The Baltic Sea Region
Cultures, Politics, Societies
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A Baltic University Publication
1. Two borderlines

In the Baltic Region there is still a borderline between East and West – concerning religion. The “Icon Wall” has replaced the “Iron Curtain”!

There is, however, a big difference between these two borderlines. The “Iron Curtain” was a real barrier guarded by armed forces in order to block the free movement of people and limit exchange of ideas. The “Icon Wall”, taken as a symbol eastern liturgy and church architecture, is a cultural border, where East and West have met for one thousand years, a line feasible to cross for contacts, exchange and dialog.

This borderline between East and West follows the western border of Russia-Belarus-Ukraine. It is the result of the historical development in the Middle Ages that established the boundaries between the Western Church, under the leadership of Rome, and the Eastern Churches. Through the actions of the Patriarch of Constantinople, Russia, Belarus and Ukraine were incorporated into the fellowship of Greek Orthodox churches.

The map also reveals that there is another borderline in the area, the one between North and South. North of this line, in the four Nordic Countries, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland, and in Estonia, Protestantism is dominant. (In Latvia, the majority is hard to determine.) This dividing line was drawn during the time of the Reformation in the 16th century and confirmed during the era of the Confessional Wars in the 17th century.

In Germany, the dividing line goes from North West to South East, including the Northwestern part of the former West Germany (BRD) and the entire former East Germany (DDR) in the region, where Protestantism is the dominant religion. East of Germany and South of this dividing line The Roman Catholic Church is predominant. In Poland and Lithuania this is quite obvious.

Map 20. Christianity approached the region from three directions around 1,000 AD. About 200 years later, crusaders spread the word, brutally waging religious wars in Finland, Estonia and Livonia. Ill.: Karin Hallgren
2. The complex picture

There are, however, some modifications to be made to this geographical description of religion in the Baltic region. There are Orthodox churches west of the dividing line. In Finland, for instance, there are two established churches with equal rights, a Lutheran Church with about 4.6 million members and an Orthodox Church with 53,000 members. The Orthodox Church presents a valuable contribution to the spiritual life of Finland, not least through its cloister, New Valamo, in Savolaks in Eastern Finland, not far from the present border with Russia.

During the 18th century the three Baltic republics were incorporated into the Russian Empire, a situation that lasted until the end of World War I. The presence of the Orthodox church in these republics is dependent to a large extent upon that fact. Russians moving westwards brought Russian Orthodoxy to the eastern shores of the Baltic. Moreover, Russian religious groups who opposed the official Russian Orthodox Church took refuge in the area that is today the three Baltic republics, adding to the religious diversity of the region. From the 1830s and on, there was a clear intention by the Russian emperors to use the promotion of the Orthodox religion in present-day Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania for political purposes. As the Russian Church law of 1832 was made law there as well, the Lutheran and Catholic Churches lost their previous privileges as established churches. The Orthodox Church became the official church of the state. Conversion was allowed, but only one way: into the Orthodox Church.

In Poland and Lithuania the Roman Catholic Church is predominant. There are, however, other religious groups as well, including two Catholic churches, which have broken all ties with Rome. From the time of the Reformation, Protestant congregations have been established in the two countries, especially in Southern Poland and in Western and Northern Lithuania. Protestants are still there, even if they are a minority.

In the Czech Republic a census in the 1990s showed some interesting information. 433,000 people, 4 per cent of the population, called themselves non-Catholic church members, mainly Protestants. The Catholics were 4 million (39 per cent), according to the same census. About the same number considered themselves agnostics, 4.1 million, 40 per cent of the population. This situation goes back to the development that began in the late Middle Ages, when Czech nationalism and Roman Catholicism were in conflict.

In the Slovak Republic, where the Roman Catholic Church is relatively stronger than in the Czech Republic, roughly 3,242,000 persons (60.5 per cent of the population) claim to be members of that church. Approximately 420,000 persons (7.8 per cent of the population) considered themselves Protestants.

In a similar reverse way Protestants and Catholics are also present in the East. Despite the fact that the Orthodox Church is predominant in Russia, other religious groups are also active.
in Russia and in other parts of the former Soviet Union. The breaking up of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the new openness towards religion in the 1990s have led to better conditions for them as well. The Baptist Church in Russia, for instance that suffered very hard conditions during the Soviet era, has been growing. The Pentecostal Movement is active as are new evangelical movements mainly with an American background.

The Lutherans now have two bishops in St Petersburg for congregations East of Finland and the Baltic republics. One is responsible for Finnish speaking Lutherans outside Finland, mainly in Ingria and Karelia (about 15,000 people). The other heads the other Lutheran congregations – mainly with German background – in the rest of the former Soviet Union.

In Ukraine another phenomenon is crossing the boundaries between East and West, the Uniates. Their history goes back to the end of the 16th century. In 1596, in Brest-Litovsk, the metropolitan of Kiev signed a document agreeing to a union with the Church of Rome, a triumph for Jesuit diplomacy. According to the Brest-Litovsk Union, the members of the Orthodox Church inside the Polish-Lithuanian Empire were taken into the Roman Catholic Church. They maintained their eastern liturgy and church order but acknowledged the Pope as their superior. Great numbers of believers became Uniates and, over the centuries, became strongly committed members of the Roman Catholic Church. They have remained anti-Russian and have become staunchly anti-Communist, a not quite inconsiderable factor in developments during the end of the Soviet period. The Brest-Litovsk Union in 1596, intended to reduce the religious split, in fact increased religious diversity in the region. In consideration of their liturgy, the Uniates belong to an eastern branch of the Christian church. Organizationally, they belong to the Roman Catholic Church. In that way they have added to the complex situation in the region and contributed to the rather strained relations between the Patriarch in Moscow and the Pope of Rome up to the present time.

3. Post-war changes of the map of religion

One religious group has nearly disappeared from the region, the Jews. They were once an important minority in the southeastern part of the Baltic Region – in fact one of the most important territories for Jewish culture and religious life. In the beginning of the 20th century the predominant majority of the Jewish population of the world (90%) lived in the region, chiefly in Poland, Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania. The biggest aggregation of Synagogue buildings in Europe, “Grosse Alte Choral Shul”, was to be found in Vilnius at the beginning of the 20th century where the Jewish population constituted 40% of the population. Today Jewish life is next to extinct in that region, because of the Holocaust and emigration mainly to Israel and the USA.
The Second World War led to another change: The repatriation and mass deportation of the German population from East Prussia. In that way East Prussia and its capital Königsberg, renamed Kaliningrad, ceased to be the stronghold of Protestantism that it had been from the time of the Reformation.

During the post-war period labor migrants and refugees have had an impact on religion in the Baltic region and contributed to religious pluralism. Sweden can be used as an illustrative example. Traditionally Protestant Sweden today has a number of non-Protestant Churches and other religious groups. The Roman Catholic Church is now the second biggest church in Sweden. From 1975 to 2000 the membership of the Roman Catholic Church in Sweden has increased from 70,200 to 158,000 members. That means an increase of 125 per cent. During the same period, the Orthodox and Oriental Churches in Sweden had an increase of 98%. In 2000 the membership of these churches – organized in 14 different church bodies – taken together was close to 100,000, compared to 50,500 in 1975.

The present Swedish religious society also includes a substantial number of followers of other religions, most of them Moslem refugees and asylum seekers. The number of regular attendants at the different mosques in Sweden can be estimated to 100,000. In 1999 a big mosque, which can accommodate 1,500 people, was opened in the center of Stockholm. Other religious groups, such as Buddhists (perhaps 8,000) and Hindus (about 5,000) are harder to determine. The number of Jews, 16,000, has been fairly constant during the last 25 years. The present religious pluralism has not resulted in any real conflicts, except local protest against plans to build a mosque in a local area. The attitude of the churches has been important. When a pyromaniac destroyed the mosque in Trollhättan, the local Lutheran church made a collection towards the reconstruction – an example of good neighbourship!

The vast majority of the Swedish population, 83.5% (7.4 million people) are still members of the national Lutheran Church, Church of Sweden. At the same time religious pluralism inside Swedish society is obvious. This was one of the factors which finally concluded the debate – fifty years of discussions and inquiries – about the relationship between the Church of Sweden and the Swedish State. At the end of the 20th century the Swedish state-church system came to an end. That change was not an isolated Swedish issue. It was part of a common European pattern. In the European context, the Nordic national churches, with their close connections to the national state, have in fact been exceptions in the period after the First World War.
4. Church and State in the West

The relationship between church and state has developed in different ways in the west and the east. By the end of the 19th century in the west, the normal situation in the region was that of a close relationship between the state and the dominant church. In the years following the end of the First World War, a major change occurred, partially because of the new political situation.

In Germany, for instance, where the principalities disappeared, the Evangelical Lutheran and Calvinist Churches had to be reorganized as independent “Landes-kirchen”. There was, however, another important factor as well: during the second half of the 19th century the claim for freedom of religion had grown strong. That claim meant demand for individual freedom and the abolition of all kinds of religious compulsion. It also meant equal rights for different churches and groups, as well as self-determination and autonomy for the dominant church.

Germany set the example of a peaceful solution that was satisfactory to both sides. “Separation between church and state”, as it was proclaimed in the Weimar Constitution of 1919, was carried out in a way favorable to the church. It did not turn the churches into private organizations, left totally on their own. In fact the conditions meant interrelationship and cooperation. The state collected the church taxes as part of the public taxes and supported the work of the church through public grants. In return the church gave a very significant contribution to social welfare through its institutions and the work done by its deacons and deaconesses.

However, during the period between the two World Wars, the relationship between church and state in Germany was not totally harmonious. Questions about schools and religious education were a major field of conflict. This issue is dealt with later on in this article.
The experiences during the Nazi period demonstrated the importance of religion as an independent force in society. In West Germany, during the post-war and Cold War periods, the churches – Catholic and Protestant – were recognized as important factors in society. They were treated as independent, legal entities, which could negotiate with state authorities. Church taxes were collected by means of the state.

5. Church-state relationships in the East

The situation in East Germany was in many ways contrary to that in West Germany, despite the fact that the principle of separation between church and state was declared in East Germany as well. However, the content of the principle was given quite another meaning in East Germany. There, the state took no part in collecting church fees, but often interfered in church affairs and obstructed the work of the church. The relationship between church and state in East Germany was an example of the eastern solution. This is most clearly seen in Russia.

In the Russian Empire the connection between church and state had been very close. The Russian Orthodox Church, almost a state department and thoroughly loyal to the state, was the religious foundation for the Russian state and the Russian emperor for centuries.

The events in 1917 meant a total change. The phrase “separation between church and state” acquired a totally different meaning from that in contemporary Germany. The Bolsheviks, who came to power in November 1917, were clearly hostile towards the church and Christianity, even towards religion as such. In their opinion, the new order in society would cause religion, being unnecessary, to fade away within one or two generations. Until then, the church, as a foreign entity in a Socialist society, had to be controlled and its activities restricted.

As a consequence of an atheistic world view, religious education was totally abolished in the schools. Decrees in 1921 and 1924 also made it illegal for the church to offer regular religious education for children and young people less than 18 years. No more than three children at a time were allowed to receive religious education at home by their parents or a teacher. The Soviet version of freedom of religion got its programmatic form in 1929: “Freedom for religious cult and anti-religious propaganda”. According to that program, the activity of the church was restricted to religious activities inside the church buildings, while the state and anti-religious groups were free to make anti-religious propaganda without restrictions.

Even access to church buildings was restricted. Church buildings were taken away from congregations. Some of the churches were demolished. Others were used for non-religious purposes, such as factories, warehouses, gymnastic halls or museums. They were often used even as propaganda centers for atheism and for the new Socialist world order. Monasteries were closed, access to theological seminaries limited and controlled by the communist party or by state authorities. In spite of the principle of strict separation between church and state, the national church was strictly controlled by the central Soviet agencies, the congregations controlled by local authorities and Communist party representatives, often obstructing the work of the church.

In spite of all that, religion in the Soviet Union refused to die. The Divine Liturgy, the heart of Orthodox piety, was offered in divine services in overcrowded churches. Grandmothers took responsibility for the primary religious instruction of the children at home and took
them to church. That activity, often mocked in the Soviet press, did not cease in the next generation.

The Soviet policy towards religion was not always the same. Periods of oppression were followed by periods of relative calm. In emergency situations the Soviet authorities even called for the support of the church, for instance in crises and time of war.

As a result of World War II, the Soviet outlook was partially “exported” to other countries behind the Iron curtain. The role assigned to the church in the Soviet Union was not satisfactory to the Orthodox Church. It was, however, not totally devastating from the Orthodox point of view, as long as the liturgy was observed. West of the religious dividing line, in countries where the Catholic or Protestant Churches were the dominant religious bodies, the restrictions laid on the churches by Socialist regimes were even harder to stand. In this way, quite unintentionally, the church turned out a potential alternative and a national force, opposite to the Socialist vision of a New World order beyond national limitations. This is what happened with the Catholic Church in Poland and Lithuania, and with the Protestant Churches in East Germany.

One consequence of viewing religion as a marginal phenomenon of no real interest to society was that no official statistics in religious matters were kept. Even today religious statistics from most of the countries of the former east bloc are slightly uncertain.

6. The church and the downfall of communism

The fact that Poland has survived as a nation, in spite of partition and oppression from Russians in the East and Germans in the West, can to a large extent be explained by two factors: the geographical setting and religion. Poland has always had a significant Protestant minority and a substantial number of Jews. The majority of the Poles, however, normally consider themselves good Catholics. Catholicism made Poland and the Polish people different from German Protestantism in the West and the Russian Orthodoxy in the East.

In spite of being a supranational entity, Roman Catholicism became a national force in Poland. For the same reason, the Polish Socialist government after World War II never succeeded in subduing the Catholic Church in Poland, being the main target in its anti-religious politics. When the opposition against the Communist regime grew strong in the late 1970s and 1980s, religion played a major role, supporting and sustaining the members and leaders of “Solidarity”, the new labor union.
The visit to Poland in June 1979 by Pope John Paul II, a Pole by birth, was an important event. His message to the Poles, repeated in many sermons was the words of Jesus to his disciples: “Don’t be afraid” (Mark 6:50). By vindicating human rights, the Roman Catholic Church contributed to a national moral renewal in Poland, that finally brought about a new political order.

In Lithuania, Poles traditionally dominated the Catholic Church. At the beginning of this century the Catholic Church in Lithuania could hardly be considered a national force. In the 1970s, however, it appeared as the only remaining national symbol of the country.

The Lithuanian guerrilla war against the occupants had ceased. The Lithuanian intellectuals were silenced by the Socialist regime. The only major, independent factor in Lithuanian society was the Catholic Church. The church was restricted in its activities, deprived of its religious orders and some church buildings and other property, cut off from the major part of its own leadership hierarchy which was exiled and forced to silence, forbidden to give religious education to children and young people. It was even isolated from the surrounding world.

In spite of all that, and because the church did not submit to the Socialist regime, the Catholic Church in Lithuania became one of the most powerful symbols of the liberation movement. Large crowds of people gathered at Cathedral Square in Vilnius to celebrate mass outside the confiscated cathedral. That was an important manifestation of a development that led to the revival of Lithuania as an independent republic in 1991.

In East Germany the Luther jubilee in 1983 seemed to be an indication of a major change in the policy regarding religion. “The plowshare movement”, was an important force, that literally took the Socialist peace propaganda and turned it against the Socialist regime itself. It was made up mainly of young people who used biblical arguments for their pacifism. The name of the movement was taken from the Book of Isaiah 2:3: The Lord shall judge between the nations, and he shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nations shall not lift up swords against nations, neither shall they learn war any more.

The plowshare symbol was banned by the state, a decision that contributed to strengthening the unity of the movement against the Socialist regime. The activists began to gather in Protestant church buildings and in this way Protestant churches became sanctuaries and regular meeting places for opponents of the actual political order in East Germany, despite the fact that the liberation movement included people without primary religious interests. A development had started that ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall at the end of 1989 and the reunion of Germany in October 1990. During the last period of East Germany as a separate state, Protestant pastors even played a major role in politics.

As a result of the reunion of Germany, the constitution of West Germany – including regulations of church-state issues – was made valid even for former East Germany, where the churches faced new assignments – and new problems – for instance in the field of religious education.

In the last period of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev called on the Russian Orthodox Church for help. This was an indication that the religious situation was in a process of rapid change. Another indication was the fact that church officials were able to participate in political life as members of the People’s Congress. Religion was again recognized as a factor of some importance, church buildings were restored and returned to the Church, cloisters reopened. A new Church law for the Soviet Union, recognizing the existence of the church, was promulgated some months before the demise of the Soviet Union. The time of religious oppression had come to an end.
New, independent states came into being when the Soviet Union ceased to exist in 1991. In some of them, mainly outside our field of interest, religious division proved to be crucial for national unity. In Ukraine old problems came to the surface. The antagonism between the Orthodox Church and the Uniates, who used the eastern liturgy and church order but acknowledged the Pope as their superior became visible. In addition to that a tension within the Orthodox Church itself was brought up; the Orthodox Church in Ukraine was divided in two with one independent group and one subordinate to the patriarch in Moscow. All these three groups consider themselves the legitimate keepers of the religious heritage of the country and the true local Church.

The disappearance of the Soviet system also meant that the borders were opened to influences from the West. Revival movements and evangelical sects immediately exploited the new situation east of the Baltic. As a reaction, a Russian law on Religious Freedom was approved which has meant a safeguard for traditional Russian religion, a provision welcomed by the Russian Orthodox Church.

The development in the East during the last years has meant a rediscovery of the role of the Church in society.

7. In the West: religion as the foundation of society

Religion was also a factor in the formation of the New Europe of the West. The founding fathers of what is today the European Union were committed members of the Catholic Church, well aware of the role of Christianity as the foundation of a new unity in Europe. The opposition to Socialist anti-religious Eastern Europe during the Cold War period was of some importance too.

8. The historical role of the Church in education

In regard to its spread and influence in popular education up to the end of the 19th century, few books can compete with the Catechism, a short confessional summary usually in the form of questions and answers. In many countries around the Baltic Sea the Catechism was the very first book to be printed in the national language. Luther’s Small Catechism was translated and printed in the Estonian language in 1535. The first Lithuanian edition, translated by one of the most influential Lithuanian reformers Martin Maz˙vydas, was printed in Königsberg in 1549.

Even more interesting is what happened in the field of the Latvian language. The first printed book in Latvian was a Catholic catechism printed in Vilnius in 1585. The following

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<th>Natural Rights</th>
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<td>The concept of Natural Rights is fundamental to Western Democracy and the European Community. It means the acknowledgement of individual rights, valid even in opposition to the state. These rights have to be respected by interstate organizations, by states, by international as well as national local governments and authorities. Firmly rooted in the Christian theology of creation, the concept of Natural Rights puts the interests of the individual ahead of those of the state, in a way unknown to the east-European ideology of the Soviet era.</td>
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year another Latvian catechism was published, a translation of Luther’s Small Catechism, printed in Königsberg in 1586.

These two books could serve as an illustration of Latvian Church history during the time of the Reformation. Two different religious centers, Catholic Vilnius and Protestant Königsberg, were actively involved in the development of Latvian religiosity. They were both promoting higher education, an important factor not least during the time of the Reformation. The University in Königsberg and the Academy in Vilnius were important institutions for higher learning. They were also promoting popular religious education in which the Catechism was a major tool.

Luther’s Small Catechism is also an illustration of the close connection between church and education. The catechism contained the central Christian teaching, the Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Words of the institutions of Baptism and Eucharist, the Biblical texts and Luther’s commentary. It was also a prayer book to be used in church and at home, and last but not least it was a book that offered the basic tools for promoting the ability to read. The Catechism was the first real popular book. In Protestant countries it was the basic book for religious education in church, at home and in schools for more than three centuries. School education was considered part of religious education, which the congregation offered its baptized children. Religious education in schools was therefore dependent on the doctrine of the Church.

9. Religious education in secular and post-communist states

As a more complex society asked for a broader public education at the expense of religious education, the role of the Church in public education was gradually reduced and has actually disappeared during the 20th century. Secular society has taken full responsibility for the instruction of the youth. This development has not been totally painless, because of conflicting interests. The religious education issue was in fact one of the major subjects of contention in Europe after World War I.

Germany is again an illuminating example. The interest of the state in creating a homogeneous school system clashed with the interest of the Churches that wanted to use the teaching of religion in the school system for the purpose of confessional instruction. It sometimes also conflicted with the desires of the parents. It was not possible to solve the issue about religious education in public schools at the national level. Different German states tried different solutions, and the issue remained an irritating factor during a major part of the Weimar period. The memory from that period, in combination with the experience of the totalitarian state of the Nazi period, made it important to find a solution to the issue in the period following World War II.

The solution of the church-school issue in West Germany was that religious education was to be kept as part of the public school program, but assigned to be the responsibility of the Churches. In that way the interests of the state as well as of the churches were satisfied, and the choice was left to the parents. One of the difficulties concerning religious education in the public schools in the period between the two World Wars was the religious diversity inside the borders of the states drawn up in the peace treaties.

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania solved that problem in the period between the two world wars by granting cultural autonomy and state support to minority groups.
In Scandinavia the question about the relationship between state-school-church in the matter of education has not been such a burning issue as in Germany. Even there, however, the conditions have changed. A major change concerning religious teaching occurred in Sweden in the 1960s. The solution was different from that in Germany. Religion is still on the schedule of the elementary and secondary schools, as it is seen as being in the interests of Swedish society. The church, however, does not decide the content of the school curriculum in religion, nor is the teaching supervised or led by the church. It has the form of objective teaching about religion. The purpose is no longer to contribute to a Christian upbringing, but to confer knowledge about religion in order to explain one aspect of human life and its effect on society. This is even more important in a pluralistic society.

The situation in the East implied a total change during the 1990s. In countries east of the former “Iron curtain”, Religion was back as a subject in the public schools and was basically compulsory. However, the pupils could be excused, if the parents so requested, and be given an ethical education or an alternative religious education organized by their own church.

This new situation in the 1990s also meant many new problems. There was no experience of teaching religion in a school setting and a lack of satisfactory teaching material. The question of how to satisfy the interests of minority religious groups, not numerous enough to justify separate religious education, was also to be taken into account.

In Lithuania, for example, the possibility of religious education is offered in public school, with ethical education as an alternative. The church appoints special teachers with a pedagogical education approved by the state for teaching religion – chiefly priest and catechists. For minority groups such as the Lutherans it is possible to arrange for religious education with Lutheran teachers by gathering children from different schools. That could often be arranged in cities but not so easily in the Lithuanian countryside.

10. Church life in the post-communist countries in the 1990s

“The church has won the war! How to deal with the peace?”

In the 1990s Russians tried to reorient themselves in “a New World”, where religious belief was a matter of conscience, whereas Communism was a fallen idol. In the political situation at that time in Russia, politicians of entirely different political opinions were trying to make use of the symbolic values represented by the church. The rebuilding of the mighty Church of Our Savior just outside the Kremlin walls in Moscow was a clear symbol of the roll ascribed to the church by the politicians. It was to a large extent paid for by the city of Moscow and by the Russian State.

In a period of deep confusion and the possibility of a historical renewal of Russian society, the Russian Orthodox Church, as the dominant Russian denomination, as well as the minority churches in Russia, got a new importance and had to determine their new role in society.

In Poland, the Roman Catholic Church appeared the winner after a long period of suppression and struggle. It had successfully supported the forces that finally defeated the anti-religious, Socialist regime. That victory also resulted in a possibility to exert an influence on Polish legislation. The result in the form of new laws against abortion and birth control is quite obvious. These laws and the reaction to them, however, revealed a growing discontent with the involvement of the church in state affairs.

During the period of suppression, the Roman Catholic Churches were overcrowded with people. When the suppression was over, church attendance in Poland was declining and
seemed to be more and more like that of the Churches in the West. The tendency, however, changed again in the middle of the decade. By the end of the century church attendance was at the same level as it was in 1989.

All the Churches in Poland, not only the dominant Roman Catholic Church, had to face a new situation in the 1990s. They had to realize that they had a special mission in the field of social work and personal caring. They also had to take new initiatives in the field of religious education for adults. Initiatives do not necessarily emanate from the church leaders and are not always the result of a good economy but of faith and pious devotion among ordinary lay people.

The German occupation of Poland and the Holocaust had left hard feelings and memories in Poland. As early as the 1960s the Roman Catholic Church in Poland decided to deal with that issue. As an act of reconciliation the Polish Cardinal sent a message to the German Catholic bishops, but he got no answer. In the late 1990s the Roman Catholic Church in Poland, stimulated by the example of the pope John Paul II, has confessed its sins in regard to the Holocaust and the hatred towards the Germans and asked for forgiveness.

In Lithuania religious life seemed to prosper in the 1990s. Church buildings were given back to the congregations and restored. Different confessions, not only the Catholic Church, were supported by the state. The services in the churches were well attended, as they were during the last years of the Soviet period. There was, however, towards the middle of the decade some decline in attendance, and, more seriously, a growing discontent among young people: “Why do the church leaders not meet the new challenges? Why is the church not willing to move?”

One reason for that reaction was that the Catholic hierarchy in Lithuania had been exiled for about 25 years and cut off from the development in the rest of the Roman Catholic world. For those reasons the renewal of Roman Catholicism, which is the result of the Second Vatican Council, had only partially influenced Lithuanian Catholicism.

An important new element in Catholic Church life in Lithuania in the 1990s was the return of the religious orders. Through them new roads for international contacts have been opened, which is important not least for young people. The contribution of the religious orders to Catholic spirituality in Lithuania is probably also important as an alternative to the enticement of new religious movements from the West. These movements have been consciously active, here as in other parts of the former East.

In the former East Germany two patterns are apparent. First: the time for the Protestant churches to be the places for protest and forming the future is over. The crowds have left the churches. Second: the Church has not been able to change the predominance of the secular youth inaugural ceremonies, or non-religious “confirmation” once introduced by the Communist regime as an alternative to the church confirmation. The church is also losing members because of migration westwards. The introduction of church taxes has also brought about withdrawal from church membership.
In spite of the fact that the Protestant Churches in former East Germany only have 25% of the population as their members (the majority of the population have no church membership at all), they still see themselves as “Folk churches” with a mission to the entire population.

11. The Church in secular societies

There has been no official campaign against religion in the countries west of the former “Iron curtain”. However, there has been a continuing process of secularization. The Churches are no longer expected to be the source of values and norms in society. The voice of the Church is but one of many in the marketplace of ideas in a pluralistic and secular society. Religion is, at best, one aspect of modern culture. Even in private life, religion plays a minor role today.

A general pattern in the Western countries in the Baltic Region is a decline in church membership and church attendance. There is no real difference between Catholic and Protestant churches. With few exceptions there is not even a difference between state-affiliated churches and free-churches. The only growing churches are mainly the new Churches of immigrants, American inspired evangelical movements with a fundamentalist character, and sects such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Mormons.

There is, however, another pattern just as obvious. The Churches are still important on special occasions, both in public and private life. Festival days, where the church service is part of the family celebration, are still important in the social calendar. The role of religion is apparent in times of personal crisis and catastrophes.

The most important contacts between churches and individuals are at the momentous occasions in life: baptism, confirmation, weddings and funerals. The church offers not only a ceremony of celebration, but also a pattern for interpreting life and what it is all about. The tenability of these rituals of passage is also an indication of demand for a spiritual dimension. Part of that pattern is also the need for a sense of belonging in a time of rapid change. Even in regions with few regular churchgoers the common response to proposals to the closing of church buildings has been: “Don’t take away our church!” The church building as such is still a matter of identity.

In the 20th century, secular society has taken full responsibility for social welfare, leaving a minor part to the diaconia (social work) of the churches, mainly as a personal service to individuals. In this process, tensions between secular society and churches have been inevitable. Today, however, new ways and means of cooperation are in sight. Secular society has had to realize that it is not able to fulfill all the needs of its inhabitants any more. There is a new tendency to ask for help from the churches and from voluntary organizations within or outside the churches. The reason is the so-called “custody crisis”, mainly a question of staff and money. A new role for religion in society is also appearing as a result of an increasing sense of a lack of ethics.

In many countries there is a new interest for religion and a search for spirituality. That does not, however, mean that people are returning to the church. It is mainly a change of attitude and it manifests itself as private religiosity outside the traditional and inherited forms of religious life.

The church must ask the question: what does it mean to be a Church in a modern society, and what is the mission of the Church towards the people of the country and in a worldwide setting? This has, in fact, been a major field of research, studies and the makings of programs in many Churches around the Baltic.
8. Invention of Culture
Baumann, Gerd, *Contesting Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996
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9 and 10. The region and its landscapes & Populating the Baltic region


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