

# The Ecumenical and Patriotic Activity of the Estonian Eparchy in the Context of Soviet Politics of Religion in 1954–1964

Andrei Sõtšov

*University of Tartu*

**Abstract:** The post-Stalinist decade resulted in a temporary liberalization in Soviet religious policy in 1956–1957, followed by an intensification of administrative suppression of religious life during the years 1958–1964. A close evaluation of archival sources reveals the quiet two-faced tendencies of Soviet religious policies vis-a-vis the Orthodox Church of occupied Estonia: on one hand, the dozens of orthodox congregations at the local level were forcibly liquidated and the number of clerics decreased rapidly; on the other hand, the patriotic and ecumenical activities of the administration of the Estonian Eparchy increased dramatically and achieved its “golden era” during the tenure of its new bishop of Tallinn, Aleksii Ridiger (the future patriarch Aleksii II of Moscow). This study describes in detail the gradual increase in the interference of Soviet propaganda with the ecumenical and patriotic activity of the Estonian Eparchy from 1959. In the course of subsequent restrictions and the persecution of religion under Khrushchev, the Estonian Diocese of the Moscow Patriarchate was integrated into the larger scheme of Soviet peace propaganda and ecumenical cooperation. This took the form mainly of the joint reception of foreign church delegations which coincided with the tenure of Bishop Aleksii, who played a big role in the Moscow hierarchy as well as in the external affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church. Visits of Church delegations in Tallinn and Kuremäe monastery became a kind of “show piece” of religious freedom and played their part in Soviet peace propaganda. In conclusion, the rise and ebb of the patriotic and ecumenical activity of the Orthodox diocese in occupied Estonia were influenced by the changes, which took place among the USSR’s highest authorities in the religious policies level and by the transition from Stalinist totalitarian dictatorship toward Nikita Khrushchev’s more oligarchical system.

Address correspondence and reprint requests to: Andrei Sõtšov, University of Tartu, Department of Church History, Faculty of Theology, Estonia. E-mail: andrei.sotsov@mail.ee

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE BACKGROUND: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SOVIET UNION AND THE CHURCH IN 1954–1964**

This article explores the influence of Soviet religious policies on the patriotic and ecumenical activity of the Estonian Orthodox Eparchy of the Moscow patriarchate in the conditions of the post-Stalinist period (1954–1964).<sup>1</sup> The article shows how the religious denominations, in particular the Estonian Orthodox Eparchy of the Moscow patriarchate, established in 1944–1945 in the place of the autonomous Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church, survived in conditions of Communist ideological suppression and Sovietization. The article further considers the impact of Soviet religious policies vis-à-vis the Orthodox Church in Estonia and its different expressions such as the patriotic and ecumenical activity regulated by the Soviet authorities.

The focus of the article will not be the analysis of the political consequences of the Sovietization of occupied Estonia during the post-Stalinist decade — collectivization, nationalization, centralized planning, militarization. There still remain several other issues, waiting to be dealt with, such as the general developments of economical and cultural changes of the occupied Estonia in the mid-1950; the history of the Orthodox deaneries and congregations in the period under discussion; the unofficial history of the eparchy, reconstructed on the basis of collecting and analyzing the memories of the ordinary believers. All these themes will introduce new facets in the relations between the Estonian Eparchy and the Soviet authorities and would allow us to explore these relations more efficiently. More comprehensive comparative research concerning all the suppressed churches and religious unions should also be undertaken.

## **AN ABRUPT DECLINE OF THE CHURCH-STATE RELATIONSHIP AFTER DEATH OF JOSIF STALIN**

In the first part of research, let us look at the general situation of the Russian Orthodox Church in the post-Stalinist Soviet Union-wide context. After the death of Josif Vissarionovich Stalin, the Russian Orthodox Church tried to assess the attitude of the new Soviet Government toward religion. In autumn 1953, the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia expressed a wish to meet the leaders of the government.

The expected meeting did not take place, because it was not yet sure who would be Stalin's successor. This period represented the decline of the relations between the state and the church. On July 7, 1954, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) issued a decree "on the enormous deficiency in scientific-atheistic propaganda and measures for improving it": this marked the beginning of a new assault on religion in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), similar to what had happened in 1949. Behind the decree stood the bloc headed by Nikita Khrushchev; the most important among all the ideologists were Denis Shepilov and Mikhail Suslov.

The decree declared that the activity of the Russian Orthodox Church was opposed to the "conscious and active" construction of communism in Soviet society. Stalin's policy of reconciliation with the Orthodox Church was condemned and a total elimination of the Church was pursued in the whole Soviet society (Chumachenko 1996, 152–153).

Such a burst of activity against the religion started by Khrushchev and his coterie provoked a protest on the part of the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church (Chumachenko 1996, 153–154). According to Metropolitan Gregorii of Leningrad and Metropolitan Nikolai of Kolomna and Krutitsy, such stiffening in religious policy could have affected the reputation of the USSR on the stage of foreign policy, especially concerning the peace-movements and the protests against nuclear war.

### **THE DECREE OF THE 10TH OF NOVEMBER 1954. AN IMPROVEMENT OF THE STATE-CHURCH RELATIONSHIP. STABLE RELATIONS IN 1955–1957**

On November 10, 1954, the Central Committee of the USSR issued a new decree "on the deficiencies of popularizing the scientific-atheistic propaganda among the population." In this new decree, atheistic work was handled more carefully and so to say more professionally. Recommendations made by the Council of the Russian Orthodox Church and of the Council of Religious Affairs (CRA)<sup>2</sup> on the correct use of Church terminology were taken into consideration in order to eliminate from the atheistic literature such terms, which had offended the religious feelings (Anderson 1994, 25). The decree emphasized that the believers, regardless of their religious views, could still be loyal citizens of Soviet society. Religious beliefs were now to be considered the private affair of the individual. Atheistic activity

had to be strictly separated from politicizing, malpractice, and slandering the believers (Chumachenko 1996, 157).

The new decree engendered new enthusiasm and gratitude on the side of the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church. On November 12, 1954, Aleksii, the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, and the Holy Synod issued a resolution, in which the Soviet Government was thanked for the decree issued two days previous. An indicator of the change in Soviet religious policy was the reception of Patriarch Aleksii and Metropolitan Nikolai by Georgi Malenkov, the chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR that took place on December 11, 1954. The reception together passed with entirely superficial exchanges of pleasantries. The years between 1955 and 1957, which coincided with the period of the “thaw,” can be regarded as the mildest period in the religious policy of the USSR since the year 1918.

According to the Church historian, Tatiana Chumachenko, there were two auspicious factors for this unique breathing space in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church: (1) the fight between the blocs of Khrushchev and Malenkov inside the Party; and (2) the complexity of the problems of the internal and foreign policy.

These factors pushed Soviet religious policy temporarily to the background. It was also important to consider the public opinion as well. All this helped the Church to carry on, between 1954 and 1957, with the Soviet oriented patriotic activity that involved the peace-movement, the protests against nuclear war and the propaganda for disarmament (Chumachenko 1996, 160).

## **THE PATRIOTIC ACTIVITY OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOXY AND THE SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY IN 1954–1957**

The main expression of the contribution of the Russian Orthodox Church to the Soviet patriotic activity in 1954–1957 was obviously participating in the peace-movement. The leaders of the Moscow Patriarchate observed closely the developments in Soviet foreign policy immediately before the discussions in Geneva. For example, the full text of the documents of the meeting of the Bureau of the International Peace Council from March 28–30, 1954 was published in the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* in its May 1954 issue.

The Church supported the meeting in Geneva also by joining a common appeal on the part of eight leaders of the Orthodox Church and of their

representatives (from the Orthodox Churches of Alexandria, Antioch, Georgia, Romania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria), who met on July 21, 1955 in Moscow, to the representatives of four big states in Geneva.

In addition, the Church skilfully took part in the disarmament propaganda of the Soviet Union. So, for example, Nikolai, the Metropolitan of Kolomna and Krutitsy, represented the Moscow Patriarchate at the international conference of the International Peace Council that took place from June 19–23, 1954, where he was elected the chief of the religious section. During the period of “thaw,” the efforts of the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church on the field of peace-movement were recognized by Soviet authorities.

One could compare the years 1955–1957 with the renaissance epoch in the life of the church in 1940s. The number of congregations and of the members of clergy, as well as religious activity increased. This kind of a “loosening the screw” in Soviet religious policy offered the Soviet authorities a possibility to declare to the outside world that Soviet citizens enjoyed freedom of religion and speech, while consolidating the authority of the Soviet Government which had seemed uncertain after death of Stalin (Davis 2003, 29–30).

## **THE ECUMENICAL AND PATRIOTIC ACTIVITY OF THE ESTONIAN EPARCHY IN 1954–1957**

In the history of the Estonian Eparchy the years between 1954 and 1958 can be characterized as a period of stability — there was no violence expressed against the rights of the church and the cooperation between the commissioner for Council of Russian Orthodox Church Affairs in Soviet Estonia and the Church administration was reliable. The relations with the other confessions were official, correct and friendly. The clergy of the Estonian Eparchy tried to make their own contribution to promote the peace-movement through their writings and sermons.

The more authoritative clergymen in the council of the Eparchy and the provosts were responsible for the patriotic work of the Eparchy. One of such Soviet minded priests was the director of the Council of the Estonian Eparchy, archpriest Georgi Alekseyev (later John, the Bishop of Tallinn and All Estonia). In spite of the active participation in the peace-movement, the ecumenical cooperation with other churches initiated by the Moscow Patriarchate (as well as by Estonian Eparchy) was almost non-existent. The low inter-confessional relationship of the local Orthodox

diocese could be explained with the general reserved position towards protestant churches of the Russian Orthodox Church in this time.

One could rather observe a critical and rejecting attitude toward the World Council of Churches (WCC). Founded in Amsterdam on August 23, 1948 by representatives from 147 churches, the WCC was criticized by West and East alike, and elicited negative coverage from both *The Wall Street Journal* and *Pravda*. This was surely related to the Cold War atmosphere's bipolarity of two ideological blocs and the WCC needed to accept that. In 1948, the Soviet leadership ordered its Churches not to join the organization. Accordingly, various Orthodox Church representatives gathered in Moscow and agreed not to join the WCC and declared that "ecumenism" was not accepted for the Orthodox World (Beeson 1975, 306).

### **ABRUPT STIFFENING OF THE SOVIET RELIGION POLICY IN 1958. NEW ASSAULT ON RELIGION IN 1958–1961 AND THE STAGNATION OF THE NEW CHURCH POLICY 1961–1964**

In 1957, the political life of the USSR witnessed a struggle for power among the leadership of the CPSU. The gradual concentration of power in the hands of Khrushchev and his active reform policy had stirred discontent among several members of the Presidium of the Central Committee, who tried to overthrow Khrushchev at the first opportunity. They failed in this attempt and Khrushchev ejected them from their positions, labeling them "the Anti-Party Group." In March 1958, Khrushchev became chairman of the Council of Ministers — this meant that he held both the top party post and the top governmental post (Kuuli 2002, 63–64).

In connection with all of this, religious policy changed abruptly. Whereas Khrushchev had earlier had to reckon with the more accommodationist orientation of his older "comrades" (Georgi Malenkov, Vyacheslav Molotov, Nikolai Bulganin) in questions of religion, after the destruction of the antiparty bloc in 1958, Khrushchev was able to set the parameters of religious policy essentially unilaterally (Anderson 1994, 6).

Khrushchev was not remarkably competent in religious questions and dealing with the problems of the Church did not belong to his grandiose plans about establishing communism. It is a well-known fact that the leading ideologues under Khrushchev were Mikhail Suslov and Leonid

Ilichev, who advocated a much stiffer course in religious policy than what had been pursued in the years 1954–1958 (Anderson 1994, 10).

First of all, the state-machinery of Khrushchev began with a profound reorganization of the Council of the Russian Orthodox Church (CROC) and the CRA, which in the eyes of the Council of Ministers feebly controlled the activities of religious organisations in the Soviet Union. CROC was expected to fulfill new assignments: first, to revise the former activity of the Council, and second, to work out new norms of the legislation on religious affairs, which would help to control the Church more efficiently. According to this, there was a total purge carried through among the personal staff of the CROC in 1957–1961. During the years 1958–1961 CROC and the CRA were transformed from tutorial organizations that defended the rights of believers to organizations, which began to apply stricter controls on religious life in a systematic way. Another step toward the implementation of these changes was engaging the media in spreading more aggressive atheistic propaganda, which had the aim of reducing thereby the influence of religion among the population (Chumachenko 1996, 176–177).

After that, the Khrushchev government started to intensify scientific-atheistic propaganda, which had so far been in a bad state. On October 4, 1958, the Central Committee of the CPSU issued and sent to the republics a secret decree “on the deficits of scientific-atheistic propaganda,” that reinforced the hostile decree of July 7, 1954. The decree aimed to improve and intensify scientific-atheistic propaganda. Local departments of ideology and agitation were obliged to “take a row of administrative measures to restrict the activities of church and the religious associations” (Pospelovsky 1996, 322; cf Conquest 1968, 45–46).

The intensification of scientific-atheistic propaganda was followed by a thoroughgoing correction of Stalinist legislation on religious affairs. As a first step, the economic foundations of the Church were ruined. On October 6, 1958, the Council of Ministers of the USSR passed a decree on “the retroactive taxation of the businesses of the Administration of the Eparchy and the Monastery incomes.” According to the new law, the candle production of the Church was retroactively taxed with an elevated income tax, by a decree dating from October 1 (Davis 2003, 34–35).

On the same day, the decree on “the monasteries of the USSR” was passed. This decree prescribed that the local administrations should reduce the number of the monasteries by half. The organs of power were ordered: (1) to secularize most of the lands that belonged to the monasteries; (2) to reduce the number of monks by establishing an age

restriction, no one under the age of 30 could become a member of a monastery; (3) to forbid the use of hired workers. The financial support of the monasteries and hermitages from the central fund of the Church was forbidden. In 1958, there were 56 active monasteries in the USSR. During the year 1959, 14 monasteries and five hermitages were closed. The annual plan for the year 1960 was almost fulfilled already by August 1 — 11 monasteries of 15 that had to be closed were already shut down (Chumachenko 1996, 201–204). This new course in religious policy found an echo also in the columns of the Soviet press. After 1958, it was filled with scientific-atheistic writings and libels against the Church and the clergy.

In 1961, the new religious policy was ultimately applied toward the Church, which lasted until the mid-1960s. Everything that had been elaborated and tried out in 1958–1960 gained juridical form in 1961. On March 16, 1961, the Council of Ministers of the USSR passed decree No. 263 entitled “On Strengthening of the Control over Fulfilment of the Legislation on Religious Affairs.” According to this decree, the right of registration of the Churches and of eliminating them from the list of approved religious organizations was assigned to the CROC under the jurisdiction of the Council of Ministers of each republic. On the same day, the CROC and the Council for Religious Affairs passed an instruction on how to apply the legislation on religious affairs — this settled the action boundaries of the religious associations of the USSR, which were inspired from the list of prohibited activities in the 1929 Law of Religious Associations (Anderson 1994, 35). The instruction forbade the clergy: (1) to use their resources and property in the benefit of charity; (2) to organize religious meetings and discussions, to open clerical educational institutions and seminaries on their own initiative and to publish religious literature by themselves; (3) to organize pilgrimages to the sacred places (Chumachenko 1996, 122–123).

In addition, in 1961, obeying the order of the Soviet authorities, the Moscow Patriarch had to bring the Church’s statute into harmony with the state’s legislation on religious affairs. On July 18, 1961, under the instruction of the CROC, Patriarch Aleksii convoked the Holy Synod. At this meeting the association of the Moscow Patriarchate and the WCC were approved and an important change was made as regards the Statute of the Church. Under the new version of Church Statutes all administrative and financial authority was transferred from the parish priest to the laity. In sum, the Orthodox clergy’s role in the leadership of parish was diminished, because the Church’s rules and regulations were re-written in the spirit of Soviet law. In 1960–1964, the Russian Orthodox Church

eliminated 5,457 congregations and closed five of its eight seminaries (Kiev, Saratov, Stavropol, Minsk, Lutsk). In the mid-1960s, the number of its monasteries decreased to 18 (Chumachenko 1996, 221–222).

In connection with such an oppression of the Church, the following fact might have been seen as an astonishing one. When the Soviet government began to “tighten the screw” in matters of religion, at the same time it decided to activate the Church’s role in foreign policy, especially in the peace and anti-nuclear movements and in the campaign of disarmament. Soviet religious policy became much more two-faced than it had been up to now. It was important to show to the world the existence of the total freedom of belief in the Soviet society, whereas in the USSR religion had to be totally eliminated.

### **ENLIVENING OF THE ECUMENICAL AND PATRIOTIC ACTIVITIES OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN 1958–1964**

According to the well-known church historian, Olga Vasilyeva, in 1958–1964 the leading position of the Russian Orthodox Church among the Orthodox Churches began to weaken. The influence of the Ecumenical patriarchate increased in foreign affairs in connection with the reconciliation with the Roman Catholic Church on December 7, 1965 in Jerusalem, where both of the Churches repealed the interdict of the year 1054, which had confirmed schism of the Churches (Vasilyeva 2004, 361–371). This decision was useful for both sides. At this time we can observe also the same tendencies of striving for better relations on the part of Khrushchev vis-à-vis the Vatican under Pope John XXIII and Paul VI regardless of severely tightened controls of Lithuanian Catholic Church and Russian Orthodox Church (Vardys 1978, 83–86).

In this contradictory light of rapprochement and hostility, the Soviet authorities tried to exploit the Church in their foreign policy with the active co-operation with the WCC. Actually the relations between Russian Orthodox Church and the WCC began to warm up in 1958. On August 7–8, 1958 delegations of the Russian Orthodox Church and of the WCC met in Utrecht (Netherlands). The main topics were the Russian Orthodox Church’s relation to the ecumenical movement, Christian unity in peacekeeping, the Moscow Patriarchate’s attitude toward socio-political life, the unity of WCC and the Church, the common concern of the Churches about guaranteeing freedom of belief

(*Zhurnal Moskovskoy Patriarchii* 1958, No. 9, 22). Finally the delegations worked out a communiqué, according to which there should be a permanent exchange of information, new ways of developing the relationship should be worked out, and the unity of the Christendom should be achieved (*Zhurnal Moskovskoy Patriarchii* 1958, No. 9, 22). In November 1961, in New Delhi at its third assembly, the WCC granted the Russian Orthodox Church full membership (Vasilyeva 2004, 361–371).

How did the Kremlin view the role of Russian Orthodox Church in the World Council of Churches? For Soviet ideologists, the participation of Moscow Patriarchate in this ecumenical organisation was supposed to achieve three objectives. First, ecumenical co-operation between the Russian Orthodox Church and the World Council of Churches was considered useful as a support for socialist positions of friendship of the nations, peace movement, and total disarmament. The second goal was to diminish in the WCC the reactionary forces or anti-communist tendencies of West, to strengthen anti-‘imperialis’ positions and to advance a positive image of socialism (Helby 2005, 111–113). The third goal was to popularize the ideas of Soviet-minded patriotic propaganda within the WCC and influence the peace movement, disarmament and coexistence doctrine.

The Moscow Patriarchate was also used not only in ecumenical movement but also in other Soviet foreign policy events. For example, the Patriarch of Moscow and the heads of the Georgian and Armenian Churches, Patriarch Ephraim II and Catholicos Vazgen I, approved and sent a telegram of support to Premier Khrushchev on October 28, 1960 after his scandalous performance at the XV assembly of the UN (*Zhurnal Moskovskoy Patriarchii* 1960, No.12, 3). The co-operation from the Churches of socialist countries with the International Peace Council went on also very positively in 1958–1964. In spite of his strict religious policy, Khrushchev tried to leave a good impression by acknowledging the efforts of the East European churches in the fight for peace. A good example of that was the telegram sent by Khrushchev to the first All-Christian Peace Assembly, which took place on June 13–18, 1961 in Prague (*Zhurnal Moskovskoy Patriarchii* 1961, No. 7, 32–33).

## **THE PATRIOTIC AND ECUMENICAL ACTIVITIES OF THE ESTONIAN EPARCHY IN 1958–1964**

Until 1961, there were two important patriotic and ecumenical activities organized in the Estonian Eparchy. First, there was a grandiose event

for world peace, which all the members of the clergy of the Eparchy were involved (Archive of Saare-Hiiu deanery of EOC, Circular Letter of Bishop Ioann of Tallinn of August 13, 1959). The aim was to popularize the decisions of peace movement made at the congress of the Worldwide Council of Peace held from May 8–13, 1959 in Stockholm (*Zhurnal Moskovskoy Patriarchii* 1959, No, 6, 43–47). This action was directly initiated in the Church dioceses by the Chairman of CROC, Ivan Karpov, in Moscow.

Bishop Ioann of Tallinn called all deans to a general assembly of the deans and clergy on July 4, 1959 in Tallinn and the agenda was to review the documents adopted on May 13, 1959 in Stockholm by the World Peace Council (ESA D. 87, l. 33). The participants decided to distribute these documents in all parishes and signed a declaration that they unanimously supported the main tenets of the Soviet peace campaign. “We add ourselves to the ranks of the fighters for peace. We want a global peaceful co-existence of all nations; irrespective of the social order [...] We believe that it is crucial to impose a ban on weapons that enable the mass destruction of humanity and cultural achievements. We are against colonialism and racial discrimination” (Archive of the Saare-Hiiu deanery of EOC, Report in Tallinn, on June 4, 1959).

The first foreign Church delegation visited the Estonian Diocese in 1958. The visit of the pastors from the Hungarian Reformed Church took place from April 27–29, 1958. They were given a detailed tour of the Orthodox churches in Tallinn. The delegation was hosted by archpriest Nikolai Kokla, Secretary of the Estonian Diocese. In the evening of April 28, the visitors were invited to supper by Bishop John, where they had an “informal conversation about friendship and peace” (ESA D. 85, l. 23). They shared their impressions at the supper table and Bishop Ioann and Bishop Lajos Daranyi, head of the delegation, delivered salutatory addresses. On April 30, the Bishop gave an overview of these addresses in a report to the commissioner and to Nikolai, the Metropolitan of Kolomna and Krutitsy. The address of the Bishop included a eulogy to the friendship between nations and the fight for peace (ESA D. 85, l 25).<sup>3</sup>

The golden era of the patriotic and ecumenical activity of the Eparchy over-lapped with the first years of the reign of Aleksii (Ridiger), Bishop of Tallinn and All Estonia in 1961–1964. During the first years of reign of the Bishop Aleksii the number of foreign delegations increased 10-fold. In 1962, for example, nine foreign delegations visited the Estonian Eparchy. The first of them was the delegation of 12 members of the Lutheran Church from the German Democratic Republic, led by the

general superintendent of Berlin-Brandenburg. (*Zhurnal Moskovskoy Patriarchii* 1962, No. 6, 23. 26–27; cf. Kes, kus, mis? — *Kodumaa* 24 (186), June 13, 1962, 8).

On November 14, 1961, the Bishop was designated the vice-president of the department of the Church's foreign affairs of the Moscow Patriarchate (Struve 1980, 162; cf. Tallinna ja Eesti metropoliidi Aleksius 50. sünnipäev 1980. L3). This was quite a fast rise in the hierarchy of the Russian-Orthodox Church. The new position was directly connected with the official representation of the church abroad and involved the visits of the churches abroad. Already before his promotion the Bishop Aleksii was sent as a member of a delegation to the Common Council of Orthodox Churches that took place from September 24–30 on Rhodes (Greece). The aim of the council was to jointly prepare for the coming worldwide Orthodox Church Council (*Zhurnal Moskovskoy Patriarchii* 1961, No. 11, 5–6). In the same year, he took part in the III Assembly of the WCC in New Delhi, where the Russian Church became a member of the WCC was taken into the order of the day (*Zhurnal Moskovskoy Patriarchii* 1961, No. 12, 4). Nobody knows what caused such a career in a very short time.

Bishop Aleksii explained the multitude of foreign delegations in 1962 by referring to the danger of closing of the convent of Kuremäe and St. Alexander's Cathedral in Tallinn, which he tried to avoid by inviting foreign guests to the Estonian SSR (Patriarch Aleksii 1999, 453–454). Another reason was the important position of the Bishop in Moscow, which enabled him to invite the foreign delegations to his home eparchy in order to improve and strengthen his own and the Estonian Eparchy's reputation. The argumentation of Commissioner Jaan Kanter was different. He explained the increasing number of foreign delegations as reflecting a desire on the part of the Soviet authorities to present the "lenient" Soviet policy of religion to foreigners and to promote the Communist idea of the "friendship of nations" under the label of ecumenical relations (ESA D. 120, l. 12).<sup>4</sup> However, the number of foreign delegations began to diminish in the following years. In 1963, there were six delegations (among others, delegates from France, the USA, Greece, Switzerland) that visited the country (ESA D. 127, l. 115–116).

One organization that enabled the local eparchy to exercise its patriotic activities was the Peace Defence Committee of the Estonian SSR. In 1962, the leader of the committee was Bishop Aleksii. On April 26, 1962, the committee organized a Disarmament and Peace Conference of the

Estonian SSR in Tallinn. Also, Aleksii, the Bishop of Tallinn and All Estonia and Jaan Kiivit, the Archbishop of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC), were invited to take part in the conference. The order of the day included the following themes: (1) fight for peace and disarmament; (2) new elections of the direction of the peace-defence committee of the Republic; (3) elections of delegates to a Peace Defence Conference of the USSR in Moscow (*Zhurnal Moskovskoy Patriarchii* 1962, No. 6, 46). Bishop Aleksii presented a speech that made such a positive impression, that he was selected as a delegate for the above-mentioned conference in Moscow (*Zhurnal Moskovskoy Patriarchii* 1962, No. 6, 48–49).

The young bishop was also an active propagandist and member of the peace fund. In his article, “The Russian Orthodox Church and the Peace Fund” he called for donations to the peace defence fund of the USSR. But the donations to the fund were not actually voluntary, as one would assume them to be. The campaign of collecting money was ordered and organized by the CROC with the help of a commissioner. In 1963, the 15 local orthodox congregations supported the undertaking with 1,722 rubles (ESA D. 125, l. 71–72) and the monastery of Kuremäe with 400 rubles (ESA D. 125, l. 82).

Between 1963 and 1964 the ecumenical activity of the Estonian Eparchy increased. Bishop Aleksii had a good relationship with the head of the EELC. Common prayers with other Christian denominations were now allowed. For example, from January 18–25, 1964 the Church organized a prayer-week for Christian unity. At that event, Bishop Aleksii of Tallinn and All Estonia held a special sermon dedicated to the theme at an ecumenical worship in St. Alexander’s Cathedral in Tallinn (*Zhurnal Moskovskoy Patriarchii* 1964, No. 3, 36). Why did it seem that the credibility of the Russian Orthodox Church was greater than that of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church at the local level in the orthodox eparchy of Tallinn? The Baltic Lutheran Churches’ contacts with the West initially took place by way of the Russian Orthodox Church; therefore most of the letters of invitation to visit the Western countries reached Lutherans through the Orthodox Church, and first had to be accepted by the Orthodox Church leaders, more precisely by the department of foreign affairs of Moscow patriarchate. For example, if Jaan Kiivit himself received a letter of invitation, he first translated it into Estonian, then sent a copy of original letter and the translation to the state commissioner, who organized the Russian translation, which was sent to Moscow. Only after the decision came from Moscow could

the archbishop reply to the letter, and in some cases, it was too late (Altnurme 2003, 194). This made it difficult for Estonian representatives to visit any meetings, which were called on short notice. The procedure of visa application was another complication that sometimes took several months. The EELC was not always permitted to accept invitations. Later, when Kiivit had already gained some reputation abroad, the government officials “helped” him choose the correct events for participation if several meetings overlapped (Kaldur and Kurg 2009, 133–134).

The work of the local bishop was soon appreciated by the higher administration. On July 23, 1964, His All Holiness, Patriarch Aleksii, promoted Bishop Aleksii to the rank of archbishop and he received the right to wear a cross on his mitre. On December 22, of the same year, Archbishop Aleksii was appointed general secretary of the Moscow Patriarchate and became a permanent member of the Holy Synod. All this — the promotion, duties in the central administration of the Russian Orthodox Church and the frequent dispatches brought the Bishop of Tallinn more and more away from his Eparchy. The active contribution of Aleksii to the Soviet peace cause was later also recognized by the authorities in Soviet Estonia. In 1979, Johannes Käbin awarded Archbishop Aleksii the Order of Friendship of Peoples, which was the highest award for patriotic accomplishments (Tallinna ja Eesti metropoliidi Aleksiiue 50. Sünnipäev 1980, 3).

## CONCLUSION

How was the change in religious policies in 1954–1964 manifested in the Estonian Eparchy patriotic and ecumenical activity? First of all, the local Church-state relations as closely related with Soviet Union-wide context played big role in the changes (e.g., liberalization in the mid-1950 or upgrading of atheistic propaganda in the finish of 1950s).

In sum, the patriotic activity and ecumenical relations of Estonian Orthodox Eparchy can be divided into two periods. The first period, listing from 1954 to 1958, could be characterized as time of respite and liberalization for Estonian eparchy. This period has also been confirmed by the eparchy’s low involvement in the activities that were characterized by Soviet patriotism. At the apex of the so-called “thaw” (1954–1957), the ecumenical and Soviet patriotic activities in the Estonian Eparchy were quite non-existent — the foreign delegations were not invited any more nor was there any intense co-operation with the other confessions. Since

1958, the ecumenical and patriotic activities of the Estonian Eparchy became more active. That was closely related with the increase of the administrative suppression upon religious life in 1958–1964. The official positions of the Estonian Diocese in relation to ecumenical cooperation were clearly reserved and any contacts were restricted to the level of local congregations. During this time there were no bigger activities and the clergymen of the Eparchy showed their Soviet-minded attitude only by the so-called patriotic peace-sermons.

The second period (1959–1964) was confirmed by the gradual engagement of eparchial clergy with the ecclesiastical life in the activities that were characterized by Soviet patriotism (i.e., ideological Peace and demilitarization's propaganda). Subsequent restrictions and persecution of religion under Khrushchev, the Estonian Diocese of the Moscow Patriarchate was integrated into the larger scheme of Soviet peace propaganda and ecumenical cooperation. This took mainly the form of joint reception of foreign church delegations which coincides with the tenure of Bishop Alexii (Ridiger), who played a large role in the Moscow hierarchy as well as in the external affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church. Especially during his governance the number of foreign Church delegations visiting the Estonian Diocese increased considerably. The beginning of the 1960s can be confidently described as the "golden era" of the patriotic and ecumenical activity of the Estonian Orthodox Eparchy.

With the development of ecumenical activities the use of local dioceses in Soviet-minded peace-propaganda actions also became more vivid. At the level of the Eparchy the first patriotic activity of a wider scope was the propagandizing campaign of the decisions made at the congress of the International Peace Council in Stockholm in 1959. The second expression of the patriotic activity was taking part in the work of the peace defence committee of the Estonian SSR. The Estonian Orthodox Bishop Aleksii and the archbishop of Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church Jaan Kiivit, were active members of this committee. And the third expression was the propagandizing of the campaign of collecting money for supporting the peace fund.

## NOTES

1. This research was supported by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, targeted financing projects SF0180026s11 and SF0180050s09. Address correspondence and reprint requests to: Andrei Sychov, Department of Church History, Faculty of Theology, University of Tartu, 50090, Estonia. E-mail: andrei.sotsov@mail.ee

2. CROC was established in September 1943 and its main function was dealing with the religious problems of the Russian Orthodox Church. CRA was established one year later and setup to deal with the affairs of others religious groups. See Anderson, John. 1994. *Religion, state and politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States 1953–1993*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 25.

3. In his report, Bishop John writes, I said in my opening speech: "... Could we not compare this meeting to a nourishment of grace in a difficult and suffocating atmosphere for mankind? The entire country desires and needs peace and prays for it. It is a great joy to see fellow-minded friends and brethren who also fight for peace in building a new life. I extend my hand to you as a token of friendship and peace."

4. In his letter, local commissioner, Jaan Kanter, describes to the head on CROC Vasily Kuroyedov the work of Bishop Alexii (future patriarch Aleksii II) with the Lutheran pastors: on May 7, 1962 from 10 to 12 o'clock, the delegation met with Bishop Alexii who delivered a 25-minute presentation on the situation of the Orthodox Church in Estonia. "... The delegates were positively surprised ("wow!") by a reply of the Bishop to a question, when he said that there are over 100 Orthodox parishes in the republic. The responses of the Bishop were thorough, skilful and exhaustive.

## REFERENCES

- Altnurme, Riho. 2003. "The Sovietization of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church." In *Sovietization of the Baltic States 1940–1956*, ed. Mertelsmann Olaf. Tartu, Estonia: KLEIO.
- Anderson, John. 1994. *Religion, State and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States 1953–1993*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Beeson, Trevor. 1975. *Prudence et courage. La situation religieuse en Russie et en Europe de l'Est* (English translation here). Paris, France: Éditions du Seuil.
- Conquest Robert. ed. 1968. *Religion in the USSR*. London, UK: The Bodley Head.
- Davis, Nathaniel. 2003. *A Long Walk to Church. A Contemporary History of Russian Orthodoxy*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Helby, J. A. 2005. "The State, the Church, and the Oikumene: 1948–1985." In *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union*, ed. Ramet S.P. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 111–113.
- Kaldur, Peeter, and Ingmar, Kurg. 2009. "Ecumenical Relations of the Lutheran Church." In *History of Estonian Ecumenism*, ed. Altnurme Riho. Tartu, Estonia: University of Tartu/Estonian Council of Churches, 133–134.
- Kuuli, Olaf. 2002. *Sula ja hallad Eesti NSV-s. Kultuuripoliitikast aastail 1953–69* (English translation here). Tallinn, Estonia: AS Ühiselu.
- Struve, Nikita. 1980. *Rapport secret au Comité Central sur l'État de l'Église en URSS* (English translation here). Paris, France : Éd. Du Seuil.
- Tallinna ja Eesti metropoliidi Aleksiuuse 50. sünnipäev. Eesti Piiskopkonna Valitsus. Tallinn, 1980.
- Vardys, Stanley V. 1978. *The Catholic Church Dissent and Nationality in Soviet Lithuania*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Васильева О. Ю. *Русская Православная Церковь и II Ватиканский собор. Факты. События. Документы*. (Москва, Лепта-Пресс, 2004).
- Патриарх Алексий. *Православие в Эстонии* (Москва, Православная Энциклопедия, 1999).
- Пospelовский, Дмитрий. *Православная Церковь в истории Руси, России и СССР*. Учебное пособие. Библиейско-Богословский Институт св. Апостола Андрея. Москва, 1996.
- Чумаченко, Татьяна. *Государство, православная церковь, верующие. 1941–1961 гг.* (Москва, АИРО-XX, 1996).

## PERIODICALS

- Kodumaa*. 1962. “Kes, kus, mis?” June 13, 1962, 8.
- Zhurnal Moskovskoy Patriarchii*. 1958–1964. *Журнал Московской Патриархии*.  
Встреча представителей Русской Православной Церкви с членами Всемирного Совета Церквей (1958, № 9, p. 22).
- Коммюнике о встрече делегации святой Русской Православной Церкви и делегации Всемирного Совета Церквей (1958, № 9, p. 36).
- Докменты сессии Всемирного Совета Мира (1959, № 6, pp. 43–47).
- Председателю Совета Министров СССР Никите Сергеевичу Хрущеву (1960, № 12, p. 3).
- Хрущев, Н. Всемирному Общехристианскому Конгрессу Мира (1961, № 7, pp. 32–33).
- Список делегатов совещания (1961, № 11, pp. 5–6).
- Отъезд делегации Русской Православной Церкви на 3-ю генеральную ассамблею Всемирного Совета Церквей (1961, №12, p. 4).
- Казновецкий, А. Пасторы и богословы из ГДР (1962, № 6, pp. 23. 26–27).
- За всеобщее разоружение и мир (1962, № 6. p. 46)
- Конференция представителей Советской общественности за всеобщее разоружение и мир (1962, № 6, pp. 48–49).
- Карманов, Е. К “неделе молитв о христианском единстве” (1964, № 3, p. 36).

## Estonian State Archive (ESA), Fond R-1961, opis 1

- Delo 87, l. 33. May 30, 1959. Circular Letter of John, Bishop of Tallinn.
- Delo 85, l. 23. April 30, 1958. Information Report of Bishop John–Pavel Kapitonov.
- Delo 120, l. 12. May 10, 1962. Kanter–Kuroyedov.
- Delo 125, l. 71–72. 1962. Information Report. Kanter–Kuroyedov.
- Delo 125, l 82. 1962. Information Report. Kanter–Kuroyedov.
- Delo 127, l. 115–116. May 10, 1962. Information Report. Kanter–Kuroyedov.

## Archive of Saare-Hiiu deanery (Kuressaare, Orthodox Church of Estonia)

- Unnumbered Delo. June 4, 1959. Communiqué of the meeting of clergy in Tallinn.
- Unnumbered Delo. August 13, 1959. Circular Letter of Bishop John.