

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

THE BALTIC AREA

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How fared Orthodoxy on the shores of the Baltic Sea?¹ To be sure, this is an interesting subject of inquiry. First, taking all different branches of Orthodoxy together, it might indeed be true that it is the largest Christian confession in Estonia and Latvia. Second, the presence of the Estonian and Latvian Autonomous Orthodox Churches, and the eparchy of Vilnius and Lithuania, which profess allegiance to the Moscow Patriarchate, was closely connected to Russian tsarist expansionism. For that reason, Churches and eparchy lay embedded in a predominant, in the recent past sometimes overtly hostile, non-Russian cultural setting. Third, the linkage with the spiritual centre Moscow remained strong over the last 15 years, but proved to be problematic. Because of the distance between the Baltic societies on the one hand and the not so well integrated Russian minority on the other, and because of historic experience, everything Russian or Soviet is being looked upon unfavourably. Fourth, in their desire to leave this past behind, indigenous as well as ethnic Russian Orthodox broke away from the Moscow Patriarchate in the 1990s. The Priestless Old Believers' leadership in Latvia on the contrary established contacts with the Patriarchate, thus creating discord among the faithful as well.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 the Baltic region underwent important changes, some for the better and some for the worse. Sometimes eye-catching but more often less pretentious architecture altered the skylines of Tallinn, Rīga and Vilnius considerably. Though renovation and new construction witness to a more healthy investment climate, the economy is still far from reaching its 1989 level. Due to the integration of the Baltic region into European and Transatlantic organisations the foreign press focussed intensely on the position of the large ethnic Russian minorities in Estonia and Latvia. In the wake of this media coverage, the Estonian capital Tallinn was crowned 'prostitution centre of Europe' and Narva on the Russian/Estonian border the 'ugliest city of Europe'. Trafficking of women

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¹ This review of the Baltic region deals primarily with the period 2002-2005. For the years 1998-2001 see F. Hoppenbrouwers, 'Baltische landen', *CO*, 53 (2001), pp. 242-255.

and very high suicide rates, for example, have been disconcerting phenomena of the transformation. The uneven distribution of newly acquired wealth led to greater differences among citizens, thus fuelling discontent. Gradually it dawned on the Balts that the change from an ideological, totalitarian and stagnant social order to a dynamic society of free individuals carries with it hazards as well as promises.

The year 2004 was an eventful one. On 2 April, the flags of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were hoisted at the headquarters of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in Brussels. And, during a solemn ceremony in Dublin on 1 May, the Baltic countries joined the European Union (EU) as well. The 'New Europe' is politically very much oriented towards the West, and, unlike the 'Old Europe', at least the Baltic governments have been keen supporters of the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Culture and Politics

Because of its marginalisation in the tsarist and Soviet past and ever-increasing Europeanization, national identity still is a major concern throughout post-communist Central and Eastern Europe. This is especially the case with small countries like Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, where very low fertility rates induce fear of cultural and even physical extinction.² Since 1990, the Baltic nations have been struggling for economic sovereignty from their Russian neighbour which itself is trying to keep some grip on the region. In Estonia, ethnic Russian citizens and non-citizens make up about 25 percent of the pop-

ulation, in Latvia 28 percent and in Lithuania 6 percent. The fear of foreign domination therefore remained strong after 1990 and added to existing worries. But lacking a Tolstoy, a Malevich or a Shostakovich, a sense of cultural inferiority may play a role, too.

The Russian minorities and their Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian neighbours often live in more or less separated worlds. The music they listen to, the television and radio channels they choose, the news they read, and, in Estonia, the national party they vote for, everything is different, form as well as content. Therefore, the Balts ask themselves: Could these former 'occupants', who immigrated to the region in Soviet times, be some kind of fifth columnists? Opinion polls among non-citizens, for instance, have repeatedly shown that their support for NATO and EU fails to reach the 50 percent mark. History still affects the emotional climate. While Russian historiography, state officials and Patriarch Alexey II all alike depict the Red Army soldiers as liberators to which the Balts should pay respect, the Baltic peoples themselves hold a different opinion. They view them as the spearhead of a genocidal regime that indiscriminately deported and murdered 'class enemies', destroyed national culture and persecuted religion. Furthermore, the old bear may have lost its teeth, but it can still lash out mighty claws. Since the tiny Baltic countries

² L. Halman, R. Luijkx and M. van Zundert, *Atlas of European Values* (Leiden, 2005), p. 20. National pride in Lithuania is lowest in Europe, a bit more intense in Estonia and quite outspoken in Latvia.

economically depend a great deal on their neighbour, the former superpower is able to keep a grip on the region. Russia now wields non-lethal weapons, but in the eye of many it remains an oppressive and expansive force.

Domestic and international politics very much revolves around minority-rights issues. In both Latvia and Estonia, Russian schools have had to introduce the national tongue as part of the curriculum, and as a teaching language next to Russian. Civil servants in Estonia must fulfil specific language requirements and non-citizens need to pass a citizenship exam. The language skills required are low among ethnic Russians, but then again state policies lack financial and institutional support. 'Mother Russia' voiced severe criticism, and at times the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) joined in.

World War II remains open to varying and controversial interpretations. The plaque of an Estonian SS soldier with iconic Stahlhelm, Iron Cross and Mauser machinegun pointing east, which was unveiled in Pärnu in 2002, not surprisingly provided the Russian government with an opportunity to insist once more on the tainted past of their 'near abroad' neighbours.³ Still, the monument clearly depicts the predicament in which the Baltics found themselves: being eaten by wolves or by bears is all the same. The Soviet occupation in 1940 and subsequent 'liberation' by Nazi Germany in 1941 led many Balts to assume a pro-German stance.

The nationality question also reflects on the appreciation of Orthodoxy and the religious and national self-identification of the Orthodox in the Baltic region.

A schism within Estonian Orthodoxy, which remained without a solution for a long time, became a serious topic in foreign relations. The Estonian government sided with the breakaway Church, while Russian President Boris Yeltsin and his successor, Vladimir Putin, came to the support of the Moscow loyalists. The Patriarch's visit to Estonia was postponed over and over again during a ten-year period. He returned to visit his native country only after a formal settlement in 2003. Within the Latvian Orthodox Church tensions arose between ethnic Russian and Latvian clergymen in the 1990s. In the eparchy of Vilnius and Lithuania a recent experiment with a Lithuanian-language liturgy replacing Old Church Slavonic turned out to be a bridge too far for the rather conservative, mostly ethnic Russian flock.

Health and Demography

The vital health and demographical statistics quite exactly mirror the social, economic, political and even emotional situation. Thus, they provide some tangible information concerning the intensity with which the Baltic population experienced 15 years of post-communist transformation: these were trying times. Great hopes and expectations preceded the 1990s, but they gave way to

³ The Estonian and Latvian Waffen-SS divisions participated in the military campaigns on the Eastern front and had no involvement with the extermination of Eastern European Jews. However, individual members, who previously acted as police auxiliaries, may have or actually did.

disappointment about the changes thereafter. It has been only from the second half of the 1990s that Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians have begun to feel that they have a better hold on life.

Marriage and fertility rates, which had started to slide after 1989, were on their way up again after 1994/1995 and confirmed a renewed hope that even the Asian economic crisis (1998) could not quench. While cohabitation is on the increase and 50 percent of all marriages last only ten to eleven years, just one fifth of all Latvian newly-weds had their union blessed in church.⁴ However, the number of new-born Balts has been far too low to compensate for mortality and emigration. The case of a Vilnius mother, who recently gave birth to her fifteenth child, is indeed the very rare exception to a very strict rule. In Estonia the abortion figure dropped in 2004 to 12,625, which is a little more than one-third of that in 1970 and a similar development could be observed in Lithuania. Still, the abortion rate is high, especially in post-Soviet countries. Thanks to educational programs about health risks of all sorts, the cases of sexually transmitted diseases, dangerous driving, and smoking and drinking are on the decline, but they are still higher than in the beginning of the 1990s. On the brink of the new millennium life expectancy at birth had surpassed that of the first years of independence. As a consequence, the Baltic region will soon be confronted with experience the hard facts of an ageing population as well. And, what is more, it will face the toughest challenge of all EU countries over the next four decades.

AIDS took on epidemic proportions. Between 2003 and 2004, the number of registered HIV-infections grew tenfold in Estonia to 4,600 and tripled in Latvia, reaching a peak at 3,033. Lithuania saw an increase of 215 percent to 840 cases during the same period. This has resulted mainly from the use of intravenous drugs and from heterosexual prostitution. After all, the attitude of Baltic society towards gay sex is not very becoming for individuals who allegedly indulge a narcissist and hedonistic personality. Meanwhile sexual enlightenment outside the family sphere and the advertising and usage of contraceptives, however, incurred the wrath of ecclesiastical authorities. The mental health of the Baltic region remains fragile. In 2002 the Lithuanians figured among the most pessimistic people worldwide, but a 2004 Gallup survey showed that they had become more optimistic about their future, and even a little more than their Latvian and Estonian neighbours.⁵ Nevertheless, when it comes to suicide Lithuania has been the world leader for more than a decade, with Estonia (4th) and Latvia (6th) in close pursuit. Suicide has been high ever since World War II, but the trend peaked in the mid-1990s and then remained at roughly the same level the following

⁴ The geographical distribution of church weddings seems to indicate that a Latvian ethnic background plays a decisive role.

⁵ Researchers offered improvement of the economical situation, higher wages and forthcoming EU membership as an explanation. However, in this respect Lithuania did not differ from the other two Baltic countries.

years.⁶ These facts are mind-boggling: every week dozens of Balts take their lives and this is year after year.⁷

In spite of increased health problems, it must be clear that the change from communism to a market economy has not significantly deteriorated real life circumstances. The overall medical condition of the Balts is actually changing for the better. Yet even if World Health Organization officials applaud the transformation of the health care system,⁸ it should be asked whether criteria like equal access to healthcare and affordability have been met.

*Religious Landscape*⁹

While there were centres of Orthodox life here and there, the Lutheran Church (Estonia and Latvia) and the Roman Catholic Church (Lithuania and the Latvian region of Latgallia) dominated the Baltic region from the Middle Ages to World War II. A new, Orthodox flavour was added in the 17th century and onwards. The territories of present day Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania became a sanctuary for the Priestless Old Believers (*bezpopovtsy*), who fled persecution by the tsarist authorities. In the 18th and 19th centuries the Baltic area was conquered by the Russian Empire and the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) engaged in missionary activities, while the state discriminated against dominant religion, favoured conversion and encouraged migration of ethnic Russians to the amber coast. Next, Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Methodists and some rather small Protestant communities found their way to the region at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries.

Religious diversity has increased further since the 1980s, when so-called New Religious Movements (NRMs)¹⁰ started

⁶ That is, based on data from 2002 and 2003. Quite remarkably most Central and Eastern European countries are among the top twenty in the world. Female suicide is relatively high in most former Soviet republics.

⁷ The case of Lithuania shows how difficult it is to give clear-cut explanations. It was a rare phenomenon before 1940, religion is supposed to have a mitigating influence, alcohol abuse is not unique and economically the country fairs much better than Soviet republics, where suicide seldom occurs.

⁸ See for example 'WHO evaluates a decade of Estonia's primary health care reform', 5 January 2005; www.euro.who.int/eprise/main/WHO/Progs/CMA/pressnotes/20050623_4

⁹ In September 2005 the author visited Latvia and Lithuania and met with official and less official representatives of the Latvian and Russian Orthodox Churches and of the Old Believers Church as well. Written sources: *The Baltic Times* (2002-2006), Forum 18 News Service (www.forum18.org), *Glaube in der 2. Welt*, 30-33 (2002-2005), *Irenikon*, 75-78 (2002-2005), Keston Institute News Channels (www.keston.org), *Orthodoxie Aktuell. Informationen aus der orthodoxen Kirche* (2001-2005), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (www.rferl.org), Russia Religion News, (www.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews) and *Service Orthodoxe de Presse* 264-304 (2001-2006). See also F. Hoppenbrouwers, 'Romancing Freedom. Church and Society in the Baltic States after the Fall of the Berlin Wall', *Religion, State & Society*, 27 (1999), 2, pp. 162-173.

¹⁰ NRMs are often referred to with the

to appear on the religious scene. With about thirteen hundred self-declared practitioners in Lithuania in 2001 and twelve registered Dievturi communities in Latvia in 2004, the reinvention of paganism as an institutionalised indigenous religion has been quite remarkable. Even though these modern-day newcomers are not very successful numerically, they testify to the cultural differentiation process the Baltic region is going through.

Where NRMs are concerned, it has become clear that the fall of the Iron Curtain did not induce an all-out invasion of dangerously persuasive sects. On the contrary, the issue has been grossly overstated. In Lithuania, for example, many instances came under police or secret service investigation, but all except one failed to meet the legal criteria.¹¹ A popular NRM is the so-called New Generation Church of the Latvian Alexy Ledayev, who can boast some three thousand followers in Latvia and a few tens in Lithuania. Ledayev started off as a preacher of an extreme charismatic 'prosperity gospel' in the early 1990s, but later turned to more mainstream evangelical teachings.¹² In recent years there has been much ado about the rising popularity of Satanism. Indeed, satanic or sacrilegious graffiti scar streets and graveyards, but as such they demonstrate first of all the bad taste of a youth subculture. Every now and then, however, grave acts of vandalism occur. During the nights of 30 October and 1 November 2004, fifty-three crosses were torn from graves of Orthodox nuns at the Rīga Pokrov cemetery. One of them was put upside down into the ground. Meanwhile there is not much love lost

between traditional confessions either. In fact, ecumenism is lingering. Surely, church leaders send each other Christmas and Easter greetings and on state occasions they stand next to their Orthodox, Roman Catholic or Protestant brothers or sisters, yet profound relations or theological discussions are extremely rare, at all levels. Here the same mechanism seems to be at work as in the post-communist state building process. The different religious communities are also passing through a period of emphatic identity seeking. Hence, most of them exhibit a rather inwardly oriented view, weak interest in open debate, common language, or converging beliefs. The previously discussed separation among ethnic subcultures plays its role, but the general decline of ecumenical fervour after 1990 has affected the Baltic region as well. Common action may be provoked, however, by current events like the terrorist attack on the United States in 2001, when memorial services were organised, or by moral issues, as when the first ever Rīga Gay Pride Parade on 23 July 2005 led to a multi-confessional protest. It had been framed in the question of gay marriage, a no-go area in the conservative Latvian society, and mustered an unusual mix of religiously motivated demonstrators, populist politicians, hardened

derogatory, vague and therefore misleading label 'sects'.

¹¹ Offences under the Penal Code, violation of human rights, freedoms and public safety.

¹² For a wider view of the changing Lithuanian religious landscape, see www.religija.lt

traditionalists, right-wing extremists, and violent homophobes. Painting a more or less clear picture of thirty-three European countries, including Russia, the Caucasus and Turkey, the 2005 *Atlas of European Values* shows how differently the Balts look upon religion, its profession, creeds and significance in life.¹³ When it comes to matters of faith Estonia takes up the rear. Together with Bulgaria and the Czech Republic it is home, for example, to the largest number of religiously unaffiliated people, while just 25 percent of them ever go to church. In Latvia the number of more or less regular churchgoers climbs to 60 percent; in Lithuania it reaches 80 percent. Looking at the percentage of people who pray at least once a week, again the Estonians end up last, the Latvians are in the lower half of the ranking and the Lithuanians in the middle bracket. It comes, therefore, as no surprise that Estonia emerges as the most secularised of the three Baltic countries.¹⁴ A majority of the Lithuanians for their part greatly value the Roman Catholic *rites of passage*, which mark the most important stages of life. Latvians finally find themselves somewhere in the middle. Interestingly enough, Lithuanians display a strong, Italian like interest for the occult. Actually, their trust in telepathy is highest in Europe. This phenomenon is exemplified by many commercial television shows and above all by the close relations of the impeached President Rolandas Paksas (2003/2004) to the Georgian seer Lena Lolishvili. The attitude of the Balts toward religion is, generally speaking, sympathetic and it became in fact more favourable during the 1990s.

Looking for answers, the Balts appreciate the Church's spiritual dimension much more than its social or moral teachings. They tend to take a laid-back attitude to traditional religion.

Even though pockets of ethnic Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians are present within the Baltic Orthodox Churches, these churches remain closely linked to Russian culture, while the ROC abroad provides much support. The ties between ethnicity and religion are especially noticeable among Old Believers, where conversion ideally would mean entering an entirely new cultural context of often forgotten traditions.¹⁵ These Orthodox Churches make up reasonably small minorities with relatively few practicing believers. As Diaspora churches, they constitute rather closely-knit communities, which seldom interfere with national and international politics. They are rarely drawn into the limelight, though prolonged and extensive media attention was given to the 1993 schism between mainly ethnic Estonians and ethnic Russians of the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate.

¹³ L. Halman, R. Luijckx and M. van Zundert, *Atlas of European Values*, pp. 60-73.

¹⁴ This has frequently been ascribed to the individualising tendencies within the traditional, one time predominant Lutheran Church.

¹⁵ For the Baltic, Pomor'e Old Believers, see V. Baranovskii and G. Potashenko, *Staroverie Baltii i Pol'shi: Kratkii istoricheskii i biograficheskii slovar'* (Vilnius, 2005). This reference book is available on the Internet as well: <http://kopajglubze.boom.ru/staroverie.htm>

Orthodoxy in Estonia

The 2000 census inquired after the religious allegiance of the 1.12 million members of the population 15 years old and above. The results turned out to be remarkably low. Only 152,000 of all Estonian residents stated their membership in the Lutheran Church. About 143,000 believers – 63 percent of them Russian speakers – belonged to one of the two branches of Estonian Orthodoxy. Baptists and Roman Catholics make up rather small minorities with, respectively, 6,000 and 5,700 adherents. With 2,500 members the Old Believer community is fairly small. The faithful are mostly ethnic Russians, but there are 91 Estonians, some Ukrainians and Byelorussians as well.

In the 1880s German philologist Jakob Grimm drew from Estonian folklore some unique fairy tales, which we still enjoy today. The relations between ethnic Estonian and ethnic Russian Orthodox believers, however, have been less fairy tale like for many years. Together with their supporting pillars, the Estonian and Russian governments, and the Ecumenical and Moscow Patriarchates, they became part of a trans-European stand-off. Starting off as a clash among conflicting characters in 1993, two Orthodox jurisdictions came into being, the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (EOC) and the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church of the Ecumenical Patriarchate (EAOC). Subsequently the Estonian government identified the latter as the sole legal successor to the interwar Orthodox Church. At the local level, emotions, property, and registration issues were at stake. At

the international level, next to border treaties, economic interests and occasional deportations of diplomat-spies, the treatment of the ethnic Russian majority at large got caught up in the controversy as well. Finally, at a spiritual level the highest Orthodox Church leaders questioned each other's authority over the newly-independent republics of the former Soviet Union. The conflict over Estonia became so tense that official contacts were suspended for a short while in 2000/2001.

Things cooled down a bit in 2002, when the Estonian government officially recognised the EOC. A kind of legal separation was pronounced. On the one hand the rival EAOC retained its official status as the sole successor to the autocephalous interwar Orthodox Church, while on the other hand, the EOC could register under its proper name and uphold its own legal claim. However, it was made clear by the then-Minister of the Interior Ain Seppik that any demand was a matter for the court to decide. As of 17 April the EOC was officially registered with the Ministry of the Interior, and soon thereafter its parishes as well. In October a deal was struck between the EOC and the Ministry. Paying a monthly rent of € 0.06 per edifice, the Church received the right to use 14 churches and four buildings over a period of 50 years. For its part, the EAOC, who became the legal owner in October 1993, ceded its property rights to the Estonian state and received some € 2.1 million in funding in return. The execution of this compromise solution, however, seems to have suffered from bureaucratic complications.

Nominally the EOC¹⁶ consists of some 150,000 believers, but in reality the number of active members is much lower. Meanwhile, infrastructure is well-developed. There are several deaneries with about 30 parishes. Since 1989 seven new churches have been built and two more are now under construction. No exception to the post-communist pattern, most of the 41 priests and 27 deacons were ordained after 1990. The Pühtitsa Dormition convent is not only an important national spiritual centre, but is such also for the entire ROC. The convent now houses some 150 sisters and novices under the guidance of mother superior Varvara (Trofimova). The Church's leader is Metropolitan Kornely (Yakobs) of Tallinn and all Estonia, who in 1990 succeeded current Russian Orthodox Patriarch Alexy II. He became an archbishop in 1995 and a metropolitan in 2000.

A major occasion was the long-awaited visit of the supreme head of the ROC, who was greeted on his native grounds once again on 25-30 September 2003. He was accompanied by Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, responsible for foreign church affairs, Patriarchal dignitaries and Metropolitan Alexandr of Rīga and all Latvia. His Holiness visited several localities in Estonia, among which the Pühtitsa monastery and the Lasnamäe neighbourhood in Tallinn, where he laid the first stone of a new parish church. On 26 and 27 September the Patriarch celebrated Holy Liturgy in the Alexandr Nevsky Cathedral in Tallinn, moving the faithful to tears. On 26 September he met with PM Juhan Parts. At the press conference that followed, he com-

plained that not all juridical problems had been solved. He also regretted the 'grave error' of anti-Russian sentiment in the 1990s, 'when the Russian speaking population, which is intimately connected to the Orthodox Church, was regarded as second class'.¹⁷ On 30 September His Holiness was awarded with the Märjamaa cross by state president Arnold Rüütel. Arguing that the Patriarch was once a KGB agent, opposition parties Pro Patria Union and Moderates protested, but the Foreign Ministry explained that the decoration merely was a matter of protocol. After all, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew had received the Terra Mariana Cross as well. On the last day of his visit Patriarch Alexy II unexpectedly met with Metropolitan Stephanos (Charalambidis) of Tallinn and all Estonia of the breakaway EAO, who had asked for such a meeting. They discussed the situation of Estonian Orthodoxy, mutual relations and the property issue.

Another remarkable event in church life was the canonisation of military chaplain Sergy Florinsky of Rakvere as a martyr on 17 July 2002. Florinsky had been executed by Estonian Bolsheviks in 1918. On 17 November 2005, the well-known Estonian composer Arvo Pärt, a native from Rakvere, was presented with the Order of the Venerable Sergy of Radonezh by Metropolitan Kornely. In his congratulatory message Patriarch Alexy II commended the way, in which

¹⁶ Estonian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate (www.orthodox.ee).

¹⁷ 'Tallinn: Visite officielle du patriarche de Moscou en Estonie', *Service Orthodoxe de Presse*, 282 (2003), 11, pp. 10-12.

the artist bound the liturgical and theological traditions of East and West together.

The EAOE¹⁸ claims approximately 20,000 believers, who are mainly ethnic Estonians. They are provided with spiritual care in some 59 parishes by 24 priests and 8 deacons. One priest is active as an army chaplain and another as chaplain at Tartu prison. The Church has been engaged in renovation, rebuilding and restructuring as much as any other. For instance, the metropolitan curia left its cramped offices at Roosikrantsi Street for the Saint Platon centre at the nearby, more prestigious Wismari Street on 31 July 2002. That same year, a seminary annex at a catechetical school opened its doors. Gradually the courses are taking shape, and in November 2004 the EAOE and the University of Tartu joined hands. There are now about thirty-five students. Two lay persons study theology in Thessaloniki, and two clerics and three lay persons are working on doctoral degrees in Paris, Thessaloniki and Tartu. An attempt is now under way to revive monastic life. Over the last ten years some 2,500 baptisms were performed. When Bishop Simon (Kruchkov) of Abydos unexpectedly died in 1998, current Metropolitan Stephanos was elected in 1999 to head the EAOE.

Undoubtedly important to church life was the second visit of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew from 3 to 5 July 2003, which preceded the commemoration of 80 years of EAOE church autonomy that same month. On 27 October the 1935 church statutes were replaced by more up-to-date ones. No

less significant was the reburial of the remains of the martyr Saints Mikhail and Nikolai. Together with Bishop Platon of Tallinn, the two parish priests, who are Saints of the EOC as well, had been murdered by retreating Red Army soldiers in 1919. Their bodies were exhumed on 30 May 2005 during renovation work on the Dormition church in Tartu.

The last general assembly of the EAOE took place on 16 June 2005, at which Metropolitan Stephanos presented his 'moral report' of the Church. His presentation offered an authentic insight in recent church developments. In the area of youth work, the church leader applauded various Christmas activities, and in particular the celebration of a Holy Liturgy in Pärnu exclusively for children, which had attracted about 150 4 to 12-year olds and their parents. Still, his criticism on this aspect of church life was severe. Parish catechesis is practically nonexistent. Furthermore, he felt unhappy that no suggestions had been made to attract youngsters to church, while suggestions, which had been proposed by the youth organisation Noorte Liit, had gone without consequences. 'Everything is possible with a good will and a genuine desire to break out of our sclerotic and outdated working methods. I tell you honestly, our youngsters are bored with the chronic monotony and lack of joy and optimism in our parish communities', the Metropolitan added.¹⁹ Acknowledging the Church's

¹⁸ Eesti Apostlik-Õigeusu Kirik (www.eoc.ee) and Orthodox Church of Estonia (www.orthodoxa.org).

¹⁹ Metropolitan Stephan, 'Assemblée

limited resources to deal with poverty issues, he reminded his audience of the introduction of a food bank in December 2004.

Furthermore, Metropolitan Stephanos complained in general terms about the attitude of the ROC at the level of Orthodoxy worldwide. Actually, he spoke mildly and carefully, much more than in the recent past. On 19 January 2005, the church leader deplored that Russian Orthodox representatives refused to participate in official events, if representatives of the EAOC were present. In addition, he denounced the entanglement of Kremlin and Patriarchal policies. Despite appearances, he clarified, the Estonian religious landscape wasn't peaceful at all and the EAOC stood under great pressure. The Estonian case was an 'anomaly' and should be characterised as 'under Soviet occupation'.²⁰

Harbouring rich and age-old traditions, the Union of Old Believer Communities of Estonia²¹ was revived in 1995. Geographically, the Old Believers are concentrated in the eastern parts of Estonia. There is one parish in Tallinn and another one in Tartu, while nine others are located in the predominantly Russian Lake Peipsi region. With the exception of the village Tähtvere, the population there is predominantly Russian and mixed marriages are rare. These last fifteen years, pre-war traditions were reinvigorated, like the celebration of a yearly all-Estonian church feast day. In Suur Kolkja the Old Believer children enjoy religion class at school. A remarkable feature of modern Old Believers is the participation of women in the local parish councils, or even fulfilling the

task of *nastavnik* (teacher, educator). It attests to a general trend of 'feminisation' in most modern day churches.²² A very serious problem for the community is the theft of icons. In Varnja and Kükita robbers repeatedly burgled the parish church. A mere glimpse at church statistics at the grass-root level clearly reveals that great discrepancies exist between estimated, self-declared and practising believers.²³ For instance, there are about fifteen thousand Old Believers by birth, while the 2000 census counted just 2,500. Four hundred eighty-three Old Believers live in Tartu, one of the major Estonian cities, but only 140 are registered with the local community.

*Latvia*²⁴

With 2.3 million inhabitants in 2005 Latvia is the second largest of the three Baltic countries. According to a 2003 survey 25.1 percent of all Latvians considered themselves to be Orthodox, 24.7 percent Lutheran, 21.2 percent Catholic, 2.7 percent Old Believer, 2.1 percent Baptist, 0.3 percent Adventist, and 0.1

générale du 16 juin 2005. Rapport moral' (15 June 2005): www.orthodoxa.org/FR/estonie/messages/AG05FR.htm

²⁰ O.S., 'Kritik an Moskauer Patriarchat', *Glaube in der 2. Welt*, 33 (2005), 3, p. 5.

²¹ Russian Old Believers in Estonia (www.starover.ee).

²² Estonian and Lithuanian statistics reveal percentages of 60 to 65 (women) and 35 to 40 (men).

²³ This observation is valid with respect to most traditional confessions.

²⁴ Ofitsalnjy Web-server Latvyskoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi (www.pareizticiba.lv) and Latvyskaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov (www.orthodox.lv).

percent Jewish. Some 9 percent said that they believed, but did not relate to a specific confession. The percentage of atheists was among the highest in Europe, 11.9 percent. Of the 1,031 people questioned two revealed themselves as pagans and one as a Buddhist. In the capital Rīga there are 41.2 percent Orthodox believers, 16.8 percent Lutherans, 15.7 percent Roman Catholics and 9.7 percent atheists. Lutherans are most numerous in the Vidzemē, Kursemē and Zemgalē region; Catholics and Old Believers in Latgallia. In 2003 the Department of Religious Affairs disclosed the following statistic: 350,000 Orthodox, 247,931 Catholics, 370,000 Lutherans, 3,849 Seventh-Day Adventists, 6,503 Baptists, and an unbelievably low number of Old Believers, 2,281.²⁵ With respect to the registered parishes and organisations in 2004, the Lutherans took the lead (341), followed by Roman Catholics (251), Orthodox (118), Baptists (93), Pentecostals (48), Old-believers (67), and Seventh-day Adventists (50).

Following Latvia's declaration of independence on 4 May 1990, the Moscow Patriarchate granted the eparchy of Rīga autonomy. Under the guidance of Archbishop Alexandr (Kudryashov) of Rīga and all Latvia, who became a metropolitan on 25 February 2002, the rebuilding of the Latvian Orthodox Church (LOC)²⁶ has gradually progressed. At Christmas 1992 the first Holy Liturgy in many years was improvised in the Nativity of Christ Cathedral at Brīvības ielā, which had been transformed into a planetarium with coffee shop in the 1960s. A long period of ren-

ovation followed. Once the interior redecoration was finished, attention shifted to the cathedral's exterior. In the presence of Professor Imants Freibergs, who represented his wife, Latvian President Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, the financial campaign 'Light' took off on 8 January 2003. It turned out to be a success, as some € 650,000 have been collected from companies and businessman. Looking somewhat embarrassed, one of the organisers, poet and former ambassador to the Kremlin Jānis Peters, explained in May 2005: 'This spiritual project could not do without a thing as sinful as money.'²⁷ In November the President extended an invitation to Patriarch Alexy II to visit Latvia, which His Holiness gladly accepted.

The LOC is relatively well provided with clergy and religious persons. There are 84 priests, 12 deacons and some 40 seminarians are now studying at Katoļu ielā. The nunnery of Rīga dates back to the 19th century, but was never closed during Soviet times. As far as Orthodox monks are concerned, in Jelgavā an attempt is made at reviving a men's monastery. In 18 churches services are provided in the Latvian language, and in the cathedral there is one Holy

²⁵ 'Religious situation in Latvia', *Blagovest-info/Russkaya Linya* (22 July 2003): www.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/03071.html#49

²⁶ *Ofitsalnyj Web-server Latvyskoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi* (www.pareizticiba.lv) and *Latvyskaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov* (www.orthodox.lv).

²⁷ 'Large-scale restoration works of main Orthodox cathedral begins in Latvia', *Itar-Tass* (20 May 2005): <http://itar-tass.com>

Liturgy in Latvian each Sunday. In the countryside the LOC faces a common problem: the population is rapidly aging and the young are leaving for the city. In some villages 95 percent of the inhabitants are elderly people. The villages are poverty-stricken, alcohol and drug abuse is rampant and social ties are weak. Ideally a priest is a man of religion, a fundraiser, an architect and a social worker as well.

Church-State relations have been strained at times, and every now and then the LOC has felt a need to publicly underline its rights, and those of its faithful. In 2002 Archbishop Alexandr readily agreed, when Minister for State Reform Affairs Jānis Krūmiņš proposed to make Orthodox Christmas (7 January) a public holiday, because it was 'both Christian and fair',²⁸ but on 26 January 2004 the Church Synod criticised the introduction of Latvian as a teaching language in Russian schools. After apologising for meddling with state matters, it pointed out that the State should make each resident feel at home and respect his or her religion and nationality. The assembly cited the example of the ethnic Latvian martyr Saint Archbishop of Rīga and all Latvia Jānis Pommer,²⁹ who allegedly never distinguished people by their ethnicity. Awaiting the restitution of the 18th century Saint Peter and Paul church, the Church is now facing up to an interesting example of bureaucratic sabotage. In court the property question was decided in its favour, but the present owner, the city of Rīga, did not move on the issue. 'Some extreme nationalists scream that we are "the wrong kind of Church" and that the Patriarchate of

Constantinople is the legal successor to the Russian Orthodox Church', Metropolitan Alexandr lamented on 18 January 2006.³⁰ Still, the problem is more complicated than that. The church has been the stage of the chamber choir Ave Sol since 1989.

Referring to the 2000 social doctrine of the ROC, the Latvian Orthodox Sobor commented quite extensively upon the Latvian society in transformation, too. In its 'Declaration on the Health of the Human Person and the People' of 24 September 2001 the church council wanted to express its opinion on ethical questions of a sexual, medical, biomedical and social nature. Issues were, among others, access to medical care, euthanasia, marriage and abortion, homosexuality, same sex marriage, pornography, family and children.³¹ Spiritual life was profoundly marked by three important events. In a sensational find the un-decomposed remains of Jānis Pommer were discovered on the Rīga Pokrov cemetery on 15 July 2003 and taken in solemn procession to the Nativ-

²⁸ 'Christmas again', *Baltic Times* (17-23 January 2002), p. 5. At present there are no signs to indicate that this well-meant proposal will become law.

²⁹ For Jānis Pommer, see here below.

³⁰ 'Singing and dancing in the sanctuary of the oldest Orthodox church in Latvia Riga' (18 January 2006); www.interfax-religion.com

³¹ 'Opredelenie. Sobora Latvyskoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi o zdorov'i lichnosti i naroda' (Riga, 24 September 2001); www.pareizticiba.lv/Main_ru/Menu_files/Church_today/Ofdoc/Sobori/2001/Zdorovje.html

ity Cathedral on 3 October. Several thousands gathered to pay their respects to the interwar church leader, whose savage murder in 1934 is still shrouded in mystery. Depending on ethnic sympathies, the culprit is either the Soviet secret service NKVD or Latvian President Kārlis Ulmanis. Pommer was beatified in 2001. Travelling back to Russia the famous Tikhvin icon went on display in Rīga, where it had passed 55 years earlier on its flight to the United States. The exposition in the Nativity Cathedral on 21-23 June 2004 was an international multi-confessional occasion which attracted some 300,000 visitors, among them Latvian President Viķe-Freiberga, PM Indulis Emsis, Metropolitan Kornely, Old Believers, Cardinal Jānis Pujāts and Lutheran Archbishop Jānis Vanags. Featuring Mother Mary, the jewel-encrusted golden icon was painted by Saint Luke and taken in the fifth century from Jerusalem to Constantinople, where it disappeared. It miraculously reappeared in 1383, when fishermen saw it hovering above Lake Ladoga, and in 1560 Tsar Ivan the Terrible had the Dormition Monastery built near Tikhvin to house the icon. A painted copy, which was rubbed against the original to absorb a part of its spiritual power, is now on permanent display in the Orthodox cathedral. More modest was the exposition of the relics of Russian Grand Duchess Elisabeth and her associate nun Barbara, which were travelling from Jerusalem to Moscow in the summer of 2004. The two pious women had been murdered by Bolsheviks in 1918 and were sanctified by the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCA) in 1981 and by the

ROC in 1992. Several miracles were recorded during the festivities.

In 1994 the Latvian Orthodox priest-monk Viktor Kontuzorov left the LOC and joined the ROCA.³² He was consecrated Bishop of Daugavpils and Latvia the following year and elevated to the rank of archbishop in November 2000. Presently Archbishop Viktor heads the Latvian Autonomous Orthodox Church (LAOC), which consists of 14 parishes all over Latvia. Until now he was unsuccessful in obtaining official registration as an 'Orthodox Church', since the 1995 Latvian law on religion states in §7.3 that 'Congregations of the same denomination may establish only one religious association...'³³ Therefore, there can be only one registered Orthodox Church, i.e. the LOC. Because in 2003 signs appeared that the Latvian government would want to change the clause, the LOC soon reacted. In May the secretary of the Church Synod underlined the separation of Church and State and the possibility of discord within Orthodoxy. On 18 July the Sobor issued a statement in which it laid a claim on the exclusive use of the epithet 'Orthodox', but it did not oppose legal registration of the breakaway church. In 2003, Archbishop Viktor explained the consequences of non-registration.

³² Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church (www.roac.ru) and the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church web site for the Dioceses of the Americas (www.roacusa.org).

³³ See 'Latvia', in *Laws on Religion and the State in Post-Communist Europe*, eds. S. Ferrari and W. Cole Durham Jr. (Leuven, 2004), p. 167.

The LAOC is not allowed to teach religion in schools or to visit its parishioners in nursing homes and in hospital without risking a fine. Renovation of his Daugavpils cathedral church proved to be impossible and in 2001 the city administration even made him take down new crosses from the church's roof because it had not yet been registered. Since then, however, problems have eased. On 27 April 2003, for example, the city granted permission to hold an Easter procession around the church. Meanwhile, the refusal to register or to change the law has led to a religious freedom issue. This is the opinion of the British lawyer John Warwick Montgomery, who won the case of the Bessarabian Orthodox Church against the Republic of Moldova at the European Court of Human Rights, and of the head of the Latvian Religious Affairs Office Dr Ringolds Balodis.³⁴ In 2005, the Religious Affairs Administration proposed to amend §7.3 once again, but neither the Government nor the advisory Ecclesiastical Council, which represents the main confessions,³⁵ reacted. Archbishop Viktor sustained numerous burns in an arson attack on his residence in the cathedral church on 28 August 2003.

In December 2005 the Rīga based Alexandr Men' Foundation celebrated its fifteenth birthday. From the outset its main goal has been the promotion of inter-religious and ecumenical dialogue, just as its spiritual father Alexandr Men' had wanted it to be. Over the years, it spent much effort in improving the relations between different confessions and nationalities, organising national and

international conferences, and publishing and translating a great variety of books on theology, spirituality and religious dialogue. Last year the fifteenth annual almanac *Christianos* appeared. The Foundation also participated in an exchange program for students of the Moscow State University for Humanities in cooperation with the University of Latvia and various governmental offices in 2005. In this manner the Foundation wants to foster the spiritual and intellectual heritage of Father Alexandr, which is decried in influential Russian Orthodox fundamentalist circles ever since his brutal murder on 9 September 1990. In the specific Diaspora situation of the LOC interest seems almost, if not entirely absent.

With seventy to eighty thousand members and more than fifty communities, the largest Old Believers Church (OBC) on the shores of the Baltic Sea is located in Latvia.³⁶ These Old Believer parishes are affiliated to the Latvian Central Council of the Old-Orthodox Pomorian Church. The Church's spiritual and intellectual centre is the Grebenchikov community in Rīga, which is said to be the largest worldwide and boasts some seven thousand parishioners. The faith-

³⁴ Balodis labeled it 'one of the major abuses of religious freedom'. R. Balodis, 'Church and State in Latvia', in *Law and Religion in Post-Communist Europe*, p. 153.

³⁵ Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Old Believer, Baptist, and Jewish.

³⁶ Some local information at Starover-Pomorets (www.starover-pomorec.lv/index.php).

ful are often described as peaceful and pacifist, an attitude which resulted from over two centuries of often violent persecution.

Nowadays much attention is being paid to the revival of the old church rituals and to singing. Ritual and song, of course, are essential elements of the *Staroverie*. Problematic, at least for some, is the inescapable presence of women in the church. In the villages they will sing liturgy, direct the church choir, or even, in absence of a *nastavnik*, fulfil his tasks themselves. Liturgical singing, to start with, is a man's job, a *nastavnik* was recorded as saying. However, the introduction of a church hierarchy and subsequently of all seven sacraments by the *bezpopovtsy* really stirs up emotions. The supporters argue that the OBC lost its ecclesial fullness when the Old Believers broke with the ROC in the 1660s, its bishops were murdered and, as a consequence, priesthood died out. Therefore, church life was reduced to a state of emergency and anomaly, which a few centuries later was mistaken for authentic and normative. According to some the ROC should provide the apostolic succession needed to legitimately ordain an Old Believer bishop, while opponents decry this as *nikonianstvo*³⁷ – a return to heterodoxy.

In 2002 the determined pursuit of rapprochement with the ROC led to the downfall of *glavny nastavnik* (head teacher, educator) Ioann Mirolyubov of the Grebenchikov parish, who was stripped from office on 14 July. The community managers were removed as well. Following this palace revolution of almost Shakespearian dimensions, they were replaced with former ally Tri-

fon Kustikov and Parliamentarian Pavel Maximov, a novice Old Believer, whose interests purportedly are more worldly than spiritual. After all, the parish not only keeps centuries-old traditions alive, but priceless books, icons and artefacts as well. And from the huge parish building on the river Daugava real estate in the city centre and building land worth millions and millions of euros in much sought after areas of Rīga are being administered. The Latvian Religious Affairs Office subsequently gave its blessing to the change of leadership, court cases followed and finally on 16 January 2004 the Latvian Supreme Court ruled against the appellants. The judges put an end to a conflict, which started in 1995. That year Mirolyubov succeeded to Aleksy Karataov, who was violently banished from the Grebenchikov parish because of his mismanagement of the community's worldly goods. Already in 2001 the wind started to blow cold, when he stepped down as head of the Central Council at the national Sobor in Daugavpils. He was replaced with his predecessor in Rīga.³⁸ In January 2006 Mirolyubov was a deacon of the ROC and functioned as secretary of the commission for the relations with the Old Believers under Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad.

History is an important part of the Old Believers' cultural life. In 2004, the Grebenchikov faithful celebrated the

³⁷ In the 1660s Patriarch Nikon's church reform prompted the Old Believers to leave the ROC.

³⁸ Various news articles. See www.newstime.ru and <http://religare.ru>

245th anniversary of their community with a solemn procession, a religious service and a historical conference. On 29 April 2004 the scientific symposium 'Staroverie in Latvia: Historical experiences, culture and contemporary developments in society' took place. In his word of welcome *glavny nastavnik* Trifon Kustikov underlined the task of the present generation of Old Believers to hand over faith to the next. 'It cannot be that this branch of the Church of Christ, and its fruits, which God will judge, would fall to the ground', he told his audience. Among the guests were LOC Metropolitan Alexandr, an Old Believer by birth, representatives of the Latvian government and Russian Ambassador to Latvia Viktor Kalyuzhnyj. Another happy anniversary was the commemoration of the 4 April 1905 ukase of Tsar Nicholas II, which put a legal end to the persecution of the Old Believers in the Russian Empire.

Since Mirolyubov's departure for Moscow there is not just a Sunday school for children at the Grebenchikov parish, but one for adults as well. The main goal is a better understanding of the Old Church Slavonic liturgical language, and a greater appreciation thereof as well. Recently, a confessional Old Believers secondary school came into being, but the program is still a matter of serious concern. Over the years three groups of Old Believers crystallised: children, adults and learned adults.

*Lithuania*³⁹

The population of the largest Baltic country shrunk considerably over the last 15 years. At 3.42 million inhabitants in 2005 their number had reached

the 1981 level. According to the 2001 census 80 percent of all Lithuanians call themselves Roman-Catholic. They are distributed over 675 parishes. With 140,000 adherents, the Russian Orthodox eparchy of Vilnius and Lithuania remains the second largest confession. Lithuanian Orthodox as well as Roman Catholics describe mutual relations as 'cold'. In third place comes the OBC with a flock of twenty-seven thousand. The Evangelical Lutheran Church has some twenty thousand members in 58 parishes, primarily in the Nemunas region in the southwest. After a split into two branches some years ago, the number of Evangelical Reformed believers now totals at approximately seven thousand. There are 17 communities. The six Sunni Muslim communities count 2,700 members. Approximately 300 people adhere to the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. Finally, the Jewish community numbers roughly four thousand, mostly elderly people, of which only twelve hundred belong to one of seven different Jewish confessions. The Lithuanian law recognises nine traditional confessions: the aforementioned denominations and the Karaites. This recognition means, among other things, that they are allowed to register marriages, set up schools and provide religious instruction in public schools. Furthermore they enjoy exemption from social security taxes for clergy and employees and from VAT on utilities, such as electricity and telephone. All nine received state funding in 2005.

³⁹ Russkaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov', Litovskaya Eparxiya (www.orthodoxy.lt).

The eparchy of Vilnius and Lithuania is one of the smallest of the ROC. It comprises three deaneries, notably Klaipėda-Kaunas, which stretches from the shores of the Baltic Sea to the centre of the country, Visaginas in the northeast and Vilnius in the southeast. With roughly 40 church buildings the archdiocese presently has fifty-two parishes, which are mainly situated along the border with Belarus. Their number is relatively high, but as a matter of fact, most of them are not very much alive. About twenty-three villages are left with barely any believers, and liturgical services have been reduced to a minimum of one, two or three times a year. For example, the feast of the titular saint may be the only occasion, on which Holy Liturgy is celebrated. The situation has become sadly clear: the young leave their native villages, the old stay on and eventually die. Furthermore the number of practicing Orthodox is very low. Of the 140,000 perhaps 20 percent participate more or less regularly in liturgical services, live a religious life, and educate their children according to tradition. Undoubtedly the number of believers will further decline in the near future. The two main reasons for this are mixed marriages and absorption into the Roman Catholic Church, which is being described as an attractive alternative for youngsters. Demographic developments and the closure of the Ignalina nuclear power plant, however, will undoubtedly reduce the number of ethnic Russians even further. What is more, the eparchy will undergo a process of Lithuanisation in the next decades. The number of Lithuanian-speaking Orthodox is very low now, no more than a hundred, but

that figure will increase, once ethnic Russians start to switch over to Lithuanian as their primary language. The first native-language liturgy ever was tried out last year by one of the three ethnic Lithuanian priests, but following complaints of the believers the experiment was finished prematurely. Although the Old Church Slavonic liturgical language will remain a mystery for most believers their whole life, they are very conservative in this respect and feel very uncomfortable with any change whatsoever. The translators will have to go back to work. Still, change is inevitable, because the 210,000 Russians and forty thousand Byelorussians cannot provide the cultural backbone necessary. In Latvia, on the contrary, some 45 percent of all believers are Russian speakers.

Presently there are 34 priests and two deacons, from the very young to the very old, who are actively engaged in parish service. The Church's spiritual centre is the Holy Ghost Monastery for men at the picturesque Aušros vartų in Vilnius. Five priest-monks, one deacon-monk, five married priests and five married deacons presently serve liturgy and provide pastoral care there. In the Maria Magdalena convent in Vilnius, there now live 12 religious sisters. The eparchy of Vilnius and Lithuania is headed by the old Metropolitan Khrizostom (Martyshkin) since 1990. He has been very vocal in his criticism of the ROC in the past, but had kept silent for a long while. In 2003, *Sovershenno Sekretno* (Top Secret) did an interview. The Metropolitan reiterated previous observations regarding the Soviet past of major church officials and subsequently reaf-

firmed the need to put as much distance as possible between the Church and the Russian State. Clearly implying that the situation of the Orthodox Churches in Estonia and Latvia continued to be much less favourable, his description of Church-State arrangements in Lithuania was a positive one. Besides, Metropolitan Khrizostom regretted the cold relations between Orthodox and Catholics hierarchs. The common discourse on the 'expansion of the Catholic church in Russia' he found rather exaggerated, not the right approach to things.⁴⁰

The eparchy of Vilnius and Lithuania is a small-scale establishment and its future is sought, first and foremost, within the ROC. Social activities have been developed, but the scope is rather limited due to a lack of means. Every parish has its own youth groups with song, discussion and sports. The Church attends to some two to three thousand youngsters. An event of note was the Lithuanian visit of the relics of Grand Duchess Elisabeth of Russia and of her associate nun, Sr. Barbara, in the summer of 2004.

There is not much known about the Old Believers of Lithuania. Civil court proceedings in Vilnius, however, made it clear that the seeds of discord were planted among the Lithuanian faithful as well. Following the registration of 39 Old Believer communities, the judge affirmed in April and June 2003 the legitimacy thereof. Indeed, the Lithuanian Old Believers have experienced an eventful history ever since World War II. The number of parishes has remained more or less the same, yet the number

of believers and *nastavniki* dropped dramatically during the Soviet era. The Church's presence was reduced to the countryside, but as soon as Lithuania regained its independence in 1991, communities were revived or newly established in cities like Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Zarasai and Panevėžys. The Vilnius community is the centre of the Lithuanian Old Believers Church, and, growing rapidly in the 1990s, it laid a claim for the spiritual leadership of the Baltic *Staroverie*. At the end of the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s the number of baptisms rose considerably as did the number of worshippers, especially at feast-days. A Sunday school opened its door and a choir was organised. The number of believers varies between ten and fifteen thousand, while an impressive 4,800 take part in church life on a more or less regular basis.⁴¹

Schisms in parishes, competing factions within the church leadership, material difficulties and the inability to repossess property that was stolen away by the communists are the more worldly worries. At the same time the wounds of the past need healing, too: godlessness, lack of responsibility and submissiveness. Presently, 59 Lithuanian Old Believers' parishes are registered with the Supreme Council of the Old Orthodox Pomorian Church in Lithuania.

⁴⁰ L. Velekhov, 'Interview with Metropolitan Khrizostom of Vilnius and Lithuania', *Sovershenno Sekretno* (July, 2003), 7; www.stetson.edu/~psteeves/rel-news/0307e.html

⁴¹ V.B[aranovsky], 'Vil'nyusskaya (Vilenskaya) Obtschina' [Vilnius, 2005]; www.kopajglubze.boom.ru/slovar/v.htm

Even though mixed marriages have been frequent in the past, and there are quite a few Lithuanians with Old Believers' roots, they represent just a tiny religious minority.⁴²

⁴² G. Potashenko, 'The Culture of Old Believers of Baltic States' [Vilnius, 2005]; www.ldm.lt/Naujausiosparodos/Old_Believers_b.en.htm