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Romancing Freedom: Church and Society in the Baltic States since the End of Communism

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In spite of the challenge of 'homo sovieticus' and the so-called 'moral vacuum' the Churches in postcommunist countries since 1989 do not seem to have had the impact they themselves or others thought they would. On the contrary, in the context of newly-acquired freedom and possibilities for expansion the role of the Churches as purveyors of meaning to the individual and society has remained rather limited. In the eyes of many a believer in Eastern Europe this is the result of western influences: since the opening of the Iron Curtain all sorts of evils like liberalism, individualism, consumerism, materialism and (Protestant) sects have harmed the native Churches. Whether this analysis is right still remains to be proven. It is clear however that the events of 1989 were ambiguous for the Churches. Initial euphoria has given way to realism. To what extent are the Churches prepared for the future and what is their contribution going to be in the new, liberal and capitalist society? Let us take the example of the Baltic States.¹

Short History until 1980²

From the time of the Reformation the Baltic States were predominantly either Roman Catholic (Lithuania) or Lutheran (Latvia and Estonia). In some regions within the present state borders the majority of the inhabitants were of another faith. In Latgalia (eastern Latvia) the population was mostly Roman Catholic and in the Klaipėda region (western Lithuania) Lutheran or Reformed. Orthodoxy was only weakly present. Under the Russian tsars, however, from the beginning of the eighteenth century, the religious composition of the Baltic States gradually changed. Old Believers who were persecuted established themselves on the edges of the Russian Empire. Thus Riga was to become the world-wide spiritual centre of the Priestless Old Believers' Church. In the context of the government's russification policies – triggered by various national movements – the Russian Orthodox Church started its missionary work in the mid-nineteenth century. At the end of that same century various Protestant denominations, including Methodists, Baptists and Adventists, found their way to the Baltic region. These Churches remained generally rather small. During the first period of Baltic independence the Churches and the state were from time to time antagonists. With the Second World War started a 50-year-long period of persecution.

The Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches from the 1980s

From the 1970s pressure on the Churches in the Baltic Soviet republics started to decline. During the 1980s the state authorities allowed commemorative festivals: the 200th anniversary of the building of the Aglona basilica in Latvia (1980); the 600th anniversary of the death of Lithuania's patron saint Casimir (1984) (a public mass event); and the 800th anniversary of Christianity in the Baltic States in Latvia (1986). The Russian Orthodox Church and the Old Believers commemorated the 1,000th anniversary of the conversion of Kievan Rus' (1988). During the *perestroika* era religious dissidents were allowed to return home. The present Roman Catholic archbishop of Kaunas, Sigitas Tamkevičius, for example, who had been imprisoned for his part in producing *The Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church* (1972–90), returned in 1988 from exile in Transdnistria. In the autumn of the same year there was irrevocable liberalisation of church life. In all the Baltic Soviet republics national awareness was growing during the 1980s. When one looks back now it seems that it must have been clear quite early that fundamental changes were on the way. This was not how the local population perceived events, however, since little hope existed for a radical change of the system. The amendments that party leader Mikhail Gorbachev wanted to make all aimed at the reform, not the elimination, of communism.

Increasing freedom of religious expression in the 1980s was linked with growing national consciousness. Increasing numbers of converts were reflected in church statistics. Just as in artistic circles in the 1920s it had been a sign of nonconformity to be a nonbeliever, in the 1980s it was a sign of protest to be a believer. Until about 1985 church statistics showed a rapid decline in church participation and church membership, but afterwards a more positive development set in, affecting all the major denominations. The period 1990–92 can best be characterised as an explosion: this at least is what the statistical material concerning the distribution of church sacraments tells us. The Churches exercised their greatest attraction during these years of crisis, when the former USSR fell apart and the Baltic States struggled for their independence. The three years 1990–92 saw the high point of church attendance. After that it began to decline again. This pattern was paralleled by the presence in public life of various church leaders. Initially they would regularly make their own, new and alternative standpoints known in the media. Nowadays things are quite different. Church leaders are less present in the public domain and people generally take less interest in church matters. Church leaders themselves, from the larger Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches to the small so-called 'Free Churches', have observed this change as well.

As far as the decline of church membership is concerned there are some remarkable differences amongst denominations. It is now clear that the Roman Catholic Church in Latvia and Lithuania has survived the Soviet occupation much better than the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Both Churches were so-called 'People's Churches' that comprised the majority of the native population either at the national or at the regional level. While the Lutheran Church in Latvia was traditionally much larger than the Roman Catholic Church, in the early 1990s for instance the number of baptisms in the Lutheran Church was only 15 per cent higher than in the Roman Catholic Church and the number of church marriages was actually lower. Various factors can explain the 'success' of the Roman Catholic Church. The Lutheran Church was often (and still is) considered to be a German Church and not a national Church. Under Russian control the German-speaking

population of Estonia and Latvia formed the upper social class of noble landowners and rulers. The intellectual and church elite was also of German descent. The Roman Catholic lower clergy in Latvia and Lithuania were by contrast traditionally closer to the local population and had actively contributed to the growth of national awareness in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. When the Baltic States came under Soviet control the German Baltic population was to a large extent repatriated (*Heim ins Reich*) or fled voluntarily to Germany. This was not so much the case with the Roman Catholic clergy, though many leading figures in both – in fact all – Churches were deported or murdered by the German and Soviet occupiers. The exact role of specific denominational beliefs and church structures remains unclear. The emphasis placed by Lutheranism on the individual may have made the Lutheran Church less able than the Roman Catholic Church to survive the Soviet era as a coherent entity. Married Lutheran ministers were supposedly more vulnerable to manipulation than the celibate Roman Catholic priests. Celibate priests, it is argued, were also firmly attached to their parishes; consequently the Roman Catholic Church was 'predisposed' to play an important role in binding religious meaning, national identity, protest and resistance together.

The dramatic decline in church membership is well documented by the Estonian Lutheran Church and other small Protestant denominations that register only active members. Membership of the Estonian Lutheran Church was about 100,000 in 1970, about 50,000 in 1986, about 75,000 in 1992 and about 55,000 in 1997. In the case of the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and other Lutheran Churches, for instance, it is not so easy to determine exact membership. Estimates are often mere guesswork on the basis of the religious composition of the population before the Second World War. Membership of the Roman Catholic Church is *ipso facto* nominal: no one who has been baptised into it can cease to be a member. The number of baptisms and confirmations in the Lutheran Church of Estonia, however, has stabilised at a significantly higher level than before 1989. The same development can be observed in the Latvian Roman Catholic Church. The number of baptisms and marriages declined after 1991, but stabilised at a higher level.

Somewhat paradoxically religiosity in general and sympathy for religion are on the increase again. Surveys in Estonia showed that the percentage of the population having a sympathetic attitude to religion rose from 37 in 1992 to 50 in 1998. Of a population of 1.5 million 64.5 per cent is of ethnic Estonian descent. Up to 45 per cent of these 975,000 Estonians call themselves Lutheran (6 per cent more than in 1992); the total number is up to nine times higher than the active membership. Similar developments can be observed in Lithuania, where the Roman Catholic Church remains the most trusted social institution. A plausible reason is the political antagonism between the Baltic States and the Russian Federation (see for example the minority question) on the one hand and, on the other hand, the economic wealth of the neighbouring European Union and the slow pace of integration. Thus traditional Christian faith – with its specific denominational colour, especially Roman Catholic and Lutheran – has become once again, as in the 1980s, an important element in a distinctive Baltic-European, non-Slav, non-Orthodox and non-western national identity. Consistent with this is the emphasis placed by many denominations on their Baltic roots and Baltic character.

For details of church membership in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania during 1996–98, see Table 1.

Table 1. Church membership in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (1996–98).

	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania
Inhabitants	1,450,000 (est. 1998)	2,440,000 (est. 1998)	3,710,000 (est. 1998)
Baptists	6,500	6,180	?
Jews	1,000	11,000	10,000
Lutherans	55,000	300,000	35,000
Methodists	1,842	?	?
Muslims	10,000	?	?
Old Believers	10,000	90,000	35,000
Orthodox	60,000	280,000	185,000
Reformed	?	?	12,000
Roman Catholics	3,000	500,000	2,590,000

Other Denominations

The smaller Churches like the Old Believers, the Estonian and Latvian Orthodox, the Baptists, the Methodists and the Adventists were more severely affected by Soviet oppression than the bigger Churches, because they already had fewer means and a smaller adherent group.³ The little they had was taken away from them. In 1944–45 the national Orthodox Churches were coerced into the Russian Orthodox Church and shared thereafter its sad fate. Moreover, they have been the objects of russification as well.⁴ The various Old Believer Churches in the Baltic Soviet republics were forced to join a union that acted as a governing body.⁵ Free Churches, including the Pentecostal movement and evangelical Christians, were merged with the Baptists. Baptist communities that refused to register suffered relentless persecution. The Moravian Brethren in Estonia had to join the Methodist Church, but the Methodist Church in Lithuania was incorporated into the larger Protestant denominations (Lutheran and Reformed). Because of deportations by the Soviet authorities the Reformed church membership in Lithuania was cut by half. The Jewish community has its own well-known tragic history. The Holocaust and Soviet antisemitism led to the destruction of two long-established and flourishing centres of Jewish life in Eastern Europe in Kaunas and Vilnius. About 10,000 people of Jewish descent now live in Lithuania and Latvia; they are often in great social need.⁶ Because of their specific historical background the role and impact of these religious communities in society is much smaller than those of the Roman Catholic and Lutheran 'People's Churches'.

New Church Structures⁷

From 1940 local church leaders were taken hostage, deported and murdered by the Nazis as well as the Communists. Existing church structures were systematically dismantled: they were entirely destroyed, or reduced, or taken over by communist-approved functionaries. After the death of Stalin church leaders who had been deported and had survived were allowed to return home, but they were not permitted to take up ecclesiastical functions. The result was that those Churches which had a horizontal church structure were centralised, while Churches with a hierarchical structure were deprived of their central governing bodies: decentralised churches were thus centralised, and vice versa. Nevertheless, the Latvian and Lithuanian Roman Catholic Churches were allowed new bishops, the former in 1972, 1982 and 1987 and the latter in 1965, 1968, 1969 and 1982.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the independence of the Baltic States in 1990–91 favoured the reshaping of church structures. Some problems however needed to be solved. What should be done with the church officials who – voluntarily and involuntarily – had cooperated with the Soviet authorities? Did the current church structures provide an appropriate framework for the 1990s? In what way should the church structures set up by émigrés who had fled from Soviet occupation be dealt with? Who was qualified to take responsibility and assume leadership?

The tricky question of collaboration was generally handled with care. Church leaders either did not run for a new term, or were not reelected, or were demoted and transferred to the background of church life. In the Lithuanian Roman Catholic Church, for instance, priests who wanted to repent were invited to present themselves to their bishops.

Under the Soviet regime the Latvian Lutheran Church gradually developed the office of archbishop, modelled on the example of the Roman Catholic Church. Bishops were first introduced into the Lutheran Church in Lithuania in 1976. Nowadays these features seem to be more or less accepted. Women's ordination is another issue of current concern. This is also a practice which was introduced under Soviet occupation. The present Latvian Lutheran church leader, Archbishop Jānis Vanags, linked his election in 1993 with the abolition of women's ordination. This question is controversial in Estonia and Lithuania too. These specific issues – church hierarchy and women's ordination – as well as special attention to liturgy are considered by the Lutheran Church to be aspects of its Baltic identity that was shaped by its Roman Catholic and Orthodox surroundings. In these and other respects the Lutheran exile Churches are generally considered to be too liberal. The Roman Catholic bishoprics have been restored in Latvia and Lithuania. Local bishops are initiating a number of canonically defined activities – for example, education and charitable activity – with sometimes very limited financial resources, but the foundations are being laid with aid from the West. As far as the Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches are concerned, then, ecclesiastical normalisation implies more or less a return to the prewar situation. Meanwhile the Lutheran Church seems to have taken on a more high-church character.

Ethnic problems impeded the rebuilding of the Orthodox Churches in Estonia and Latvia. After the Second World War the national Orthodox Churches continued to function abroad, while the local Orthodox Churches were forcibly integrated into the Russian Orthodox Church and were russified. Around the time of Baltic independence in 1991 the exile Orthodox Churches under the ecumenical patriarch in Constantinople, Bartholomaios, became active in Estonia and Latvia. (In Lithuania there had never been a national Orthodox Church, since there were hardly any ethnic Lithuanian Orthodox.) Tensions rose particularly when the two Russian Orthodox archbishoprics of Tallinn and Riga needed to register as national church entities in order to reclaim the church property that had been confiscated by the Soviet authorities. For this reason patriarch Aleksii granted administrative autonomy to both archbishoprics in 1992–93; they nevertheless remained under the tutelage of the Moscow Patriarchate with regard to spiritual life and foreign relations.

In Estonia, trumping the autonomous Estonian Orthodox Church, the exile Orthodox Church was in 1993 the first to register under the prewar name of the Apostolic Estonian Orthodox Church. By its choice of name this Church clearly saw itself as the juridical successor of the prewar Orthodox Church, and it achieved government recognition as such. A conflict ensued between the Apostolic Orthodox Church and the still unregistered Estonian Orthodox Church, focusing on the issue of

ownership of church property. Despite an agreement in 1996, according to which the believers were to decide to which Church they would belong, the antagonism still lingers on. The ownership of the Aleksandr Nevsky Cathedral in Tallinn, for instance, was in dispute throughout 1998. The majority of ethnic Estonian believers chose the registered Church, and the majority of ethnic Russians the unregistered Church. In May 1998 the Apostolic Estonian Orthodox Church acquired its own bishop: the ethnic Russian archimandrite Simeon Krushkov, who had joined the Church in 1996. In 1992, when the Russian Orthodox archbishopric was still undivided, he had been a candidate to become archbishop, but Patriarch Aleksii had appointed the ethnic Estonian Kornili Jakobs. Bishop Simeon's term of office was rather brief: he suddenly died on 21 September 1998.

In Latvia things are a bit different. There the small Orthodox Church of ethnic Latvians is prevented from registering with the state authorities. The autonomous Latvian Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate was the first to register and therefore the use of the designation Orthodox a second time was not allowed by the Ministry of Justice. Registration or secession problems did not occur in Lithuania, for there are only few ethnic Lithuanian church members, there has never been a national Orthodox Church, and the Archbishopric of Vilnius is still an integral part of the Russian Orthodox Church. The local church leader is Archbishop Khrizostom who was appointed in 1990 after a previous demotion. Interestingly the Russian Orthodox Church identifies itself closely with the foreign policies of the Russian Federation, which is very much opposed to the expansion of the NATO.

Quite remarkable is the situation of the profoundly traditionalist Church of the Priestless Old Believers. In Latvia for instance this Church is looking for ways to adapt itself to modern times. One problem, which has received extensive coverage in the Latvian press, is infiltration of local communities by Russian nationalists and the Russian Mafia. (The same thing is happening in Lithuania.) An obvious though controversial solution would be the introduction of a church hierarchy (bishops and priests) in order to centralise church structures. In the theological domain there are some problems too: the level of theological education is rather low, and many now consider the Church's isolation from modern society, reinforced by its traditional apocalyptic way of thinking, inappropriate. Whether adaptations will be introduced depends very much on the mental flexibility of this Church. The absence of a church hierarchy, millenarianism and traditionalism have been important identity-building elements.

Church Renewal since 1989

Under Soviet occupation church activities were strictly limited to the interior of the church building. Any activity outside the church community which in any way expressed a religious inspiration was liable to be suppressed by the state authorities. After 1989 newly-acquired freedom was translated into a desire to reestablish the societal role of the churches: proper religious education, theological training, primary and secondary schooling, social activities and charity, access to the media, involvement in political life and the appropriate financial support and infrastructures. The Churches have already achieved a lot, especially those which could rely on help from sister Churches in the West.

Soviet policy aimed at a reduction of the level of theological education and the number of theological students. The Roman Catholic Church had only two strictly monitored seminaries in Riga and Kaunas, each with a *numerus clausus*. These semi-

naries had to supply the whole of the USSR with priests. The Lutherans had theological institutes for distant learning in Riga and Tallinn. Only few students were allowed to finish their studies. Many a Lutheran minister had to learn by practice. The Russian Orthodox Church in the Baltic States lost all its seminaries. The nearest seminary was in Leningrad. Orthodox priests acquired their professional skills in practice and after ordination they were sometimes allowed to receive some training. The smaller denominational groups lacked any formal training facilities. Sometimes they used the facilities offered by other denominations. In the early 1990s, therefore, there were only a few trained clergymen and laymen with adequate theological qualifications to assume educational responsibilities. To some extent all Churches have suffered from a dilution of their theological and spiritual heritage.

Much attention has been paid to the formation of a 'professional management'. Existing training schools have been expanded and new ones established. Students, including laymen, have been sent to foreign universities in order to obtain academic degrees. As early as 1989 a second Roman Catholic seminary opened its doors in Telšiai, Lithuania, and attracted many new students. Other seminaries followed. In 1990 a theological faculty was established in Kaunas. There were similar developments in the Lutheran Church. Full-scale theological faculties were established in Estonia (1991) and Latvia (1990) and there are specialised training schools for those students who want to become ministers after obtaining their bachelor's degree. In 1992 the Lutheran and Reformed Churches established a bachelor's course of theology in Klaipėda, Lithuania. In 1994 the Methodist Church opened its Tallinn-based Baltic Seminary. All these educational faculties are trying to improve their standards. Gradually the new schools are being integrated into the educational system. In Estonia, for instance, six theological schools (Lutheran, Baptist and Methodist) were visited by a Dutch-British committee and as a result five of them were formally recognised by the Ministry of Education in June 1998. Recognition is essential for the formalisation of degrees and finances.

In order to establish new denominational schools at primary and secondary level the Churches in the Baltic States largely have to rely on their own funding. Generally the local government departments that are responsible for primary and secondary schools are very reluctant to hand them over to the Churches. In Estonia there is only one denominational school, a Roman Catholic primary school in Tartu that was returned in 1993, and even here the staff and pupils are mostly non-Catholics. The Old City College (*Vanalinna Hariduskolleeģium*) in Tallinn is a municipal grammar school (gymnasium) with a large number of Roman Catholic teachers on its staff. Their religious commitment is expressed for instance in a contribution to the integration of handicapped pupils into the regular educational system: the school takes on two each year. In Riga, Latvia, there are four denominational grammar schools, a Roman Catholic, as Lutheran, a Baptist and an Orthodox. In Lithuania there are four Roman Catholic grammar schools, but one of them is of a pre-seminary type. Because of their high professional and moral standards these secondary schools generally have a good reputation. They attract children from religious and non-religious backgrounds, and every year quite a number of applicants have to be turned down.

In Estonia and Latvia only the so-called 'traditional denominations' (see below) and in Lithuania the 'registered denominations' are permitted to teach religion in primary and secondary schools. In Estonia the 1996 legislation states that parents and pupils can ask for religious education, but that school directors are not compelled to fulfil that wish. In 1997 religion was being taught in 7 per cent of all primary and

secondary schools. Since the 1997–98 academic year pupils in Latvia can choose religion as a school subject, and this has also been the case for some years in Lithuania. In Latvia in 1998 about \$200,000 – a large sum by Latvian standards – was made available by the government for the improvement of religious and ethical education by means of retraining and curriculum development. Together with government-appointed education specialists the Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Baptist, Latvian Orthodox and Old Believer Churches are represented on committees that determine the curriculum of ethics and nondenominational religious history. Other denominations can comment on the conclusions of these committees. In Lithuania the situation is similar, but the Churches seem to have less influence on the curriculum content. In Estonia there seems to be little or no cooperation between church and state in this area.

Because of the Churches' poor financial situation the option of supradenominational religious education at school supplemented with specific denominational teaching by the Churches themselves has been considered in Latvia, but the proposed arrangement was completely rejected by the Roman Catholic, Latvian Orthodox, Lutheran, Old Believer and Baptist Churches. Arguments against supradenominational religious education included the fear that some denominations might nevertheless spread religious propaganda or that what might prevail would be atheism. (The spectre of the Soviet era when scientific atheism was the sole religion is still present.) Arguments in favour were that religious tolerance would be promoted, that supra-denominational education would reflect existing religious pluralism, and that a large part of the population did not have strong religious affiliations. In Estonia a similar proposal was the subject of a newspaper discussion in 1994 and 1995.

The new Latvian law on education of September 1998 confirmed the already existing situation: that Roman Catholic, Old Believer, Lutheran, Baptist and Latvian Orthodox Churches could teach religion in state schools. (By consequence the training of teachers by the Churches will be financed.) For pupils up to 14 years old religious education will be available if the parents of 10 or more pupils wish them to learn this subject. When the pupils reach the age of 14 they can choose for themselves. The other pupils are to be taught ethics (obligatory from the age of 14), the history of religions or cultural history. It is not yet clear what the future demand for religious education will be. Figures for 1997–98 seem to indicate that interest in religious education is rather low. In Lithuania legislation was introduced some years earlier and undoubtedly served as an example for Latvia. According to Lithuanian statistics interest in religious education has been declining slightly since 1993–94. In 1997–98, some 63 per cent of pupils were taught religion (96 per cent of them in Roman Catholic religion classes) and 37 per cent ethics. The problems of religious education in the Baltic States are more or less the same as in the West. Interest on the part of pupils is not great; many are simply following their parents' choice. Moreover, many teachers of religion have no formal training.

Another aspect of church renewal is the development of pastoral care and charitable activities. In all three Baltic states the Churches have become active in these domains. In the army, prisons and hospitals clergy and laymen provide spiritual help for those who request it. All Churches, large and small, are engaged in charitable activities, from distributing food and clothing to full-scale programmes on behalf of weaker social groups such as the elderly, children and single mothers and also asylum-seekers who have been caught passing through on their way to the West. In Lithuania the Roman Catholic Church has taken the lead in the academic training of social workers: with help from the American Bishops' Conference the first school

for the training and retraining of social workers in Lithuania opened in Kaunas in 1993. The Churches play an important role in the sphere of secular social work. This is because the state has limited means, has set different priorities or simply lacks the interest to overcome the social problems that have been severely aggravated by political, social and economic transformation.

A Shift in Mentality since 1989?

Most of the Warsaw Pact countries were relatively open to foreign visitors, but the USSR, and especially the Baltic States, were much more isolated. Until the end of the 1950s it was virtually impossible to visit Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and afterwards foreigners were allowed only in limited numbers. Possibilities for the citizens of the Baltic States to travel abroad were extremely rare. All this started to change in the mid-1980s. The unexpected fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 started off a new stage in the history of the Baltic States. Independent from 1991, they came into contact and confrontation with the western way of life that would function thereafter as the dominant model. Unexpected freedom proved to be ambiguous, especially for the Churches, which had had a clear role as the enemy of the communist regime. The transition from a well-defined and more or less static situation to a new, fuzzy and dynamic one is complicated and is still going on.

The new societal order now needs a different approach on the part of the Churches. The old introverted attitude needs to be replaced by a new extroverted one. Through 50 years of persecution the Churches became rather inward-looking; they started to dry up intellectually as they perforce limited themselves to their core activities: the distribution of the sacraments and the preaching of the word of God. Church structures and mentality adapted to a life under and against oppression. Now other qualities like cooperation, dialogue, openness, shared responsibility, consensus and the will to make compromises are needed, but the psychological structure of many a clergyman and layman is not yet prepared for that. As an Estonian Orthodox priest put it, 'We suffer from a kind of Soviet style of working'.

The new, postcommunist situation proved to be even more complex, however, when it became clear that the societal role of the Churches was going to be rather limited. Initial popularity was not translated into lasting moral or political authority, influence or power. Thus the positive aspects of the democratisation, liberalisation and individualisation of society – in short, life in liberty – came back to the Churches like a boomerang. They had been marginalised under communist rule; now they found themselves among the many players in the life of society. This situation even induced feelings of nostalgia. Some examples will illustrate the adaptation problems that Churches and individual Christians are encountering in the new and open Baltic societies.

Lithuania is one of the few Eastern European countries with a large national Christian political party. Behind the Conservatives (30 per cent of the votes and 69 seats), the Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party is the second largest party (12 per cent of the votes and 15 seats). Since December 1996 these two parties have participated in a centre–right government coalition. There is also the very small Christian Democratic Union founded by the antisemitic journalist Kazys Bobelis. In Latvia there used to be a national Christian political party, the Union of Christian Democrats. In 1994 five members were elected to the Saeima (parliament), but after internal disputes there were only two left in 1998. In the elections of October that year the UCD was voted out of parliament. In Estonian Lutheran church circles the

establishment of a Christian Democratic party is being considered, but this initiative is controversial. It has generally become clear, however, that the traditional Roman Catholic and Lutheran backgrounds of the Baltic States have not resulted in large influential political movements. The specific contribution of Christian parties in the national political arena is limited. The Christian Democrats have had some successes, especially in legislative, educational and financial areas affecting the Churches. On questions of public morality they have had less impact. In Latvia, for instance, expressions of Roman Catholic opposition to abortion and (in 1998) to the death penalty have made no difference. There are various reasons why the impact of the Christian political parties remains small. Firstly, even where they are a part of a government coalition, as in Lithuania, they do not have decisive political power. Secondly, it is difficult for small political parties to master the broad range of political issues. Thirdly, they tend to concentrate on religious matters that are of little interest to other parties; however, during election campaigns other political parties do take a serious interest in legislation affecting the Churches: in Latvia, for example, an educational law passed through parliament just before the elections of October 1998.

Another area in which there has been a rather difficult shift in mentality since the end of communism is that of the relationship between church and state. This relationship is clearly ambiguous. On the one hand the state is expected to contribute to the material and financial needs of the Churches. (According to the Churches much still remains to be desired.) On the other hand the same state has to guarantee societal and ideological pluralism. This is often not compatible with the Churches' vision of the public welfare or of the contribution they want to make to the public good. Controversial issues include the 'sect problem', pornography, homosexuality, liberalism and the transition to the market economy. Especially lively issues are the restitution of church property, church finances and religious education, since they all impinge directly on the Churches' ability to carry out their mission in their respective societies.

In the Baltic context, marked by antagonism between the Russian Federation and the Baltic States, patriotism is a sentiment which can enhance the importance of the Churches in the eyes of the government authorities. In order to strengthen their role in society the 'traditional' denominations have requested a special, privileged status, referring to their contribution to public welfare, to their historic, national roots and to the role they play in society. In Estonia the Lutheran and Orthodox Churches have not succeeded in obtaining a special status, though this issue was placed on the political agenda again in 1998: representatives of other denominations expressed their fears about the creation of an underclass of nonprivileged churches. In Latvia there is no legislation, but government officials and the so-called traditional Churches are making an unofficial distinction between traditional and nontraditional Churches. For example, the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Latvian Orthodox, Old Believer and Baptist Churches as well as the Jewish community have a permanent seat on the Ministry of Justice's Advisory Committee for Religious Affairs, while other denominations must approach the Ministry individually. Furthermore these are the only denominations which are allowed to teach religion in state schools. Only in Lithuania is a specific legal distinction made between traditional and nontraditional denominations. The traditional religions are the Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Russian Orthodox and Old Believer Churches, the Jewish community, the Muslims and the Karaites. However, all registered denominations can teach religion in state schools. Any registered denomination can file a request for the status of traditional religion; it needs to prove its positive contribution to

Lithuanian society over a period of 25 years. The regulating of the relationship between the state and the Roman Catholic Church, which has a long tradition in this matter, is causing some controversy. In Estonia a treaty was concluded some years ago, but in Latvia and Lithuania there is still no agreement between the Roman Catholic Church and the state. Any concordat is contested by the (unofficial) traditional denominations in Latvia and Lithuania. In Lithuania complaints about state favouritism towards the Roman Catholic Church are quite frequent.

The end of communism meant the start of open communication between the sister Churches of East and West. This was a often a shocking experience, for the Churches and the believers themselves in the two regions had become quite dissimilar. In very simple terms one could speak of a contrast between faithfulness on the one hand and secularisation and rationalism on the other. The differences between East and West are both instinctive and intellectual. The Second Vatican Council (1962–65), for example, profoundly changed the Roman Catholic Church in the West: it brought with it an open attitude towards the modern world, democratisation, the predominant use of vernacular language in (renewed) church rituals, a larger role for laypeople, theological pluralism with regard both to content and to method. The Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands is often cited as a terrifying example of the consequences. The Protestant denominations in the West did not have this kind of legislative church council, but they have experienced similar developments. Following his election in June 1995 the Lutheran bishop Jonas Kalvanas, for example, stated that one of his primary tasks was to counter religious influences from the West. This attitude is quite widespread within the Churches of Eastern Europe. Fear of innovations from the West means that theological and philosophical literature, visiting professors and so forth stand under suspicion. This fear has sometimes led to a rather paternalistic attitude on the part of various Churches in the West, which have taken to administering the dreaded and probably inevitable innovations in small doses.

The differences between the Churches within the Baltic States themselves are often quite large. In Lithuania the Roman Catholic Church in Latvia is considered by some to be an old-fashioned, prewar Church. The discussions preceding the Anglican–Evangelical Lutheran Porvoo Agreement (1996) revealed that there was a lack of common features in the Lutheran Churches in the Baltic States, or in other words there was a great deal of internal pluralism.

The lifting of the Iron Curtain led to a vast influx of representatives of various free evangelical Churches, mostly from the United States, and more or less exotic sects. According to state representatives responsible for registration, the actual influence of these groups and sects has remained rather small. In Estonia as many as 60 small groups are officially known. In Latvia 40 of them have been officially registered. Only the adviser on religious affairs to the Lithuanian Council of Ministers clearly distinguishes an acute problem. None of the (registered) groups have however been banned or prosecuted in any of these countries, for none of them has been shown to pose a threat to state security, to physical or mental health or to public order and morality. In February 1998 a temporary problem arose when some employees of the Ignalina nuclear power plant in Lithuania proved to be members of a sect. According to Kazimieras Andriuškevičius, who in December 1998 founded a home providing spiritual help for former sect members in Vilnius, individuals often experience psychological problems *after leaving* these groups. Although church representatives see sects as a serious social problem, their actual threat is first of all an ideological and psychological one. They are perceived as illegitimate competitors, who are often well equipped with money and goods.

Conclusion

It has become clear that the role of the Churches in Baltic society in the 1990s has been somewhat limited. Church institutions have been restored and church structures have generally been normalised. Denominational education, especially higher education, has been developed and religious education is an optional subject in both primary and secondary schools. In the social domain the churches are also active and sometimes take the lead. Their impact, however, seems now to be much less than at the beginning of the 1990s. The Churches have not so far been able to fill up the moral vacuum they perceived in society. Why?

One problem is 'romancing freedom'. According to my dictionary 'to romance' means 'to add interesting but untrue details to the facts in telling a story; to exaggerate'. When the Churches were aspiring towards freedom they romanced it, not knowing what it would really be like. Now that they are accusing it as their main opponent, they are still romancing it. Even if they sometimes rightly criticise the use of freedom, they do not necessarily understand it better. This attitude towards freedom can be explained in various ways.

First of all there is a mental-ideological explanation. On the threshold of the third millennium, it seems to me, the Churches are standing at the crossroads of two ideological systems. On the one hand there is the recently-ended communist experiment, characterised (by President Reagan) and experienced as the 'empire of evil'. On the other hand there is the current intrusion of western culture, characterised by Pope John Paul II as a 'culture of death'. The tendency is to consider both systems as profoundly immoral, the former aspiring to a totalitarian control and denying individual liberties, the latter exaggerating individualism and neglecting fundamental human values in its pursuit of technological progress. Some questions need to be asked, however. First of all, is a total and indiscriminate negation justified? Secondly, how can such a profoundly defensive attitude, that criticises communism on the one hand and western liberalism on the other, contribute to modern-day life? If the Churches fail to provide constructive help for those adjusting to developments in society, and fail to help individuals with their problems, they run the risk of losing authority. Leaving the world of communism means leaving behind paternalism, authoritarianism and the unhistorical pursuit of a monocultural society and coming to terms with religious, social, cultural and individual pluralism and autonomy. The difficulty of course is to determine how to steer a middle course and how to decide what that middle course should be.

There is also a sociological explanation. As national entities Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania see themselves faced with two major problems. They have to maintain their national *identity*, which they see as threatened by the westernising of culture and by the large minorities living inside their own borders. They also have to safeguard their national *sovereignty* against supranational organisations like the EU and NATO and also against the Russian Federation. Sociological surveys in other Central and Eastern European countries have shown that antagonistic contexts do not necessarily entail the attribution of negative values to those considered 'outsiders', but tend rather to lead to the attribution of positive values to the 'insiders'. This would explain negative attitudes to both the communist past and the liberal-capitalist present and future, and also the affirmation of patriotic and nationalistic attitudes, as if there existed a 'third way'.

In an inquiry into European values, Paul Zulehner and Hermann Denz have concluded that in Eastern and Western Europe many traditional Christian values are

still very much alive, but that the individual religiosity of the European citizen is less church-orientated than before, and they observe that 'In the future a big task for the Churches will be to offer (institutional) support to personal, denominationally homeless religiosity.'⁸ At the same time they stress the need for the Churches to pay due regard to autonomy, tolerance, freedom, dialogue and openness. One danger for the Churches is that they will recognise only one notion (their own) of autonomy and tolerance and turn freedom, dialogue and openness into a conversion strategy. If they persist in this way they will in the future play only a marginal role in society.⁹

Notes and References

- ¹ The author visited the Baltic States in March 1996 and June/July 1998 and spoke with church leaders, representatives of church and social organisations and civil authorities. Additional information was gathered from newspapers and the internet, and by fax, and email.
- ² For a short history of developments within the Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Orthodox Churches in the Baltic States see: E. Benz, 'Schwieriger Neubeginn: Die Kirche in den baltischen Ländern nach der Wiederherstellung der Unabhängigkeit', *Acta Baltica: Liber Annualis Instituti Baltici* (Institutum Balticum, Königstein i. T., 1995), vol. 33, 1995, pp. 107–68; S. Krumina-Konkova and N. Gills, 'Die Lebendigkeit von Religion und Kirche im gegenwärtigen Lettland' and T. Lehtsaar, 'Religiöse Entwicklungen in Estland seit 1989' in D. Pollack, I. Borowik and W. Jagodzinski (eds), *Religiöse Wandel in den postkommunistischen Ländern Ost-und Mitteleuropas* (Egon, Würzburg, 1998), pp. 429–77 and 409–27. See also G. Adriányi, *Geschichte der Kirche Osteuropas im 20. Jahrhundert* (F. Schöningh, Paderborn, München, Wien, Zürich, 1992), pp. 30–41; W. Kahle, *Die lutherische Kirchen und Gemeinden in der Sowjetunion seit 1938/1940* (Gerd Mohr, Gütersloh, 1985), pp. 44–113; and F. Hoppenbrouwers, 'Baltische staten', *Het Christelijk Oosten*, no. 49, 1997, pp. 335–44.
- ³ S. T. Kimbrough Jr (ed.), *Methodism in Russia and the Baltic States: History and Renewal* (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1995).
- ⁴ J. Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church: A Contemporary History* (Croom Helm, London, 1986) and *id.*, *The Russian Orthodox Church: Triumphalism and Defensiveness* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1996).
- ⁵ R. R. Robson, *Old Believers in Modern Russia* (Northern Illinois University Press, Illinois, 1995) and W. Hollberg, *Das russische Altgläubigentum: Seine Entstehung und Entwicklung*, 2 vols (Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, Tartu/Dorpat, 1994) (Original manuscript written 1953).
- ⁶ A. Koschel and H. Pflug (eds), *Die vergessene Juden in den baltischen Staaten* (Köln, 1998) (*Galut Nordost: Zeitschrift für jüdisch-baltische Kultur und Geschichte. Sonderheft 2.*)
- ⁷ For current events in the Baltic States, see among other publications *The Baltic Times* (1995–), *Glaube in der 2. Welt* (1972–), *Religion in Eastern Europe* (1980–) and *Religion in Communist Lands* (1973–90), thereafter *Religion, State and Society* (1991–).
- ⁸ Paul M. Zulehner and Hermann Denz (eds), *Wie Europa lebt und glaubt: Europäische Wertestudie* (Patmos, Düsseldorf, 1993), p. 238.
- ⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 261–62.