

The International Dimension of Estonian Lutheranism in the 20th Century

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Introduction

Estonian Lutheranism, with its institutions, forms of religious identity and theological research, has its own specific character. This singularity, however, comprises a combination of theological, social, political and historical aspects. One of the factors that has shaped and is characteristic of Estonian Lutheranism is its international dimension. It is, however, impossible to analyze one specific moment without understanding and describing Estonian Lutheranism in its full complexity, since all the various aspects are interconnected. The aim of this article, then, is to analyze the international dimension of Estonian Lutheranism and its development through the 20th century in a wider context, taking various domestic and international actors into account.

Having established the interconnection between the specific and the general context, a more detailed definition of the international dimension of Estonian Lutheranism is needed. I distinguish two major motives, one being ecclesiastical, the other theological. The ecclesiastical motive involves formal and informal relations, i.e. international relations between churches, participation in the ecumenical movement and in various religious communions. The second motive is less formal, and although it includes institutional cooperation between theologians, the primary focus here is on the impact of the international dimension of Lutheranism on Estonian theological thought and church life. The structure of the analysis makes it possible to follow the changes in these motives over the 20th century. After a general introduction to the social and political context in which Estonian Lutheranism operated in the early 20th century, the article provides an analytical overview of local theological thought in the 19th century, thus portraying the main features of Lutheranism in Estonia. The third section covers the first period of Estonian independence from 1918 to 1940 in more detail, in order to better understand the changes in theological and ecclesiastical thinking in Estonian Lutheranism in connection with its international dimension. How this new orientation became a source of conflict is the topic of the following section, which deals primarily with the relationship between German and Estonian elements in the church. Radical changes took place after the Second World War when the Baltic States were occupied and annexed by the Soviet Union. The four sections which follow describe and analyze the development of the new, state-orchestrated internationalism. After a brief look at developments within Soviet Estonia, the fraught relationship with the Estonian Lutheran Church in exile is analyzed. The next section deals with the role of Jaan Kiivit in toning down the conflict across the Iron Curtain, and is followed by a section investigating the new generations of religious leaders that grew up in Soviet isolation.

The central question in the development of the international dimension of Estonian Lutheranism throughout the 20th century is its influence on local religious identity. The history of foreign influence and how it relates to religious identity is the key to understanding the identity of the Estonian Lutheran Church in the 21st century.

From Provincial Order to State Independence – the Historical and Social Context of Estonian Lutheranism in the Early 20th Century

In order to understand the history of Estonian Lutheranism, we first have to be aware that the Baltic States underwent a number of political changes in the course of the 20th century. These changes had a profound effect on their societies, population, social order, values and the development of civil society. They also changed the religious landscape and the profile of religious associations.

At the beginning of the 20th century the territory of Estonia was part of the Russian Empire. It was administratively and ecclesiastically divided into two provinces – Estland in the north and Livland in the south. Altogether, Lutheran congregations in the Russian Empire formed eight consistorial districts, which were subordinated to the General Consistory in St Petersburg. However, the General Consistory was not the highest authority in administrative matters, as it was subordinate to the Russian Ministry of Interior, the Governing Senate, and the Tsar. The church was a ‘Lutheran territorial church’, often called *Landeskirche*.¹

All local Lutheran peasants were obliged to belong to a certain congregation, but they were not allowed to participate in governing bodies of the parish. As society in general, the congregations were governed by the Baltic-German nobility, who were mostly local manor owners. The majority of the clergy were also of Baltic German origin.² Although the church’s freedom for self-government was officially limited and controlled by the state, in practice the church was in Baltic-German hands.³ The state did not usually intervene in the daily affairs of the church. That said, one must not forget the interest of the state in establishing a common identity for the empire, a development which was extremely intense during the so-called Russification period in the last decades of the 19th century. This also had consequences for the Lutheran Church, as its activity was severely hampered by the state, which favoured the established faith of the empire, the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as the Russian language.⁴

The First World War resulted in the fall of the Russian Empire in 1917, which was soon followed by the establishment of the new independent Baltic republics in 1918. The states – Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia – were internationally recognized and joined the international community. Little more than twenty years later, during the Second World War, their independence was forcefully interrupted. The Baltic States were annexed in 1940 by the Soviet Union (USSR), and were forced under Soviet rule. The fall of the Soviet Union in

1 Cf. Andres Andresen: *Luterlik territoriaalkirik Eestimaal 1710–1832. Riigivõimu mõju kirikuvalitsemisele, -institutsioonidele ja -õigusele* [The Lutheran Territorial Church in Estonia 1710–1832. State Influence on Church Administration, Institutions and Law], Tartu 2004, pp. 162 f.

2 Cf. Johan Kõpp: *From Established Church to Free People’s Church. A Chapter from the History of the Evangelic-Lutheran Church of Estonia*, in: Jaan Olvet-Jensen (ed.): *Apophoreta Tartuensia*, Stockholm 1949, pp. 2-5.

3 Cf. Mikko Ketola: *The Nationality Question in the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1918–1939*, Helsinki 2000, p. 25.

4 Cf. Ea Jansen: *Usk ja kirik* [Faith and Church], in: Andres Andresen et.al. (eds.): *Eesti Ajalugu V. Pärisorjuse kaotamisest Vabadussõjani* [Estonian History V. From the Abolition of Serfdom to the Independence War], Tartu 2010, pp. 314-326, here pp. 320 f.

1991 saw yet another change, as the states fulfilled their goal of restoring their independence and have since then taken the path of democracy.⁵

The shift from provincial order, i.e. being a part of the Russian Empire until 1918, and of the Soviet Union from 1940 (1944) to 1991, to state independence meant a conceptual change. Although the declaration of independence in 1918 was addressed to “the peoples of Estonia” (in plural), and in 1925 the Republic of Estonia passed one of the greatest achievements in interwar Europe – the cultural autonomy law –, the Republic of Estonia was nevertheless established on the basis of Estonian national self-determination. It was, and still is, a nation-state. During the first half of the 20th century around 90% of the population were Estonians. Independence was perceived not only as an administrative act, but also as an expression of cultural identity and national history. For the first time, Estonian culture was publicly protected, fostered and promoted by the Republic of Estonia.⁶

Equally important is the fact that the establishment of Estonian nationhood made Estonia a part of the international community and created an Estonian national self-image, equal to other independent nations. The establishment of the Republic of Estonia thus introduced the concepts of national and international for the Estonians. During the interwar period international relations were primarily connected with the issue of foreign orientation and the preservation of independence. Choosing the right friends with whom to establish closer contacts seemed to be the best guarantee to preserve state independence. The Republic of Estonia, although internationally recognized, was still one of the smallest states established after the First World War according to the principle of national self-determination, and it was seen as a buffer country between Europe and Soviet Russia.⁷

Defining Lutheranism in the Context of ‘Domestic’ and ‘International’ Prior to Estonian Nationhood

The provincial order before Estonian statehood had two major ideological pillars: firstly, the predominantly Russian language-based ideology of the Russian Empire, which was more or less supported by the Russian Orthodox Church; and secondly, Baltic-German ideology, represented by the German-speaking ruling minority, with its local administrative and social institutions, including the Lutheran Church. Lutheranism and the Lutheran Church were considered to be the most important moral guardians of society and the guarantors of social order. As the Baltic Germans and the Russian government were unable to create a socially stable and nationally balanced political system, the end of the 19th century saw the establishment of an Estonian civil society, based on national values and national history.

5 Cf. Ago Pajur: Riikluse rajamine [The Development of Statehood], in: Ibidem et.al.: Eesti ajalugu VI. Vabadussõjast taasiseseisvumiseni [Estonian History VI. From the Independence War to the Restoration of Independence], Tartu 2005, pp. 47-64; Jüri Ant: Nõukogude okupatsioon [The Soviet Occupation], ibidem, pp. 164-180; Tõnu Tannberg: Taasiseseisvumine [The Restoration of Independence], ibidem, pp. 374-396, here pp. 391-393.

6 Cf. Andres Kasekamp: A History of the Baltic States, Basingstoke 2010, pp. 113-119.

7 Cf. Eero Medijainen: Saadiku saatus. Välisministeerium ja saatkonnad 1918–1940 [The Fate of the Ambassador. The Foreign Ministry and the Embassies 1918–1940], Tallinn 1997, pp. 47-55.

This was not integrated into the ruling social system, but started to function as a parallel society, with its own social organizations, media, and from the beginning of the 20th century political parties, which soon succeeded in controlling a few local governments.⁸

At the beginning of the 20th century the Lutheran Church in the Baltic provinces also faced renewal. However, reform efforts were rejected and the church managed to remain firmly behind the Baltic-German ruling class and preserve its confessional identity. Although Estonian clergy participated in the Estonian national awakening, the church in general was a bystander in these affairs and to some extent even opposed the development. Lutheran confessionalism had deep and reputable roots in the Baltic provinces, because the Faculty of Theology at the University of Tartu, responsible for educating clergy, was an institution with a prominent history, reputation and influence. It was the only Evangelical Faculty in the Russian Empire which trained ministers for the entire Russian Evangelical Lutheran Church. The Faculty at the University of Helsinki mostly produced ministers for the Lutheran Church in Finland. Confessional Lutheranism, as the predominant theological approach of the faculty for most of the 19th century, aimed to unite characteristics from Pietism and Orthodoxy as well as the historical-critical method of Bible studies. Before the wave of confessional theology in the second half of the 19th century there had also been several prominent representatives of Lutheran orthodoxy; Professors Theodosius Harnack and Friedrich Adolf Philippi should be mentioned here.⁹

Just as the political orientation of the Faculty gravitated to Germany so did its theological orientation. The most intimate ties were established with the University of Erlangen, so that new theological approaches reached the Baltic provinces in the form of Erlangen theology. The most famous representatives of the faculty during its peak in the second half of the 19th century were Alexander von Oettingen and Moritz von Engelhardt.¹⁰ In 1859 von Oettingen set up the faculty's theological journal *Dorpater Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, and acted as its editor for the next 15 years.¹¹

Interestingly, the faculty was also a platform for theologians who later became professors at universities in Germany. This also serves as evidence of the close ties between Germany and the Baltic provinces. For example, Adolf von Harnack, professor of Church History at the Friedrich-Wilhelm University of Berlin was the son of Theodosius Harnack, Professor of Practical Theology in Tartu. Coincidentally, Reinhold Seeberg, Professor of Dogmatic

8 Cf. Toomas Karjahärm, Väino Sirk: *Eesti haritlaskonna kujunemine ja ideed 1850–1917* [The Development and Ideas of the Estonian Intelligentsia 1850–1917], Tallinn 1997, pp. 210 f.

9 Cf. Jouko Talonen, Priit Rohtmets: *The Birth and Development of National Evangelical Lutheran Theology in the Baltics from 1918 to 1940*, in: *Journal of Baltic Studies* 45 (2014), no. 3, pp. 345–373, here p. 347.

10 Cf. Heinrich Seesemann: *Die Theologische Fakultät der Universität Dorpat 1802–1918*, in: Reinhard Wittram (ed.): *Baltische Kirchengeschichte. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Missionierung und der Reformation, der evangelisch-lutherischen Landeskirchen und des Volkskirchentums in den baltischen Landen*, Göttingen 1956, pp. 206–219, here pp. 212 f.

11 Cf. Urmas Petti: *Tartu teoloogide algatatud kiriklik-teoloogilised perioodilised väljaanded XIX sajandil* [The Church and Theological Periodicals Initiated by Tartu Theologians in the 19th Century], in: Riho Altnurme (ed.): *Eesti teoloogilise mõtlemise ajalooost. Sissejuhatavaid märkusi ja apokrüüfe* [History of Estonian Theological Thought. Introductory Remarks and Apocryphals], Tartu 2006, pp. 38–44, here p. 42.

Theology at the Friedrich-Wilhelm University in Berlin, was also an alumnus of Tartu. As a representative of confessional Lutheranism, he balanced Harnack's liberal position in Berlin, and became one of his main opponents in theological matters.¹²

Adolf von Harnack had visited the Baltic provinces in 1911 to give lectures and promote his views. His lectures gained much attention; however, his views were considered too liberal and were not approved by the local church or supported by the professors of the Faculty of Theology in Tartu. Earlier, he had even had a conflict with his father, who was a notable representative of confessional Lutheranism, and for some time even parted ways with him. Harnack's views were condemned, but at the same time his influence proved to be a key factor in the division among the clergy during the inter-war period. Before Estonian nationhood, liberal theology had more support in the province of Livland than in Estland, where theologians tended to be more reserved about following the new line.¹³

At the same time, there were works published in Estonian about the new approach to Christianity in the light of Christian history. For example, the works of Ernest Renan, Gustav Frenssen, Johannes Riehl, Friedrich Delitzsch, David Friedrich Strauß and others were translated, published and promoted. Therefore, even though the church and the faculty were not prepared to go along with liberal tendencies, these views were nevertheless analyzed, reviewed and even supported by some pastors and theologians.¹⁴

The faculty was consolidated as an exclusively German affair, so that even during the Russification period it managed to avoid any major restrictions. Even though Russification brought with it new conditions, particularly the implementation of the Russian language, Slavic culture and Orthodox faith as the cornerstones of the empire's common identity, the Russian government deemed it dangerous to teach evangelical theology in Russian.¹⁵ The only new limitation concerned the appointment to the chairs, which was now in the hands of the government. The first non-German appointed to the chair of Church history was the Slovak Ján Kvačala.¹⁶

The strengthening of the Estonian national movement resulted in a struggle against the dominance of the ruling Baltic-German minority, including the Baltic-German clergy. During the period 1875 to 1916, 128 Estonians graduated from the Faculty of Theology in Tartu, 93 of whom were ordained as pastors. At the beginning of the 20th century the

12 Cf. Lembit Raid: *Tartu Ülikooli usuteaduskond 1632–1940* [The Tartu Faculty of Theology 1632–1940], Tartu 1995, pp. 30–32.

13 Cf. Jouko Talonen: *Latvian kansallisen teologian synty. Kiista teologian suunnasta ja taistelu pappiskoulutuksesta Latvian evankelis-luterilaisessa kirkossa 1918–1934* [The Birth of Latvian National Theology. Conflict about Theological Direction and Pastors' Education in the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church 1918–1934], Rovaniemi 2008, p. 276.

14 Cf. Riho Saard: *Kultuurprotestantismi ja teoloogilise liberalismi ajalugu Eestis. Peatükk XX sajandi Eesti teoloogilises mõtteloos* [Cultural Protestantism and Theological Liberalism in Estonia. A Chapter on the History of Theological Ideas in Estonia in the 20th Century], Tallinn 2008, pp. 45–57.

15 Cf. Urmas Petti: *Keiserliku Tartu Ülikooli usuteaduskonna esimesed professorid* [The First Professors of the Imperial Tartu University Faculty of Theology], in: *Ajalooline Ajakiri* 116/117 (2002), no. 1/2, pp. 127–132, here p. 127.

16 Cf. Karl W. Schwarz: *Ján Kvačala ja tema tähendus Tartu/Dorpati ülikoolile* [Ján Kvačala and His Importance for the University of Tartu], in: *Altnurme* (ed.), *Eesti teoloogilise mõtlemise ajaloost* (see note 11), pp. 72–83, here p. 73.

Estonians and Latvians thus began demanding the appointment of native Estonians and Latvians as professors of practical theology and greater influence in parish life.¹⁷ However, these demands were rejected, although the number of Estonian students rose consistently from the last decades of the 19th century and clergy had to be able to preach in local languages, i.e. in Estonian and Latvian.¹⁸

During the First World War, when anti-German agitation and activity reached a peak, the faculty was obliged to teach in Russian. While most of the Baltic German professors decided to resign, the state approved the call to appoint native Estonians and Latvians to the faculty, and in 1916 Johan Kõpp was appointed the first Estonian professor of practical theology.¹⁹

Although some congregations had a friendly relationship with the local Baltic-German pastor, after the 1905 revolution parishes began to demand pastors of Estonian origin and mother tongue. These demands could not, however, be fulfilled satisfactorily because there were not enough Estonian theology students to fill the posts, and the policy was not accepted by the ruling Baltic-German nobility.²⁰

All in all, Lutheranism in Estonia was influenced foremost by German culture and theology. The church and the faculty of theology belonged to the German cultural and theological world, although, politically, the Baltic provinces were a part of the Russian Empire. For the religious institutions in the Baltic provinces the sense of belonging to the German cultural and theological world was so deeply rooted that the influence of German evangelical theology cannot be defined as 'international'. At the same time, there was definitely a certain domestic form of theology in the Baltic provinces; however, this was still a part of the German world, and was recognized as such by theologians and clergy in Germany, as well as in the Russian Empire. The international dimension of Lutheranism in Estonia was therefore rather limited. There were almost no noteworthy international relations outside the German cultural space. The domestic form of theology was interpreted in the context of the German theological mainstream. The domestic interpretation of theology and the German context proved to be viable even after social and political conditions changed with the establishment of the Republic of Estonia.

17 Cf. Villem Reiman: Eesti ja Läti usuteaduse õppetoolide asutamisest Tartu Ülikooli juures [About the Establishment of Estonian and Latvian Chairs of Practical Theology at the University of Tartu], in: *Ibidem: Mis meist saab? [Where Are We Going?]*, Tartu 2008, pp. 447-452; Riho Saard: Eesti rahvusest luterliku pastorkonna väljakujunemine ja vaba rahvakiriku projekti loomine, 1870–1917 [The Development of an Ethnic Estonian Pastor-class and the Creation of the Free People's Church Project, 1870–1917], Helsinki 2000, pp. 6, 312 f.

18 Cf. Arthur Vööbus: *The Department of Theology at the University of Tartu. Its Life and Work, Martyrdom and Annihilation. A Chapter of Contemporary Church History in Estonia*, Stockholm 1963, pp. 22 f.

19 Cf. Jansen, *Usk ja kirik* (see note 4), p. 323; Priit Rohtmets: *Rektor Johan Kõpp [Rector Johan Kõpp]*, Tartu 2007, p. 29.

20 Cf. Saard, *Eesti rahvusest* (see note 17), p. 312.

Establishing New Perspectives – The International Dimension of Estonian Lutheranism in the 1920s and 1930s

The independent Estonian Lutheran Church was born as a result of the Russian Revolution in 1917. Its constitution was passed in 1919, at a time when the world was recovering from the atrocities of the First World War.²¹ As the leaders of churches and states started to work towards avoiding the repetition of similar bloodshed in the future, it also signaled a new era in the cooperation between churches. It was the war that gave the impetus to establishing many inter-confessional organizations with an aim to fight for peace in the world. Doctrinal differences were often set aside, and the social role of the church in stabilizing society was emphasized instead. The establishment of an independent Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC) and the emergence of the ecumenical movement as a way to approach society through uniting the churches were the two major aspects which influenced the international dimension of Estonian Lutheranism from the 1920s.²²

The Lutheran church was established as a people's (folk) church. The main author of the church's new basic concept, Johan Kõpp, declared in 1917 that the aim of the church was to unite all members into one organization so that they would all feel at home in their own church.²³ The concept clearly addressed the Estonian majority and signaled a conceptual change in defining the relationship between the church and its membership and society. These views were in accordance with the path Estonian society had decided to take after the 1917 Revolution in Russia.

The new church order was democratic and had an episcopal-synodical structure, with its parliament (Church Diet) of more than 500 members, church government (Consistory) with a lay vice president, a bishop to lead the church, and its court system for religious matters. The constitution was passed at the Second Church Congress in 1919 by parish members who had earlier been elected according to new democratic rules implemented by the Republic of Estonia to organize their parish life and represent their congregation at the congress. According to these rules there were no limitations based on property or social position. The majority of church members were Estonians, thus the representatives in congress were also mostly Estonians. The Baltic-Germans lost their prerogative as well as the initiative they had held in leading the congress and electing the new leadership. In conclusion, it was the Second Church Congress that ended the Baltic-German hegemony, and as a result of the congress the Baltic Germans were ousted from the leading positions. All new members of the consistory were native Estonians, including Jakob Kukk, who was elected as the bishop of the church and served as its leader until his death in 1933.²⁴

21 Cf. Riho Saard: Eesti Evangeelse Luterliku Kiriku sünniloost [The Birth Story of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church], in: *Akadeemia* 22 (2010), no. 12, pp. 2177-2202, here pp. 2196-2199; Priit Rohtmets, Erik Salumäe: Eesti evangeelse luterliku vaba rahvakiriku asutamisest [The Establishment of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Free People's Church], in: *Akadeemia* 23 (2011), no. 6, pp. 1135-1178, here pp. 1148 f., 1166.

22 Cf. Priit Rohtmets: Eesti Evangeeliumi Luteri Usu Kiriku välissuhted aastatel 1919–1940 [Foreign Relations of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church 1919–1940], Tartu 2006, p. 214.

23 Cf. Johan Kõpp: Kiriku ja riigi vahetõde [The Relationship between the Church and the State], in: *Ibidem*: Vaimu valgusel [In the Light of the Spirit], Tartu 2009, pp. 25-28.

24 Cf. Olaf Sild: Eesti kirikulugu. Vanimast ajast olevikuni [Estonian Church History. From the Earliest Times to the Present], Tartu 1938, p. 230.

The implementation of the new church order and the election of the new leadership went hand in hand with a new mentality and orientation of the church. At the same time the church had difficulties regaining the social position it had held before Estonian nationhood, because for many the church meant something that belonged to the past. Formally, the church and the state were separated, and now the church had its internal freedom. Even with the separation of church and state, the church's ability to function still depended on the state. Because of the church's past and socialist influence in Estonian politics during the first years of the republic, the state's attitude towards the church was not as friendly as the church had hoped. However, there were also centre-right-wing parties, who were more supportive towards the church. They did not consider the church as something of the past, but at the same time they severely criticized the church's past from a national perspective. So, the general scene tended to be pessimistic, and the church faced criticism from every direction. To protect the church, several members of the clergy, as well as laypeople, established a Christian-Democratic Party, which was represented in Parliament until the beginning of the 1930s. They managed to prevent the worst for the church, but were unable to win back the prerogatives the church had had earlier.²⁵

Although the church had aimed for self-rule and the state had approved the new approach, as an outcome of the new policy the church was now deprived of nearly all of its public functions. For example, the parliament passed a law that banned religious education from schools. After a referendum in 1923, initiated by the Christian Democratic Party, most of whose supporters were in favour of religious education, the subject was reinstated in the school curriculum on a voluntary basis. From the second half of the 1920s, the church gradually handed over its duties of registering births, deaths, marriages and divorces. The clergy preserved the right to register marriages as authorized civil servants. Most importantly, with the land reform passed in 1919 the church lost most of its properties in rural areas, because they were considered equivalent to Baltic-German manors. This weakened the church's position considerably. Financially, the church now functioned only with the support of its members and their voluntary annual fees. The system of compulsory tax and regulative tax, with landowners financing the church was abolished.²⁶

It was not only the state and the politicians who considered the church a symbol of the past or criticized the church's past, but it was the clergy themselves who wanted to overcome the image of a Baltic-German past. In fact, the Estonians responsible for reorganizing the church at the beginning of the 1920s did everything to free the church and Estonian Lutheranism from anything that resembled the previous *Landeskirche*, a church for the nobility, or the *Herrenkirche*, as it was often called.

It also meant that the orientation in foreign relations changed diametrically. Where previously the church had belonged to the sphere of German Lutheranism, Scandinavian

25 Cf. Ursula Haava: *Kristliku Rahvaerakonna tegevusest ja seostest luteri kirikuga 1919–1931* [The Activities of the Christian People's Party and Its Links to the Lutheran Church], Tartu 2006, p. 94.

26 Cf. Niilo Pesonen: *Valtionkirkosta vapaakirkoksi? Viron evankelis-luterilaisen kirkon järjestysmuodon kehitys 1919–1925* [From State Church to Free Church? The Development of Church Order in the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church 1919–1925], Helsinki 2004, pp. 318–320.

churches and the Church of England now received maximum attention. The neighbouring churches were also included in the foreign relations short-list.²⁷

The church defined its foreign relations in two ways. Firstly, there were neighbour-churches and other partner churches: Cooperation with these was primarily related to certain fields of church activity. Secondly, there were relations with significance for the church's way of thinking and belonging to the family of other Protestant churches. The Church of Finland can be considered a unique case, because as the closest neighbour and an ally it belonged to both groups. In addition to bilateral relations with other churches, the EELC began to actively participate in the ecumenical movement.²⁸

The orientation of the EELC was, in fact, chosen even before the church was established. In 1916, Archbishop Nathan Söderblom of the Church of Sweden founded a Cooperation Committee of Scandinavian Churches. In so doing, mutual cooperation was not the only aim Söderblom had in mind: His ambition was to unite all the churches in the region in order to act as one organ in international Protestant and ecumenical forums. Olaf Schild, Professor of Church History at the Faculty of Theology during the inter-war period, mentioned that Söderblom's plans were more far-reaching than anyone at that time would have expected.²⁹ Söderblom expressed his conviction that the episcopal structure of the Baltic churches should be re-established and that the churches should be a part of the Scandinavian Cooperation Committee. It was also Söderblom who initiated the establishment of an Estonian national committee of the ecumenical peace organization: World Alliance for Promoting Peace through the Churches, which was the first ecumenical initiative in Estonia. Söderblom was literally the person who took the EELC to the international arena. Even though the cooperation between the two churches was not as close as it was, for example, with the Latvian or the Finnish Lutheran Church, the impulse which the Church of Sweden and Söderblom gave the EELC marked a completely new orientation.³⁰

Consequently, the Church of Sweden and its Archbishop were the closest allies for the EELC in shaping its new identity in the 1920s. Even though the Scandinavian Church Committee lost its significance by the mid-1920s, its importance cannot be overemphasized, because it was the church committee and the following cooperation which helped to formulate the concept that the EELC belonged to Scandinavia, or was a part of Baltoscandia, as it was called in the interwar period. As a clear sign, the first bishop of Estonia, Jakob Kukk, was consecrated by the Swedish Archbishop Nathan Söderblom.³¹

27 Cf. Jakob Aunver: *Eesti rahvakirik ristitee* [The Way of the Cross of the Estonian People's Church], Stockholm 1953, pp. 76 f.

28 Cf. Rohtmets, *Eesti Evangeeliumi Luteri Usu Kiriku valissuhted* (see note 22), pp. 10 f.

29 Cf. Aila Lauha: *Suomen kirkon ulkomaansuhteet ja ekumeeninen osallistuminen 1917–1922* [The Foreign Relations and Ecumenical Participation of the Finnish Church 1917–1922], Helsinki 1990, pp. 88 f.

30 Cf. Priit Rohtmets, Veiko Vihuri: *Ecumenical Relations of the Estonian Lutheran Church (From the Beginning of the 20th Century to World War II)*, in: Riho Altnurme (ed.): *History of Estonian Ecumenism*, Tartu et.al. 2009, pp. 32-61, here p. 45.

31 Cf. Jakob Aunver: *Oma kirik* [Our Own Church], in: *Jumala abiga edasi. Piiskop dr. Johan Köpp'u 75. sünnipäevaks* [Onwards with the Help of God. On the 75th Birthday of Bishop Dr. Johan Köpp], Stockholm 1949, pp. 74 f.

Furthermore, Estonians were attracted to a concept which glorified the golden Swedish era in the 17th century, describing it as a period when the University of Tartu was established and there was a promising future ahead for local peasants. The church also used it to praise the 16th century Reformation and its aftermath, and claimed that it was the Reformation that brought spiritual freedom for Estonians.³² Cooperation with the Church of Sweden was also important because of the Swedish minority in Western Estonia. The Church of Sweden supported them financially, sending them pastors, and Söderblom visited the parishes personally in 1922.³³

However, the idea of Baltoscandia and the Golden Swedish era was not the only concept the EELC adopted in the 1920s. Another major idea concerned the cooperation between Finno-Ugric peoples. As a clear sign of friendly and close relations, the representatives of the Swedish and Finnish churches were both present at the Second Church Congress of 1919.³⁴

The EELC considered The Church of Finland as a big brother whose church life was observed with awe. The Church of Finland was the most influential and the closest partner of the EELC during the interwar period. The relations can be divided into several groups and phases, beginning with personal ties, through contacts between ecclesiastical societies, ending with official relations between the two institutions.³⁵

While the relations were closest between missionary societies in the 1920s, the cooperation began to attract other fields of church life in the following decade. What makes the Church of Finland special is the fact that the relations were usually interpreted in the context of common Finno-Ugric roots. The concept of Finno-Ugric peoples was promoted by many cultural organizations, singers, writers, and scholars of the inter-war period. To promote closer cooperation, a new tradition of organizing Finno-Ugric cultural congresses was called into existence in the 1920s. It took some years for the EELC to realize the benefits of cultural congresses. From 1929 the church began to use the Finno-Ugric concept and the cultural congresses to achieve closer cooperation with the Finnish Lutheran Church and its clergy. Finno-Ugric cooperation between the two churches culminated in the first Finnish-Estonian pastor's congress, which took place during the fourth Finno-Ugric cultural congress in 1931. The second such event was organized in 1935. The 1935 congress resulted in the establishment of a special committee to promote bilateral relations between the two churches. The congresses were intended not just for a few leading pastors, but included a great number of clergy. In addition to Estonians and Finns there was a third party, Hungarian Protestants, who organized the greatest event of the interwar period in 1937 when Finno-Ugric pastors were invited to a conference in Hungary.³⁶

32 Cf. Piiskop Jakob Kukk: Sissejuhatus [Introduction], in: *Usupuhastus eestlaste maal 1524–1924* [Reformation on Estonian Soil 1524–1924], Tartu 1924, pp. 2 f.

33 Cf. *Rootsi peapiiskop Rootsi kogudusi Eestis vaatamas* [Swedish Archbishop Visiting Swedish Parishes in Estonia], in: *Kaja* 158, 14 July 1922, p. 3.

34 Cf. Sild, *Eesti kirikulugu* (see note 24), p. 223.

35 Cf. Jukka Yrjölä: *Uskon sita Suomenlahden yli. Suomalaisten kirkolliset suhteet Viroom vuosina 1918–1939* [Faith Links over the Gulf of Finland. The Church Relations of Finns to Estonia 1918–1939], Helsinki 2016, pp. 358–365.

36 Cf. Rohtmets, *Eesti Evangeeliumi Luteri Usu Kiriku valissuhted* (see note 22), pp. 44–47.

Although the cooperation contributed to the development of a strong sense of Finno-Ugric consciousness and was certainly of an international character, it was only a matter with regional importance. The internationalism of Finno-Ugric relations was important to Estonians and to the EELC because it helped to strengthen Estonian national religious identity. In reality, however, no new identity was created. The cooperation positioned Estonians among the Finno-Ugric peoples, but it had hardly any effect on the interpretation of religion. At the same time, the cooperation had several practical consequences, e.g. the contacts established between parishes. Estonians learnt from the well-organized Finnish church how to organize youth work, missionary work etc. The Church of Finland was the first partner church of the EELC with whom there was a modest, but growing, cooperation between parishes and church choirs already in the 1930s. This development was certainly a great step forward. The Finno-Ugric common stand helped to develop practical relations and gave a sense of shared history and identity. These aspects were crucial in re-establishing contacts between Finnish and Estonian clergy after they had been broken off by the Second World War.³⁷

In terms of foreign orientation and religious identity there was a third and, in comparison with the Finnish Lutheran Church, a completely different type of cooperation, with the Church of England. After the Church of Sweden and the Finnish Lutheran Church, the Church of England was the third major foreign partner with significance for the church's mentality.

The starting point in the relations with the Church of England was a decision of the Lambeth conference in 1930 to turn to the Finnish Lutheran Church and the Baltic Lutheran Churches with a proposal for cooperation. There had already been some contacts earlier. The Church of England had from the end of the 19th century sought ecumenical cooperation with Protestant and Orthodox churches.³⁸ The relations with Baltic and Finnish churches were a follow-up to the contacts established with the Church of Sweden. The Episcopal structure of the Nordic Lutheran churches was a crucial factor in reaching an agreement between Anglican and Lutheran churches; the Church of Sweden had maintained an uninterrupted episcopal succession and was therefore the first church with which contacts were established.³⁹

After Nathan Söderblom's death in 1931, the Church of Sweden lost its leading ecumenical figure, and the EELC lost a close friend and partner. This meant that the Anglican Church became the main partner with significance for the EELC's way of thinking. Anglicans were interested in coming to an agreement with partner churches to organize conferences, consecrate bishops, accept communion and mutually acknowledge marriages and baptisms when local pastors are not at hand. After two sessions of negotiations in 1936 and 1938 the churches of Estonia, Latvia and England signed a joint report with a recommendation to the church heads and parliaments to formalize the agreement. It was approved by the churches and by the British Lower and Upper houses in 1939, but unfortunately political developments did not allow the new relations to flourish.⁴⁰

37 Cf. Yrjölä, *Uskon sita* (see note 35), p. 365.

38 Cf. Georges Florovsky: *The Orthodox Churches and the Ecumenical Movement prior to 1910*, in: Ruth Rouse, Stephen Charles Neill (eds.): *History of the Ecumenical Movement. Volume I: 1517–1948*, Geneva 2004, pp. 263–306, here pp. 295 f.

39 Cf. Rohtmets, Vihuri, *Ecumenical Relations* (see note 30), p. 58.

40 Veiko Vihuri: *Hugo Bernhard Rahamägi, Eesti Evangeelse Luterliku Kiriku teine piiskop 1934–*

The New Orientation of Estonian Lutheranism as a Source for Internal Conflict

The new orientation of the EELC was not approved unanimously. On the contrary, the inter-war period was marked by conflicts over the new foreign approach. The new orientation was not exclusively connected with foreign relations, because there was domestic controversy over confessional and national religious identity as well. These discussions were primarily related to the aim of the church to say goodbye to its past as a *Herrenkirche*. The new foreign orientation developed for the same reason and was connected with domestic debates.

Discussions on the church's statute in 1917–1919 illustrated two contradictory concepts of the church, its mission and administration. This division was the basis for the formation of theological factions in the 1920s. One group of clergy and church members wanted first and foremost to get rid of the *Herrenkirche* and the influence of the ruling German minority to bring the church closer to its members; the other group wanted to rid the church of some of its members, namely the so-called nominal Christians, in order to include only the people who valued the church based on its eternal message and foundation. The majority of Estonians belonged to the first group and supported the free people's church (*Volkskirche*) concept as opposed to the old order and mentality that did not sufficiently recognize the role of the members of the church. Most of the Baltic Germans emphasized that church members ought to be religiously active and did not, partly on national grounds, want to oppose the former church order and its mentality to the same extent. This group also included a small proportion of the Estonian delegates.⁴¹

Estonians, who were behind the free people's church wished to create a new religious identity suitable for Estonians and minorities, whereas Baltic-Germans and conservative Estonians saw the need to finally establish a church of true Christians. In doing so, the Baltic Germans, with the help of conservative Estonians wished to remain in control of the church and preserve the religious identity of the previous period. However, as mentioned earlier, they lost control of the church in 1919 and henceforth the first group began to shape the church according to their own concept.⁴²

Based on these discussions and the alteration of the confession paragraph in 1918, when a clause was included about doctrinal foundation, which was now understood in the "spirit of reformation" (in 1919 it was again altered to "the spirit of Protestantism"), three theological factions emerged in the 1920s: the conservative, the liberal and later the ecclesiastical-confessional. The conservative faction understood the new doctrinal foundation as a betrayal of the church's confessional identity. It represented orthodox or confessional Lutheranism,

1939 [Hugo Bernhard Rahamägi, the Second Bishop of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1934–1939], Tartu 2007, pp. 173–202.

41 Cf. Priit Rohtmets: Teoloogilised voolud Eesti Evangeeliumi Luteri Usu Kirikus aastatel 1917–1934 [Theological Factions in the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church 1917–1934], Tartu 2012, pp. 474–477; Veiko Vihuri: Kirikuõpetuslikke vaateid Eesti teoloogias. Rahvakiriku küsimus 1917–1940 [Dogmatic Views in Estonian Theology. The Question of the People's Church 1917–1940], in: Jaan Lahe, Tiit Pädam (eds.): Minu Issand ja minu Jumal! Pühendusteos Dr. theol. Toomas Pauli 70. sünnipäevaks [My Lord and My God! Festschrift for Dr. theol. Toomas Pauli on His 70. Birthday], Tallinn 2009, pp. 131–145, here pp. 132–135.

42 Cf. Rohtmets, Teoloogilised voolud (see note 41), pp. 139–142.

whereas the liberal school of thought tended to support German liberal theology, and especially Adolf von Harnack.⁴³

The ecclesiastical-confessional faction emerged after the actions of the two opposing schools began to compromise the unity and structure of the church. The majority of pastors followed this third school. The name of the school – ecclesiastical-confessional – referred to Lutheran confessional theology and a centralized church. This faction supported the preservation of the old doctrinal foundation, and therefore in 1925 the “spirit of Protestantism” was removed from the doctrinal paragraph and the church adopted the doctrinal foundation it had had in the Lutheran church of the Russian Empire. In reality, the theological programme of the ecclesiastical-confessional school was less clear than that of the liberals and conservatives, because the main aim of the school was to protect the people’s church order and keep the church in one piece. In general, they represented the “Old Tartu” tradition, i.e. the views were in compliance with the approach which the Faculty of Theology had represented during the earlier period.⁴⁴

These debates revealed three aspects which formed the backbone of the discussions and actions of the church in the interwar period. First, there were theological views and their historical background, second a new religious and national identity, and finally the foreign orientation. Several pastors embraced the new liberal approach to theological issues, but the discussions about the confession paragraph proved that the church was not prepared to change the interpretation of its doctrinal foundation. It was nevertheless willing to look for a new foreign orientation and for a new religious (and national) identity with updated ecclesiology, liturgy etc. The EELC also wished to recognize Lutheranism as a positive element in Estonian national history.

National religious identity became especially topical in the 1930s after the coup in 1934 when the Republic of Estonia became an authoritarian state. A normative form of Lutheranism, suitable to Estonian souls and minds, was the approach that was now most often looked for. However, the nationalistic stance did not result in the abandonment of the theological heritage of the previous period, even though the theological, liturgical and ecclesiastical profile of the church changed over the years. Consequently, the theological legacy from the previous period was maintained and even though a new foreign orientation was introduced, theologially the church still belonged to the German world. Pastors from the entire spectrum of theological orientation used the German theological arsenal. Therefore, the German theological heritage, as well as contemporary German theology did not necessarily mean that the church was living in history or trying to maintain its previous identity unchanged. German theology can also be considered as a sign of openness to new ideas and therefore its contribution to Estonian theological thought must be highly valued.

It was the theological heritage which made it difficult to create a new religious profile for the church. It was criticized by the educated class in the Estonian media for preserving the ‘German’ theological profile. In fact, it was the inability to adopt a new religious identity – a nationally understood Estonian Lutheranism – that was criticized, since no sustainable domestic form of theology had developed which would have satisfied the educated class. The foreign orientation was interpreted as something that would change church life and

43 Cf. Saard, *Kultuurprotestantismi* (see note 14), pp. 73-78.

44 Cf. Talonen, Rohtmets, *The Birth and Development* (see note 9), pp. 360 f.

help to establish a new approach to Christianity, understood in the Estonian way. However, while there were some elements introduced from Finland and Scandinavia, the theological profile in general remained almost unchanged.

Another point of criticism was the number of Baltic-German clergy working in the EELC and at the Faculty of Theology. They were considered to be representatives of German Lutheranism, with its culture, language etc., which for many belonged to the past. Although the number of Baltic German clergy declined over the years, it was still an issue that was often raised, even at the end of the 1930s when the number of Baltic German pastors was in fact no longer a problem. In 1919 there were 58 Estonian and 74 Baltic-German pastors; by 1939 there were 173 Estonian and 49 Baltic-German pastors.⁴⁵

The criticism was not only verbal; there were several conflicts that characterized the difficulties between the Baltic-Germans and the Estonians who now ruled the church. The Baltic Germans fought several battles during the interwar period to maintain their position. Firstly, after the Baltic Germans were ousted from power, they for some time even considered the establishment of a separate church. Finally, in 1921, a national deanery was established to unite all German parishes. The Swedish minority also had a deanery of their own. A second confrontation emerged in the early 1920s, in connection with Tallinn Cathedral. Bishop Kukk wished to use it as his cathedral, and argued that previously it had been a bishop's church. The German congregation using the church refused to hand it over, thus obliging the state to nationalize it and pass it over to the bishop in 1925.⁴⁶

Thirdly, there was a conflict about theological education. For some time in 1919 the (re)opening of the Faculty of Theology was seriously under discussion, because the socialist government was not prepared to educate pastors in a public school. One of the key arguments in favour of the faculty was the fact that in its absence the church and the state would have had to send theology students to study abroad, most probably to Germany, which was not considered desirable.⁴⁷

The Baltic-Germans considered the qualification and competence of Estonian professors at the Faculty of Theology insufficient. In 1931 they established a separate Luther Academy to educate their own clergy.⁴⁸ In Latvia, the Herder Institute was established for the same reason in 1922.⁴⁹

While the Herder Institute turned out to be a successful institution, the Lutheran Academy in Tartu had lost its significance by the end of the 1930s. Nevertheless, the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs considered the preservation of the Academy essential in promoting German culture in Estonia. At first, it had been rather sceptical, but over the years it came to appreciate the Academy as a beacon of German culture. In the second half of the 1930s there were even plans to enlarge the academy, so that other subjects could also be taught.⁵⁰

45 Cf. Aunver, *Eesti rahvakirikku ristitee* (see note 27), p. 76.

46 Cf. Ketola, *The Nationality Question* (see note 3), pp. 326-328.

47 Cf. Peeter Põld: *Eesti Vabariigi Tartu Ülikool 1919–1929* [Estonian Republican University of Tartu 1919–1929], Tartu 1929, p. 122.

48 Cf. Ketola, *The Nationality Question* (see note 3), p. 232.

49 Cf. Talonen, *Latvian kansallisen teologian synty* (see note 13), pp. 167-169.

50 Cf. Mikko Ketola: *Tartu Luther-Akatemia saksalaisena etuvartiona idässä 1930-luvulla* [The Luther Academy in Tartu as a German Outpost in the East in the 1930s], in: *Teologinen Aikakauskirja* 120 (2015), no. 3, pp. 194-208, here p. 206.

In reality, one of the reasons for founding the academy was that the Estonian language was now the official language of higher education. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that new Estonian professors of theology were appointed to the Faculty of Theology. Johan Köpp had already been appointed in 1916 and continued throughout the 1920s and 1930s as Professor of Practical Theology. From 1923 to 1928 he was the vice-rector, and from 1928 to 1937 rector of the University of Tartu.⁵¹ Professor of Systematic Theology was Hugo Bernhard Rahamägi, an Estonian who was elected as the new bishop in 1934 to lead the church after Bishop Kukk's death.⁵² Professor of Church History was also an Estonian – Olaf Sild, who for many years served as the dean of the faculty.⁵³ A new chair for comparative religion, which was established in 1919, was also held by a notable ecumenical Estonian, Eduard Tennmann. He was an honorary secretary of the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship Through the Churches, and organized Baltic regional conferences to promote peace.⁵⁴ At the same time, and until the second half of the 1930s, the chairs of Bible studies were held by Baltic Germans, teaching in German. After their deaths the faculty became fully Estonian. The appointment question was not so much about qualification, but about language and views about the future of Lutheranism in Estonia. The Baltic Germans considered the Estonians too nationalistic, although they, too, followed the German theological tradition. Most of the professors represented confessional or liberal theology. In 1921, the University parish was divided into two branches on the basis of language.⁵⁵

The Faculty of Theology in Tartu contributed to regional cooperation between theologians and faculties of theology, but the cooperation was also hampered by national confrontations. In 1927, the Finns organized the first conference for theologians from the Baltic States and Scandinavia, and in 1929 a similar meeting took place in Riga. The list of participants had grown, with representatives from Königsberg and Uppsala, so that there were now theologians present from Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Germany. While the first conferences were devoted to administrative matters, e.g. theological curriculum and teaching techniques, from the 1930s they focused on contemporary theological discussion.

In 1929 the question arose whether new member-faculties should be invited to join the conference. There were a few candidates, including the Herder Institute in Riga. This move was strongly opposed by the members of the Latvian University, as the Herder Institute was German-minded and had a more practical orientation than the other members. After 1931 the Luther Academy was also included in the list of candidates. The next conference took place in Tartu, in connection with the university's 300th anniversary in 1932. The question of inviting new members was on the agenda. While the Estonians succeeded in

51 Cf. Rohtmets, Rektor Johan Köpp (see note 19), p. 132.

52 Cf. Vihuri, Hugo Bernhard Rahamägi (see note 40), p. 116.

53 Cf. Riho Altnurme: Olaf Sild Tartu Ülikooli usuteaduskonnas [Olaf Sild at the Tartu Faculty of Theology], in: Marju Lepajõe, Andres Gross (eds.): Mille Anni Sicut Dies Hesterna. Studia in Honorem Kalle Kasemaa, Tartu 2003, pp. 300-313.

54 Cf. Priit Rohtmets: Ecumenical Peace Organisation “The World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches” and Resistance to Totalitarian Regimes between Two World Wars, in: *Usuteaduslik Ajakiri* 64 (2013), no. 1, pp. 62-83, here pp. 78-83.

55 Cf. Hugo Bernhard Rahamägi: Tartu Ülikooli koguduse Eesti pihtkond 1921–1931 [The Estonian Branch of the Tartu University Parish 1921–1931], Tartu 1931, pp. 8-17.

keeping the Luther Academy off the list of participants and nearly everybody agreed with that solution, the application of the Herder Institute was supported by the University of Königsberg. This was a source of conflict. There was a third party involved, which made the situation even more critical. The Estonians had invited the only Evangelical Faculty of Lithuania from University of Kaunas, but this decision was strongly opposed by the University of Königsberg. In the end Lithuanian theologians were unable to take part in the meeting, because their synod took place at the same time.⁵⁶

The next conference was hosted by the University of Königsberg in 1934. Among others, the Herder Institute was invited, while the evangelical theologians from Kaunas were not. For this reason, the Latvians decided not to take part; the Estonians decided to support them, and did not participate either. The conflict threatened to hamper the planning of the next meeting, because there seemed to be no solution. Since the Herder Institute had already participated in the meeting once, it was also invited to the Turku conference in 1937, which was hosted by Åbo Academy.

Finally, after much persuasion, the Latvians agreed to participate. The Estonians had already announced their participation before the Latvians and had, together with other participants, sent a letter asking the Latvians to take part in the conference. The conference decided to recognize the Herder Institute as a permanent participant, but not as a member of the board of deans, responsible for organizing the conferences. So, towards the end of the 1930s the 'national obstacle' was overcome.⁵⁷

In addition to the conflict between theologians, there were also warm relations between Estonian professors and their German colleagues, and the former took a keen interest in contemporary German theology. For example, Hugo Bernhard Rahamägi visited Germany in 1920 to consult and listen to lectures by Julius Kaftan, Reinhold Seeberg, Paul Tillich and Ernst Troeltsch.⁵⁸ Young scholars, like Uku Masing and Siegfried Aaslava studied for some time at German universities. In 1932, Masing spent a semester in Tübingen and thereafter two semesters in Berlin, Aaslava had a scholarship from the University of Tartu and spent the years from 1929 to 1931 in Greifswald, Heidelberg and, for a short time, in Paris.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, in the 1930s Masing was extremely critical of the foreign orientation of the EELC, defending the need to find a suitable version of Christianity for the Estonian soul, rather than importing the identity from outside.⁶⁰

In the 1920s, the foreign orientation formed part of the heated debates initiated by the theological factions. The Faculty of Theology was criticized too, mainly because of Eduard Tennmann and Johan Köpp, who were considered too liberal by the conservatives. Similarly, the international orientation was severely criticized by the conservative faction.

56 Cf. Rohtmets, *Eesti Evangeeliumi Luteri Usu Kiriku valissuhted* (see note 22), p. 80.

57 Cf. Priit Rohtmets: *Baltijas un ziemeļvalstu teologu konferences starpkaru perioda* [The Baltic and Nordic Theological Conferences in the Interwar Period], in: Gvido Straube, Jānis Kalnačs et.al. (eds.): *Vidzeme, baznīca, sabiedrība laikmetu mainā* [Livland, Church and Society through Changing Times], Valmiera 2009, pp. 115-123, here pp. 115-119.

58 Cf. Vihuri, Hugo Bernhard Rahamägi (see note 40), p. 28.

59 Cf. Urmas Nõmmik: *Saateks* [Preface], in: Uku Masing: *Uskuda, elada* [Believing, Living], Tartu 2006, pp. 383-402, here p. 385; Andreas Härm: *Siegfried Aaslava elu ja töö* [Life and Work of Siegfried Aaslava], Tallinn 2001, pp. 16-24.

60 Cf. Uku Masing: *Eestipärasest ristiusust*, in: *Protestantlik Maailm* 16 (1938), no. 1, pp 5-9.

For the entire interwar period the church was ecumenically open and participated in almost all major ecumenical events, including the peace organization, World Alliance for Promoting Friendship through the Churches, the Life and Work movement, and the Faith and Order movement. In 1938 the EELC was invited to become a member of the World Council of Churches, which at that time was in its formation stage.⁶¹

The ecumenical movement attracted mostly liberal and ecclesiastical-confessional pastors. Conservatives remained rather cautious because they feared that the doctrinal issues would be disregarded in favour of social questions.⁶² They also opposed the Swedish orientation, because the Church of Sweden, with its ecumenically active Archbishop, was considered too liberal.

In addition to the ghost of liberalism there was a fear of Catholicism, which was sometimes related to the so-called high church elements. For example, in 1921, a fervent discussion about the bishop's office and the apostolic succession followed the consecration of Bishop Kukk because the conservatives accused the church leadership of importing Catholicism to the EELC. In reality, the EELC had taken on the new identity of an episcopal church, brought to Estonia from Sweden. As there had been no episcopal church structure in Estonia for centuries and the church had been run by a General Superintendent, the new church order was considered strange, foreign and Catholic. In the 1930s, the relationship with the Church of England was even more alarming. First, there were fears that the 'Catholicism' of the Church of England would lead to weakened ties with German Lutheranism. Thus, the relationship with the Church of England was interpreted as a change in international orientation and religious identity. Dean Harald Põld, the leader of the conservative faction, asked whether the English had set a trap for the Estonians. There were also pastors who seriously enquired what the Reformation had been all about, considering that the EELC would be joining the Anglicans.⁶³

With the emerging national perspective another kind of criticism surfaced when a young theologian, later one of the most respected theologians of the 20th century, Elmar Salumaa, expressed his scepticism about the agreement with the Church of England. In 1938 he wrote that replacing German models with English ones only meant a relocation of furniture and that it was simply an illusion to replace one foreign influence with another. He was convinced that the blow to the Germanized church was not mortal. He claimed that the church remained a German church, with its dogmatism and formalism. He wanted to create instead a nationally accepted church for the Estonian majority, with its own religious morals as the basic norm for a harmonious society. The German tradition had to be abandoned. In foreign contacts it was important to find a balanced solution and in terms of identity not to focus on one church. He emphasized the need to enrich religious life and take into account personal religious feelings.⁶⁴

In addition to theological arguments there was criticism based on foreign politics. As the United Kingdom had made it clear that it was not going to provide security to the Baltic States, the Republic of Estonia, in fear of the Soviet Union, had begun to seek closer

61 Cf. Rohtmets, *Eesti Evangeeliumi Luteri Usu Kiriku valissuhted* (see note 22), p. 147.

62 Cf. Vihuri, Hugo Bernhard Rahamägi (see note 40), p. 357.

63 Cf. *ibidem*, pp. 184-186.

64 Cf. Elmar Salumaa: *Evangeelium ja eetos* [Gospel and Ethos], Tartu 2008, pp. 42-52.

cooperation with Germany. Officially, Estonia remained neutral. Consequently, the church's actions were observed by the state with mistrust, and as Bishop Rahamägi had problems with trust and supporters within and outside the church, this was yet another reason why he was removed from office by the Minister of Interior in 1939.⁶⁵

In conclusion, in the interwar period, there was a movement to find a new foreign orientation and to create a new understanding of Estonian Lutheranism. On the one hand, the EELC managed to establish a large network of partner churches and participated actively in the ecumenical movement, but at the same time the desire to find a new orientation and to distance itself from German influence was not entirely fulfilled. The German theological tradition was still followed and interpreted in a domestic context, so that the church remained intimately connected with the German Lutheran tradition.

Soviet Occupation and State-Orchestrated Lutheran Internationalism

The annexation and occupation of the Baltic States changed the social position of religious associations and the attitude towards religion in general. In a *de facto* atheist state, religion was considered a relic and something society needed to overcome. For this reason, the activity of churches was strictly regulated and observed. It was made difficult in every possible way to be a religious person or a church member. Church organizations, missionary activity and youth work was criminalized as religious propaganda. Publishing activity was also prohibited. Consequently, church buildings remained the only places for worship and practising religion, because any other public expression of religion was prohibited. The clergy fell victim to repressions and many pastors were forced to become agents and keep an eye on their colleagues. Eventually, it was a society of fear which the Soviet authorities had established and controlled, leaving little room for religious freedom. Nevertheless, for the churches the situation improved starting from the second half of the 1950s, and although the main line was firm, the authorities were not very consistent in putting policy into practice. As there were a number of institutions dealing with religion, and they were hardly in agreement with each other, their actions were not always coordinated.⁶⁶

From the end of the Second World War until the mid-1950s there were no foreign relations between the Soviet Protestant churches and the West. Although the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) had already been made a tool for the Soviet regime after 1943, when Stalin met the leaders of the ROC in Kremlin, Protestant churches were kept in isolation for another decade. Their contribution in promoting the message of the Soviet authorities abroad was discovered only after Stalin's death in 1953. Initially, the contacts of Protestant churches were orchestrated by the ROC and Moscow.⁶⁷ There is proof that even in the 1970s

65 Cf. Veiko Vihuri: Piiskop Rahamägi ja luterlik kirik vaikival ajastul [Bishop Rahamägi and the Lutheran Church in the Silent Era], in: Ajalooline Ajakiri 125 (2008), no. 3, pp. 215-244, here p. 235.

66 Cf. Atko Remmel: Religioonvastane võitlus Eesti NSV-s aastail 1957–1990. Tähtsamad institutsioonid ja nende tegevus [The Anti-religious Struggle in the Estonian SSR 1957–1990. The Main Institutions and Their Activities], Tartu 2011, p. 288.

67 Cf. Peeter Kaldur, Ingmar Kurg et.al.: Ecumenical Relations of the Lutheran Church, in: Altnurme (ed.), History of Estonian Ecumenism (see note 30), pp. 126-153, here p. 133.

permissions for local clergy to participate in meetings abroad were often granted only after a positive answer from Moscow. This sometimes took several months, meaning that some meetings could not be attended.⁶⁸

The Soviet regime considered the foreign relations of the churches to be in the service of general political interests. Therefore, foreign relations were not run by the churches themselves, although over the years, after becoming used to the Soviet system, they did manage to lay down their own agenda in promoting foreign relations. The church wanted to break out of its isolation, as isolation would have meant definite muteness and downfall. Thanks to earlier periods in which the Lutheran Church had been relatively active in establishing new links with partner churches and had participated in the ecumenical movement, the church was now able to re-establish contacts.

However, in general, foreign politics and relations were under the control of the state, run by the state and represented the interests of the state. For most of the Soviet period the churches were used as soft power tools and were expected to show that the Soviet state was not an enemy of religion, and that there was religious freedom in the Soviet Union. Any reports about the persecution of Christians in the Soviet Union were condemned as Western propaganda against the communist state. The churches were also the promoters and spreaders of the ideas of Communism and were assigned the task of exerting political and economic pressure to obtain the support of developing countries, where the Soviet Union had certain interests.⁶⁹

An Ideological Battle Between Estonian Churches on Different Sides of the Iron Curtain

In 1939, the Baltic German pastors left Estonia after a call from Germany. The *Umsiedlung* meant that the church had lost a considerable number of its clergy who had been the bearers of German theological and cultural tradition. What made the situation even worse was the fact that in 1944, fearing new Soviet repressions, approximately 70,000 Estonians had also left the country, escaping either to Sweden or Germany. Among them was the leader of the EELC, Bishop Johan Kõpp, who had been democratically elected to office in 1939 and had remained in office during the Soviet and German occupations. More than 70 pastors managed to leave Estonia in 1944.⁷⁰ The exodus caused the church considerable damage. In addition to Bishop Kõpp, Vicar-Bishop Johannes Oskar Lauri also left Estonia, reached

68 Archbishop Kiivit sent every invitation to the Commissioner for Religious Affairs. Usually there were two copies, one translated into Russian. For important conferences, the invitation was sent to Moscow. One copy was left in the church's archives and is usually marked "Given to the Commissioner", which means that in discussing foreign affairs there were probably personal contacts between the Commissioner and the Archbishop. Cf. EELCCA (Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church Consistory Archives), Kirjavahetus Kirikute Maailmanõukoguga [Correspondence with the WCC], 1964–1965. From Kiivit to the Commissioner, 28.4.1964; From Kiivit to the Commissioner, 22.4.1964; EELCCA, Kirjavahetus usuasjade volinikuga ENSV-s [Correspondence with the Commissioner for Religious Affairs] 30.6.1951–24.12.1979; From Acting Archbishop Hark to the Commissioner, 11.9.1973; From the Archbishop to the Commissioner, 3.10.1974.

69 Cf. Kaldur, Kurg et.al., *Ecumenical Relations* (see note 67), p. 138.

70 Cf. Jakob Aunver: Johan Kõpp, Uppsala 1969, p. 70.

Germany and began to organize religious work there.⁷¹ Therefore, by the beginning of the new Soviet occupation in 1944 the two leaders and most members of the church government had left Estonia. In Soviet Estonia, under the guidance of the Soviet authorities, a new church leader, Jaan Kiivit senior was elected in a somewhat rigged election in 1949. The new archbishop served the church from 1949 to 1967.⁷²

Bishop Kõpp arrived in Sweden and with the help of the Church of Sweden managed to appoint district pastors (Sweden was divided into six districts), who began to organize religious work among Estonians. The fact that the Church of Sweden and the EELC had had a close and friendly relationship during the previous period was beneficial for the organization of religious work under these new circumstances. This is clearly shown by the fact that for six months Bishop Kõpp lived in Archbishop Erling Eidem's residence in Uppsala, where the two men had long conversations about Baltic refugees, but also about religion and the future of the church in general.⁷³

By the end of the 1950s the church in exile had around 60 congregations all over the world, with 65 ministers and around 65,000 members.⁷⁴ The EELC in exile participated at the founding meeting of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Amsterdam in 1948, and based on a 1938 decision made by the EELC to join the WCC, it was accepted as a full member. In 1947, the EELC in exile was also one of the founding members of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). The LWF was essential for Estonian refugees because of its relief work. American churches supported refugees financially and from the end of the 1940s guaranteed them permits to enter the United States of America.⁷⁵

Naturally, the main aim of the church was to be of service to the exile community and to unite the Estonian community around the world in the service of God. No less important, however, was the ideological fight against communism, and drawing attention to the Soviet oppression of the Baltic States.

The two world organisations – the WCC and LWF – played an essential part in achieving this goal. Johannes Oskar Lauri, Vicar-Bishop and from 1964 Archbishop of the EELC in exile, wrote in 1950 that it was necessary to preserve the member status in these organi-

71 Cf. *ibidem*: Piiskop Johannes Oskar Lauri 70-aastane [Bishop Johannes Oskar Lauri's 70th Anniversary], in: *Issanda kiriku tööpõllul* [Working in the Lord's Field], Uppsala 1962, pp. 7-14, here p. 13.

72 Originally the EELC had been run by a bishop, and although there were already negotiations in the 1930s to establish eparchies with bishops and appoint an archbishop, the latter was carried out in 1949 by Soviet authorities. This was to show that Kiivit was not subordinate to Kõpp, who resided in Stockholm. This in turn resulted in a decision made by the EELC in exile to declare Kõpp an archbishop too. Cf. Riho Altnurme: *Eesti Evangeeliumi Luteriusu Kirik ja Nõukogude riik 1944–1949* [The Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet State 1944–1949], Tartu 2001, pp. 165 f.

73 Cf. Aleksander Täheväli: *Eesti Evangeeliumi Luteri Usu Kiriku korraldamine ja juhtimine Rootsis* [The Organization and Leadership of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sweden], in: *Jumala abiga edasi* (see note 31), pp. 96-112, here p. 98.

74 Cf. *Eesti kirik vabaduses. Aastaraamat 1958–1959* [The Estonian Church in Freedom. Yearbook 1958–1959], Toronto 1957, p. 45.

75 Cf. Mikko Malkavaara: *Luterilaisten yhteyttä rautaesiripun laskeutuessa. Luterilainen yhteysliike ja Itä-Euroopan luterilaiset vähemmistökirkot 1945–1950* [Lutheran Contacts at the Fall of the Iron Curtain. The Lutheran Movement and the Lutheran Minority Churches of Eastern Europe 1945–1950], Helsinki 1993, p. 538.

zations, especially at a time when “other doors have closed in front of us”⁷⁶. At the same time, both world organizations began to search for contacts with Soviet churches, aiming to incorporate them into the international society, thus trying to achieve greater autonomy for the churches in the Soviet Union.⁷⁷

In 1955, Archbishop Kiivit made his first visits abroad – to Finland and Great Britain. The Soviet authorities allowed such contacts in order to demonstrate the freedom of religion in the USSR and to collect information on foreign religious organizations. Another important aim for Estonian churchmen was to establish contacts with Estonians living in exile and try to obtain help from church leaders in Helsinki and London for the education of young clergy at universities in Great Britain and Finland. For the EELC it was not an entirely new concept, because there had already been similar contacts in the 1920s and 1930s. For example, Rudolf Kiviranna had studied in Hungary and Jaak Taul in Great Britain.⁷⁸

Now, in the new political situation, the motives had changed. For the Soviet state educating clergy abroad was considered an important counter-intelligence tool. At the same time, however, it did give the church an opportunity to educate pastors, since the Faculty of Theology had been closed by the Soviet authorities in 1940. There was only a small Theological Institute financed by the church itself with limited resources and a small number of students, who only gathered for limited study sessions. Among the students were two candidates who were sent to Great Britain and Germany. Kiivit had visited Germany in 1958 and during a meeting in Stuttgart had been promised that the Lutherans in the Federal Republic of Germany were prepared to cover the costs of one or two young Estonian theologians. The LWF was prepared to help finance studies in Great Britain. Kuno Pajula, the future Archbishop of the EELC from 1987 to 1994, was selected for studies in Germany. From 1960 to 1961, he stayed in Göttingen. The second student was Kaide Rätsep, who began his studies at Oxford in 1958 and with short breaks stayed there until 1961.⁷⁹ According to the KGB files, both exchange candidates were also recruited as agents. They had to win the trust of the intelligence service and go through several test jobs before they were allowed to leave the Soviet Union. The Finnish Lutheran Church was willing to support and welcome Estonian candidates in Helsinki, but due to political complications the plan could not be carried out.⁸⁰

The accession of the Russian Orthodox Church to the WCC in 1961 paved the way for other churches in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe to join the WCC. The EELC joined

76 Johannes Oskar Lauri: Kiriku ülesanded paguluses [The Tasks of the Church in Exile], in: Eesti Kirik 1 (1950), pp. 4-7, here p. 6.

77 Cf. Mikko Malkavaara: Kahtia jakautuneet Baltian luterilaiset kirkot ja Luterilainen maailmanliitto 1944–1963 [The Twofold Baltic Lutheran Churches and the LWF, 1944–1963], Helsinki 2002, pp. 378 f.

78 Cf. Rohtmets, Eesti Evangeeliumi Luteri Usu Kiriku valissuhted (see note 22), pp. 43, 65.

79 Cf. Indrek Jürjo: Pagulus ja Nõukogude Eesti. Vaateid KGB, EKP ja VEKSA arhiividokumentide põhjal [Exile and Soviet Estonia. Views on the Basis of KGB, EKP and VEKSA Archival Sources], Tallinn 1996, pp. 166 f.

80 Cf. Kristel Engman: Usuteaduse Instituut Eesti ja Soome luterlike kirikute suhetes 1946–1986 [The Theological Institute in the Relations between the Estonian and Finnish Lutheran Churches 1946–1986], in: Riho Saard (ed.): Kultuurisillad Läänemere-äärses kultuuriruumis. Töid eesti kirikuloo, süstemaatilise teoloogia ja piibliteaduse alalt [Cultural Bridges in the Baltic Cultural Space. Works from Estonian Church History, Systematical Theology and Bible Studies], Tallinn 2011, pp. 137-163, here pp. 140-144.

the WCC in 1962 and the LWF in 1963. The WCC, LWF and the EELC had corresponded with one another from 1955.⁸¹ However, the first proposal by the Executive Secretary of the LWF Carl Lund-Quist to ask Jaan Kiivit to participate in the LWF meeting had been made back in 1952, but had been severely criticized by the exile church.⁸² Consequently, the internationalism of Estonian Lutheranism now meant either justifying or condemning Communism and the Soviet Union. This question was especially topical in ecumenical and confessional world organizations. Initially, the EELC in exile had managed to keep the EELC in Estonia away from the international arena for some years. In 1956, the exile church still managed to prevent discussion about the EELC joining the LWF. However, after a meeting of the Conference of European Churches the following year, which was also attended by Estonian and Latvian church leaders, the position of the LWF began to change. In 1959, the Conference of European Churches (CEC) was founded, which gave smaller churches more opportunity for cooperation. From the very beginning, the CEC was open to Soviet churches, and also respected the peace work which Soviet churches promoted. Therefore, the EELC was among the founding members of the CEC. Jaan Kiivit belonged to the presidium of the CEC and was one of the key figures in the organization.⁸³ Soon after founding the CEC, the EELC was also accepted into the LWF.⁸⁴

Among the most ardent and passionate protesters against the violation of religious freedom and the acceptance of Soviet churches into Christian world organizations was Arthur Vööbus (Vööbus), a respected and well-known Estonian theologian, who worked at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. He constantly sent public letters to Christian organizations and governments. From 1969 he began to publish a fourteen volume series "Studies in the History of the Estonian People", which served as a testimony of the sufferings that the Estonians had endured under the occupation.⁸⁵

In 1959, the General Secretary of the WCC Willem Adolph Visser 't Hooft visited the Soviet Union⁸⁶ where he met the Baltic Protestant church leaders. Although Kiivit admitted that religious life had been severely hit, he nevertheless expressed his conviction that the situation was improving. Kiivit was considered a church leader who had made a personal sacrifice in becoming archbishop. The official speeches Kiivit gave were usually heavily censored and never revealed the whole truth. They did not contain direct lies, but described the Soviet society from a positive perspective.⁸⁷

81 Cf. EELCCA, Kirjavahetus Luterliku Maailmaliidu ja Kirikute Maailmanõukoguga [Correspondence with the LWF and the WCC], 1955–1965. Franklin Clark Fry to Jaan Kiivit, 6.8.1955; Carl E. Lund-Quist to Jaan Kiivit, 6.9.1955.

82 Cf. Swedish National Archives (SNA), Estniska evangelisk-lutherska kyrkans i exil arkiv [The Archive of the Estonian Lutheran Church in Exile], A 1:1, The minutes of the Committee of the EELC, 26.6.1952.

83 Cf. Kaldur, Kurg et al., *Ecumenical Relations* (see note 67), p. 133.

84 Cf. Malkavaara, *Kahtia jakautuneet Baltian luterilaiset kirkot* (see note 77), pp. 380-385.

85 Cf. Amar Annus: Saateks [Introduction], in: Arthur Vööbus: *Kummargil käsikirjade kohal* [On the Spot of Crooked Manuscripts], Tartu 2009, pp. 397-404, here p. 401.

86 Cf. J.A. Hebly: *The State, the Church, and the Oikumene. The Orthodox Church and the World Council of Churches, 1948–1985*, in: Sabrina Petra Ramet (ed.): *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union*, Cambridge 1993, pp. 105-124, here pp. 120 f.

87 Cf. Riho Altnurme: *The Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Union after the Second World War*, in: *Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift 104* (2004), pp. 95-103, here p. 99.

In the 1960s, the EELC in exile continued to protest about the absence of religious freedom in the Soviet Union. The biggest campaign was organized to oppose the WCC's decision to accept the Protestant churches of the Soviet Union as members. Archbishop Kõpp claimed that the clergy was simply being used as a tool to promote Soviet propaganda. Visser 't Hooft in his reply said that there were so many devoted men who were loyal to the Lord not only among the believers, but also among the leaders of the churches in communist countries, and that was the reason why the WCC desired fellowship with them. In a confidential memo sent to the LWF in 1959 regarding the situation in Latvia and Estonia, Visser 't Hooft was hopeful that religious activity in Estonia and Latvia was progressing.⁸⁸

In 1963, a similar confrontation took place during a LWF meeting in Helsinki, where Archbishop Jaan Kiivit of the EELC in Soviet Estonia replied to the criticism presented by the exile church. This was one of the few occasions when the representative of the Lutheran Church in Soviet Estonia criticized the exile community in Western media. Talking about religious freedom and the activity of the Lutheran Church in Soviet Estonia, Kiivit made three major points: There was no violation of religious freedom in the Soviet Union. To this he added that, in addition to the freedom of conscience there was also the freedom for anti-religious propaganda, but as a Soviet church leader he was convinced that the anti-religious policy had no effect on church life. Second, he emphasized that religion was not directly supported and its public presentation was forbidden in the Soviet Union, at the same time stressing that it was not these restrictions but urbanization and changes in civil society in general that were causing the church to lose members; in that sense, he argued, the Soviet Union did not differ from the West. Finally, he reasoned that the emigrated branch of the church was not in a position to judge the activity of the church in Soviet Estonia. He rhetorically questioned the decision made by the clergy in exile to abandon their congregations and move to the West.⁸⁹

With both churches taking part in international cooperation, a clear distinction between official relations and personal contacts emerged in the 1960s. In private conversations even the heads of the churches were more or less honest. For example, there was a secret meeting between Kiivit and a few persons from the exile community during Kiivit's visit to the USA in 1956 in which Kiivit was open-minded and honest. In a conversation he asked for medicine for his heart, as well as dark buttons for the gowns of ministers. When asked about his position as archbishop, he answered that somebody had to lead the church. He described the situation in Estonia as grey: there were no mass deportations any more. People had learned to keep their mouths shut, and suffered in silence. He looked at his compatriots now living in exile in the United States and said: "You would have learnt it too."⁹⁰

Well into the 1970s international organizations and their conferences continued to be events where the ideological battle between the exile and Soviet church delegations took

88 Cf. World Council of Churches Archives (WCCA), 42.2.044, WCC General Secretariat, Correspondence: member churches: 1938–1993, Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Exile, Visser 't Hooft to the Consistory of the EELC, 18.2.1963.

89 Cf. Interview with Kiivit: Kirik ei saa olla viies kolonn [The Church Cannot Be a Fifth Column], in: *Võitleja* 12 (1963), no. 8, p. 3.

90 EELCCA, Perekond Kõpp [Family Kõpp], Johan Kõpu kirjavahetus erinevate isikute ja organisatsioonidega [The Correspondence of Johan Kõpp], Juhan Suurkivi to Johan Kõpp, 16.10.1956.

place, as the WCC assembly in Nairobi in 1975 illustrates. Before the assembly, the EELC in exile had published a brochure “A message to the churches from the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church” about the persecution of Christians and the church in the Soviet state. Archbishop Konrad Veem of the EELC in exile had even met with the General Secretary of the WCC, Philip Potter, intending to draw attention to the violation of religious freedom in the Soviet Union. Archbishop Edgar Hark of the EELC in Soviet Estonia, in turn, claimed at the assembly that there was no violation of religious freedom in the Soviet Union. In Hark’s report on the assembly, which he later wrote to the KGB, he claimed that Veem had afterwards apologized and claimed only to accuse the Soviet state and not the church. Veem offered a different description of the conflict, highlighting that Hark’s Nairobi reply had been calm and solid, and in Russian. Veem therefore negatively referred to Hark as a true Soviet church leader, adding that, personally, the two men got along just fine.⁹¹

As the churches were ousted from the public realm and foreign relations were in the hands of the state, only a small number of pastors were allowed to represent the church abroad. Although the number increased over the years, it still remained relatively small and travelling abroad was exclusively the privilege of church leaders and a few previously monitored pastors and theologians; for ordinary pastors it was impossible to attend any conferences, or to visit the West for other reasons. The case of Archbishop Kiivit senior is a good example of how pragmatic the state was in using the church for its own interests. Kiivit was respected by Western church leaders as one of the wisest theologians and church leaders in the Soviet bloc. For this reason he was elected to the boards of Christian organizations and attended so many meetings and conferences in various countries that the Soviet authorities began to suspect his loyalty and to fear that he had become too popular and too independent in representing the church abroad. Consequently, in 1967 he was removed from office by the authorities, ostensibly because of bad health. In reality, he was removed because he had become a threat to the system.⁹²

Old Partners, New Circumstances

It was partly Kiivit’s charismatic personality that helped to re-establish the relationship with one of the closest partners of the EELC during the Soviet period, the Finnish Lutheran Church. In the foreign relations of the Soviet period there were two major partner churches – the Lutheran churches in Finland and in West Germany.⁹³ The first visit that Kiivit was allowed to make was to a peace conference in Finland in 1955. During this visit he met

91 Cf. Riho Saard: “On küll kahju...” Luteri kiriku vaimulike välissõitudest ja välismaa kirikutegelaste külaskäikudest Eesti NSVsse [“That Is Sad...”. The Foreign Visits of Lutheran Clergy and Foreign Church Visitors to Soviet Estonia], in: *Akadeemia* 26 (2014), no. 7, pp. 1164-1205, here p. 1188; Konrad Veem: *Eesti vaba rahvakirik. Dokumentatsioon ja leksikon* [The Free People’s Church of Estonia. Documents and Encyclopedia], Stockholm 1990, p. 343.

92 Cf. Riho Altnurme: *Peapiiskopi tagandamine aastal 1967* [The Removal of the Archbishop in 1967], in: Arne Hiob, Urmas Nõmmik et.al. (eds.): *Kristuse täisea mõõtu mööda. Pühendusteos Jaan Kiivitile 65. sünnipäevaks* [Across the Entire Lifespan of Christ. Festschrift for Jaan Kiivit on His 65. Birthday], Tallinn 2005, pp. 66-78, here pp. 72-77.

93 Cf. Engman, *Usuteaduse Instituut* (see note 80), p. 162.

the Bishop of Tampere, Eelis Gulin. Previous cooperation during the interwar period was crucial in Kiivit's search for friends. For example, the first contact he made with the Church of England was Herbert M. Waddams, who had been the secretary of the British delegation during the 1938 negotiations between the Church of England and the Estonian and Latvian churches. He was also an ardent supporter of a friendly relationship between the Soviet Union and Great Britain and during the Second World War had convinced the Swedes and Finns to adopt a friendlier attitude towards the Soviet Union.⁹⁴ Gulin, too, had been involved in the interwar cooperation between the Estonian and Finnish churches. At the same time, he had been a supporter of a friendly relationship with the Soviet Union and had even gained the nickname "red bishop".⁹⁵

From the mid-1950s the Church of Finland was involved in a dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church and the WCC welcomed the Finnish church's position as a bridge builder.⁹⁶ Thereafter, the Soviet Union slowly but steadily came to acknowledge that it was also useful to consolidate cooperation between the EELC and the Church of Finland. In 1957, the authorities permitted the EELC to publish a yearbook in order to demonstrate that it was possible to publish religious materials in the Soviet Union. This was, however, only distributed outside Estonia. The next yearbook was not published until 1982.⁹⁷

Kiivit may have been too courageous in promoting the church's own agenda, although his activities were probably coordinated with the local Commissioner for Religious Affairs. In any case, the first time he invited Gulin and the Bishop of Helsinki, Martti Simojoki, to visit Soviet Estonia in 1959, this only caused confusion. The Soviet authorities did not grant Simojoki and Gulin a visa, advising Gulin to travel privately as a guest of the Association for Promoting Friendship between the Soviet Union and Finland. Gulin declined, correctly pointing out that there was probably a political motive behind this advice. In turn, Kiivit was invited to Finland in 1960 and 1962, but was not given permission to go abroad until 1963, when he travelled to Helsinki for the LWF meeting, and received an honorary doctorate in theology from the University of Helsinki. In 1983, Archbishop Edgar Hark received the same honour, and in 1982 the archbishop emeritus of the Finnish Lutheran Church Martti Simojoki was named honorary doctor of the Theological Institute in Tallinn.⁹⁸

In 1962 Kiivit had argued that through Finland it was possible to approach the Scandinavian churches and normalize relationships with them.⁹⁹ Another aim was to establish contact with the exile church in order to diminish its influence and convince them to ease the public campaigns against the Soviet Union. On a few occasions, exile church represen-

94 Cf. Hanna-Maija Ketola: *Relations between the Church of England and the Russian Orthodox Church during the Second World War, 1941–1945*, Helsinki 2012, pp. 190-193.

95 Cf. Riho Saard: *Jaan Kiivit senior – Soome ja Eesti kirikute vahelise silla taastaja* [Jaan Kiivit senior – Rebuilding the Bridge between the Estonian and Finnish Churches], in: Hiiob, Nõmmik et.al. (eds.), *Kristuse täisea möötu mööda* (see note 92), pp. 51-65, here p. 62.

96 Cf. Riho Saard: "Suurenmoinen rakkauden näytelmä". *Suomen evankelis-luterilaisen ja Venäjän ortodoksisen kirkon oppineuvottelut kylmän sodan vuosina* ["A Wonderful Spectacle of Love". *The Talks between the Finnish Evangelical-Lutheran Church and the Russian Orthodox Church during the Cold War*], Tallinn 2006, pp. 38-48, 205-207.

97 Cf. Riho Altnurme, Atko Rimmel: *Church Life during Occupations*, in: Riho Altnurme (ed.): *History of Estonian Ecumenism* (see note 30), pp. 109-125, here p. 118.

98 Cf. Engman, *Usuteaduse Instituut* (see note 80), pp. 157 f.

99 Cf. Saard, "On küll kahju..." (see note 91), p. 1173.

tatives met during the visits of church leaders from the Soviet bloc to Finland, but mostly no meetings took place, because of the fear created by propaganda.¹⁰⁰

In 1964, after Kiivit had visited Finland several times, a delegation of the Finnish Lutheran church finally visited Soviet Estonia. The visit took place less than a year before the President of Finland, Urho Kaleva Kekkonen came to Estonia, and held a speech in Estonian at the University of Tartu, in which he stressed how he cherished the Finno-Ugric relationship between the two nations.¹⁰¹ Thereafter, a few other visits were organized, notably that organized by Professor Kauko Pirinen, who was accompanied by almost 50 theology students. The end of the 1960s marked a setback in foreign relations due to the events in Prague in 1968 and the removal of Kiivit in 1967.¹⁰² The Consistory of the EELC drew up a document justifying the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.¹⁰³

The Finnish Lutheran church was one of the churches to break through the Iron Curtain and send religious literature to Soviet Estonia. German Protestants and the representatives of ecumenical organizations contributed to this cause even more passionately. In Germany, there were a few Baltic German and Estonian pastors who were also active in supplying Estonia with theological literature.¹⁰⁴ In the 1950s and early 1960s Kiivit had brought along as many books as he could, because his luggage was not always checked. From the late 1960s books were allowed through customs.¹⁰⁵

Continuity and Disruption – New and Old Perspectives on Estonian Lutheranism

As mentioned earlier, only a small number of pastors were allowed to go abroad. The EELC hosted groups from the West, but before the 1980s there were no such visits organized to visit the Western churches. For most of the clergy, literature was the only way to break out from isolation, with the result that the internationalism of Estonian Lutheranism was rather limited and one-sided.

The church was, to a large extent, isolated in terms of international cooperation, but it was also kept from the public realm within Soviet society. In Soviet society, there was no honest and open discussion about social matters, and the church was not allowed to take a public position on any social issues. Peace work was the only exception, and this was

100 Cf. Riho Altnurme: Foreign Relations of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church as a Means of Maintaining Contact With the Western World, in: *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte / Contemporary Church History* 19 (2006), no. 1, pp. 159-165, here p. 165.

101 Cf. Saard, Jaan Kiivit *senior* (see note 95), p. 61.

102 Cf. Altnurme, *Peapiiskopi tagandamine* (see note 92), pp. 66-78.

103 Cf. Riho Saard: Nõukogude aeg. Arengutest Euroopas ja Nõukogude Eestis [The Soviet Era. The Developments in Europe and in Soviet Estonia], in: Anne Velliste (ed.): *Usk vabadusse. Artikleid ja mälestusi Eesti Evangeelse Luterliku Kiriku osast Eesti iseseisvuse taastamisel* [The Faith on the Way to Freedom. Articles and Memories of the Role of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Estonia Regaining Independence], Tallinn 2011, pp. 36-47.

104 For example Burchard Lieberg, who had left Estonia in 1939, and Toomas Pöld, who escaped Estonia in 1944 and served as the Dean of the EELC in German exile.

105 Cf. Riho Saard: "Rõõmustame selle üle..." Usulise ja teoloogilise kirjanduse saatmine Soomest Eestisse 1950.–1980. aastatel ["Let's Rejoice...". Sending Religious and Theological Literature from Finland to Estonia, 1950s–1980s], in: *Akadeemia* 16 (2004), no. 4, pp. 844-869.

used zealously as a way of breaking out of isolation. The EELC participated in the 1958 Prague peace conference and in those which followed. Archbishop Kiivit was one of the prominent leaders of the movement. Peace work was also promoted by the churches inside the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁶ The Soviet authorities expected the church to praise the regime, but to do so in a way that would not reach a wider audience. Isolation shaped the profile of the EELC during the Soviet period, i.e. the questions asked in a free society differed from those asked in a totalitarian society. More importantly, isolation had consequences for the theological profile of the church because it meant that the church had little leeway if it wanted to preach the gospel in relative safety. Of course, there were a few dissident pastors, but in general, the result of isolation was a simplified, static and biblical form of theology, so-called survival theology.¹⁰⁷

As there was a constant need for pastors, from 1967 the church also ordained women. After one or two years of study, young candidates were usually ordained as assistant pastors. Some continued their studies after ordination, some did so independently, with limited supervision, and most only graduated from the Theological Institute after many years. This had a negative effect on the sustainability of theological tradition, resulting in a disruption of tradition and less quality in theological education.

Even though there were theologians with admirable wisdom and talent, which they put into practice, many were not very open to new ideas or to finding new approaches to analyzing the Christian faith, and the positive effect of internationalism tended to be only modest. The contribution of Elmar Salumaa, a systematic theologian, who in the 1930s had worked at the Faculty of Theology, has to be highlighted, because he was the most prominent teacher for many young candidates. Uku Masing was another notable and much respected theologian, even though he was ousted from the public sphere. While Masing's theological legacy has only been published in recent decades, Salumaa's contribution to translating and interpreting contemporary theology already shaped the church during the Soviet period. From 1967 he began to publish a one-man theological journal "Teoloogiline kogumik". Each of the 58 volumes consisted of up to ten articles and translations. In addition to the journal he published translations of contemporary systematic theology and wrote schoolbooks for theology students. They were typed and distributed in a small number of copies for students and pastors.¹⁰⁸

Despite German Protestants being one of the closest partners of the EELC, the German tradition slowly but steadily faded from the church's sub-consciousness. There was no Faculty of Theology, no Baltic German pastors, and the majority of society did not accept religion, although for a certain minority it proved to be an important alternative to Soviet ideology. Leading theologians of the church remained true to German theology, but their ability to influence the church without any publications and public debate was relatively

106 Cf. Kaldur, Kurg et.al., *Ecumenical Relations* (see note 67), p. 137.

107 Cf. Riho Saard: *Aktiivsetest reziimivastastest Eesti luterliku kiriku kontekstis 1970. ja 1980. aastatel* [About the Active Dissidents in the Estonian Lutheran Church Context, 1970s and 1980s], in: *Suomen kirkkohistoriallisen seuran vuosikirja 102* (2012), pp. 77-110.

108 Cf. Priit Rohtmet: *Järelsõna. Elmar Salumaa teoloogi ja õpetajana* [Epilogue. Salumaa as a Theologian and Teacher], in: *Elmar Salumaa: Tiib pandud aastaile õlale* [Wings Put on the Shoulders of Years], Tallinn 2010, pp. 871-873, here p. 871.

small. The vanishing German tradition did not mean that the church fell into complete isolation, nor did it mean that the relations with German Protestants ceased to exist. The Finnish influence has already been discussed, but there was another source, which influenced the church from the end of the 1970s, the Lithuanian Catholic Church. In addition to formal contacts with Germans, Finns etc. a group of young pastors began to visit the Lithuanian Church in the 1970s. With its 'sacramental movement' this church was rather successful in fighting communism, and was thus admired by Estonian pastors. A few pastors even left the Lutheran Church and became Catholics, but the majority of clergy tried to interpret Catholic theology in a Lutheran context and change some elements of the traditional liturgy as well as the appearance of pastors.¹⁰⁹ As a result, a lively debate has been going on since 1991 as to whether women should be ordained, whether pastors should be called pastors or priests, whether they should wear a black gown or a white alba, and whether the church should enrich its liturgy with elements of Catholic or Lutheran high-church background. Some of these questions were raised back in the 1980s, but at that time were criticized by Archbishop Edgar Hark and the Consistory.¹¹⁰

Official foreign visits and personal contacts were very complicated at least until 1975, the signing of the Helsinki Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. After that, and especially at the beginning of the 1980s, the number of foreign visits started to increase, although there were a few setbacks.¹¹¹ Archbishop Hark's role was also noteworthy. He was a Red-Army Second World War veteran and had good relations with state representatives. He managed to ease the church's isolation considerably from the end of the 1970s. A major event for the EELC was the LWF conference on peace policy in Tallinn in September 1980. This was a topic which was acceptable to both the Soviet and Western parties. International Christian organizations and churches in the West often put Tallinn on the list of destinations for their delegations because it was one of the most Western cities in the Soviet Union and thus seemingly had more religious freedom.¹¹²

At the beginning of the 1980s the number of foreign guests rose constantly and more and more groups came to Soviet Estonia. Notably, even the congregations hosted foreign visitors, mainly from Finland. The real breakthrough, however, came with the social change in the Soviet Union, beginning in 1985. In 1986 a delegation of the EELC visited the North-Elbian Church, and from that visit friendly relations have been maintained to the present day. Already in 1989 Jaan Kiivit junior, a minister in Tallinn Pühavaimu parish, and one of the most prominent Estonian theologians in the 1980s and 1990s, admitted that the relationship with the Church of Finland and with other Western churches had helped

109 Cf. Riho Saard: *Katoliiklik vagadusvool 1970. ja 1980. aastate Eesti Evangeelses Luterlikus Kirikus* [The Catholic Piety Movement of the 1970s and 1980s in the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church], in: *Usuteaduslik Ajakiri* 63 (2012), no. 1, pp. 36-62, here pp. 58 f.

110 Cf. *Eesti Evangeelne Luterlik Kirik* [The Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church], Tallinn 1984, p. 78.

111 Cf. Kaldur, Kurg et.al., *Ecumenical Relations* (see note 67), p. 142.

112 Cf. *ibidem*, p. 144; Riho Saard: *Luterliku Maailmaliidu Euroopa vähemuskirikute konverents Tallinnas 1980* [The LWF Conference of the European Minority Churches in Tallinn 1980], in: Riho Saard (ed.): *Kultuurisillad Läänemere-äärses kultuuriruumis. EELK Usuteaduse Instituudi toimetised XXI* [Cultural Bridges in the Baltic Cultural Space. Miscellanies of the EELC Theological Institute XXI], Tallinn 2011, pp. 164-191.

to preserve the memory of a democratic state and church.¹¹³ Kiivit junior was elected archbishop of the EELC in independent Estonia in 1994.

Conclusion

During the 20th century the Lutheran church came a long way from a territorial church run by the German nobility to a democratic people's church. The international dimension of Estonian Lutheranism shaped the church and Lutheran identity along this path.

At the beginning of the 20th century Lutheranism in Estonia was influenced foremost by German culture and theology. The church and the Faculty of Theology at the University of Tartu (Dorpat) belonged to the German cultural and theological world, although, politically, the Baltic provinces were a part of the Russian Empire. For religious institutions in the Baltic provinces the sense of belonging to the German cultural and theological world was so deeply rooted that one cannot define the influence of German evangelical theology as 'international'. At the same time, there was definitely a certain domestic form of theology, but this was still a part of the German world, and was recognized as such by theologians and clergy both in Germany, and in the Russian Empire. The international dimension of Lutheranism in Estonia was therefore quite limited.

The domestic interpretation of theology and the German context proved to be viable even after social and political conditions had changed with the establishment of the Republic of Estonia. As a result of the Russian Revolution in 1917 an independent Estonian Lutheran Church was born. The Lutheran church was established as a people's church. The establishment of an independent church and the emergence of the ecumenical movement, as a way to approach society through uniting the churches, were the two major aspects that influenced the international dimension of Estonian Lutheranism from the 1920s. The implementation of the new church order and the election of new leadership went hand in hand with a new mentality and orientation of the church. Where, previously, the church had belonged to the sphere of German Lutheranism, Scandinavian churches and the Church of England now received maximum attention. The neighbouring churches were also included in the foreign relations short-list.

In addition to bilateral relations with other churches, the EELC began to actively participate in the ecumenical movement, aiming to find a new foreign orientation and create a new understanding of Estonian Lutheranism. The church managed to establish a large network of partner churches and participated actively in the ecumenical movement, but the desire to re-orientate and distance itself from German influence was still not completely fulfilled.

The new cooperation and foreign influence did not result in the abandonment of the theological heritage of the previous period, even though the theological, liturgical and ecclesiastical profile of the church changed over the years. Consequently, the theological legacy from the previous period was maintained and even though a new foreign orientation was introduced, theologically the church still belonged to the German world.

113 Cf. Saard, "On küll kahju..." (see note 91), p. 1201.

The Soviet occupation managed to disrupt that tradition. The Soviet authorities considered the churches' foreign relations in terms of general political interest. Therefore, foreign relations were determined by the state, not by the churches. Over the years, church officials became used to the Soviet system and managed to lay down their own agenda in promoting foreign relations, but the scope remained very limited. As the churches were ousted from the public realm and foreign relations were determined by the state, only a small number of pastors were allowed to represent the church abroad. Although the number increased over the years, it remained relatively small. For most of the clergy, literature was the only way to break out of isolation. The internationalism of Soviet Estonian Lutheranism was quite limited and one-sided and the contacts that existed were characterized by a constant ideological battle between the exile and Soviet church delegations.

The Faculty of Theology in Tartu was closed and replaced by a theological institute supported by the church. This institute did not offer full-time studies, which had an effect on the quality of theological education. Despite German Protestants being one of the closest partners of the EELC the German tradition slowly but steadily faded from the church's sub-consciousness.

As a result of the Soviet experience, a lively debate has been going on since 1991 about the religious identity and theological profile of the Estonian Lutheran Church. One can conclude that the internationalism of Lutheranism and the Lutheran church in Estonia has helped to preserve the sense of openness in finding and defining religious identity at the beginning of the 21st century.

Zusammenfassung

Die lutherische Kirche durchlief während des 20. Jahrhunderts einen langen Wandel von einer vom deutschen Adel geleiteten territorialen Kirche zu einer demokratischen Volkskirche. Während dieses Entwicklungsprozesses prägte die internationale Dimension des estnischen Luthertums die Kirche und die lutherische Identität. In diesem Beitrag werden die internationale Dimension des estnischen Luthertums und seine Entwicklung während des 20. Jahrhunderts beleuchtet und dabei verschiedene nationale und internationale Akteure berücksichtigt.

Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts wurde das Luthertum in Estland vor allem durch die deutsche Kultur und Theologie beeinflusst. Die Kirche und die Theologische Fakultät der Universität Tartu (Dorpat) waren Bestandteile deutscher Kultur und Theologie, obwohl die baltischen Provinzen politisch gesehen Teil des Russischen Reiches waren. Die religiösen Einrichtungen in den baltischen Provinzen waren so tief in der deutschen Kultur und Theologie verwurzelt, dass man den Einfluss der deutschen evangelischen Theologie nicht als „international“ bezeichnen kann. Zudem war die Theologie definitiv national geprägt, obschon sie weiter als Bestandteil der deutschsprachigen Sphäre anzusehen ist. Sie wurde sowohl von den Theologen und dem Klerus in Deutschland als auch im Russischen Reich als solche anerkannt.

Die nationale Auslegung der Theologie und der deutsche Kontext erwiesen sich als existenzfähig, selbst nachdem sich die sozialen und politischen Bedingungen mit der Gründung der Republik Estland geändert hatten. Als Ergebnis der russischen Revolution wurde

im Jahre 1917 eine unabhängige Estnische Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche geboren. Die Lutherische Kirche wurde als eine Volkskirche gegründet. Die Einrichtung einer unabhängigen Kirche und die Entstehung der ökumenischen Bewegung als Mittel, sich der Gesellschaft durch die Vereinigung der Kirchen zu nähern, waren die zwei Hauptfaktoren, die die internationale Dimension des estnischen Luthertums ab den 1920er und 1930er Jahren beeinflussten. Gehörte die Kirche zunächst noch zum Einflussbereich des deutschen Luthertums, erhielten nun die skandinavischen Kirchen und die Kirche von England die größtmögliche Aufmerksamkeit. Die Kirchen der Nachbarstaaten wurden ebenfalls in die Außenbeziehungen mit aufgenommen.

Zusätzlich zum Aufbau der bilateralen Beziehungen mit anderen Kirchen begann die Estnische Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche (EELK) damit, sich aktiv an der ökumenischen Bewegung zu beteiligen. Ziel war es, eine neue Ausrichtung nach außen zu finden und ein neues Verständnis des estnischen Luthertums zu schaffen. Doch der Wunsch nach einer neuen Ausrichtung und einer Distanzierung vom deutschen Einfluss wurde nicht vollständig erfüllt.

Die neue Zusammenarbeit und der ausländische Einfluss führten nicht zu einer Abkehr vom theologischen Erbe der vorangegangenen Ära, auch wenn das theologische, liturgische und kirchliche Profil der Kirche sich über die Jahre wandelte. In theologischer Sicht gehörte die Kirche weiter zur deutschsprachigen Sphäre.

Dieser Tradition wurde durch die sowjetische Besatzung ein Ende gesetzt. Nunmehr sollten die Außenbeziehungen der Kirchen im Dienste eines allgemeinen politischen Interesses stehen. Der Internationalismus des sowjetischen estnischen Luthertums war sehr begrenzt und einseitig. Obwohl die Gruppe der deutschen Protestanten eng mit der EELK zusammenarbeiteten, verschwand die deutsche Tradition langsam aber beständig aus der Kirche. Trotzdem verfiel die Kirche in keine vollständige Isolation und auch die Beziehungen mit deutschen Protestanten wurden weiter unterhalten. Es wurden Kontakte mit der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Finnland und der Litauischen Katholischen Kirche gepflegt. Die Mehrheit des Klerus versuchte, die katholische Theologie im lutherischen Kontext zu interpretieren und einige Elemente der traditionellen Liturgie sowie das Erscheinungsbild der Pfarrer zu ändern.

Als Ergebnis der sowjetischen Erfahrung wird seit 1991 eine lebhafte Debatte über die religiöse Identität und das theologische Profil der EELK geführt. Die wesentlichen Themen umfassen Fragen wie die der Frauenordination oder ob Pfarrer Pastoren oder Priester genannt werden sollen, ob sie einen schwarzen Talar oder eine weiße Albe tragen sollen und ob die Kirche ihre Liturgie mit Elementen der katholischen oder der lutherischen hochkirchlichen Vergangenheit anreichern soll.

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