



Juris Dreifelds was born in Jelgava, Latvia, in 1942. At present he is a faculty member of Brock University in St. Catharines, Canada, where he taught teaching political science since 1974. He received his Ph.D. in 1978 from the University of Toronto. He also obtained a degree in forestry at the same institution. He has written about Latvian and Baltic political, social and nature protection issues in various academic journals and books. In 2001 he prepared a research report for the World Bank on the dimensions of corruption in Latvia. He was the initiator of the ombudsman concept in Latvia. A series on the ombudsman experiences in the world was published in "Latvijas Vestnesis" from 29 April 1999. He has written a book about Latvia's transition period, *Latvia in Transition*, Cambridge 1996. In May 2002, he organized a two day conference in Riga on Latvia's court system. He is a member of the Latvian Academy of Sciences. He was president of the Association of Baltic studies [AABS] from 2000 to 20002 and currently remains the director at large in this organization.



Latvia has a unique mixture of religious traditions. The preponderant share of believers is found in the Evangelical Lutheran, the Roman Catholic and the Russian Orthodox branches of Christianity. In addition to these three, there are viable groups of Baptists, Old Believers, Adventists, Pentecostalists and Jews. Until the 1980s all of these religious organizations were experiencing different rates of decline and atrophy.

During the period 1986 to 1989 a new grassroots movement called "Rebirth and Renewal" led by mostly young Lutheran theologians prepared the ground for a total reorientation of the Lutheran Church. In April 1989 reformists took over leadership in this church and ended over four decades of official subservience to and frequent cooperation with Communist authorities. Soon thereafter the crumbling of the atheist Latvian State allowed for a new affirmation of faith by all religions. Freedom of religion was once again the guiding policy of Latvia. Many new congregations were formed. Churches were repaired or returned to their original owners, Sunday schools flourished, theological education attracted many young people. Since 1988 there has been a resurgence of interest in religion among all classes of people including the intelligentsia and especially the younger generations. Nevertheless, religion in Latvia as yet is not a major influence on life and politics. The overwhelming majority of the population is willing to accept and even praise religion as the clear antipode to Communism, but is not yet prepared to become actively involved in its sacral or lay activities.

While much blame for the decline of religious practice and belief can be placed at the doorstep of organized and militant atheism, not all of its inroads and seeming victories are the result of such actions and policies but rather can be found in the peculiar mixture of Latvian history and in the world-wide neutralizing effects of urbanization and modernization.

Religion in Latvia has never been as closely interwoven with nationality as is the case in Lithuania and Poland. There are several explanations for this. The lack of a homogenous religion among Latvians, no doubt, prevented the deep rooting of such an associative

bonding. While three quarters of Latvia's territory was predominantly Lutheran, the South East portion, the area of Latgale, was almost exclusively Roman Catholic.

The historical legacy of the way in which Christianity was first established also left its mark on the consciousness of the nation. 12th century German priests and bishops brought with them battle-tested troops which successfully conquered the Latvians, one tribe at a time and imposed Christianity with the help of the sword. These soldier-conquerors then became the new masters and landlords of the Latvian territories and they and their progeny ruled many centuries thereafter with the help of German or germanized clergy.

At another crucial period of development the Lutheran clergy passed up the chance of national support. The movement of national awakening which set in motion the rapid growth of Latvian cultural and national consciousness in the second half of the 19th century did not attract many notable religious figures except in the case of Catholic clergy in Latgale. In fact the Lutheran clergy were more sympathetic to the interests of the German land-holding elite than to the stirrings of Latvian cultural nationalism. In Latgale on the other hand, the Catholic clergy, predominantly of Latvian origin, gained much sympathy from the people for successful struggle against the tsar's Russification policy and their active support for and leadership in the creation of a new Latvian-Latgallian intelligentsia.

During the two decades of the independence period (1920-1940) the Lutheran church was slowly Latvianized and acquired many new trappings of nationality. Latvian clergy educated in Latvian higher schools replaced many of the German pastors. The New Testament was translated into modern Latvian literary language and many hymns were composed by Latvian poets. In sum, the church generally became integrated into the rhythm of Latvian national holidays and national life. This trend of religiosity was intensified somewhat by the experience of the alien Communist and Nazi occupations and the uncertainties of the war years when death lurked so palpably close. But this new bonding was seriously checked by the deportation and emigration of clergymen and tens of thousands of the most active citizens and members of the intelligentsia. The devastation and bombing of churches in the last year of the war and the imposition of strict anti-religious laws by Stalinist bureaucrats seriously decreased the opportunities for interaction between organized religions and the nation ¹.

Before the traumatic years of World War II Latvia had a very broad religious mosaic.

Among ethnic Latvians 68.3 percent (1,005,207) were Lutheran and 26.4 percent (388,117) were Catholic. The remaining 5.5 percent were scattered among other religions: Orthodox (57,600), Baptists (12,429), Old Believers (2,786) and Jews (170) ².

With the advent of communist rule, all churches without exception were subject to the anti-religious activities of the State and Party, suffering particularly fierce assaults in the periods 1949 to 1953, and 1959 to 1964. Yet, not all religions were equally affected because of differential solidarity and flexibility shown by religious leaders and their flocks. A particularly striking contrast developed between the anaemic Lutheran church and the much more vital Catholic church. The reasons for this difference can only be surmised but it seems probable that the early historical bonding of the Catholic church with the people allowed for much greater mutual support during trying times. Catholic clergy have also

Table 1. Religious Mosaic in Latvia According to 1935 Census.

Denomination	Absolute Number	%	Clergy	Congregations
Evangelical Lutheran	1,075,641	55.15	288	325
Roman Catholic	476,963	24.45	177	177
Russian Orthodox	174,389	8.94	128	163
Old Believer	107,195	5.50		
Jewish	93,406	4.79		
Non Lutheran Protestant	19,146	.98		
Other	3,762	.19		

Source: *Ceturtais Tautas Skaitļš Latvijā, Rīga, 1936*, pp. 71-88.

been active bridge builders between the various nationalities integrating Latvian, Polish and Belorussian Catholics as equals before God. One should also note that Catholicism throughout the world has had a deeper impact on religiosity than Protestantism. Lutheranism, especially the Scandinavian variety, has not been particularly demanding or strict in either church attendance or religious participation. Lutherans are not excommunicated. No doubt, guidance from Rome for Catholics has allowed a certain measure of protection against direct manipulation of clergy leadership by Communist functionaries. The Catholic practice of confessions is a particularly useful method for gauging the mood of the population and for mounting pre-emptive actions to prevent serious cleavages or ruptures in congregations.

Another factor is worthy of note. A much higher percentage of Lutheran than Catholic clergymen fled from Latvia as refugees. In general, Latgale experienced the smallest outflow of refugees because it was furthest away from seaports and because Latgallian refugees were cut off much earlier from access to the coast by the Red Army which effectively sealed that part of Latvia. From another perspective, Lutheran clergymen had families to think about whereas Catholic clergy were less encumbered in deciding their options.

The assault on religion in Latvia was unrelenting, but compared to Russia, Ukraine and other republics it was slightly less harsh. Indeed, many of the Baptist and Adventist sects emigrated to Latvia because it was easier to register congregations and their children could receive education with less discrimination. Riga had more congregations during the Soviet period than Leningrad with six times the population³.

THE STATE OFFENSIVE AGAINST RELIGION

For over four decades thousands of full time atheists as well as all the levers of state power, including the media, were arrayed against religion and even against the belief in a divine being. This direct intervention by the state made a mockery of the Soviet constitutional declaration about freedom of conscience and the right to profess any religion and conduct religious worship. Yet the constant one-sided bombardment by atheistic forces with no allowance for rebuttal or fair play as well as the well planned policies to emasculate all church power and influence managed to seriously cripple religion in Latvia. But even the

vestiges of a seemingly dying institution were considered a serious threat to the Communist establishment. On January 19, 1982, the official Party newspaper in Latvia, "Cēma", concluded a long editorial on effective atheistic upbringing with the following exhortation: "Religion is still a very effective form of ideological opposition. All ideological workers and means of mass communication must become more actively engaged against it. This is a struggle for people, for the benefit of mankind".

Basing itself on the view that religion is harmful, the Party skewed the rules of the game entirely in favour of atheism and against the growth and survival of religion. In his analysis of antireligious propaganda in the Soviet Union, David E. Powell has pointed out that the communist regime sought to achieve six antireligious objectives:

1. To destroy the political and economic strength of the church.
2. To limit the church's access to the citizenry, especially to the children.
3. To induce people not to attend church.
4. To induce people not to celebrate religious holy days or perform religious rituals.
5. To convince religious believers that their views are "wrong".
6. To mould citizens into militant atheists and Soviet Men ⁴.

The Soviet regime attempted to implement the above objectives in Latvia as well with variable success. For a better overview of their impact a brief analysis of each of the objectives will be presented.

Any economic and political power religious denominations may have held in pre-war Latvia was crushed by the Communists in 1940 and later in 1945. All church property was nationalized and much of it confiscated. Many churches were turned over for secular uses or shut down and vandalized. All religiously supported political movements and parties were outlawed. More important, every activity undertaken by various religions and even their existence was subjected to the arbitrary regimentation of the Party-controlled Council of Religious Affairs which had been mandated to use the restrictive laws on religion to further Party interests. The Council could control religious personnel, activities, policy and whether or not any single group was to be allowed to maintain a congregation, a church or prayer house. It influenced the selection of church leaders and, through selective inducements and restrictions co-opted clergy into performing "useful" roles especially in dealings with the outside world. In this capacity they joined in supporting Soviet foreign policy and cultivating the Soviet image. Thus almost all church leaders in Latvia had to give their dues to state interests by participating in world congresses by visiting church leaders in non-communist countries, and by hosting world religious leaders in Riga. All this was done in conformity with the policies worked out by the Party. In this finely tuned theatre of "impression management" church leaders were pressured into performing their assigned roles in order not to jeopardize the already precarious position of the church and by hopes of establishing their loyalty and winning some minor concessions for their flock from the authorities.

Almost all activities of religious organizations including the most trivial were regulated by a Party representative or commissioner. Even local and republic an congresses and confer-

ences required permits to be approved and issued separately for each case by local state organs for local meetings and by the Council of Ministers of the Latvian SSR and of the Council for religious Affairs of the Council of Ministers for republic wide meetings. Other clauses of the law regulating religious activity may appear at first glance rather innocuous but the broadness of the terms used left much arbitrary or discretionary power in the hands of the regulators.

There is no doubt that in Latvia the Communist authorities effectively destroyed every vestige of political and economic strength that churches may once have had. Even more, one could say that the churches became co-opted by the state for political missions and image building activities abroad.

The Communist regime also made much progress in realizing its second goal of limiting the church's access to citizens and especially to children. The entire state controlled system of socialization – the schools, media, books, propagandists, youth groups – all were dragooned into the service of atheism. Knowing full well that young people are the most impressionable, the law forbade the church from teaching Sunday schools, and from involving youths under 18 in any church activity such as choir singing, processions, orchestras or even religious rituals. As well, laws limited the range of religious undertakings to only church services within the walls of assigned premises. One can imagine the consternation of any North American congregation where church and state are also separated if confronted with a state edict which set out the following:

Religious societies and cult servants are forbidden...to organize special prayers or other meetings for children, youths or women; or meetings, groups, classes and sections for joint bible and religious studies, for literature, handicrafts and work; as well as to organize excursions, and children's playgrounds, to open libraries and reading rooms, to organize sanatoria and medical aid; ... to create mutual aid societies, cooperative enterprises and associations, or in general use the property and money of religious societies for any other purpose except the satisfaction of their religious needs ⁵.

The school system became one of the most important battle grounds for the spiritual allegiance of the young – determining whether they would become “secular, scientific and progressive”, or “religious-superstitious and regressive” as seen by Soviet authorities. The school system was explicitly mandated and encouraged to do everything in its power to neutralize and eliminate any vestiges of religious belief. Teachers were urged to confront religious parents. Classmates were encouraged to confront and reform any “deviants” in their ranks. Neutrality towards religion was not tolerated by the Party. All children and youths had to be indoctrinated with atheism so that they would become militants willing to extirpate religious beliefs wherever they found them, including in the family. At school age level no compromises were allowed, no accommodations were made. The war was total and unconditional. Any remnants of religious belief among young believers were seen as a failure, a neglect of duty or gross negligence by teachers, deserving of severe reprimand and chastisement. The “goodness” of Communism was to displace the “evil” of religion. Even when no “religious problems” were perceived the struggle was expected to continue because the dark forces of religion were cunning, adaptable and ready to use any means to

achieve their ends. Therefore atheism was to be strengthened as a prophylactic against future exposure to the disease. The Latvian teacher's newspaper "Skolotāju Avīze" was very explicit about the dangers: "Schoolteachers who consider that atheistic training should only apply in cases where religious prejudices are strongly rooted should reconsider their approach. Religiosity is a disease that can appear with a person not only in childhood but also later. Therefore for prophylactic purposes elementary immunity should be vaccinated in all youths from the start" ⁶.

Attempts at converting young people to the cause of atheism began from an early age indeed as attested by a headline in the 1980 Latvian school and family journal "Skola un Ģimene": "Atheistic Upbringing in the Kindergarten" ⁷ [Source]. School subjects were mobilized for a continuous barrage of atheistic propaganda. Teachers were urged to draw atheistic conclusions from their class presentations. For example, Latvian teachers were presented in their newspaper with an explicit set of atheistic arguments for use in chemistry classes. Each of the several points were to undermine the credibility of religion from different angles:

- a) The famous chemist M. Lomonosov was a militant atheist.
- b) Religion once violently opposed the atomic molecular theory of matter and then totally reversed itself. Today the theory has been accepted and is used to prove the existence of God.
- c) The law of the indestructibility of matter proves why the world was not created from nothing and will not disintegrate into nothing. No god can create or destroy.
- d) New methods of radioactive dating conclusively invalidate the religious belief that the world was created seven and a half thousand years ago.
- e) The predictions of the prophets are not super-natural. Unknown elements were predicted from D. Mendeleev's tables before they had yet been discovered.
- f) Mendeleev was a militant atheist ⁸.

Detailed arguments were prepared also for teachers of geography, geology, history and biology ⁹.

A favourite approach taken by atheist militants was to ferret out students who were still under the influence of religion and to focus their "neutralizing" efforts using a personal approach. Widespread and localized sociological studies of student attitudes helped pinpoint "problem areas". Other approaches included personal discussions by the teacher with parents and students, content analysis of written work and analysis of drawings which dealt with student orientations to "reality, religion and god". Schools also had museums of atheism, atheism clubs, atheist lectures, films, question and answer forums and similar undertakings. Needless to say, no clergymen were invited to outline their side of the argument or participate in the one sided debates ¹⁰.

But even the small number of believers uncovered gave atheists no rest in their search for ultimate solutions. They acknowledged the tremendous role of the family in the continuation of religious traditions and hence set out to neutralize the impact of the family itself. One article suggests that in the first place teachers should explain to these religious parents

“how deleterious to the spiritual growth of children is the foisting of religious beliefs”¹¹. If this fails other more drastic measures can be taken including the placing of children into state custody. Having discovered the preponderance of women in religious organizations, atheists decided to focus their attention on activities to neutralize religious mothers, grandmothers and aunts¹².

As adults, citizens were no less protected from the verbal and psychological assaults of militant atheism than they were as youths in school. The republican council on atheism was responsible for coordinating a vast network of local councils on atheism. These groups were reinforced by a large cohort of voluntary lecturers of the Society of Knowledge. According to “Cēņa” of 19 January, 1982 the republic had “over 6000” people employed in the work of atheism. Each year books were published on topics of atheism, and atheistic-oriented scientific research was supported at higher educational institutes. One individual, Jānis Vējš, was sent to study theology at Oxford in order to better formulate programs of atheism¹³. Formerly religious people who had apparently relinquished their beliefs were allowed to write extensively in books and articles on the error of their former ways¹⁴. On the other hand, a reversion back to religion was seen as a threat to be contained. In the case of Baptist preacher Oskars Puķītis, who had earlier fallen away from his faith but returned to religion, “Cēņa” wrote an article warning against the “misuse” of his example by congregations for religious purposes¹⁵.

The paranoid nature of atheists is well revealed by their great consternation at the practice adopted by many youths in Latvia during the 1970’s of wearing decorative crosses around their necks:

The cross is and remains a symbol of Christianity. It has been a cult object since the fourth century. It has not lost its significance for Christians ... Like any other symbol, the cross is the physical representation of certain ideas, concepts and relationships... Youths with a clear materialistic world view, of course cannot stand on the side lines when their cohorts demonstrate an unprincipled attitude towards a symbol under which so much harm has been done to mankind. History speaks about this very convincingly¹⁶.

The third objective of the antireligious crusade war was to attempt to induce people not to attend church. In this respect significant inroads were made among Lutherans as attested by the low figures of church participation. It seems to have been much less successful with Catholics. One of the important means of checking church attendance was the absolute rule that no Party or Komsomol member could be seen in a religious building or even at a ceremony. As well, individuals who did not necessarily want to become members but who aspired to better occupations and higher pay knew that upward mobility rested on Party connections and a “clean” record – that is one which was not tied with religion.

Party demands were very categoric. Even deviations for the sake of family were not tolerated. Thus in 1970 a Latvian kolkhoz chairman was expelled from the Party and voted out by the kolkhoz because he allowed his mother to be buried by a Catholic priest and attended her funeral. It made no difference to the Party that such a religious burial was his dying mother’s last wish¹⁷.

An extensive discussion in the Latvian Komsomol journal “Liesma” in 1980 about the case of a secret church wedding by a Komsomol member with the attendance of his Komsomol colleagues who also joined in the cover-up, concluded with a call to principles and for

expulsion from the organization: “Can a Komsomol youth use the ceremony services of the church for his wedding – this question I repeat is not debatable. If a Komsomol member cannot free himself of all prejudices, if he does not recognize the Komsomol Statutes and does not respect his organization’s principles of honour, there is no room for him in the ranks of the Komsomol”¹⁸.

Until the period of rebirth in 1988, harassment of churchgoers was a common policy. Films would be taken by state employees of those entering churches. Places of work put pressure on their employees to abstain from church attendance. A young music teacher, Andris Lasmanis, was fired from his position in 1975 because he refused to stop supporting the Baptist Church¹⁹. Public ridicule against believers was widespread. Cartoons reinforced the officially cultivated image of the clergy as retrograde, money grubbing, and womanizing exploiters. In the last few years, harassment for religious beliefs and church membership decreased in volume, but as in the case of the attacks on the Rebirth and Renewal group in 1987 the venomous style and distortions were still part of the atheist arsenal.

The fourth objective of the displacement of church officiated “rites of passage” by state sponsored ones was one of the most successful initiatives of the Party. While religious baptisms and funerals remained more tenacious, confirmations and weddings were celebrated almost entirely outside religious confines. A cleric was allowed to officiate at a funeral service only if there were no objections from any member of the immediate or extended family. In one conflict, between a religious woman preparing to bury her husband according to Catholic rites but opposed by her five sons each with a high standing Party position, a compromise resolution was achieved. Religious ceremonies were held in church, followed the next day by an “atheist funeral” at the cemetery²⁰.

As in other fields of communist endeavour, official campaigns of atheism were not as effective nor as conscientiously carried out as planners would have hoped. The leading writer on atheism in the republic, Z. Balevics, a blood relative of a Catholic bishop, captured the essence of this “problem” when he complained that in many Soviet enterprises, lectures or discussions of atheism were organized only once a year or even less often. As he saw it, “the sum of sermons in religious congregations many times over surpasses the number of atheist lectures presented in the republic”²¹. In spite of such rhetoric, however, the impact of atheist programs, but especially state punitive measures was enormous. Many people were turned away from active participation in religion. Some did it to preserve their careers, others wanted to protect their families. Nevertheless, some individuals, especially Party organizers from Catholic backgrounds avoided conflicts by going to and receiving sacraments from neighbouring congregations where they were not known or recognized.

While the Communist establishment more or less effectively neutralized active religious participation, it was not successful in mobilizing large numbers to join the ranks of militant atheism. It was fairly easy for people to decline joining the vanguard of atheism without encouraging serious consequences. Thus in the sixth objective of anti-religious propaganda the track record points to only minimal success among several thousand individuals rather than to the engagement of large masses of people in the work of atheism. It is a miracle of sorts that religion was able to survive during more than four decades of anti-religious propaganda and of direct state assault. To be sure, the ranks of the religious had been

Table 2. Number of Congregations in Latvia by Religious Denomination.

	1/1/88	1/1/89	1/10/90	1/1/93	1/6/96 (A)
Lutheran	202	224	248	282	300
Roman Catholic	179	182	185	190	196
Russian Orthodox	86	88	88	94	111
Old Believers	64	64	65	54 (B)	55
Baptist	60	60	61	68	79
Adventist	23	26	28	33	42
Pentecostal	2	4	6	34	60
Jewish	4	4	4	5	6

A) In 1996 there were also the following other congregations: 6 Methodist, 5 Buddhist, 3 Muslim, 2 Uniate, 1 Armenian Catholic, 1 Krishna, 1 Latvian Dievturi, and 10 smaller Protestant denominations.

(B) Old Believer congregations have not diminished but 10 of the smaller ones have not been able or willing to register.

Source: Diena, March 18, 1993, Rīgas Balsis, November 6, 1996 and unpublished data from the Religious Affairs Department of Latvia.

badly battered. By the mid 1980s clergy were predominantly of pensionable age with minimal replacements filling the gaps. The bulk of active parishioners were in the older age groups and most church goers were women. A few more decades of continued active state atheism would have resulted in the death-knell for most religions in Latvia. Only the advent of change induced by a more tolerant regime allowed religion to end its rapid decline into oblivion and to begin a journey back to vitality and significance. While all religions suffered repression and all were weakened, some were better able to withstand the pervasive and pernicious inroads of militant atheism and widespread indifference and apathy than others.

In January of 1988, the year commonly considered to be the demarcation point between decline and the rebirth, Latvia had 620 officially registered congregations from all religions serviced by 320 clergy. In 1940 there were 1131 congregations with about 900 clerics²². In 1988 the decline in congregations stopped and growth began.

EVANGELICAL LUTHERANS

The ranks of the Lutheran clergy were seriously weakened by the events of the Soviet and Nazi Occupations and World War II. From a pre-war total of 198 their number dwindled to 95 immediately after the war in 1945. Even this dramatic loss was not the end of the dissipation of clerical representation. In the next five years 21 more were deported, five were killed, four were imprisoned and six disappeared without a trace²³. Conditions were slightly improved with the return of many deportees from Siberia in 1955-56²⁴.

Following this amnesty under Khrushchev the number of Lutheran clergy reached a post war high of 120, and thereafter decreased gradually, falling to a low of 85 in 1987²⁵. The decline in the number of clergy was paralleled by a decline in the number of congregations from 311 in 1940 to 200 in 1987. A more dramatic fall-off was evident in the number of church goers and the number partaking of religious sacraments and rituals. An internal church document

of 18 March, 1987 spoke candidly of a then current membership of less than 25,000 with 3800 of these in the capital city of Riga. In 1986, the Lutheran Church registered 1090 baptisms, 212 confirmations, 142 marriages and 605 funerals ²⁶. These are dismal statistics indeed. Put another way, that year each of the 200 Lutheran congregations witnessed, on average, five christenings, one confirmation, less than one marriage and three religious funerals.

After 1987 the Lutheran Church experienced a rebirth not only in its leadership but also in its appeal. The number of congregations rose from 200 to 241 in 1990 and 271 by the end of 1991 ²⁷. Sunday schools began in late 1988 and by May 1990 had been introduced in 103 congregations. In comparison one could note that in 1940 there were 130 such schools ²⁸. According to one church organizer Sunday schools have been a surprisingly effective means of reaching “the middle, lost generation”, the parents of attending children. At the same time the placing of children in Sunday schools by inactive parents can result in conflict situations: “Alongside the positive changes there are also negative nuances – spiritual conflict between parents and children. Non-believing parents take their children to Sunday school. The child begins to live a new life but the parents remain with the old, thus creating an incompatibility in the beliefs and perceptions of life. The children suffer. This is a serious problem” ²⁹. Latvia was the first of the former Soviet republics to offer religious education in state schools. Optional instruction on the history of religion was provided by a Lutheran pastor in the fall of 1988 to several Riga schools. A major innovation in the realm of education was the establishment of an explicitly Christian school in the fall of 1991. Many pupils had to be turned away indicating the need for more such schools ³⁰. By the fall of 1993 there were already three explicitly Christian schools financed in large part by the state.

The mass media also discovered religion and the whole subject of “spirituality”. The radio presentations by the erudite and eloquent Reverend Juris Rubenis have been particularly effective. The revolution in press orientation to religion was highlighted in the Latvian youth paper “Padomju Jaunatne” (Soviet Youth) of April 21, 1989, when the Lutheran archbishop’s call for young people to apply for the theological seminary was printed on the front page. Indeed there is now keen competition to get into the newly created Faculty of Theology at the University of Latvia. By 1991 the number of church baptisms and weddings had increased tenfold and church funerals almost tripled. In 1992, 92 percent of all children born that year were baptized. In addition, 26 percent of all weddings and 28 percent of funerals were officiated by religious representatives ³¹.

It should be noted that many of the baptisms and confirmations are requested by nominal Lutherans who are not regular members of any congregation. There is, no doubt, a built up demand for these sacraments by people who formerly were too intimidated to experience them. Hence there are adults who are being baptized and confirmed, especially if they desire to have a church wedding. As well, it is extremely difficult to disentangle from the bare statistics alone the cultural from the religious components, especially at a time when Soviet style traditions are being denigrated and a return to the traditions of free Latvia is in fashion. For example, in 1991 the Anna congregation of Liepāja had 770 registered members, 690 christenings but 170 regular churchgoers ³². Surprisingly, in all of Latvia the number of registered Lutherans was only about 32 thousand in 1991 or about 7 thousand

Table 3. Religious Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals in Latvia, 1991.

	Baptisms		Weddings		Funerals	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Roman Catholic	10,661	35.0	2,651	55.3	4,995	52.8
Lutheran	10,666	35.0	1,549	32.3	1,439	15.2
Orthodox	6,315	20.8	468	9.8	1,937	20.5
Old Believers	1,273	4.2	33	0.7	730	7.7
Jews	-	-	35	0.7	137	1.4
Pentecostal	662	2.2	37	0.8	25	0.3
Baptist	462	1.5	20	0.4	130	1.4
Adventist	388	1.3	5	0.1	69	0.7
Total	30,427	100	4,798	100	9,462	100

Source: Unpublished report titled "Ad Limina" prepared by the Riga Roman Catholic Bishop, Jānis Cakuls, in 1992.

more than in 1987, the period of religious stagnation and Communist power, although according to the late Archbishop Gailītis there were about 300,000 who could be denoted as falling within the Lutheran "sphere of influence" ³³. Part of the problem of low numbers could be explained by the fact that official registration is accorded only to those who pay their annual church dues. According to some ministers Latvians are reticent about settling their regular financial obligations to the church although they are more generous in providing funding for major projects, especially building renovations. The Lutheran Consistory of Latvia was forced to remind congregations that their ministers should receive wages at least equivalent to those set for "minimal survival" by the state ³⁴.

There are obstacles to more rapid growth in membership which appear to be in the process of being mitigated or overcome. As yet there is a shortage of space for various church activities. Sunday schools are often forced to use municipal libraries or attics. Most church property, except for the actual hall of worship, was nationalized and reconverted to nonreligious uses and only now is being returned or being considered for return. This is also the case with former clergy residences. For decades clergymen had difficulties in finding accommodations close to their spiritual charges. The local communist farm or village administrators were opposed to providing housing to "unproductive labour", especially since they had a space shortage for their own workers. Under such circumstances over half of all clergy in 1987 were forced to reside in Riga and commute usually with public transportation as best they could to their respective parishes. Such a practice, needless to say, did not foster great psychological warmth or intimacy between pastor and communicant. At the end of 1991 the situation had not yet changed and 47 of the 114 full and assistant clergy were domiciled in Riga and no rapid changes were expected in the future ³⁵.

A corollary problem is the dearth of clergymen. With a total of only 114 clergy in 1991 (of which 29 were either pensioners emeritus [17] or members of the church administration) it is inevitable that in order to service 271 congregations almost all servants of God were forced to adopt more than one parish. One unusually vigorous minister for example, was responsible for eleven different congregations with a total of 1105 members ³⁶. Personnel pressures have forced the church to use ordained and non-ordained theology students as

pastors. In 1992 this practice was to be modified. Further ordination will now be allowed only after completion of theological studies and no students alone will be made responsible for entire congregations as before ³⁷.

Servicing several congregations has its pitfalls, not readily discernible by those accustomed to North American facilities. Automobiles are an obvious luxury in Latvia and generally not available to clergy who face tremendous difficulties in trying to reach their scattered, mostly rural congregations. A small number have received aid from congregations abroad to buy automobiles, but most have to rely on buses or trains to reach their houses of worship. After 1992 many of the rural bus routes were discontinued because of fuel shortage and the cost of tickets skyrocketed. As well, it is apparent that most congregations cannot expect church services every week but must be satisfied with monthly gatherings.

The age structure of the clergy is another problem facing the church. There has been a marked improvement in this area since 1987 when only 39 pastors out of a total of 85 were under the age of normal retirement. The age distribution of clergy is still far from normal, but the infusion of new blood is having its effect and in 1991 there was almost a doubling of clergy below retirement age ³⁸.

The quality of theological education is another residual problem which for new recruits has now been largely resolved. Unfortunately most of the clergy studied under difficult conditions with minimal resources. Competition for entry to clerical studies was also low although the harassment of the church at that time assured that only the most dedicated would apply.

The approach to new recruitment was evidently haphazard and ad-hoc prior to 1969, involving essentially private consultations. In February 1969, however, the General Synod voted to create a theological seminary to be located in Riga. No doubt the seminary was a decided improvement over the previous period, but it still had major problems. Theological studies at the seminary were part-time only. Students met with their professors and lecturers only three days a month and did most of their studying on their own from mimeographed notes and outlines, alongside their work as parish leaders or helpers. They received a small stipend and usually took up to 10 years to complete their studies. This long period of training brought about impatient urgings from Archbishop Ēriks Mesters in 1986 to expedite the study process in order to fill more quickly the critically short-staffed ranks of the clergy ³⁹. Such shortcuts, however, held obvious dangers. Already in 1980 the faculty of the seminary discussed the necessity of paying greater attention to student quality and being more demanding of students during their study period. For many years the seminary was located at the Sv. Jana (St. John's) Church and according to one participant was merely "a small corner in pitiful shape with a tiny library in the attic". Only after 1987 were slightly larger quarters obtained as a result of the donation of a minister's residence adjoining Sv. Pāvila (St. Paul's) Church ⁴⁰.

All lecturers were clergymen who in most cases undertook their academic assignments alongside full time work with their own parishes. The shortage of qualified lecturers forced the church to adopt a new strategy in 1981. It was decided that all seminarians completing their courses "with distinction" were to be encouraged to work on a scientific thesis in a theological discipline and defend this work before the Seminary Council, thus receiving a theological candidate's (licentiate) degree. With this degree individuals could become sem-

inary lecturers in their area of specialization. By 1987, over six young pastors had completed their candidate requirements and had been inducted as lecturers ⁴¹. In 1988 the 50 newly accepted seminarians were the first to enrol in full time studies ⁴².

A major shift in theological education occurred when University of Latvia renewed the Faculty of Theology in June 1990. This Faculty has been geared to provide a base for Lutheran theologians although students can receive a broad theological education. The current study program appears very intensive and demanding. Students carry a lecture load of 36 hours a week and graduate after completing 31 obligatory, 10 optional and 4 language credits, usually in five years. Each day begins with an obligatory chapel service. All faculty are certified and paid by the University. First year enrolment in 1991 was limited to 30, chosen from 42 applicants. One third of the successful student candidates already had a completed degree and one third were women ⁴³.

Under the circumstances of a dire shortage of ministers it was indeed ironic that for many years the Church leadership has refused to ordain women. During his tenure in the 1970's and 1980's, Archbishop Jānis Matulis, after a wide but informal consultation with his colleagues took the unprecedented step within the Latvian Lutheran Church of ordaining half a dozen women. After his death and the accession of Archbishop Ēriks Mesters, the ordination of women was stopped. This issue has been reviewed several times but the deadlock has not yet been broken. Unfortunately the environment for women has not been overly warm and in 1991 only nine women were listed in the ranks of the clergy, at least one of whom had come from outside Latvia ⁴⁴.

The bulk of the theological seminary's efforts prior to 1988 aimed to satisfy the requirements of the Latvian Lutheran Church. However, a small fraction of its graduands were slated for ministration work in Lithuania and in other republics of the U.S.S.R. where pockets of Lutheran faithful existed. In an unusual reversal of roles Latvia also became a leadership centre for religious work in the Soviet Central Asian republics servicing over 500 predominantly German language Lutheran congregations outside the Baltic.

The Lutheran Church for a long time coasted along as if resigned to its ultimate disappearance. Among the main items of the 1970s' Church chronicles in fact were funerals and various birthday ceremonies for septuagenarians and octogenarians. Christel Lane, in his 1978 book *Christian Religion in the Soviet Union* had a very pessimistic assessment of the Lutheran Church in Latvia and Estonia:

In general, then, it appears as if the combined impact of rapid economic and social change on the one side and of militant activity on the other has eroded the strength of the Baltic Lutheran Churches to such an extent that they now have only a very marginal influence over their respective populations and are faced with the prospect of complete decay in the not so distant future ⁴⁵.

Lane's assessment reflected the reality of Lutheranism up to the late 1970's. At this point, however, the Church began to stir from its long period of lethargy. A common point of mobilization became the repair of old churches. Donations of time and money were solicited and received. Groups of individuals used their own training, personal contacts and ingenuity to scrounge materials, draft plans and construct technically complicated renovations.

Both the inside and outside of historic churches were refurbished. Joint commitments and pooled efforts at reconstruction led to greater congregation solidarity, pride and enthusiasm which in turn spurred personal efforts at mobilization of new members. The same enthusiasm infused church services.

No doubt part of this slow movement of the Church came about because of increased foreign pressures. U.S. President Jimmy Carter's religious orientation was not lost on Kremlin tacticians. The example of Polish activism may have revitalized battle-weary members. Most important, however, has been the role of the many new ministers who certainly did not complete their theological training to become witnesses to the dissolution of the Church.

The advent of new blood, however, brought with it certain problems. It created severe strains on the one hand between those who were comfortable in the old ways and on the other hand, the new visionaries determined to undertake the sweeping of the Augean stables in record time. The confrontation has had extremely serious repercussions which have yet to be fully assessed and resolved ⁴⁶.

THE CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT FOR "REBIRTH AND RENEWAL"

The arrival of a new wave of seminary graduates was bound to disturb the complacency of the status quo. Individuals who for the most part had not experienced Stalin's camps and who had grown up within the Soviet system were not afraid to speak out and demand fair treatment for the church. They were also not willing to accept the rapidly decreasing membership and dwindling role of the church without trying out new, more contemporary methods of church services and activities. Their innovations and enthusiasm brought in new members and a new vitality to congregation activities. Such a situation was intolerable to the Party. It began its counter offensive by forcing the Lutheran Church leadership to remove one of the most visible new clergymen, Modris Plāte, from a key congregation in Central Latvia (Kuldīga) and relocate him in an obscure area of Eastern Latvia ⁴⁷. Unbowed and with the full support of his two congregations Plāte continued to fulfil his church functions ignoring the decision of the Lutheran Consistory. Meanwhile, discontent in the ranks of the clergy mounted when Archbishop Ēriks Mesters in his newsletter of 20 April, 1987 called a halt to all liturgical innovations and demanded that all ministers commemorate the 70th anniversary of the communist revolution and provide detailed accounts of their sermons and service proceedings. In reaction, 22 pastors sent a petition on May 8 calling for a special synod to consider the "question of the Archbishop's suitability for his position".

The sense of grievance and frustration at the inability of the church leadership to stand up to pressures from the state and the general mood of "glasnost" prevailing at the time brought many of the reformers together in a common cause. They formed a group which they called "Rebirth and Renewal" (R&R) and on 14 June 1987 came out publicly with a single page statement of grievances backed by fifteen signatures (fourteen clergy and one lawyer) ⁴⁸. Most of the signers were from the younger generation and many were faculty members of the Seminary. The primary thrust of the document was to defend and promote the rights of believers in Latvia.

The polarization of the reform and status-quo clergymen increased dramatically and became acrimonious and politicized and the Communist newspaper "Padomju Jaunatne" on 18 September 1987 charged that the reformers wanted nothing less than "an independent Latvian state". Indeed, the reformers played a most important catalyst role in the struggle for independence. The Latvian independence minded Helsinki '86 group was guided to a large extent by the reformist clergymen. Several of the luminaries of the "Rebirth and Renewal" movement became prominent in the conception of the idea of a Latvian People's Front in the summer of 1988 and later were active participants in the organization of the Front and in its accession to political power in the Spring of 1990. The efforts of two of these organizers, Modris Plāte and Juris Rubenis, culminated in an unprecedented event in Communist occupied Latvia. On 9 October 1988 they were able to arrange a special church service in the Doma Cathedral in Riga which for 20 years had been closed to religious use. This service was organized to pray for the success of the first congress of the Latvian People's Front assembled at that time. The sermon by Plāte and the entire service, with an overflow crowd was viewed by all of Latvia on television. One year later at the second congress of the People's Front Rubenis was instrumental in breaking a deadlock among Latvian national groups by his call for mutual accommodations⁴⁹. In the vanguard, to defend Latvian survival interests was Kārlis Gailītis who had been a candidate for archbishop in 1986 but lost to the more regime oriented Ēriks Mesters.

In April 1989 at the XIV Latvian Synod after over a year of tension and acrimony between opposing factions within the Church, Gailītis was elected the new archbishop and many of the reformers, including Plāte and Rubenis, were elected to leadership positions in the Consistory. As well, a new church constitution was adopted and resolutions were passed on returning nationalized church property, on the protection of conscientious objectors who were slated for the military draft, the unification of the Latvian Lutheran Church (with the emigré church), the annulment of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939 signed by Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union "giving" the Baltic States to the USSR, and the right of Latvia to sovereignty and independence⁵⁰.

The Lutheran Church strengthened its positive image in the Latvian public. The Archbishop himself and many in the Consistory participated actively in the pursuit of Latvian independence. They offered church buildings to allow Latvians to register for the nationalist oriented "Citizenship Committee"; they declared their opposition to the "zero option" which would grant citizenship to all the post-war Soviet colonists currently residing in Latvia; several clergy, including the Archbishop, became official members of the Latvian National Independence Movement (LNNK), and they provided support for the 3 March, 1991 referendum on independence. Archbishop Gailītis even ran as a candidate for the Latvian Supreme Soviet (Council) in April 1990 but lost to his opponent Juris Bojārs, an ex-KGB officer who claimed that the new Latvia needed economists and law experts more than theologians. Since the elections of the Supreme Council in the Spring of 1990 the Lutheran Church has lowered its political profile although it actively pursues its goals through Parliament and the Council of Ministers. Archbishop Gailītis died in a car accident 22 November 1992 and on 29 August 1993, Jānis Vanags was ordained as his replacement. His policies have been more defensive and status-quo oriented.

In 1997 there were still issues of disunity between reformers and conservatives, the Latvian church and the emigré church, those supporting women's ordination and those adamantly opposed. However, in spite of its many problems the Lutheran Church is poised for a major gain in its influence and appeal. With a new crew of young and well educated clergy coming through the system, a solid base of Sunday schools, refurbished church buildings together with a visible and credible leadership there is a likelihood that Lutheranism could establish itself as a component part of Latvian culture, a task it began during Latvia's first independence period but was never able to fully complete. The tenor of this symbiosis has been well articulated by the late Archbishop Gailis: "I perceive the Lutheran Church as a Latvian church. For me it is tied with Latvian culture – and our role is to give back to the nation those values that have belonged to it for centuries and from which for a very long time a large number of people have been isolated"⁵¹.

The Lutheran Church under Gailis did not waffle on the question of independence but provided leadership at a critical phase in the development of Latvian national consciousness. If the Lutheran Church missed the opportunity of blending with Latvian national sentiments in the first awakening period in the late 19th century, it may have recouped its credibility in the period of rebirth.

CATHOLICS

Catholics in Latvia survived much better than Lutherans in spite of harsher treatment by the Communist regime⁵². There is no doubt that they are today the leading and most active believers in the republic and on almost every index stand out as successful survivors. They too felt the full brunt of Soviet and Nazi occupations and many of their clergy were deported to Siberia and many died at the hands of the N.K.V.D. According to Viktors Krasts who has consulted many Vatican sources "at one time or another since 1945, approximately half of the Latvian Catholic clergy have been imprisoned or deported"⁵³. During the early 1950's about 60 priests were imprisoned and the total number of working clergy was 110, of which about 50 had received their ordination after the war⁵⁴. As a result of the 1955-56 release of political prisoners from Siberia, most of the captive clerics returned to active duty, significantly solidifying the Catholic infrastructure and providing more or less normal conditions for Catholic believers. This may be the reason why fewer Catholic churches were demolished or converted to other uses.

While one could state that the Catholic clergy are more numerous and more active than is the case for Lutherans, at present they too have a serious shortage and many of them must service more than one congregation. Although in 1990 there were about half a million Catholics, Bishop Janis Cakuls has provided a qualified analysis of the religiousness of this group. According to him, at least half never or seldom attend church although they do try to be baptized, while among the other half a part is very active and another part attends on special occasions. In 1985 Latvia had 185 Catholic parishes but only 104 priests. In 1991, the number of parishes had increased to 192 but the number of active priests declined to 98 (three of whom were continuing studies in Rome). Their age distribution in 1991 was decidedly abnormal with only 36 priests below the age of 50 but 43 of pensionable age⁵⁵. Most or 83 were Latvians. It is noteworthy that only 23 priests joined the clergy in Latvia from 1981

to 1991. This apparently slow recruitment record came about in large measure because of the special mission undertaken by the Riga Catholic Seminary. It provided education for clerics from other parts of the USSR where such training was not allowed and thus sacrificed Latvia's own needs for the greater cause of the Catholic Church ⁵⁶.

Another phenomenon has strained the resources and flexibility of the Catholic Church. During Latvia's first independence period about 70% of all Catholics were concentrated in the Easternmost province of Latgale, but ever since 1945 many of these people flocked to cities and even rural areas across the republic where previously there were no active Catholic churches. By 1991 only 42% of Catholics in Latvia were found in Latgale. In 1991 Latgale accounted for 99 parishes out of 192 and 47 priests out of 98 ⁵⁷. Latgale has traditionally had very high birth rates but relatively poor soil conditions for farming, hence the exodus has been fairly massive. These Latgalians have been replaced, to some extent, by non-Latvian migrants from neighbouring republics creating even more strain on the traditional preeminence of the church in this region. As a consequence the church has been forced to take defensive measures as indicated by Krasts: "The Church leaders in Latvia...unlike those in Lithuania to the south, where the population is overwhelmingly Catholic and Lithuanian and parishes abut one another...have had to pull together dispersed clusters of the faithful ⁵⁸.

One of the most impressive statistics of the sway of the Catholic church among its parishioners during the period of religious repression is the fairly constant number of baptisms. In 1985, the number of baptisms stood at 5167 or 13% of all children born in the republic that year. If Catholics formed about 20% of all the population at that time, then close to two thirds of them baptized their children. Using data provided by the official Latvian newspaper "Cēņa" in 1987 which claimed that in the republic between 18% to 20% of all newborn were baptized in church, then the Catholics undoubtedly accounted for the lion's share of such baptisms, whereas Lutherans, Baptists, Orthodox and others accounted for the remaining 5% to 7%. According to Bishop Cakuls about 10% to 15% of Catholic families have remained unbaptized ⁵⁹.

The Catholics have also experienced a religious revival. In 1991 the number of baptisms had more than doubled to 10,661. Only 40% of these had been born in families where the parents had been married in church. Church marriages as well, have increased. While in 1987 about one thousand marriages were performed by Catholics, the number jumped to 2651 in 1991 representing 55.3% of all church weddings that year. It must be remembered that many more Catholics would have liked church weddings but were not admitted because one of the partners was divorced. In 85% of conjugal unions in 1991 both partners were Catholics, whereas 15% were mixed, that is involved partners from other religions or ones who had not been baptized ⁶⁰. Catholics are also most likely to choose religious funerals. In 1991 they accounted for almost 5000 or 52.8% of all religious funerals.

A most unusual demonstration of Catholic commitment occurs annually in mid-August on the day of the ascension of the Virgin Mary. Tens of thousands of the faithful trek to Aglona, a small locality in Latgale, which has an old basilica constructed by the Dominicans in the 18th century. On the occasion of the celebration of the 800th year of Christianity in Latvia in 1986, the numbers assembled were estimated at over 50,000.

Other years attendance has fluctuated between 30 and 40 thousand ⁶¹. In the Fall of 1993 the Pope held services at this spot.

Catholics, as well, have introduced optional religious instructions in schools – mostly by lay believers in Latgale. They now are also providing religious classes to those preparing for their first communion and first confessional. In 1992 Archbishop Jānis Pujats was in charge of religious instruction courses for about 60 future teachers at the Daugavpils Pedagogical Institute ⁶². The Catholics have their own refurbished seminary in Riga to train young priests.

Confiscated churches are being returned and repaired or reconstructed and new ones are being built especially in areas outside Latgale where many Catholics settled after World War II. ⁶³ The Catholics are a major source of ethnic integration in Latvia. In September 1993, one quarter of Catholic believers were non-Latvians who often shared church buildings with Latvians. Thus, of the 225 congregations at that time serviced by 96 priests, in 31 congregations services were in Latvian and Polish, in 12 congregations services were in three languages: Latvian, Polish and Lithuanian, and in 3 others in Latvian and Lithuanian. In 164 congregations services were in Latvian only and in 15, in Polish only. In the St. Jekaba Cathedral in Riga services are also held in French and English.

The Catholics, much like the Lutherans, have begun to consolidate and grow in numbers and influence. Help is provided from various countries and Catholic clergy have finally been able to travel abroad and publish religious literature. Because Catholics did not fall as far as the Lutherans, their rebirth is not as noticeable. With time the 58% of Catholics outside Latgale will receive new churches and more complete services but the lingering and subtle lower status placement of Latgallians and Catholics together with the anonymity provided for a minority in an urban environment could slow down the process of total Catholic Church restoration.

In Latgale proper there has been a visible demographic dilution of ethnic Latvians and Catholics but the environment for a strong rebirth of the Church is much more positive. In this region Catholicism is an integral part of the Latgallian culture which is now witnessing a resurgence of interest.

OTHER RELIGIONS

While the Orthodox Church may have been less persecuted than the Catholic Church it, nevertheless, suffered the same attacks by atheists as all others. The membership of the Orthodox Church in Latvia in 1935 was predominantly Russian, with only one third Latvian. ⁶⁴ In view of the massive immigration of Slavs into Latvia during the forty-five years after the war, the Latvian share in this religion is today significantly lower. Indeed, the Latvian language version of the Orthodox Church calendar was discontinued in 1961.

During the first Soviet occupation in 1941 the Latvian Orthodox Church was ordered to liquidate itself as an independent entity and become a dependent branch subject to the authority of the Moscow Patriarchate. By 29 December 1992, however, it once again renewed its pre-war independent status ⁶⁵. In 1991 it had 90 parishes scattered in many of

the major cities such as Rīga, Daugavpils, Liepāja and Jelgava and also in the rural areas of Latgale. Of these 17 were Latvian ⁶⁶.

The problems faced by the Orthodox Church do not differ significantly from the Lutheran and Catholic Churches. The Chief Orthodox Bishop of Latvia, Patriarch Alexander, pointed out the three main problems as being a shortage of space, a shortage of religious literature and a shortage of clergy ⁶⁷. In contrast to the two other major religions the Orthodox do not have a local institute to train new recruits. They have to go outside Latvia for this purpose. Bishop Alexander has expressed interest in renewing the former Orthodox Seminary which functioned in independent Latvia but whose buildings were converted to serve as an “anatomicum” for the Riga Academy of Medicine ⁶⁸.

The Orthodox are also experiencing an influx of people seeking spiritual solace. Almost all congregations have Sunday schools with one in Pārdaugava claiming a membership of over 400 ⁶⁹. At the same time optional religious instructions in Russian schools are not widespread and are poorly attended ⁷⁰.

Between 1961 and 1992 the Orthodox Cathedral in the centre of Riga with its several bare cupolas served as a planetarium and a restaurant informally dubbed “God’s Ear”. The building has now been returned and crosses have been replaced by Latvian donors in Germany. There is still much to be done to restore it to its original resplendent, brilliant colours and contours. Its construction was originally financed by the tsar himself and the building with room for 2700 people was completed in 1884 ⁷¹.

Bishop Alexander was born in Daugavpils, Latvia in a religious family and until grade seven went to church every Sunday. Later when he was a student and worked as a teacher in Riga he attended different churches so as not to attract attention to himself. He later decided to enter the theological seminary in Zagorsk and served two years in the Urals before coming back to Riga to replace the former Orthodox metropolitan Dr. Leonid (Sv. Polakov) ⁷².

The Orthodox Church in Latvia is experiencing the schisms found in Russia. Some congregations are placing themselves under the jurisdiction of the Suzdalya Eparchy whose headquarters are located outside the former Soviet Union. These break-away congregations are now expressing their disgust at the way in which the Moscow eparchy collaborated with the communist regime and the K.G.B. and its “traitorous” treatment of believers ⁷³.

In Latvia during the Soviet period only the Orthodox Church was allowed to keep its convent located in Valgunde. In 1990 it united 180 nuns and in October 1991 celebrated its 100th birthday ⁷⁴. The Orthodox Church has regained several of its centrally located properties which it plans to rent out in order to obtain funds for renovations and general upkeep.

There has been some tension with the Latvian wing of the Orthodox Church. Critics have claimed that obstacles to the rebirth of Latvian Orthodoxy are being placed by the Church itself. If during Latvia’s pre-war period 54 of the 123 clerics were Latvian, in 1990 the ratio was only four out of 60 ⁷⁵.

LATVIAN BAPTISTS

During the Soviet period the Latvian Baptists provided the highest number of dissidents in

Latvia and not surprisingly, their high level of organization and activity for many years worried communist authorities. Their willingness and ability to socialize their children into the faith stymied many of the best campaigns and tactics of militant atheists. The high profile of Baptists belies their relatively small numbers. During Latvia's independence their twelve thousand adherents amounted to less than a half percentage point of all believers. Today, the Baptist Church has been able to maintain its positions better than any other church and during the Soviet occupation was able to co-opt believers from other less active religions. Current 1997 statistics indicate over 6000 active members, 75 parishes and 65 ministers or preachers. They also have a very active and extensive Sunday school system.

The Latvian Baptist Church for decades was a subordinate member of the All Union Baptist Federation and participated in the elections and deliberations of this body. In 1990 it became independent although it still maintains ties with Moscow⁷⁶. The activities of various parishes are well described in the Baptist Church Calendar which was allowed to be published for the first time in 1979 – probably in reaction to the indirect influence of Baptist Jimmy Carter.

Until 1990 aspiring theologians did not have any seminary or school which they could attend in order to receive ordination. All their studies had to be pursued through correspondence courses guided from Moscow with students receiving periodic examinations and facing final examination commission in order to graduate. Now the Baptists also have their own seminary with about 36 theology students⁷⁷.

One of the unusual aspects of the Latvian Baptists is their deep attachment to choral music and religious poetry. Almost every congregation has a choir which in most cases contains many young people. Poetry is printed in the calendar and poets are singled out in the news chronicles of Church activities. In 1992 the Baptists organized a song festival in Kurzeme and this tradition has continued with the fourth festival held in 1996.

OLD BELIEVERS

Old Believers have a long history in Latvia. They fled tsarist persecution in the 1600's and settled in what was then Swedish or Polish controlled territory of Latvia. They found particular support during Latvia's independence period when the state financed primary schools for them and aided in the building of churches. They are very strict in their traditional observances and in their daily behaviour (no smoking or drinking). There are 65 congregations and about 70-80 thousand believers with about a third concentrated in Riga and most of the others in Eastern Latvia. A significant number fled as refugees to the United States ahead of the Red Army during World War II. The remainder were persecuted with many clergy sent to Siberia.⁷⁸ Certain congregations have chosen to become isolated in their own small communities. At the same time a significant number of Old Believers prior to 1940 were efficient businessmen and gifted members of the intelligentsia. To this day they have been able to take care of their own and follow an independent line. They have maintained relations with their co-religionists in Estonia, Lithuania, Moldova, St. Petersburg, Moscow and other parts of the world. The Riga Grebeshchikov congregation is the largest in the world with 20,000 members in 1990⁷⁹. This brand of Old Believers

does not have ordained clergy but only spiritual preachers or teachers (Bespopovtsy). The first spiritual school since 1940 opened in Riga in November 1989. The course lasts two years and there were ten students in 1991⁸⁰. The Grebeshchikov Church is recognizable to all in Riga because of the tall gilded cupola, a visible landmark from almost all points of the central part of the city.

CONCLUSION

Without a doubt the slow death of religion in Latvia has been stopped and there are many signs of recovery. A public opinion poll taken in the fall of 1993 found only 12 percent convinced atheists among Latvians and 16 percent among non-Latvians, a much lower proportion than in Estonia with its 27 percent atheists. This poll thus revealed many other interesting aspects of religion. Among Latvians, 24 percent claimed to be Catholic, 2 percent Orthodox, 30 percent Lutheran, 3 percent other and 20 percent were "believers without a particular church". The rest found it difficult to answer. Among non-Latvians, 10 percent were Catholic, 49 percent Orthodox, 1 percent Lutheran, 5 percent other and 10 percent believers without a church. Claimed church attendance among believers is rather unimposing with 13 percent of Latvians and 12 percent of others attending at least once a month or once a week⁸¹. There seems to be a wide consensus that the greatest religious inroads are being made with the old and the young and that the middle generation, heavily imprinted with the pervasive cynicism and atheism of the years of communist stagnation is much less affected. Nevertheless, some of them have a wish to let their children partake of religion most often for the sake of "character building", yet in the process they too are being engaged into various church led activities.

There are many problems to be overcome and not all religious organizations have the wherewithal to cope with a surge of demands for services. Some religions are more flexible than others. With the new freedom has come a new opportunity for various religious sects which had not formerly been represented in Latvia to proselytize and obtain converts. For example Jehovah's Witnesses are finding many willing to listen and join, although they experienced much controversy in 1996 because of the death of a girl whose parents refused blood transfusions for her. Similarly, the Hare Krishna with their garb are often found in the streets of Riga. Charismatic movements are spreading rapidly. A Russian charismatic Christian sect has made great advances among youth. The Adventists have experienced a phenomenal growth rate. The opening to the West has seen a stampede of religious groups engaged in missionary work, problem assessment, aid of various sorts as well as choirs, rock concerts, mass meetings, religious ships offering books and the like. The Salvation Army, the Y.M.C.A. and Gideons-International are just some of the traditional religious components of the West now finding a niche in Latvia.

While all of this may give the appearance of a major religious revival it should be kept in mind that the Latvian environment is not going to reflect that of the United States or Poland, but more likely the one found in Scandinavia and Germany where the degree of religious activism is much more muted. There is a visible thirst for something beyond the boundaries of materialism and rationalism. Latvia has many people engaged in various extra-sense and other superstitious activities and rituals. Whether these yearnings will

underlying solution. Another book by a religious magazine came out in 1985, J. Imbilansa, *Či'ng/Patibol* [Socijalistička na društva, crkva i politika, Riga 1985].

¹¹⁷ "Či'ng", 3 August 1985.

¹¹⁸ E. Imbilansa, *Patibol* (1985), "Či'ng", no. 11, 1985, p. 27.

¹¹⁹ "Či'ng", 4 April 1978.

¹²⁰ J. Imbilansa, *Patibol* (1985), *Či'ng* (1985), no. 16, 1985, p. 8.

¹²¹ P. Berman, *The Oppression of Religious Freedom in Communist States in World Federation of Free Churches (ed.), Confession on Liberty and Dependence* (Europe Fellowship Meeting in Vienna, November 1980). *Journal of Religion in the Soviet Union and the Peoples of the Soviet Empire*, Washington 1980, pp. 20, 34-38.

¹²² E. Trops/Trops, *Latvian Roman Catholic Church: Historical Outline 1798-1998* (unpublished manuscript by Catholic clergyman after the year was abolished of the Catholic Theological Seminary in Riga), p. 86.

¹²³ E. Balcers, *Latvian Church in Soviet Latvia*, Riga 1977, p. 79; *Meža, Pārvalde, Bapaļa Latvija*, Riga 1987, p. 143.

¹²⁴ J. Imbilansa, *Či'ng* (Latvian edition), "Baltava", no. 7, 1989, p. 17.

¹²⁵ Balcers, *Latvian ch.*, p. 625. Details about this period also found in E. Imbilansa (ed.), *Latvian Church* (ed. 1, Stockholm 1998-01), pp. 220-226.

¹²⁶ The amnesty offered meant political prisoners including clergy. Lutheran Archbishop Emerus Tils of Latvia was able to include the following part of his Christmas message in the church calendar of 1986: "With the issuance of the Soviet government on September 17 regarding the amnesty of prisoners, the number of workers has increased in Latvian fields and pastures. In well, many workers continued to work in the fields of the Church." [*Latvian Church* (ed. 1), 1986, pp. 16-17.

¹²⁷ Official Soviet data for 1982 listed 113 Lutheran parishes, 11 deacons and 28 candidates. Another source, dated early 1983 indicates changes for 1982 Rūdolfs, *Latvian ch.*, p. 625.

¹²⁸ Manuscripted church documents.

¹²⁹ E. Kallits, *Latvian ch.*, with in *Latvian Evangelical Church* (Riga) Riga 1988, p. 86. [Historical cited as Riga 1988].

¹³⁰ E. Imbilansa, *Či'ng* (Latvian edition), in Riga 1988, p. 134.

¹³¹ "Či'ng", 3 October 1985.

¹³² "Imbilansa Riga", 8 September 1978. In an interview the director of the Church school Vaira Volgman, pointed out some of the problems encountered their first year: "There is a crisis in all directions [by the teaching] in Latvia. It is a Christian crisis. This is not only because we must work not only with the children, but also with their parents. Problems are caused by the fact that a large number of schoolchildren do not come from Christian families. These come - we have children that average schools usually are in Latvia. There are children... with a difficult situation, with learning problems, with a tendency to conflict with others. Volgman, however, was pleased that not a single student had left or had to be expelled from school and that conflict decreased with time.

"Latvian ch.", June/July 1982, pp. 26-27.

¹³³ "Baltava", July 27, 1978.

¹³⁴ Unpublished computer printout obtained in June, 1982 from the Lutheran Church central office in Riga. [Historical cited as Latvian journal 1982].

¹³⁵ Lutheran journal 1982.

¹³⁶ "Imbilansa Riga", 17 January 1982.

¹³⁷ Riga 1988. The propositions are tabulated from the list of clergy and their addresses listed in the end of the calendar, pp. 109-111.

¹³⁸ Lutheran journal 1982.

¹³⁹ "Imbilansa Riga", 14 June 1982.

¹⁴⁰ Riga 1988, calendar from pp. 109-111.

Days of Week of Latvian clergy officially recorded 1986

1982 and later	18
1982 - 1981	23

1942 - 1951	11
1952 - 1961	7
1962 - 1971	17 (2 of them are omitted)
1972 and earlier	20 (2 of them are omitted).

¹⁰ *Reģistrs Katoļticī 1987*, p. 143.

¹¹ The description is from: *Lutherans (Luteres, Tiesī Bīstas, of Latvia, Incorporated in Connecticut, N.Y., August 1967*.

¹² *Reģistrs Katoļticī 1987*, pp. 120-121.

¹³ These incidents were accepted in one group on 13 in May and 27 in December 1993 (*Reģistrs Katoļticī 1994*, p. 11).

¹⁴ "Apģitums", 20 August 1993.

¹⁵ Theology students Edis Tīdriņš working in a Latvian congregation, but from the USA, wrote that there was great respect with her flock, but the relationship to her "occupational colleagues" was "difficult": "Just for example at the last conference of clergy '93" was addressed in Latvian, even though there were "strains" in the communicating the laity between sessions entirely was thought to come and chat. But this is the same relationship to people that I already mentioned. Much is still about-Christians here, but in life case case it rarely. In all of Latvian context in my opinion, there is a strong and often unreciprocated attitude towards women. "Veiksmes Bīst", 11 April 1993. The first three included were H. Tīģiņš, B. Kozla and Bīstas. *Reģistrs Katoļticī 1994*, p. 105.

¹⁶ C. Lutz, *Christian Religion in the Soviet Union*, London 1979, p. 170.

¹⁷ Edis Pārulis, editor of the main Latvian newspaper "Veiksmes Bīst", wrote about the generational problem in a column of October 27, 1993: "Some of the older groups across the presence of "new believers and converts" and the way in which these new arrivals within the traditional parishioners of the church by their new activities which include Sunday schools, choir practices, weekly communions, excursions and the like". On the other hand, these conversions often members of the new congregations which replace the old laity and take over the direction of the church without regard to the past contributions of the older, who, at least decades, from the young "support and love" but having preserved the faith and the church. According to Pārulis some of these disaffected "parishioners" had accumulated debts ("there are none"), from their congregations ("not on the way forward"), with complaints, denunciations and open letters. "Oh, suddenly, quickly and unceremoniously converts who for the first time steps in step into the church, in Pārulis' view "lose the churches which at this point in time do not have these legal problems".

¹⁸ "Radio Free Europe", 18 June 1987, p. 13. See also "Radiofree Europe", 4 May 1987.

¹⁹ "Radio Free Europe", 17 July 1987, p. 9. "Sveitlīks", no. 1, 1987, pp. 64-67.

²⁰ *Reģistrs Katoļticī 1994*, p. 134.

²¹ "Veiksmes Bīst", 20 April 1993.

²² "Christians Today", 17 May 1994.

²³ Catholics had more restrictions placed on publishing and self-employment.

²⁴ V. Kozla, *Catholic Church in Latvia and the Catholic Church in Latvia*, "Radio Liberty Report", February 8, 1983, no. 73, p. 1.

²⁵ According to *Dieps, Tiesī, Latvijas Romas Katoļticī Bīstas* etc., pp. 10-11, a total of 80 Catholics during were "suppressed" between 1940 and 1988. (*Katoļticī Katoļticī*, 1993, p. 62).

²⁶ "Katoļticī Katoļticī", 1992, pp. 17-25.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

²⁸ J. Cakals, *At Katoļticī Latvijā*, "Katoļticī Katoļticī", 1993, p. 45.

²⁹ Kozla, *Catholic Church in Latvia* etc., p. 1.

³⁰ J. Cakals, *At Latvija*, p. 1. Unpublished report prepared by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Riga, Jānis Cakals, in 1992. Other mentions from "Dieps", September 8, 1987.

³¹ Cakals, *At Latvija*, pp. 1-4.

A family magazine, "Skola un Ģimene", containing an article on teaching atheism at Kindergarten, 1980.

