://www.delfi.lv/news/national/politics/latvijas-pareizticiga-baznica-kluse-par-patriarha-kirila-vizites-atcelsanu.d?id=44369537>

⁸⁰ Aleksejs Grigorjevs, “Maskavas baznīca Latvijā,” <https://www.la.lv/maskavas-baznica-latvija>

LAOC had 1,415 members.⁸¹ The only other organization that easily could challenge the LOC in a potential court case about the status of properties would be the Latvian Orthodox Church in diaspora. Estonian emigrants managed to maintain it but Latvians did not succeed in doing it. After the death of Metropolitan Augustine in Germany in 1955, the LOC in diaspora no longer had a strong leadership and slowly ceased to exist.⁸²

For a long time the position of the LOC has been that the appearance of any alternate Orthodox Church in Latvia is a threat to the security of the state and may cause ethnic tensions (which proved not to be the case because nothing like that happened after registration of the LAOC). Thus, it tried to appeal to the fears of politicians. Argument that the Orthodox Church in Latvia from 1936 to 1940 was under Constantinople was dismissed by stating that it was not canonical, was done under pressure, and that no relationships with the ROC was possible at the time because of the political situation.⁸³

The public image of the LOC leadership is shadowed by the fact that according to the KGB files publically available⁸⁴ Alexander Kudrjashov (now Metropolitan Alexander, then a priest) was recruited in 1982 by Alexander Ischenko who worked for the 5th department of the KGB, responsible for fighting “ideological diversions.” The new agent received the nickname “Reader.” After Latvia regained independence, A. Ischenko was hired by the LOC to be responsible for real estates which the LOC got back. Journalists found out that the name of the Reader appears also in “Delta,” the KGB database, in connection to the reporting that in 1987 a lay worker of the church gave him *Samizdat* literature to read. The LOC did not respond to inquiries made by journalists.⁸⁵ On the other hand, experts continue to debate the reliability of this data.⁸⁶ Files contain names of many church leaders (including now deceased ELCL Archbishop Kārlis Gailītis and Catholic Bishop Vilhelms Ņukšs). The basic problem is not this

⁸¹ “Ziņojums par Tieslietu ministrijā iesniegtajiem reliģisko organizāciju pārskatiem par darbību 2018.gadā,” <https://www.tm.gov.lv/lv/ministrija/gada-parskati/2018-gada-publiskie-parskati>

⁸² More about Estonian and Latvian Orthodox churches in diaspora see Priit Rohtmets, Valdis Tēraudkalns, “Taking Legitimacy to Exile: Baltic Orthodox Churches and the Interpretation of the Concept of Legal Continuity during and after the Soviet Occupation of the Baltic States,” *Journal of Church and State* 58, 4 (2016): 633-665.

⁸³ Aleksandrs, “Latvijas Pareizticīgā Baznīca māca būt vienotiem Latvijai,” <https://www.vestnesis.lv/ta/id/10377>

⁸⁴ Since December 2018 part of the KGB files that contain names of agents have been published online. <https://kgb.arhivi.lv/dokumenti/vdk/agenti/alfabetiski> (this is a website where all registered users can have access to cards of KGB agents).

⁸⁵ Jānis Domburs, Danuta Tomšone, Inese Liepiņa, “Maisi vaļā: Aģenta 'Čitaķel' ziņojums atklāj VDK interesi par reliģiskajām konfesijām,” <https://www.delfi.lv/delfi-tv-ar-jani-domburu/raksti/maisi-vala-agenta-citakel-zinojums-atklaj-vdk-interesi-par-religiskajam-konfesijam.d?id=50945521>

⁸⁶ Some of people whose names were in files said that they were surprised by the fact because they did not sign any document stating that they agreed to cooperate as agents. Some pastors (for example, Seventh-day Adventist ministers Andrejs Āriņš, Valdis Zilgalvis, Viesturs Reķis and others) who also have their names listed in the files talked about threats and pressure from KGB and said that they did not disclose any information that would harm others. “Čekas maisu arhīvi,” <https://adventisti.lv/lv/jaunumi/1891-Cekas-maisu-arhivi>

fact⁸⁷ but the silence of most of those involved. There has been no real lustration process in Latvia. That created a favorable soil for all kinds of rumors about the loss of some data and possible manipulation with them. Some of the people—both victims and agents—are already dead and it is not possible any longer to hear their stories.

Conclusion

Since the 1990s the religious landscape in Latvia has not changed dramatically. It is more diverse than before, but Christianity is still visually dominant (if we talk about buildings and the presence of Christian symbols like crosses in Latgale, the Eastern part of Latvia which has a Catholic majority), and in numbers (if we compare the number of Christians with numbers of adherents of other religions). However, because of secularization, similar to Western Europe, Christianity fills the role of a vicarious religion (“religion performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number”).⁸⁸ It does not mean disappearance of religion. It refigures in other ways and often could be found under expressions of spirituality, whatever this vague term means to people. Globalization of piety has opened doors to novel ideas and practices borrowed from other parts of the world. Religion is increasingly part of the market. The irony is that attempts by older churches to use state protection not only undermines freedom of religion, but also works against these churches because protectionism leads to treating religion as a market commodity.⁸⁹

Churches in Latvia have done a lot to foster good ecumenical relationships which in some cases are ahead of some other countries.⁹⁰ However, this ecumenism often is selective and as central criteria for *koinonia* it raises ethical questions like the attitude towards LGBT.

⁸⁷ Files themselves are not a legal proof of collaboration with KGB. Not all situations are clear-cut and some people have been able to clear themselves through courts even before the publication of the secret files. There were 309 court cases from 1994 to 2018 about the possible collaboration with the KGB and only in 11 cases did the court establish the fact of collaboration. Reasons for acquittal are various—from the decision that the person has not collaborated to the statement that there is no proof. Many of the KGB documents at the end of 1980s were sent to Russia; therefore there is no possibility of a complete picture of KGB activities. “Vairāki sabiedrībā pazīstami cilvēki ir pierādījuši nesadarbošanos ar VDK,” <https://www.apollo.lv/6673594/vairaki-sabiedriba-pazistami-cilveki-ir-pieradijusi-nesadarbosanos-ar-vdk>

⁸⁸ Grace Davie, “Vicarious Religion: A Methodological Challenge.” Nancy T. Ammerman, ed., *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press., 2007), p. 22.

⁸⁹ This argument is developed in the following article: Brett G. Scharffs, Shima Baradaran-Robinson & Elizabeth A. Sewell, “Religious Monopolies and the Commodification of Religion,” *Pepperdine Law Review* 32,4 (2005): 885-943.

<https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1257&context=plr>

⁹⁰ For example, in 2015 the Catholic Archbishop Zbigņevs Stankevičs took part in the celebration of 120 years since the beginning of Adventism in Latvia. It is a remarkable fact, if we bear in mind the negative relationships between these two churches in the past.

“Apsveikumi 120 gadu adventisma Latvijā pastāvēšanas atceres svētkos,”

<http://www.vestis.adventistiem.lv/2016/09/apsveikumi-120-gadu-adventisma-latvija.html?m=1>

Currently, churches engage in culture wars and women's ordination and LGBT acceptance have become a red line in this struggle between different perspectives. What James Hunter writes about the American context could be applied also to post-Soviet social space,

if there is one aspect of the contemporary cultural conflict that is striking, it is that the distinction between what is 'religious' by conventional or technical terms, and what is not, has become very blurred and, finally, rather beside the point. The reason is that public discourse over the various issues on the culture war is almost always framed in rhetoric that is absolute, comprehensive, and ultimate.⁹¹

As a result, on one side there are churches that have established a "regime of truth" with little freedom to move and on the other side there are other churches or groups of believers that still are in the process of developing a positive identity after the hurt they have experienced in communities which they left.

Churches that historically have been dominant behave as if the "Christendom model" is still valid. In practice it means making alliances with political actors and religious groups which would be unlikely under different circumstances. As Paul Mojzes rightly observes about Eastern Europe in general, "power positions had been reversed and those who were previously oppressed seemed not to remember what it meant to be disadvantaged."⁹² The local theology combined with critical social theory which would be able to distance itself from secular ideologies is much needed. Only then can an ecclesiology be born that recognizes the church as an inclusive community where Gentiles, Jews, and contemporary equivalents to these groups are fellow heirs of one body.

⁹¹ James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), p. 62.

⁹² Paul Mojzes, "Religion in Eastern Europe after the Fall of Communism: from Euphoria to Anxiety," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 40, 1 (2020): 8-9.