

BELIEVERS, HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOM OF SPEECH IN SOVIET ESTONIA*

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Introduction

Freedom of religion was guaranteed in the Soviet Union (hereinafter USSR) according to the Leninist principle: "Religion must be declared a private matter. The state must not be involved with religious societies, religious societies must not be associated with the authority of the state. Everyone must have complete freedom to acknowledge or not to acknowledge whatever religion, that is to be an atheist, which every socialist ordinarily is." However, since executive power was in the hands of the Party, and the Party's position concerning the same issue was that "religion is not a private matter in relation to the workers' party",¹ this principle became nonsense that only sounded democratic. Even though according to Marx's teaching, religion as a phenomenon of social origin should have already died out after its "social roots are severed" – there was no longer supposed to be any need for the "sigh of the downtrodden world" in the Soviet state – religion continued to doggedly resist, for which reason very varied methodology was applied to continue trying to cut through those roots, even though the knife used was dull.

The Soviet era is accordingly remembered as having been hostile to religion, yet many a time the fact is ignored that regardless of the invariably atheistic slogan, the policy concerning religion was not uniformly implemented. This policy was first and foremost in the service of constantly altering foreign policy needs,² yet changes in domestic policy were also important. Thus pressure differed from period to period. For instance, repressive laws were not applied with full rigour in the period of Stalin's rule. Control was achieved over the church through mutual agreements, terror and direct repressions. The Khrushchev era, on the other hand, brought open ideological war accompanied by concealed administrative measures and more severe laws. The stagnation era (i.e the tenure of Brezhnev's rule), by contrast, meant "routine repression" – both sides based their actions on the aphorism – "if you look at a river long enough, you can see the corpse of your enemy floating past". Differences stand out by comparison between different regions and different fields of activity. For instance, according to the Baptist preacher Jüri Puusaag, Estonia was an experimental region of the Soviet regime for experimentation with a more lenient policy on religion.³ This is actually not true but it indicates that the "tables of Moscow's commandments" could be interpreted within certain limits and that depended for the most part on local conditions. The attitude and decisions of local "nachalniks" (bosses) also played a part.

* The article was published in Estonian in the journal *Tuna* no 3/2013, pp. 65–81.

¹ Vladimir Iljitš Lenin, *Religioonist ja kirikust* (On Religion and the Church), (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1975), 211–215.

² Tatiana Chumachenko, *Church State in Soviet Russia: Russian Orthodoxy from World War II to the Khrushchev years*, edited by Edward E. Roslof (Armonk N. Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2002), 16.

³ Toivo Pilli, "Towards a Revived Identity. Estonian Baptists, 1970–1985," – *Eastern European Baptist History: New Perspectives*, edited by S. Corrado and T. Pilli (Prague: International Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007): 143.

This article considers the measures related to religious policy applied in Estonia from the aspect of human rights and freedom of religion. Repressions related to religion⁴ can be divided into two categories: the administration of religious life by legal restrictions and obligations and atheist propaganda in combination with the absence of freedom of religious speech are classified as *coercive measures* that restrict human rights and are backed up by laws. *Direct repressions* form the second group, which includes more severe modes of neutralisation.

The Religious Code in the Soviet Union

The first laws concerning religion were issued in the USSR quite soon after the Bolsheviks seized power. The most important of these laws was the decree *On the separation of the church from school and the state*, issued on 23 January 1918. This banned the teaching of “religious dogmas” in schools. This means that religion was relegated exclusively to the private sphere. Churches were deprived of all manner of rights to own property and they lost the status of a legal person. The instruction issued on 24 August 1918 concerning the implementation of that decree added numerous discriminating nuances. In 1929, a constitutional amendment banned religious propaganda but granted “freedom of antireligious propaganda”. The new Religious Code adopted in that same year worsened the position of churches even further: private prayer, ecclesiastical work among youth, excursions and libraries were banned. The rights of the state to interfere in church life increased. The activity of clergymen, or the “servants of religious cults” was limited exclusively to the congregation’s building, wearing habiliments in public was banned, etc. Clergymen had to be registered by the state in order to acquire an “operating licence” yet the state retained veto rights concerning licensing. On 16 January 1931, clergymen were prohibited from belonging to the governing bodies of congregations in order to reduce their influence.⁵ The Politburo’s position that religious associations are “legally operating counterrevolutionary forces”, for which reason they have to be destroyed once and for all, formed the background for all these changes.⁶

After the incorporation of Estonia into the USSR, the above mentioned laws went into effect here as well. Section 96 of the ESSR Constitution adopted in 1940 separated church and school in the name of freedom of conscience and provided for “freedom of antireligious propaganda” in Estonia as well⁷ – cynically speaking of guaranteeing the freedom of speech of all citizens in the subsequent section of the constitution. The Religious Code from 1929 went into effect and remained virtually the only public framework legislation according to which religious associations operated until 1977. The public Temporary Guide drawn up by religious affairs commissioner Johannes Kivi was added to this in 1945,⁸ along with a few further directives.

⁴ On the classification of repressions, see Aivar Niglas, “Üks NSV Liidu repressioonide süstematiseerimise võimalusi” (One Possibility for Systematising the Soviet Union’s Repressions), *Tuna*, no. 4 (2011): 70.

⁵ William Peter van den Bercken, *Ideology and Atheism in the Soviet Union* (Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter 1989), 93 ff.

⁶ Arto Luukkanen, *The religious policy of the Stalinist state: a case study, the Central Standing Commission on Religious Questions, 1929–1938*, *Studia Historica* 57 (Helsinki: SHS, 1997), 66.

⁷ Section 50 of the ESSR Constitution of 1978 also did not bring about any essential change and delineated religious freedom of speech with the right to “engage in atheist propaganda”.

⁸ See Riho Altnurme, *Eesti Evangeeliumi Luteriusu Kirik ja Nõukogude riik 1944–1949* (The Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet State 1944–1949), (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2001), 62 ff.

Alongside public legislation, a whole myriad of confidential or semi-confidential directives and instructions affected church life. They were issued in an avalanche that began at the end of the 1950's in connection with the antireligious campaign and created the required legal framework for discouraging religion. At the end of 1958, the USSR Council of Ministers published three directives, the first of which appealed to reduce the amount of land at the disposal of abbeys, prohibited abbeys from hiring employees, and sought ways to reduce the number of abbeys. The second directive increased the rate of income tax levied on abbeys and spiritual centres. The third directive, however, indicated the need to stop pilgrimages to sacred places.⁹ The USSR Council of Ministers confidential directive *Concerning strengthening control over religious organisations* followed on 16 March 1961 (with the ESSR Council of Ministers equivalent issued on 13 April of the same year),¹⁰ stressing the inadvisability of registering congregations with anti-state positions of a fanatical nature – Jehovah's Witnesses, Adventists-Reformists and others – and requiring a compulsory one-time statistical census of congregations to be carried out throughout the USSR. The data from this census was used in the course of the ensuing campaign of shutting down congregations.¹¹

A confidential instruction for implementing the directive toughened nearly half of the articles of the legislation of 1929.¹² In addition, penalties for violating religious legislation were made more severe. Section 137 of the ESSR Criminal Code adopted in 1961¹³ prescribed a penalty of corrective labour for up to six months, a monetary fine of up to 100 roubles or public social censure for violating the law *Concerning the separation of church from state and school from church* (appealing to people to not observe religious legislation; the organisation of religious cult ceremonies and other such actions). Section 138 did indeed prescribe penalties for obstructing the carrying out of religious rites but there is no information indicating that this provision was ever applied.¹⁴

The development of the legal code during the Brezhnev era proceeded according to the changed needs of the state – when it became clear that it was not possible to get rid of religion with a single blow, the long term implementation of a policy of choking it off began. Legislation concerning religious questions was toughened even further. The enactment *Concerning administrative prosecution for violation of religious cult legislation* passed on 29 June 1966 prescribed a fine of up to 50 roubles for minor violations, yet the new clause in the Criminal Code provided the opportunity to impose up to three years of imprisonment for violation of the law *Separation of church and state* if the accused happened to have been convicted of a similar previous offence.¹⁵ Section 201¹ of *Assault on the person or rights of citizens in the form of observing religious rites* prescribed imprisonment for up to five years

⁹ John Anderson, *Religion, State and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 34 ff.

¹⁰ The Estonian language version can be found at Estonian State Archives (hereinafter ERA) R-1961.1.103, 7 ff.

¹¹ Andrei Sõtšov, *Eesti Õigeusu Piiskopkond nõukogude religioonipoliitika mõjuväljas 1954–1964* (The Estonian Orthodox Diocese in the Field of Influence of Soviet Religious Policy 1954–1964), (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2008), 117.

¹² P. Walters, "A Survey of Soviet Religious Policy," – *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union*, edited by Sabrina P. Ramet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 20. The text of this instruction can be found at ERA.R-1.15.547.

¹³ The Russian SFSR Criminal Code of 1926 was in effect until then.

¹⁴ *Eesti NSV Kriminaalkoodeks* (Estonian SSR Criminal Code): edition with commentary, 5th corrected and supplemented edition (Tallinn: 1980).

¹⁵ *ENSV Ülemnõukogu ja Valitsuse Teataja* (ESSR Supreme Soviet and Government Gazette), no. 31, 12 July 1966.

“for organising or leading a group if the activity of the group is connected to causing harm to the health of citizens through the proclamation of religious teachings or the observation of religious rites [—], similarly by inducing citizens to avoid social activity or to refrain from fulfilling their civic duties”. Participation in the activity of such groups could bring a penalty of up to three years.

Other questions related to religion were also within the jurisdiction of the Criminal Code, for instance problems related to the loyalty of clergymen according to Section 68 (anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda with a penalty of six months to seven years imprisonment) and Section 194¹ (disseminating lies that slander the Soviet system), or cases of refusing to render military service for religious reasons.¹⁶

The alteration in policy created the need to eliminate the situation where all that believers know about religious legislation is through hearsay. The Russian SFSR Supreme Soviet decision of 23 June 1975 combined the intervening confidential directives into a public *Statute for Religious Associations*. Its Estonian equivalent was adopted on 22 April 1977 by decision of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet.¹⁷ The adoption of the statute did not in fact change anything and was borne by the need to record the status quo. A new religious code was issued in 1990 due to the changes that took place in religious policy at the end of the 1980's but this no longer affected the situation in Estonia.

Institutions Included in Implementing the Religious Legislation

Mutual interests were determined at Stalin's meeting with the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in September of 1943. The Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church (CAROC) was created as a mediator between the churches and the state, and the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC) was created for all other religious associations. The two councils were joined together on 8 December 1965 in the course of the reorganisations that followed the atheist campaign to form a single Council for the Religious Affairs (CRA). The primary function of that institution became “administrative measures”, which should be understood as keeping churches under control while in the process attempting to create the impression of ostensible freedom of religion for the outside world.

Commissioners represented the Council for the Religious Affairs in the union republics and autonomous regions. Their function was the coordination of religious questions so that everything connected to the repression of religious life would leave a legally correct impression: the gathering and analysis of information for preventing violations of the law; activities related to questions of shutting down (and rarely inaugurating) congregations; the control of cadre policy related to clergymen and the guidance of “patriotic activity”; and the resolution of complaints. The *apparat* of the deputies themselves was relatively small, consisting of an assistant commissioner, a secretary and a couple of inspectors, between whom the supervision of different religious associations was divided up. Thus the supervision of religion was the responsibility of the local executive committees in towns and rajons. The executive committees, however, often saw this obligation as an additional task that interfered with their main tasks. For the most part, their activity was not systematic. Problems were resolved as needed. Local Committees for Religious Control (LCRC, literally “the commissions for assistance for observance of religious legislation”, were formed as part

¹⁶ Estonian SSR Criminal Code.

¹⁷ *ENSV Ülemnõukogu ja Valitsuse Teataja*, no. 19, 13 May 1977.

of the executive committees in 1963 to improve the situation.¹⁸ Their aim was to assist the executive committees in religious matters, that is the control of the law-abiding nature of the activity of congregations and of the loyalty of clergymen, and the prevention of violations of the law. Since this work was done “on a social basis”, in other words free of charge, no noteworthy qualitative change followed – often the work of the commission consisted of only the chairman’s report to the deputy, for which reason “it was not infrequent that local organs of power on several occasions found themselves in an awkward situation in localities”.¹⁹ The overall problem was that members of the commissions did not have a precise overview of the laws that were in effect and of the individual attributes of the congregations under their supervision.

In addition to the LCRC, atheism commissions operated under the direction of ECP municipal or rajon committees, guiding atheist work in their areas connected with new ceremonies and the “propaganda lectures” held by the atheism lecturers from the *Znanie* (Knowledge) Society²⁰ (a society founded for scientific enlightenment among the population). Since activists in the field of atheism were in rather short supply, all the above-mentioned units very frequently consisted of one and the same people. For this reason, the limits of different working groups tended to become blurred and they quite often carried out the kind of tasks that contradicted their statutory purpose – for instance, propaganda units dealt with supervising churches, the popularisation of new ceremonies worked out by the LCRC, etc. Regardless of the criticism of the higher organs of power,²¹ nothing changed. It made no difference to believers, of course, because in ordinary cases, contact with representatives of the authorities mostly led to annoyances one way or another.

The Soviet Union’s fundamental opposition to religion caused a reverse interpretation of the Christian maxim “he who is not against us is for us” (Mark 9:40), for which reason religious matters were in the domain of the state security organs from the early years of the state already. The influence of the KGB continued even when the Council of Religious Affairs was assigned to deal with religious groups²² – during the early years of the Council of Religious Affairs, its chairmen as well as many of its deputies (in Estonia as well) came from the cadre of the security organs. This practice no longer applied in general later on, for instance, deputies in Estonia were mostly from a background in propaganda work starting from the 1950’s.

At first, religious questions were under the jurisdiction of the KGB General Department, but after reorganisation in 1953, moved under the jurisdiction of Section 5 of the 4th Department that was assigned to deal with the neutralisation of “anti-Soviet elements”, nationalist groups and saboteurs. Even later, religious matters were made the responsibility of Section 3 of the same department. After Yuri Andropov rose to the position of KGB

¹⁸ Actually, the Estonian branch of All-Union Society *Znanie* was called *Teadus* (Science). See Atko Remmel, “Religiooniseaduste kontrollimise kaastöökomisjonid Nõukogude Eestis” (Local Committees for Religious Control in Soviet Estonia), *Ajalooline Ajakiri* no. 1 (2011): 85–104; Atko Remmel, *Religioonivastane võitlus Eesti NSV-s aastail 1957–1990: tähtsamad institutsioonid ja nende tegevus* (The Struggle against Religion in the Estonian SSR in 1957–1990: the more important institutions and their activity) (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2011), 102–162.

¹⁹ ERA.R-1945.1.570, 2.

²⁰ See Remmel, *Religioonivastane võitlus*, 196 ff for information about the *Znanie* Society and its atheist activity.

²¹ ERA R-1989.1.201, 78.

²² B. Bociurkiw, “The Formulation of Religious Policy in the Soviet Union,” *Journal of Church and State* 28, No. 3 (1986): 430, 436.

chairman in 1967 and the events in Czechoslovakia in 1968, the 5th Department was created for counterpropaganda and to fight against ideologically subversive activity, and the religious sphere was also included here.²³

In Stalinist era the actions of KGB against the churches took place in massive scale, creating the networks of agents and the neutralising the persons who put up resistance. By the Khrushchev period, churches were already under the control of the security “organs” to the extent that their management was made more personal, with the greater focus on so called “sectarians”, who resisted the state “training” more than “official” churches.

The KGB’s line of activity in the field of religion was relatively separate from the rest of its units. Even though Council of Religious Affairs deputies submitted reports on the religious situation once every six months to the ECP CC and to the Council of Religious Affairs, the KGB also drew up information bulletins of that type from time to time for the ECP CC based on its own sources. There nevertheless were some points of contact. For instance, KGB employees also belonged to some LCRC – this was connected to the distinct attributes of religious associations operating in particular areas.

Means of Coercion

“Administration” of Religious Life

Since the Soviet Union was not a state based on the rule of law, the kinds of nuances that could be considered natural from the viewpoint of the functioning of religious associations also acquired a repressive nature. For instance, the aim of the registration of religious associations was not the creation of a legal entity together with the corresponding rights (religious associations had only limited rights) and obligations, but rather better control, since unregistered religious associations were not allowed to operate. Three conditions had to be met for registration: the existence of *dvadcadka*, a designated building for meeting, and a clergyman accepted by the state. Meeting those three conditions, however, was not that easy.

*Dvadcadka*²⁴ meant the minimum number of people for forming a congregation, with which the state concluded a property liability agreement for placing a “religious cult building” and the corresponding fittings at its disposal. Problems arose primarily in the case of smaller congregations that did not meet the required quorum. Members of the *dvadcadka* were approved by both the local executive committee and the deputy. This requirement was relaxed in 1968 in connection with the need to bring believers who had gone underground back under state control – a “religious group” could be formed with less than 20 members.

Clergymen could operate only on the basis of the corresponding licence. They had to maintain a sufficiently low profile in their pronouncements to obtain such a licence. In order to reduce the influence of clergymen in congregations, they were run by a three-member board that the clergyman himself was not allowed to be a part of, and an auditing committee. Executive committees had the right to demand the replacement of members of

²³ KGB documents on-line (<http://www.kgbdocuments.eu/index.php?1419399423> (25 March 2013)); Indrek Jürjo, *Pagulus ja Nõukogude Eesti: vaateid KGB, EKP ja VEKSA arhiividokumentide põhjal* (Emigration and Soviet Estonia) (Tallinn: UMARA, 1996), 162. For comparison with the activity of the KGB in Lithuania, see Arūnas Streikus, “Lithuanian Catholic Clergy and the KGB,” *Religion, State & Society* 34, no. 1 (2006), LEHEKÜLJED PUUDU and Kristina Burinskaitė, “KGB tegevuse eripärast Leedus aastatel 1954–1990” (On the Distinct Attributes of KGB Activity in Lithuania in 1954–1990), *Tuna* no. 4 (2012): 79–88.

²⁴ This term was often used without translation. The Estonianised form *kahekümnik* (twenty) was seemingly an attempt at linguistic creativity by Religious Affairs Deputy Johannes Kivi which was rarely used (ERA.R-1989.2s.1, 94).

both bodies through repeat elections – yet clergymen and the congregations' governing bodies themselves did not have that right. Commissioner Jan Kanter of CAROC explained the resolution of these roles as follows: "The duty of the clergyman is to serve god and carry out religious ceremonies according to the wishes of the members of the congregation. And nothing more. The governing bodies deal with all financial questions under the control of the auditing committee, of which a representative of the executive committee finance department is also a member."²⁵

Church rooms posed a major problem because many churches had become unusable over the course of the war and congregations had to find other rooms for themselves – in some cases that proved to be fateful in registration. The state also had trouble finding adequate rooms and thus opportunities were still being sought even in the 1960's to offer new uses for church and congregation buildings. Most of the requisitioned church buildings were put to use as warehouses or clubhouses, yet many were left to decay.²⁶ Congregation buildings were converted into offices or living space. Yet if the congregation in question was new, for instance one that split off due to disagreements, getting through the gauntlet required for registration along with finding rooms for itself could take on rather epic proportions.²⁷ Deputies disapproved of the application of bureaucracy in this manner, at least in the early 1980's already,²⁸ even though without any particular results. In solving the problem of finding the necessary rooms, the Soviet authorities at times unintentionally crossed the threshold of ecumenical activity by placing different confessions to operate in the same rooms in the name of keeping the number of sacral buildings small.

Congregations that did not meet the conditions were shut down in the course of several waves of closures in 1945–1946, 1949–1952 (Baptist congregations) and 1961–1964. In other periods, the pickings were limited to those that had been previously overlooked. Non-registration (that is banning) after the war particularly affected smaller religious associations and organisations. Consequentially, their activity died out, ended with (compulsory) merging with other movements (for instance, Pentecostals, *priilased* (free believers, a sect based in Western Estonia) and others were joined together with the Baptists (resulting in the Union of Free Evangelical and Baptist Churches of Estonia (BCE)), congregations of Moravian Brethren were joined together with Lutherans) or it meant operating illegally (Jehovah's Witnesses, some Pentecostals and others).²⁹

Statistically: there were 179 Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC) congregations,³⁰ 156 ROC congregations and 4 abbeys,³¹ and 51 Baptist congregations in Estonia before the

²⁵ Estonian Historical Archives (hereinafter EAA) T-15.1.440, 9.

²⁶ ERA R-1989.1.226, 21. See also , Andrei Sõtšov, "Eesti õigeusu koguduste likvideerimine Nikita Hruštšovi ajal aastail 1954–64" (The Destruction of Estonia's Orthodox Congregations during the Nikita Khrushchev Era in 1954-64), *Acta Historica Tallinnensia* no. 11 (2007): 126 ff.

²⁷ I have described a couple of examples in full, see Remmel, *Religioonivastane võitlus*, 140 ff.

²⁸ ERA R-1989.1.252, 142.

²⁹ Jaanus Plaat, "Eesti vabakoguduste vastupanu nõukogude religioonipoliitikale võrreldes luterliku ja õigeusu kirikuga (1944–1987) (Resistance of Estonia's Free Congregations to Soviet Religious Policy Compared to the Lutheran and Orthodox Church (1944–1987)," – *Teekond teisenevas ajas: peatükke Eesti vabakoguduste ajaloost* (A Journey in Altering Time: Chapters from the History of Estonia's Free Congregations), edited by Toivo Pilli (Tartu: Sõnasepp, 2005), 133.

³⁰ Eesti Evangeeliumi Luteri Usu Kiriku aruanne 1937. aasta kohta (Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church report for 1937). Tallinn, 1938, 76–77 places the number of congregations at 174 + 13 auxiliary congregations, from which eight congregations terminated after the *Umsiedlung* have been subtracted.

³¹ Andrei Sõtšov, *Eesti õigeusu piiskopkond Stalini ajal aastail 1945–1953* (The Estonian Orthodox Diocese during the Stalin Era in 1945–1953) (Tallinn: Andrei Sõtšov, 2004), 34.

war, in addition to smaller religious associations. Even though over 95% of the population officially belonged to churches, about a quarter of that, or 300.000 people are thought to have been active members: of those, 203.055 were Lutherans, 78.509 were orthodox, and nearly 17.000 were members of various free congregations.³²

By 31 December 1987 – before the gradual moderation of religious policy – the picture had changed: 11 religious movements operated with 359 congregations, 141 of them EELC plus 15 affiliated congregations, 77 ROC plus one abbey and 80 BCE Association congregations. When considering the number of functioning congregations, the change is not that big, yet the results of religious policy are manifested in the drastic reduction in the number of congregation members: only 47.593 Lutherans remained, 13.980 orthodox believers, 5997 Baptists, with additional smaller religious associations – Old Believers, Methodists, Jews, Catholics, Pentecostals, and Seventh-Day Adventists. There were three religious associations that operated illegally: some Methodists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and underground Baptists, with a total of 10 congregations with 620 members. Statistically speaking: according to the 1934 census nearly 98 percent of Estonia's population was associated to some degree with the churches before the war and nearly a fourth of them are thought to have been active church members, by 1987 less than a fourth of that fourth remained active church members, meaning only around 5 percent of the population.³³

Control over everyday life following registration was achieved through constant arrangement of affairs and the need to ask permission for practically everything beyond the framework of Sunday church services: renovation and construction work, the congregation's general meeting (for which notice was first sent along with the agenda and in most cases, the Commission for Assisting in Supervision of Religious Laws representative participated in the meeting as an observer, sometimes even taking the floor; the minutes of the meeting were sent later), appearances by guest preachers, Christmas and Easter services, and the organisation of gatherings at cemeteries for remembering the dead. The "consultative seminars" invented by deputy Piip, in the course of which representatives of executive committees introduced religious legislation to clergymen and the governing bodies of congregations and admonished them to adhere to that legislation, were the local distinct attributes of preventive policy. They took place once or twice a year beginning in the mid-1970's and did not inspire any of the participants aside from the deputy himself.

"Preventive work" was also accompanied by more active control, in which the LCRC played the main role, obtaining the necessary information from the official reports of congregations, conversations with believers, and participation in church events. Active congregations were mostly divided up between commission members along with the obligation to inspect them over the course of set time periods (for instance once per quarter) and to continually keep an eye on the work of the "subordinated" church the rest of the time.³⁴ At other times, monitoring was more random and churches were visited only on occasions when a guest clergyman gave a sermon or when there were more people attending church than usual. The main focus of interest was the loyalty of the sermon. The number of participants was also of interest because participation in ceremonies was

³² Plaat, *Eesti vabakoguduste vastupanu*, 128 ff.

³³ ERA R-1989.2.71, 123, 139, 143, 145.

It must also be taken into account that some of the former ROC congregations ended up in Russian SFSR territory due to changes in the borders of the ESSR that took place after the war.

³⁴ EAA. T-15.1. 51, 1.

considered the main indicator of the vitality of religion.³⁵ Memorial gatherings at cemeteries, Christmas, Easter and the participation of young people under the age of 18 in religious proceedings were of particular interest. Further information on “religious improprieties” was obtained from newspaper editorial offices, yet denunciation letters from ideologically sensitive citizens were also of some importance. Typically, their motives were routine quarrels, in which the religiousness of the opposing side was treated as an aggravating circumstance – this kind of impression of believers was created due to vulgar-atheist propaganda.

Even though the security organs were often associated more with direct repression, their repertoire also included many methods that amounted only to coercion. One such approach was the recruitment of agents from among clergymen by threats and other means, the aim of which was both information and the “taming” of churches through controlling their activity. This brought results – by 1949 already, six of the Consistory’s seven assessors had been recruited and synods took place entirely according to the direction of the “organs”.³⁶ The network of agents was maintained and attempts were even made to enlarge it in later years. Cooperation with leading clergymen was of primary interest.³⁷

The channelling of churches into the “struggle for peace” was a particular approach. The foreign relations of churches was known by this term and took place under the strict control of the Council of Religious Affairs and the KGB. The Iron Curtain was opened slightly to send proven clergymen abroad to enable them to disseminate disinformation about religious freedom in the Soviet Union under the aegis of making contact with their colleagues abroad.³⁸

The success of this method is believed to have been one reason why the Khrushchev era anti-religion campaign attracted so little attention in the West.³⁹ At the same time, however, even Vladimir Kuroyedov, chairman of the Council of Religious Affairs, admitted that it was a “double-edged sword” – clergymen made themselves “useful” to the state only so that they could continue to do their work.⁴⁰ For clergymen, it was a choice between bad and worse options and there is no reason to believe that this kind of role appealed to anyone – the KGB assessed most of its church agents as “two-faced”.⁴¹

The primary and most common method for disciplining believers was administrative penalisation decided on by administrative commissions that operated under the jurisdiction of executive committees. The mildest form of penalty was the oral or written warning. More typical, however, were fines (for instance, for gathering without registration) in the range of 10–50 roubles. Local authorities rather often demanded that the deputy assign the most

³⁵ These activities added fuel to the urban legend of “recording the names of believers”, yet this monitoring nevertheless involved notes on the content of the sermon (on the scale loyal-disloyal) or the number of churchgoers because the identification of people would have been impossible on purely technical grounds already, at least in city churches, while everyone in the countryside knew each other anyway.

³⁶ Jürjo, *Pagulus ja Nõukogude Eesti*, 157 ff.

³⁷ See Riho Altnurme, “Peapiiskopi tagandamine aastal 1967” (The Dismissal of the Archbishop in 1967) – *Kristuse täisea mõõtu mööda: pühendusteos Jaan Kiivitile 65. sünnipäevaks = Zum vollen Maß der Fülle Christi: Festschrift für Jaan Kiivit zum 65. Geburtstag*, edited by Arne Hiob und Arho Tuhkru (Tallinn: EELK Usuteaduste Instituut, 2005), 66–78.

³⁸ Jürjo, *Pagulus ja Nõukogude Eesti*, 162 ff.

³⁹ Dimitry Pospelovsky, *Soviet Antireligious Campaigns and Persecutions* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 99.

⁴⁰ John Anderson, “The Council for Religious Affairs and the Shaping of Soviet Religious Policy,” *Soviet Studies* 43, no. 4 (1991): 698.

⁴¹ Altnurme, *Eesti Evangeeliumi Luteriusu Kirik*, 274.

severe penalties possible (for instance, shutting down the religious association or banning a clergyman from religious work), yet onetime severe penalties were for the most part replaced by several moderate penalties, that is by fines or warnings. For this the accused could thank the need not to escalate tensions in the religious situation arising from foreign policy and the relative reasonableness of Estonian deputies.⁴² Most of the penalised persons were from the “untamed” religious groups. There were no particular worries concerning the “domesticated” churches (ROC, EELC, legal Baptists). The reason for this was the fact that unlike the position of the Catholic Church in Lithuania, for instance, Estonian churches were not associated with the nationalist or dissident movements and had for the most part already been neutralised in the post-war years through the coercion of higher clergymen to become agents. Organisationally, however, churches were forced to their knees in the course of the anti-religion campaign of the 1950’s and 1960’s. This does not mean that they submitted without reservation or favoured the Soviet regime, rather that those churches acted quite conservatively. The role of individuals emerges only in putting up resistance. For instance, five religious figures were penalised administratively in 1986 but only one was registered by the state – the future EELC Archbishop Andres Pöder.⁴³

In the event that the fines administered by the administrative commissions did not help, there were several possibilities in the arsenal of the deputies for taming clergymen: for instance, banning the giving of guest sermons or of sermons altogether; relocation to a new, in most cases small rural congregation that limited the momentum of a clergyman’s activity at least for some time.

The deputy’s most severe means of penalisation, however, was depriving a clergyman of his employment certificate, in other words deleting him from the registry. Disobedient clergymen were indeed threatened at times with this course of action and the KGB was also involved in most cases of this kind. This kind of penalty was applied to Villu Jürjo, for instance, in the 1980’s. He was restored to his post in a few years time after he repented.⁴⁴

⁴² ERA R-1989.1.178, 115.

⁴³ ERA R-1989.2.69, 84. Pöder himself claims that such individuals were sufficiently numerous to consider the entire EELC as an organisation opposed to the state, see Andres Pöder, “Kiriku liikmeskond vabanemisprotsessi osana” (The Membership of the Church as Part of the Liberation Process) – *Usk vabadusse: artikleid ja mälestusi Eesti Evangeelse Luterliku Kiriku osast Eesti iseseisvuse taastamisel* (Faith in Freedom: Articles and Recollections of the Part of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Restoring Estonian Independence) compiled and edited by Anne Velliste (Tallinn: EELK Konsistoorium, 2011), 16–35; Andres Pöder, “Väitlus: Kuidas püüda ajaloo sinilindu?” (Debate: How to Catch History’s Bluebirds?), *Akadeemia* no. 10 (2012): 1887. Researchers of the resistance movement in particular (Jürjo, Niitsoo, Pesti in the same debate, see “Väitlus”) but also historians of religion are rather sceptical concerning this claim – Altnurme, *Eesti Evangeeliumi Luteriusu Kirik*, 253 ff; Atko Remmel, “Väärtuslik verstapost riigi ja kiriku suhete uurimisel” (Valuable Milestone in Researching Relations between Church and State), *Akadeemia* no. 8 (2012): 1507–1515; Riho Saard, “Aktiivsetest režimivastastest Eesti luterliku kiriku kontekstis 1970. ja 1980. aastatel” (On Active Opponents of the Regime in the Context of the Estonian Lutheran Church in the 1970’s and 1980’s), *Suomen kirkkohistoriallisen seuran Vuosikirja* no. 102 (2012), 77-110; Priit Rohtmets, Ringo Ringvee, “Religious Revival and the Political Activity of Religious Communities in Estonia During the Process of Liberation and the Collapse of the Soviet Union 1985–1991,” *Religion, State and Society* 41, no. 4 (2013): 355–393. Riho Altnurme examines the reactions and resistance of EELC clergymen to the anti-religion campaign of the 1950’s and 1960’s: “Eesti luteri kiriku reaktsioonid usuvastasele kampaaniale ja maailmapildi ning väärtuste muutumisele aastail 1958–1964” (Responses of the Estonian Lutheran Church to the anti-religious campaign, changes in the world view and values 1958–1964), *Acta Historica Tallinnensia* 19, no. 1 (2013): 89–114.

⁴⁴ Saard, “Aktiivsetest režimivastastest,” 88 ff.

Economic Measures

A very important form of struggle against religion was the achievement of control over the financial matters of congregations – this made it possible to keep churches in a relatively vegetative condition. Similarly to freedom of speech, legislation concerning the management of churches was also two-faced. Property that had belonged to congregations in the independent Republic of Estonia was nationalised,⁴⁵ yet in order to demonstrate freedom of religion, churches and houses of worship were placed at the disposal of congregations free of charge “to satisfy religious needs”. Thus other approaches were used to weaken the financial situation of churches and clergymen. Thus rent was collected on all “rooms not used for prayer”, that is auxiliary buildings, offices, storage rooms, etc., at the disposal of congregations,⁴⁶ to which was added a tax on all buildings in use and land tax on the land covered by those buildings. This was in accordance with Decision no. 4 adopted by the ESSR Council of Ministers on 4 January 1955. The state compensated for the absence of rental income from houses of worship with a compulsory insurance tax. Since “cult buildings” were left out of the reappraisal of state properties carried out on the basis of cubature in 1956 and thus proved to be in a favoured position, this “abnormal situation” was done away with in the course of the anti-religion campaign in 1963, which brought a five to six-fold increase in insurance tax on average. The size of churches and the ever dwindling membership led to the desired result – state taxes exceeded the annual income of congregations or swallowed up a significant proportion of it. It was not until the directive *Questions related to religious societies* was adopted in 1967 and also entrenched in the Statute of Religious Associations that congregations were given the right to rent, build or purchase buildings (and also vehicles) for their needs. At the same time, information on this was not particularly widespread in executive committees. This created confusion and obstructions. Churches were relieved of building taxes as of 1 January 1990⁴⁷ and most of the remaining restrictive measures were also done away with in that same year.

In addition to compulsory insurance tax, the rental rates and utilities for clergy were four times higher than usual and higher rates of income tax were applied as well (from 25–80 percent, depending on the income). The rental rate was equalised with the rental rates for workers and service employees in 1980 but income tax rates were not equalised until 1989.⁴⁸ On the other hand, the income tax rate of several leading clergymen had been reduced in the 1970’s already on the basis of their personal petitions in return for “good cooperation” and in some cases, this benefit was also extended to persons close to them.

Unlike ordinary consumers who paid for electricity 4 kopecks per kWh, congregations were charged 25 kopecks per kWh and religious institutions of education paid 11 kopecks per kWh according to a legislative amendment from 1960. Churches and clergymen did not achieve parity with ordinary consumers in the consumption of electricity until the start of 1985. At the same time, nothing changed in heating, for instance, where the former policy of charging churches according to a higher tariff like industrial enterprises continued.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ For information on the taxation of believers and congregations, the pensions of clergymen and other such matters, see also Altnurme, *Eesti Evangeeliumi Luteriusu Kirik*, 99 ff, 128 ff; Sõtšov, *Eesti õigeusu piiskopkond nõukogude religioonipoliitika mõjuväljas*, 92 ff.

⁴⁶ ERA. R-1989.1. 76, 186.

⁴⁷ ERA R-1989.1.340, 60, 67.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁴⁹ EAA.T-15.1.1787, 43.

The above mentioned “struggle for peace” had an economic aspect in addition to its ideological side because since 1958, payments to the Peace Fund of the Soviet Committee for Defending Peace, the umbrella organisation for the “struggle for peace” affiliated with the KGB, became yet another legal option for extracting “tithes” from churches.⁵⁰ Even though the amounts collected (around 100 000–150 000 roubles per year in total collected from all Estonian churches) were spent to ensure peace in the world according to official explanations, these sums were actually treated as the share paid by the churches for maintaining the CRA *apparat* instead.⁵¹ In order to avoid leaving the impression of extorting money from congregations, the amounts collected were sent to church administrations, from where they were transferred to the Peace Fund.⁵²

In order to more effectively control the financial affairs of churches, the Council of People’s Commissars had in 1946 already adopted a decision requiring churches to deposit their monetary resources exclusively in the State Bank. The cash limit in the church treasury was up to 50 roubles. In the interests of political correctness, the central governing bodies of churches were required to underscore this rule.⁵³ The acceptance of donations was allowed only inside the cult building and all donations had to be registered by name since “donation is a matter of the individual conscience of every religious citizen”.⁵⁴ The impression, however, remains that due to the indifference of the executive committees and their ignorance regarding legislation, churches were able to circumvent several requirements. The church organisations of ROC congregations were more firmly under state control and thus behaved more loyally in economic terms.

Propaganda

Alongside administrative restrictions, atheist propaganda also assumed compulsory form and was disseminated primarily through the press, popular scientific literature and lectures. Atheistic propaganda can be thematically categorised as follows: a) general criticism of religion; b) propaganda promoting Soviet lifestyle and ceremonies; c) stories of the conversion of former believers or clergymen; d) attacks against foreign churches and religious movements (particularly the Vatican); e) attacks against local clergymen or religious movements. Topics were in many cases combined together.

Atheist propaganda was of relatively secondary importance during the Stalinist era, when the repair of war damages was at the centre of attention and control of the leading clergymen of the various churches exercised by the security organs and direct repressions solved the religious question. It was not until 1947 that the first post-war articles and publications on atheism were published in the ESSR. A total of 98 atheist articles were published until the end of 1953.⁵⁵ The CPSU CC decision *Concerning serious shortcomings in scientific-atheist propaganda and measures for its improvement* adopted in July of 1954 led to a brief boom in atheist propaganda but excesses that followed throughout the USSR that were noted in the CPSU CC decision *Concerning errors in conducting scientific-atheist*

⁵⁰ See also Jürjo, *Pagulus ja Nõukogude Eesti*, 169 ff.; Sõtšov, *Eesti õigeusu piiskopkond nõukogude religioonipoliitika mõjuväljas*, 129 ff.; Remmel, *Religioonivastane võitlus Eesti NSV-s*, 154 ff.

⁵¹ ERA R-1989.1.225, 161.

⁵² ERA.R-1989.1.158, 21–22.

⁵³ ERA. R-1989.1. 112, 42–43.

⁵⁴ EAA. T-15.1. 954, 16, 24.

⁵⁵ Atko Remmel, *Ateismi ajaloo Eestis (XIX sajandi lõpust kuni aastani 1989)* (On the History of Atheism in Estonia (from the end of the 19th century until 1989)), master’s thesis (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli usuteaduskond, 2004), appendix no. 9, “List of Soviet era atheist literature based on the *Chronicle of Articles and Reviews*”.

propaganda among the population adopted in November of that same year led to the abortion of the campaign. The requirement presented in these decisions for a more scientific approach divided Soviet atheism into two currents in subsequent years: scientific atheism, which was supposed to be science studying religiousness in the name of the victory of atheism and simultaneously also the conveyor of scientific information; the form of atheism that spread at a popular level was denoted by the term spontaneous (or vulgar) atheism.

Regardless of requirements, it was difficult to improve the level of argumentation and instead of a treatment with well-thought out arguments, an avalanche of aggressive atheist articles formed the overall background for the anti-religion campaign that began at the end of the 1950's in which the activities of specific clergymen or congregations were quite frequently attacked. Stories of the conversion of believers and explanations of various miracles were also frequent. These articles often appeared in special columns on atheism in periodicals or newspapers (for instance, *Today is smarter than yesterday* in the newspaper *Edasi*, *The musings of an atheist* in the newspaper *Rahva Hääl*, *The combative atheist* in the newspaper *Pärnu Communist*, etc.). The high point was reached in 1960 when 162 articles on atheism appeared in the press. Five to ten popular scientific publications on atheism also appeared each year over the course of the campaign.⁵⁶ While the reading of articles was not compulsory, it was more difficult to avoid the lectures given by the atheist lecturers from the *Znanie* Society, which similarly to the rest of the society's lectures were held semi-compulsorily in people's workplaces.⁵⁷ The number of atheist lectures extended to 5000 annually yet the ideal that every person would hear 1–2 lectures per year on atheism was nevertheless not achieved. The preparation of most atheism lectures was inevitably rather weak and for this reason, rather crude argumentation characterised their presentations.

The stabilisation that followed the campaign was also reflected in the press. Most of the atheist columns that were still being published were done away with, argumentation improved and the themes of articles moved from overtly attacking believers to propaganda favouring Soviet ceremonies and achievements in atheism. The modernisation of religion was criticised and the incompatibility of science and religion was stressed.

In a fair competition, Soviet ideology should have benefited from argument over questions related to world views, yet the "freedom of Soviet citizens to engage in atheist propaganda" cast a shadow over the potential dispute, depriving believers of the chance to present their viewpoints and to answer their critics regardless of the freedom of speech that had been declared. By the beginning of 1948, all "ideologically harmful" works had been removed from public libraries and the libraries of congregations, for which reason congregations were left with only those works that were absolutely necessary for holding church services. Religious fictional literature was also banned.⁵⁸ This ban also applied to the publication of

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, appendix no. 10, "List of Soviet era atheist literature based on the *Book Chronicle*".

⁵⁷ *Znanie* Society lectures were even used as a kind of disciplinary punishment in later years – absenteeism and other such offences could be atoned for by listening to a generally edifying lecture.

⁵⁸ Piret Lotman, "Tsensuur kui usuvastase võitluse meetod Nõukogude okupatsiooni algul Eestis" (Censorship as a Method of Struggle against Religion at the Beginning of the Soviet Occupation in Estonia), – *Eesti Rahvusraamatukogu toimetised, Uurimusi tsensuurist* (Transactions of Estonian National Library, Studies on Censorship), no. 4 (1995): 129 ff., 138. Vello Salo, *Riik ja kirikud 1940–1991* (The State and Churches 1940–1991), (Tartu: Maarjamaa, 2000), 13. The destruction of the University of Tartu Faculty of Theology library indicated here appears to be erroneous. The EELC Consistory's application submitted in 1947 to have the library placed in the possession of the Theology Institute was apparently granted at least partially (see Altnurme, *Eesti Evangeeliumi Luteriusu Kirik*, 238), because after the University of Tartu Faculty of Theology was restored, a number of works were returned from the Theology Institute according to the library stamps in them (R. Altnurme, e-mail to the author on 11 April 2013).

spiritual literature. Even various practical small publications such as song sheets, church calendars and other such items could be published only with the permission of the local deputy. Isolated exceptions were nevertheless made to demonstrate freedom of publication, primarily under foreign policy considerations. For instance, the EELC yearbook was published in 1957 (the next yearbook was not published until 1982!). The Baptists, however, succeeded in publishing their new songbook in 1975. The application for its publication had been submitted in 1947.⁵⁹ Religious literature sent by mail and from people returning from trips abroad was confiscated. With sufficient self-confidence and persistence, “socially harmless” publications could later be retrieved. Restrictions also applied to advertising religious events (that is church services and gatherings at cemeteries to commemorate the deceased), which could be displayed only on bulletin boards attached to churches – and even in this case, coloured, eye-catching posters were banned.⁶⁰ The number of participants at the religious gatherings at cemeteries to commemorate the deceased was kept low small by not allowing them to be held until a week or two after secular cemetery gatherings.

The ringing of church bells was also considered to be religious propaganda. It was attempted to ban the ringing of church bells altogether in the course of the anti-religion campaign. Later, attempts were made to limit it as much as possible.

The inability to defend themselves publicly was a major source of vexation for clergymen, especially during the campaign. The best possible result was a complaint to the deputy and a notice sent by the deputy to the newspaper editorial office admonishing it not to go too far since this does not correspond to the state’s political needs, but that was all. It cannot, however, be claimed that the standpoints of believers did not reach the public at all – the occasional letter full of spelling and grammatical errors was published during the campaign with propagandistic aims to prove the illiteracy of believers and their remoteness from real life.⁶¹ This was soon followed by a “social debate”, that is articles appealing to people to abandon their erroneous viewpoints and start living “real life”. Articles appeared on a few occasions in *Edasi* on round table discussions with local clergymen that depicted the atheist way of thinking in a positive light. Debates were also held in the Atheos atheism club at the Tallinn Polytechnical Institute and within the framework of some atheist adult education courses. The best known of such debates were the debates held on the outskirts of Rakvere in Vinni in February and April of 1964 between the Baptist clergyman Arpad Arder and several atheistic activists.⁶²

Religious education in schools was also categorised as prohibited religious propaganda. The teaching of confirmation classes in the Lutheran Church was banned in 1949.⁶³ Institutions that prepared clergymen were shut down in 1940 already. The distance learning form of the EELC Higher Theological Examination Commission that later operated under the name EELC Theology Institute was the only institution that offered the opportunity for theological education, along with the correspondence courses of the Baptists and the Seventh-Day

⁵⁹ Pilli, “Towards a Revived Identity”, 151.

⁶⁰ ERA R-1989.2.64, 152.

⁶¹ For instance “Palun mitte teotata...,” *Noorte Hääl*, 18 July 1959.

⁶² K. Tammistu, “Vaidlus jätkub... Kas usk õilistab inimest,” *Rahva Hääl*, 21 February 1964; J. Mets, “Kas usk õpetab inimest,” *Punane Täht*, 15 February 1964; K. Tammistu, “Vaidlus jätkus,” *Rahva Hääl*, 29 April 1964.

⁶³ Toomas Paul, “Leeri likvideerimise lugu” (The Story of Elimination of Confirmation), *Looming* no. 4 (1996) LEHEKÜLJENUMBRID; Altnurme, *Eesti Evangeeliumi Luteriusu Kirik*, 241.

Adventists. Even later the Methodists offered underground courses. The cadre policy of clergymen was under the strict control of deputies starting from theological studies.⁶⁴

On the other hand, there was generally no escape from the atheist world view that Soviet education presented. Atheist propaganda was nevertheless not direct but more of a “concealed” programme, meaning that questions of religion and atheism were considered suggestively within the framework of different subjects. In order to fulfil the requirement of “atheist upbringing” in curricula, the general practice was for the home room teacher to talk about the topic of atheism once a year before Christmas. Optional courses in atheism were held in a few schools but most of them soon died out.

A compulsory subject called Fundamentals of Scientific Atheism was added to the curricula of institutions of higher education in the course of the anti-religion campaign yet the holding of lectures and the way the material was presented depended to a great extent on the general spirit of the university, the availability of a lecturer for the subject and the lecturer’s preferences. This course was taught continuously at the Tallinn Polytechnical Institute only⁶⁵ and the Faculty of Philosophy of that Institute became the local “main faculty of atheism” in 1977.

The “religious renaissance” that followed Stalin’s death was explained by the great influence of religious traditions, for which reason attempts were made to displace them using new “Soviet ceremonies”. The first of this kind in the Soviet Union was the summer festival for young people (popularly known as “brushwood confirmations”). The first such festival in Estonia was held in 1957. Shortly, other Soviet counterparts of the key events in the arc of life followed. Inspiration in developing them was sought from folk customs and church ceremonies were directly co-opted as well: secular gatherings at cemeteries to remember the dead, the name days of children as a substitute for christening, children’s spring celebrations, the ABC of young people, secular funerals. Completely original rites, most of them with ideological content (sending young men off to the army, Komsomol weddings and other such events), were also mixed in.⁶⁶ Success was quickly achieved thanks to the “administrative measures” applied to churches, the active development of secular rites (both practitioners and scholars were included), and the solving of questions at a high state level (the ESSR Ceremonies Commission). Even though this methodology was soon adopted elsewhere in the USSR as well,⁶⁷ ceremonies became the noteworthy distinct attribute of antireligious work in the ESSR and alongside orders and bans, they played an important part

⁶⁴ Cadre policy is examined more closely by Altnurme, *Eesti Evangeeliumi Luteriusu Kirik*, 143 ff.; Sõtšov, *Eesti Õigeusu piiskopkond Stalini ajal*, 150 ff.; Sõtšov, *Eesti Õigeusu Piiskopkond nõukogude religioonipoliitika mõjuväljas*, 144 ff.; Toivo Pilli, *Usu värvid ja varjundid: Eesti vabakoguduste ajaloost ja identiteedist* (The Colours and Shades of Faith: On the History and Identity of Estonia’s Free Congregations), (Tallinn: Allika, 2007), 90 ff.

⁶⁵ H. Sillaste, “Ateistlik kasvatustöö meie kodulinnas” (Work in Atheistic Upbringing in our Home Town), *Edasi*, 20 December 1975.

⁶⁶ Atko Rimmel, “Religioonivastase võitluse korraldusest Nõukogude Eestis” (On anti-religious struggle in Soviet Estonia), *Ajalooline Ajakiri*, no. 3 (2008): 245–280; Marju Kõivupuu, “Siirdeühiskonna siirderiitused” (Transition Rites in Transitional Society), – *Nullindate kultuur: Põlvkondlikud pihtimused* (Culture of the First Decade of the 21st Century: Generational Confessions), no. 2 (Tartu, 2012), 213–246.

⁶⁷ For instance, the introduction of such ceremonies did not begin in the Far East until the mid-1960’s; see O. Federiko, “Коллективные формы атеистической работы на Дальнем Востоке в 50–70-е годы XX в.,” *Власть и управление на востоке России* no. 2 (2009): 93.

in “the disappearance of the church as a cultural factor in the picture of life for most Estonians” by the end of the 1960’s.⁶⁸

Direct Repressions and Surpassing the Limits of Authority

Direct repressions associated with the security “organs” that were implemented on a massive scale until the end of Stalin’s rule differ from the matrix of “administrative measures” or “routine repression”. Action was not undertaken expressly against clergymen – similarly to other people, their “anti-Soviet activity” (Criminal Code Section 58) was the reason for their repression. Yet when trying to provide an overview of the number of repressed persons, the question immediately arises – should only clergymen be counted or should lay persons also be included who were convicted of “activity hostile to Soviet rule” for religious declarations? The following data is not uniform in this respect and is also incomplete. It reflects the current state of research:

– The EELC lost two ministers as murder victims during the first Soviet year already while 15 were deported and 7 were forcibly conscripted into the Red Army. In 1941, former EELC Archbishop Hugo Bernhard Rahamägi was executed.⁶⁹ The wave of arrests carried out in 1944–1946 took 13 clergymen and one preacher from the ranks of the church. They were mostly accused of collaboration with the German authorities. The General Secretary of the Consistory Elmar Lani was also a victim. The next wave in 1948–1949 added another nine clergymen and one preacher to the list.⁷⁰ Pastor Voldemar Kuljus of the congregation of the Church of the Holy Spirit of Tallinn followed in 1950,⁷¹ Pastor Arved Paul from Rõuge in 1952,⁷² and Pastor Paul-Friedrich Saar of the congregation of Tallinn Charles Church in 1953.⁷³ According to the memorial tablet in the EELC Consistory, a total of 23 clergymen perished in 1941–1954.⁷⁴

– In 1940–1941, 14 orthodox clergymen and two lay members of the Synod were arrested and most of these people perished. Two clergymen were murdered by Red Army soldiers, and two clergymen perished in the bombing of Narva. Eight clergymen were mobilised into the Soviet Army. Some of the repressed clergymen renounced their ordination, some committed apostasy and some started collaborating with the new regime. In 1944–1953, 24 clergymen and two members of the Synod were arrested, some of whom perished in Siberia,

⁶⁸ Riho Altnurme, “Eesti Evangeelne Luterlik Kirik Nõukogude Liidus (kuni 1964) = Die Estnische Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in der Sowjetunion (bis 1964),” – *Estland, Lettland und westliches Christentum: Estnisch-Deutsche Beiträge zur Baltischen Kirchengeschichte = Eestimaa, Liivimaa ja Lääne kristlus: Eesti-Saksa uurimusi Baltimaade kirikuloost*, compiled and edited by Reinhard Staats and Siret Rutiku (Kiel: Friedrich Wittig Verlag, 1998), 230.

⁶⁹ Jürjo, *Pagulus ja Nõukogude Eesti*, 151.

⁷⁰ Altnurme, *Eesti Evangeeliumi Luteriusu Kirik*, 253f.

⁷¹ *Küüditamine Eestist Venemaale, Märtsiküüditamine 1949, 2. osa = Deportation from Estonia to Russia, Deportation in March 1949, Volume 2*, compiled by Leo Õispuu, *Poliitilised arreteerimised Eestis*, köide 5 = Political Arrests in Estonia, vol. 5 (Tallinn: Eesti Represseeritute Registri Büroo, 1999), 587; *Poliitilised arreteerimised Eestis 1940–1988, köide 1 = Political arrests in Estonia 1940–1988, volume 1*, compiled and edited by Leo Õispuu (Tallinn: Eesti Represseeritute Registri Büroo, 1996), 198.

⁷² *Nõukogude okupatsioonivõimu poliitilised arreteerimised Eestis, köide 3 = Political arrests in Estonia under Soviet occupation, vol. 3*, compiled by Leo Õispuu (Tallinn: Eesti Memento Liit, 2005), 605.

⁷³ *Poliitilised arreteerimised Eestis 1940–1988, köide 1*, 467.

⁷⁴ There are 24 names on the tablet but Haldur Boris Aareandi was no longer a clergyman when he was repressed.

some returned to Estonia, and the fate of others is unknown to this day.⁷⁵ In 1941–1949, 20 clergymen perished according to information provided by Alexius II.⁷⁶

– Bishop Eduard Profittlich of the Roman Catholic Church was arrested accused of espionage and died in Kirov Prison in 1942. Apostolic administrator Heinrich Werling was deported in 1945.⁷⁷

– From among Baptist clergymen, secretary of the Estonian Baptist Association Harald-Viktor Dahl was arrested and died in forced resettlement.⁷⁸ Clergyman Viling Varalaid died en route to imprisonment. Additionally, at least 11 preachers or active members of the congregation were arrested for anti-Soviet propaganda, of whom three perished. Six preachers were mobilised into the Soviet Army.⁷⁹

– From among Pentecostals, pastor of the Tartu congregation Herman Söderlund (Sederlund), chairman of the board Nikolai Maasing, who perished in pre-trial imprisonment,⁸⁰ and head of the Kärdla congregation Voldemar Jääger were all arrested. Elder of the Narva congregation Aleksander Summanen perished in the bombing of 1942.⁸¹

– The Methodists' Superintendent Martin Pri(i)kask and Pastor Jaan Jaakobsoo (Jaagupsoo) were murdered, Vassili Prii and Pastor Peeter Häng died in Siberia, Superintendent Aleksander Kuum was arrested in 1952 and was released four years later. At least one Methodist preacher was mobilised.⁸²

– Seventh-Day Adventist preacher Feliks Villemson was mobilised but was soon thrown in jail for religious propaganda. His subsequent fate is not known.⁸³

– Old Believers clergyman Lavrenti Grishakov was accused of collaborating with the Germans and imprisoned in 1944 but was released the following year.⁸⁴

– Jehovah's Witnesses were subjected to the most severe repressions. They were deported *in corpore* together with families in 1951. Of the 279 people who were sent to Siberia, 54 were members of the congregation. At least 21 people died.⁸⁵

⁷⁵ Archpriest Andreas Pöld's material in manuscript form in an e-mail to the author (29 April 2013).

⁷⁶ Alexius II, *Õigeusk Eestimaal* (The Orthodox Faith in Estonia), (Tallinn: Revelex, 2009), 397.

⁷⁷ *Küüditamine Eestist Venemaale: juuniküüditamine 1941 & küüditamised 1940–1953 = Deportation from Estonia to Russia: deportation in June 1941 & deportation in 1940–1953*, compiled by Leo Õispuu, Poliitilised arreteerimised Eestis, köide 6 = Political Arrests in Estonia, vol. 6 (Tallinn: "Memento", 2001), 794.

⁷⁸ Pilli, *Usu värvid ja varjundid*, 20.

⁷⁹ *Nõukogude okupatsioonivõimu poliitilised arreteerimised Eestis, köide 3*, (under the key word "Baptist"); Jakob Aunver, "Kristlik kirik kommunistide haardes" (The Christian Church in the Grip of the Communists), – Jakob Aunver, *Aastate kestes* (As Years Went By), (Uppsala: Eesti Vaimulik Raamat, 1961), 103. Information concerning free congregations is rather sketchy and Aunver's data also cannot be completely relied on.

⁸⁰ *Poliitilised arreteerimised Eestis 1940–1988, köide 1*, 483; *Nõukogude okupatsioonivõimu poliitilised arreteerimised Eestis [1940–1988], köide 2 = Political arrests in Estonia under Soviet occupation [1940–1988], vol. 2*, compiled by Leo Õispuu (Tallinn : Eesti Represseeritute Registri Büroo, 1998), 268.

⁸¹ Riho Saard's unpublished manuscript *Represseeritud ja hukkunud Eesti vabakoguduste, metodistikiriku, rooma-katoliku kiriku ja ortodokskiriku vaimulikud 1940–1960* (Repressed and Perished Clergymen of Estonia's Free Congregations and the Methodist, Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches).

⁸² *Eesti ristikangelasi: peatükke Eesti Metodisti Kiriku XX sajandi usukangelastest* (Estonia's Christian Heroes. Chapters on the Religious Heroes of Estonia's Methodist Church in the 20th Century), compiled by Toomas Pajusoo (Tallinn: Eesti Metodisti Kirik, 2006).

⁸³ Voldemar Viirsalu, *Loojangu eel; Hämarus laskub maale* (Before Sunset; Dusk Descends on the Land), (Valga: Seitsemenda Päeva Adventistide Eesti Liit, 2001), 11; *Nõukogude okupatsioonivõimu poliitilised arreteerimised Eestis [1940–1988], köide 2*, 586.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 62 f.

⁸⁵ Silver Silliksaar, *Sinasilmitsi Siberiga: mälestusteraamat 1951. aasta küüditamisest* (You Facing Siberia: Book of Memoirs of the Deportation of 1951), (Tartu: S. Silliksaar, 2001) and <http://www.okupatsioon.ee/et/andmed-ja-nimekirjad/46-silliksaar> (19 April 2013); Aigi Rahi-Tamm, *Teise*

Repressions Affecting Churches in 1941–1953

EELK	ROC	Catholic Church	Baptists	Pentecostals	Methodists	Seventh-Day Adventists	Old Believers	Jehovah's Witnesses
40 clergymen and 3 preachers arrested, 7 clergymen mobilised into the Red Army. 23 clergymen perished.	45 clergymen and 4 lay members of the Synod arrested, 8 clergymen mobilised into the Red Army. At least 20 clergymen perished.	1 clergyman and one high official arrested. 1 clergyman perished.	2 clergymen arrested, both perished; additionally, 11 preachers and active congregation members arrested, of whom 3 perished. 6 preachers were mobilised into the Red Army.	3 clergymen and 1 active member of the congregation arrested, the latter perished. 1 clergyman perished in the bombing.	4 clergymen arrested, of whom 3 perished, 1 clergyman murdered.	1 preacher mobilised and imprisoned, fate unknown.	1 clergyman arrested.	279 people deported, at least 21 perished.

The change in the way the security “organs” worked after the Stalinist era brought with it the mass alteration of repressions into personal repressions. In the name of legal correctness, the general practice was the concealment of the repression of religious activities (for instance the publication and dissemination of religious literature, work among youth) or actions with a religious background (refusal to render military service, fighting for human rights or religious freedom) behind nonreligious reasons: “What a citizen believes is his own personal business as viewed from the perspective of the state and is not subject to orders or bans. However, if his actions present a danger to society, then he is responsible for his actions, not his faith.”⁸⁶ For instance, Herbert Murd, a member of the Methodist

Maailmasõja järgsed massirepressioonid Eestis: allikad ja uurimisseis (Mass Repressions in Estonia after the Second World War: Sources and the State of Research), *Dissertationes historiae Universitatis Tartuensis* 9 (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2004), 46; See also Hans Hermann Dirksen, “Jehovah’s Witnesses under Communist Regimes,” *Religion, State and Society* 30, no. 3 (2002): 231 f.

⁸⁶ Kaljo Oja, “Miks meil on mõned usuvoolud keelatud?” (Why Some Religious Movements Are Banned Here), *Küsimused ja Vastused* (Questions and Answers), no. 3 (1974): 36.

congregation in Pärnu, attracted attention with his work among youth and was charged with vagabondism and sentenced to one year in prison.⁸⁷ The Soviet authorities tried to neutralise EELC deputy pastor Peeter Kaldur by sending him to the army.⁸⁸ On the other hand, young Jehovah's Witnesses Viljar Kaarna and Silver Silliksaar were penalised in 1962–1963 for not fulfilling their military service obligation not on religious grounds,⁸⁹ but because military service was the “honourable duty of citizens of the ESSR” according to Section 104 of the Constitution.

Two clergymen were imprisoned in the post-Stalinist era ESSR. Valga Baptist congregation pastor Dimitri Minyakov was sentenced in 1981 to 5 years in prison in accordance with sections 137, 194¹ and 201¹ as described above.⁹⁰ EELC clergyman Harri Mõtsnik, the author of the works *Vastamisi ateismiga* (Facing Atheism), *Vaimulikuna ateistlikus riigis* (As a Clergyman in an Atheist State) and others, was sentenced in 1985 to three years in prison in accordance with Section 68¹ but the KGB succeeded in “breaking” its victim over the course of a relatively brief term of imprisonment and Mõtsnik was released after he submitted a petition for pardon. The price for his release was public repentance.⁹¹

From the 1960's onward, the confinement of dissidents in mental hospitals run by the KGB was used as a rather effective method. Here efforts were made to “cure” them of antisocial viewpoints.⁹² Many believers were also subjected to this same procedure. The most widely known cases of this type in Estonia are those of the young catholic Ivan Ikkonen (1978)⁹³ and Vello Salum (1980), one of the most famous dissident pastors, in whose case his connection with the insane asylum was used to discredit his viewpoints.⁹⁴

The security “organs” did not initially obstruct the dissemination of religious literature in samizdat form by persons associated with the EELC, which picked up in the 1970's. They apparently considered it sufficiently harmless or thought that it influenced only a small circle of people. Some sort of threshold was apparently crossed in the early 1980's and the KGB began taking steps to counter it, resolving the issue with a positive result for the regime by about 1984. Aside from interrogations, the confiscation of some books, and the “business trip” that Tarmo Soomere was sent on to Moscow, nothing very drastic transpired.⁹⁵ The reaction to the underground Baptists, however, was considerably more severe. Taavet Koop was sentenced in 1977 to three and a half years in prison for printing Bibles and song books in the illegal Baptist print shop.⁹⁶

Compatibility problems arose from time to time between religiousness and Soviet education. The best known case of this kind was probably that of the later clergyman and politician Illar

⁸⁷ Viktor Niitsoo, *Vastupanu, 1955–1985* (Resistance 1955–1985), (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 1997), 113.

⁸⁸ Villu Jürjo, “Kiriklikust vastupanuvõitlusest 1980. aastatel” (On the Religious Resistance Movement in the 1980's), – *Usk vabadusse*, 83 ff.

⁸⁹ Silliksaar. *Sinasilmitsi Siberiga*, 228 ff.

⁹⁰ ERA R-1989.1.251, 16.

⁹¹ See *Dissidentlik liikumine Eestis aastatel 1972–1987: dokumentide kogumik* (The Dissident Movement in Estonia in 1972–1987: Collection of Documents), compiled by Arvo Pesti, Ad Fontes 18 (Tallinn: Rahvusarhiiv, 2009), 613 ff; Niitsoo, *Vastupanu*, 115 f.

⁹² See Peeter Kaasik, “Psühhiaatrilise sundravi kuritarvitamisest Nõukogude Liidus” (The Abuse of Compulsory Psychiatric Treatment in the Soviet Union), *Tuna* no. 4 (2011): 79–96.

⁹³ *Lisandusi mõtete ja uudiste vabale levikule Eestis, 1. kd., kogud 1–7: 1978–1980* (Additions to the Unrestricted Spread of Ideas and News in Estonia, vol. 1, collections 1–7: 1978–1980), (Stockholm: Eesti Vangistatud Vabadusvõitlejate Abistamiskeskus, 1984), 39 ff.

⁹⁴ Saard, “Aktiivsetest režiimivastastest”, 85 ff.

⁹⁵ Tarmo Soomere, “Tõrvikuid läites” (Lighting Torches), *Usk vabadusse*, 248.

⁹⁶ *Nõukogude okupatsioonivõimu poliitilised arreteerimised Eestis, köide 3*, 454.

Hallaste, who was exmatriculated as a third year student from the Tartu State University Faculty of Law in 1979 for getting married in a church wedding and for simultaneously belonging to the church and the Komsomol. The official reason for his exmatriculation was “behaviour unbecoming of a Soviet university student”.⁹⁷

Heightened attention was turned to Seventh-Day Adventist children at the end of the 1970's. They were absent from school on Saturdays and this “violated the obligation to attend school under religious pretences”. For this reason, the parents of pupils in Tartu faced conversations with representatives of their children's school, the Party organisation of their place of employment as well as their local psycho-neurological hospital.⁹⁸ The efforts of the authorities did not go beyond this if results were not achieved in such cases, yet “individual educational work” that was the ideal of atheist propaganda work could also accompany the emergence of problems related to religion in Party decisions. Such educational work could easily take on the proportions of repression in the event that the representative of the state was aggressive or fiercely loyal to the state. To this end, the children of religious families were ascertained in the 1960's through the cooperation of Party and Komsomol committees and schools in Eastern Viru County.⁹⁹ People who had deviated from the correct path could also be worked over in their place of employment. The author of this article is in possession of a tape recording of an “expanded trade union meeting”, in the course of which the deliberation of the personal question of an employee who was a Jehovah's Witness lasted about three and a half hours... Fortunately, this kind of processing required considerable resources, for which reason “individual educational work” was mostly not put in practice. It must be noted at this point that everyone who dealt with atheist propaganda and other such work should not unconditionally be considered the state's underlings – it is abundantly clear that there were also quite a few people for whom their personal agenda and this aspect of state policy coincided.

Believers, however, were not the only ones who did not remain within the limits of the law – it quite often happened that state officials also overstepped the prescribed limits within the framework of the administration of religious associations. On the basis of archival data, it can be said that most of the ideas and actions that repressed churches were indeed the fruit of general policy on religion yet what took place locally did not take place only according to specific requirements from higher up. The main reasons for excesses were the image that vulgar atheist campaigns created of believers as inferior members of society and also the incompetence among state officials arising from the confidentiality of legislation concerning religion. For this reason, the preferences and choices of individual officials proved to be surprisingly important in determining the limits of legislation. As a result, Soviet policy on religion was far from monolithic. Thus believers were left with the choice of either resigning themselves to the situation (because they had rather nebulous notions of their rights as well) or of complaining to the deputy of religious affairs. More aggressive activity was conspicuous in Northeastern Estonia due to both the activeness of the German Baptists living there and the stronger vulgar atheist influence coming from Russia.

The greater portion of excesses took place after new legislation went into effect or the adoption by the Party of decisions on the topic of atheism. For instance, economic inspectors tended to turn their audits into interrogations, set the amounts subject to tax arbitrarily and did not respond to complaints after the instruction of 1961. The matter took

⁹⁷ ERA R-1989.1.220, 59.

⁹⁸ EAA. T-15. 1. 1276, 49–53.

⁹⁹ Estonian National Archives Department in Rakvere (LVMA) 2iv. 1/1.20, 1.

on such serious proportions that the USSR Ministry of Finance finally intervened and recommended that the eagerness of inspectors be curtailed.¹⁰⁰ On the other hand, the diligence of executive committees extended to utter imbecility in implementing bans. Since religious ceremonies were allowed to be carried out in “cult buildings” only, it was concluded in many areas that clergymen had to apply for the appropriate permit even to visit seriously ill or dying persons (even though legislation did not prescribe this). The situation was resolved only after the intervention of the deputy¹⁰¹ and is a good illustration of the extent to which local organs of power were abreast of legislation related to religion. Even though the methodology for preventing work by churches among youth was quite varied, thematic improvisations took place. For instance, when pupils at the church door around Christmas found themselves face to face with their overly zealous teachers or school principal, who were forced to go on patrol either by the “spirit of the times” or by the fact that they belonged to the Commission for Assisting in Supervision of Religious Laws. Even though they had no right to interfere either as teachers or as members of the Commission for Assisting in Supervision of Religious Laws, there are reports that the attempts of teachers to save the young impressionable generation from the bosom of religion ended with ugly scenes. A complaint issued by EELC Archbishop Alfred Tooming in February of 1976 reported a whole series of such grotesque cases (teachers chasing school pupils through the church and other such scenes). The assistant deputy reacted with memos to the Estonian Communist Party Central Committee, the Minister of Education and the chairmen of the executive committees that were involved asking them to ascertain whether these cases were true and if so, to “apply the necessary measures in relation to the culprits”.¹⁰² Reactions from the higher levels of power to other similar “politically imbecilic manifestations”¹⁰³ demonstrate that such instances were only cases of unprompted overkill. It must, however, be stated that excessive zeal was not demonstrated for avoiding such incidents – the issue was reduced to mere external legal correctness for both the Party and the deputies. This is also what Ideology Secretary Vaino Väljas had in mind when he wrote about a girl who was denied admission to university for religious reasons in 1974, on whose behalf Deputy Piip had emotionally stood up: “In my opinion, the correct course of action has been taken but the most successful means for implementing that course of action has not been selected. Comrade Piip’s rather pretentious letter is not very appropriate or necessary.”¹⁰⁴

Summary

Despite being one of the cornerstones of Marxism-Leninism, atheist policy in the Soviet Union was primarily in the service of foreign policy, for which reason it was important to keep everything ostensibly legal. Yet since the USSR was not a state based on the rule of law and even its laws themselves violated human rights and restricted freedom of speech – to say nothing of how the implementation of these laws took place – then based on what has been described above, the USSR violated Article 18 of the General Declaration of Human

¹⁰⁰ EAA.M-599.1s.70, 5.

¹⁰¹ EAA.T-15.1.1032, 20.

¹⁰² ERA R-1989.1.178, 35 ff.

¹⁰³ ERA R-1989.1.233, 61.

¹⁰⁴ Department of Estonian State Archives (ERAF) 1.14.69, 4–9.

Rights, that was formulated in 1948, in all aspects named within it to a greater or lesser extent.¹⁰⁵

At the same time, the question of how unpleasant it was to be religious in the ESSR depends on one's point of view. Even though the situation was far from normal, the implementation of religious policy in the ESSR can be considered relatively lenient compared to the rest of the USSR regardless of the varied methodology used. The most important prerequisite for this "leniency" was the absence of a confrontational religious situation, for which, in turn, there were at least four reasons:

1. control was achieved relatively quickly over the governing bodies of churches;
2. churches maintained a relatively low profile;
3. the discontinuation of church traditions and the relegation of religion to the periphery were achieved through administrative measures and Soviet customs;
4. the weak connection between religion and nationalism.

With the exception of the Stalinist period, primarily compulsory and preventive methods were applied most of the time. Direct repression was applied to those who overstepped the theoretical boundaries set by the state. It was not particularly difficult to demonstrate this kind of "humaneness", especially during the Brezhnev era, when the aim was to slowly choke off churches – all the more so that questions of atheism and religion were utterly irrelevant most of the time.

Administrative methods had exhausted themselves for the most part by 1988, after which the Council of Religious Affairs deputy became more and more an authority that issued recommendations and not orders, and the main decision-making power shifted into the hands of the executive committees, most of which started cooperating with churches. Atheist propaganda had died away by the middle of the decade already. The primary emphasis of KGB action, however, appeared to be aimed at dealing with new religions (Elu Sõna) that had aggressively made inroads in society.

Since archival sources leave an impression that the implementation of the ESSR's religious policy was relatively uncoordinated and chaotic, and far from total control, the "spirit of the times" and the fear deriving from it played an important role in shaping an atmosphere that was hostile towards religion and creating pressure alongside the predominantly preventive methodology described above.

The Estonian Ministry of Education and Science direct financing research theme SF0180026s11 and the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Main Centre for Cultural Theory) have supported this research paper. The author thanks Prof. Riho Altnurme for information and productive discussion; archpriest Andreas Põld, archpriest Mattias Pall, Toivo Pill, Vello Salo, Janis Tobreluts and Tatjana Šor for assistance in checking the accuracy of data concerning repressed clergymen, and Riho Saard, who allowed the author to use materials he has gathered on repressed clergymen.

¹⁰⁵ Article 18: Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. (The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, see <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#atop>).