

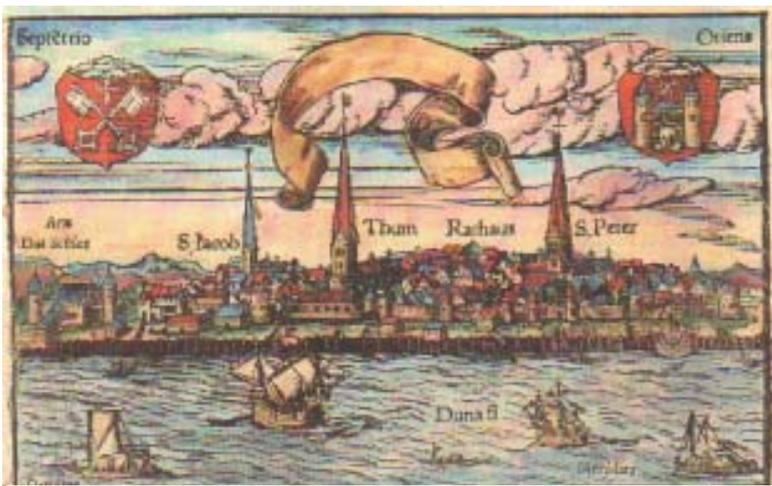
The Lutheran Church and Latvian National Identity

*Rev. Dr. Fritz Traugott Kristbergs,
“Differentiation and Identity: Towards an Understanding of Ethnic Ministry”
(D.Min. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1996), chapter 2*

The history of the Lutheran church in Latvia may be seen as a process of differentiation from the image of the dominantly Germanic church of the Reformation. This process culminated in the formation of the Latvian Lutheran church of independent Latvia. The increasing separation of the Lutheran church from its German antecedents corresponded to the increased integration of the Latvian Lutheran church with the emergence of a distinct Latvian consciousness and identity. During the exile after the Second World War the church became an even greater factor in defining and maintaining Latvian cultural identity.

The increasing degree of differentiation between the German Lutheran church and the evolving Latvian Lutheran church can be seen in several areas of church and cultural life. Translation of the Bible in Latvian and the publication of Latvian language hymnals, prayer books and sermon collections were major factors in the development of both a separate Latvian Lutheran church and a Latvian national consciousness. Systems differentiation occurred in the democratization of church life, specifically in the developing rights of parishes in relation to the German barons and in the separation of administrative authority between the German and Latvian churches. The evolution of a Latvian Lutheran church may be characterized by its increasingly high degree of differentiation between Germanic cultural and ecclesiastical influences and the decreasing level of differentiation between the Latvian Lutheran church and the Latvian nation.

The Lutheran Reformation in Latvia



The Lutheran church in Latvia has been an important factor in the emergence, development and establishment of a Latvian national identity. The Lutheran reformation had already reached Riga by late 1521 and by 1524 congregations were formed in Riga to preach to native Latvians in their own language, rather than the dominant German

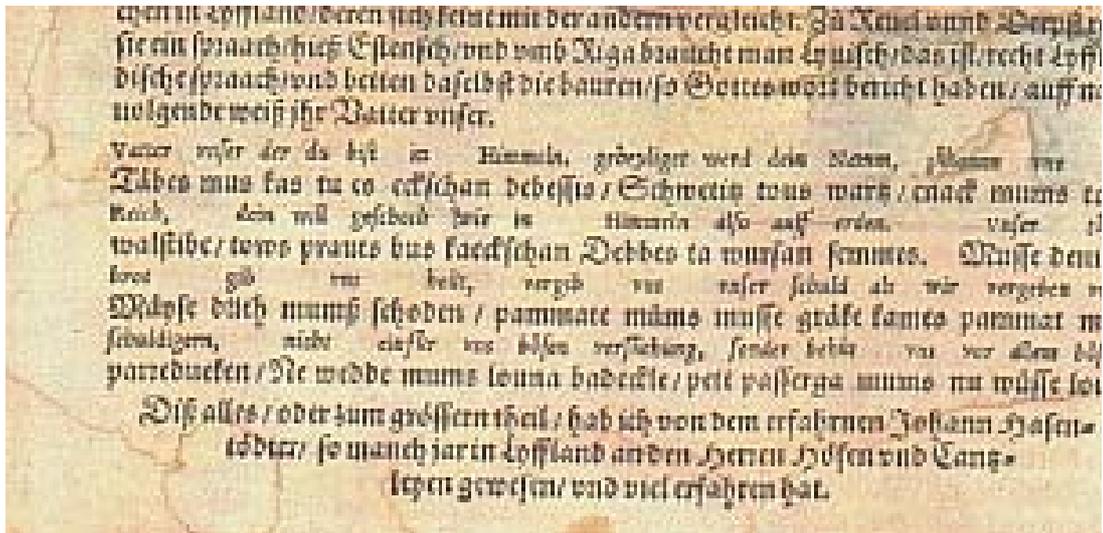
Rīga in 1548 - The oldest known scene of Rīga; from Sebastian Münster, *Cosmographia* (Basel 1550). Private collection of Rev. Dr. F.T. Kristbergs

language.¹ Even in the duchy of Curland, where the course of the Reformation was slower, German pastors learned the Latvian language to be able to preach to the people. In 1560, there was only one such Latvian preacher, but by 1570 three native-born Latvian pastors had been

educated in German universities and were active in Curland.² Thus the process of differentiation

The Lord's Prayer in the 16th century Rīga dialect of Latvian (with German text) from Sebastian Münster Cosmographia (Basel, 1550). Private collection of Rev. Dr. F.T. Kristbergs

of the Latvian Lutherans from German Lutherans was one of the first expressions of the



Reformation in Latvia.

The Reformation also produced hymnals, prayer and sermon books, and various religious tracts in Latvian which were the beginnings of Latvian written literature.

The significance of the Reformation in [Latvian] cultural history is that it gave a strong impulse for the creation of Latvian religious literature and the formation of Latvian grammar, and also for the use of Latvian in secular writing. The development of Latvian schools was also a result of the Reformation.³

Three church publications during the seventeenth century made significant contributions to the development of Latvian national identity and the Latvian language: the sermons of Georg Mancelis in 1654, the hymnal of Christoph Furecker in 1671, and the complete translation of the Bible into Latvian by pastor Ernst Gluck in 1689. Mancelis' sermons are seen as reflecting "the true cultural history of Latvian life"⁴ The translations of German hymns by Christoph Furecker "gave the form of verse convention to written Latvian poetry"⁵ while Gluck's translation of the Bible

became one of the most important manifestations of [Latvian] cultural history. There can be no doubt that the prestige of the Bible, translated into the Latvian language, deeply formed the psyche of the Latvian people, particularly in dominantly Lutheran regions. One can also surmise that there was an indirect, if not completely direct influence of the Latvian translation of the Bible also on the Latvian Catholic population.⁶

The impact of the Lutheran church during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries on the Latvian people outside of the few larger cities was impeded by the association of the church and its pastors with the wealthy German landowners, the lack of pastors fluent in Latvian, and political and economic instability during this period.⁷ Ludviks Adamovics, the leading historian of the Latvian church, describes the social differences between pastors and people during this

period and illustrates the degree of differentiation between the German dominated Lutheran church and the Latvian people:

In general, a deep social chasm separated pastors from the congregations. Pastors were dependent on their patrons or wealthy landed gentry and socially were on their side, while the peasants were kept down by the yoke of hereditary oppression. Thus it was impossible to establish those sincere and sacred relationships which are necessary between a pastor and his congregation....The liturgy and content of worship services was not attractive. The lack of organ music and the weak singing of the leaders, combined with the [congregation's] illiteracy often made singing into a frightful chaos of sound. [Pastors] viewed catachetical instruction as a great burden. The publication of civil punishments from the pulpit and the execution of civil corporal punishment at the church associated the church in the minds of the people with unpleasant memories and frightful images....The forced labor demanded by the landed gentry hindered the peasantry's participation in church services...Visitations by pastors to the homes of peasants often resulted in the peasants' flight into the woods to avoid the pastor.⁸

However, some pastors did make significant contributions to the development of a unique Latvian ethnic and national identity thus increasing the differentiation between German and emerging Latvian culture. Two such pastors were Johann Fischer, superintendent of the church in Livonia from 1674 to 1699, and his son Jacob Benjamin Fischer (1684-1744) who together are considered the founders of public education in Latvia.⁹ The *Lettische Gramatik* of pastor Georg Friedrich Stender (1717-1796) was "not only a grammar, but was the first work of one author about Latvian orthography, grammar, lexicon, phraseology, semantics, translation theory, ethnography, folklore, meter and style."¹⁰

The significance of the Moravian Brethren

The work of the Moravian Brethren filled a social and religious need in the Baltic region from 1729 to the middle of the nineteenth century and "played a decisive role in the social and national emancipation of the Estonians and Latvians."¹¹ Despite opposition from the Lutheran church and restrictions on its work by the czarist regime, the Moravian Brethren emphasis on personal piety and on congregations independent of the patronage of the landed gentry and administered by the laity proved popular in a religious atmosphere stifled by rationalism and social structures. In 1742 there were 13,000 to 14,000 organized members of the Church of the Moravian Brethren in the Baltic provinces. With the legalization of the Moravian Brethren in 1817 by the Russian czar, the number of members had increased to about 30,000 and by the middle of the nineteenth century consisted of more than 70,000 members with 270 churches.¹² For the Latvian peasant, "the Moravian communities became the ladder for improving social status. For the common man at this period social emancipation, economic betterment and membership in a Moravian congregation were synonymous."¹³

Their interpretation of church life differed radically from the administrative concept of the German baronial-controlled Lutheran church in Latvia. Central to the theology and church life of the Moravian Brethren was the role of individual believers in the corporate worship and the administration of the congregation.

The principle of autonomous congregations which determined their own religious and organizational life reached into the wider social realm. Through small and active faith groups which fostered a feeling of solidarity and community, a personally experienced faith which freed a person from all social ties and set him in a new, freely chosen and egalitarian relationship which gave self worth, the encouragement of self-initiative and creative activity, combined with a morally rigorous life-style were not without effect in the social realm.¹⁴

Thus the Moravian Brethren movement established a system and societal alternative to the prevailing Germanic culture and was a decisive counter-influence to the Germanizing tendency in the Baltic provinces.¹⁵

In particular, Moravian meeting-houses and the process of communal construction of these meeting-houses was a visible expression of their emerging national identity and differentiation from the concept of the German baronial-dominated Lutheran church and the dominating influence of German culture in general. The meeting houses were erected with great personal sacrifice and effort [and] became a symbol of national self-assertion and identity. Here the Estonians and Latvians could, in a great communal volunteer effort and in complete independence from church and secular authorities, counter the popular generalization of the peasant as a lowly being of little intelligence.¹⁶

The Moravian Brethren differentiated themselves from the dominant German Lutheran church and defined their own social and theological boundaries by the simple yet demonstrative act of building their own houses of worship. More than two centuries later, when Latvian Lutheran exiles sought to assert their own identity and differentiate themselves from the churches and culture of the lands in which they settled, they followed this example from their own history: they built their own churches.

Through its emphasis on individual religious experience and the role of the laity in congregational leadership, the Church of the Moravian Brethren “developed a Latvian community and social awareness, which prepared the way for national consciousness.”¹⁷ The congregations of the Moravian Brethren gave Latvians their first image of national identity and “embodied the first popularly recognized Latvian social and national movement.”¹⁸

Thus the Moravian Brethren contributed in several aspects to the differentiation of Latvian and German culture. On a primary level, they created a system of differentiation by establishing a church separate from the German Lutheran church. The Moravian Brethren movement also created a higher degree of social differentiation between Latvian peasants and German landed aristocracy by creating in the Latvian peasant class a greater sense of self and of empowerment which intensified their own awareness of their distinctiveness as a social class and an ethnic group. These sectors of differentiation were the precursors of the social and ecclesiastical developments of the late nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century and resulted in the declaration of an independent Latvian state and the organization of an autonomous Latvian Lutheran church.

National Awakening movement, the New Current, and the 1905 Revolution

In 1856, at the University of Tartu in Estonia, Latvian students organized a discussion group to work for the common goal of improving conditions for the Latvian people and began the movement of Latvian National Awakening. This was the first attempt by Latvian intellectuals to define a national consciousness and resulted in a wave of literary activity and a rediscovery of Latvian folklore traditions. These nationalist efforts found no support within the Lutheran church in Latvia, which was still dominated by German landed gentry. “On the one hand, the leaders of the nationalist movements wanted a share in the decisions and direction of church life, but on the other hand they were in opposition to the established church and its clergy.”¹⁹ In general, the National Awakening movement was anti-clerical, if not openly anti-Christian and many of its leaders were advocates of the ancient Latvian pagan naturalist religion.²⁰

However opposed the Lutheran church and the leaders of the National Awakening may have been, it is significant to note that the Lutheran church and the Moravian Brethren did prepare the ground for the National Awakening movement. The Moravian Brethren had already given the opportunity for Latvians to exert some degree of independence and self-government in

the administration of their own congregations. Furthermore, the efforts of the Lutheran church in creating and supporting a public educational system, together with the heritage of the Moravian Brethren emphasis on literacy among its members “guaranteed the Baltic provinces the highest literacy rates in the Russian Empire (excluding Finland) in the nineteenth century.”²¹ Thus there was fertile ground for the Movement’s appeal to a Latvian consciousness and a receptive public for its considerable literary and journalistic production.

The Movement for National Awakening is a manifestation of differentiation on a cultural level. The purpose of the Movement was to set clear boundaries to Latvian culture. In collecting and publishing Latvian folksongs and in reclaiming Latvian folklore, the Movement, much in the manner of explorers claiming distant shores for their sovereigns, claimed the past for the Latvian nation, thus establishing the distinctiveness of Latvian national identity.

In the final years of the nineteenth century, a new ideological movement called “The New Current” swept through Latvia. A synthesis of various ideas popular in Europe, it encompassed socialism, Darwinism, atheism and internationalism and found a ready audience among the working classes inadequately served by the Lutheran church.²² Some attempts at reforms of church life resulted in the establishment of new and independent congregations in Jelgava, Liepāja and Riga, but most attempts at democratization of church life were never implemented.²³

The church remained under German domination. In 1905 in the province of Kurzeme, of 103 parishes, only 35 were served by Latvian-born pastors. No congregation in Kurzeme had the right to elect their own pastor. In the rural parishes of Vidzeme in 1892 of 104 pastors, 80 were Germans, 16 Latvians, and 8 Estonians. In 75% of the parishes in Vidzeme, the pastor was installed by the land-owning baron.²⁴

The situation of the Lutheran church in Latvia at the end of the nineteenth century exhibited a low degree of administrative and system separation from the German culture. There was, however, a high degree of social differentiation between the German and Latvian cultures. An extreme level of vertical differentiation is expressed in the dismissive comments of baron Feitinghoff-Schell in comparing the peasants (and pastor!) to the sub-human status of animals. Against the wishes of the congregation in Aluksne, he appointed a pastor who knew little Latvian and had been the cause of protests and boycotts in his former parish. In response to the protests of the congregation he asserted, “Just as my sheep don’t have to know which dog I send to herd them, so the peasants have no say in which pastor I appoint over them.”²⁵

The Russian Revolution of 1905 in Latvia had a national significance and was directed against Russification and the privileges of the German Baltic barons.²⁶ The Lutheran church, having identified itself with the German nobility, was the target of much of the revolutionary violence. Parish manse were burned, worship services disrupted or prohibited, and pastors driven from their parishes.²⁷ Thirty-two pastors were executed and eight died in prison during the Revolution of 1905 in the Baltic provinces.²⁸

The period after the Revolution of 1905 was marked by a decline in church life characterized by a sharp decline in communicants and in contributions, particularly to both inner and foreign mission work.²⁹ In 1905 in Vidzeme, German barons established a commission to reform and democratize church life but which nevertheless maintained baronial control. In 1907, the landed barons in Kurzeme affirmed their position that the peasants had no right to elect church pastors.³⁰ The Revolution of 1905, which had given an impetus to the movement for Latvian independence, left the Lutheran church still under German influence.

The theological dimensions of the high degree of social/vertical differentiation between Latvian and German cultures is evident in the recollections of a Latvian pastor about the reaction to the inscriptions in his parish church in Jaungulbene:

the inscription above the altar read “Ehre sei Gott in d. Hoche” [Glory to God in the highest], but on the lower part of the altar was the inscription [in Latvian] “Nāciet šurp pie Manis visi, kas esat bēdīgi un grūtsirdīgi” [Come to me all that are weary and heavy

laden. (Mt.11:28)] The people said ironically, “See how differently the German barons and the Latvian peasant see the church.”³¹

For baron and peasant, the church was the reminder of their respective status. For the former, the church confirmed their superiority; for the latter, the church comforted them in their lowliness. Language was a mark of differentiation between two visions of the church and a measure of the increasing level of separation between two social and ethnic groups within one church. Almost a century later, the Latvian church in exile would also be confronted with conflicting visions of the church and the differentiations of social groups within the church. Language would also be the measure of that differentiation.

The First World War gave rise to renewed efforts by the Lutheran church in Latvia for reform of church life and the end of German baronial control. A conference of Latvian pastors in St. Petersburg in 1916 supported a synodical system of church government with elected congregational leadership. The anti-German feelings and the desire for a Latvian controlled Lutheran church in Latvia were expressed in the minutes of this conference:

The evangelical [i.e. Lutheran] church is in an undesirable state among the Latvians. The leading influence in the church was and remains German. The German spirit constantly attempts to exert its will on Latvian national sensibilities but, being foreign to Latvians, has not assimilated the Latvian spirit in itself, but rather has created and, indeed, still creates conflicts...The greatest present evil in our church affairs is the repression of the [Latvian] national spirit.³²

This statement clearly differentiates the German Lutheran church from the Lutheran church along ethnic and cultural boundaries. The “German spirit” and the “Latvian spirit” are in direct conflict with each other for the church. To end the “oppression of the national spirit,” a Latvian Lutheran church is necessary.

In 1917, the provisional government in Russia granted the Latvian Lutheran church the right to establish its own provisional consistory to regulate church life.³³ Thus on the eve of Latvian independence, the organizational framework for the complete system and social differentiation of the Latvian Lutheran church from the German Lutheran church was in place.

The Latvian Lutheran church in an independent Latvia

Latvia declared its independence from Russia on November 18, 1918 and, after almost two years of bloody battles against the Bolshevik government and against German attempts to regain control of Latvia, a treaty with Russia was signed on August 11, 1920 which recognized a sovereign Latvian state. The constitution of the new Latvian republic recognized the separation of church and state, but the government also recognized the role of the church in shaping the new nation.

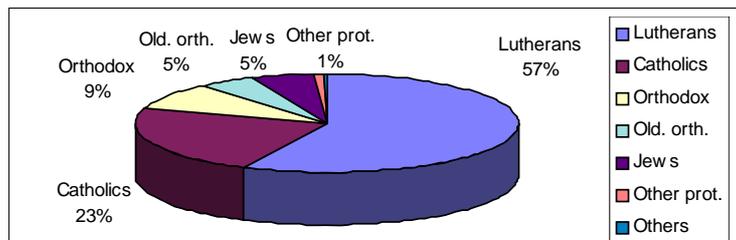
German Protestantism has made the deepest impression on our cultural development. The Lutheran faith has influenced our religious, moral and social views and shaped the development of family and social life. And even if the influence of the church is no longer as significant among our intellectuals, then nevertheless we feel that the Lutheran church has formed our social and moral views.³⁴

Thus in the first years of Latvian independence and in the beginning years of an autonomous Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia, there was a high degree of political, socio-cultural and system differentiation between German culture and Latvian culture. Within the boundaries of nationhood now established by independence, a low degree of differentiation (i.e. a high level of integration) existed between the Latvian Lutheran church and Latvian national identity. The Lutheran church was the largest of all faith groups in Latvia and dominated religious

life during the time of independence. In 1925, Lutherans constituted 57.2% of the population of around 2 million. In 1935 Lutherans were 55.14% of the population, with other faith groups remaining in about the same proportions as in 1925.

The principal task of the Latvian Lutheran Church was to establish a Lutheran church in Latvia pastored by Latvians and synodically administered by active congregations and their representatives.

RELIGIOUS CONFESSIONS IN LATVIA: 1925



Many pastors had been killed by the Bolsheviks, had left their parishes, or had died during the war.³⁵ To prepare new Latvian pastors, the Theological Faculty at the State University of Latvia opened in February of 1919.³⁶ By 1928 the

number of Latvian Lutheran pastors had increased to 144 and to 228 by 1936.³⁷ The result was that with rare exception, during the time of Latvian independence, Latvian Lutheran congregations were ministered to by Latvian pastors. Thus the high degree of cultural differentiation that had characterized the relationship between pastors and congregations throughout most of the previous centuries of German Lutheran domination was now changed to a low level of cultural differentiation between Latvian pastors and Latvian congregations.

The German Lutherans had been given the right to organize their own church life, which in 1936 consisted of 52 congregations with their own governing body and their own bishop. With the election in 1922 of Karlis Irbe as bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia, the administration of the Latvian Lutheran church was completely in Latvian hands. The process of system and cultural differentiation between the two churches was now complete.

The advances made in the democratization and autonomy of church life suffered reversals when president Karlis Ulmanis seized power in May of 1934 and restricted civil rights. To counter the proposed synod of the Latvian Lutheran church which was to meet in late 1934, the government published a decree which expanded the powers of the archbishop to include “the right to veto any decision of the church executive board or any other church body, as well the right to appoint pastors to congregations, and to remove them.”³⁸ In keeping with the authoritarian principles of the government, the archbishop was also given the right “to issue regulations and instructions between synods which, according to the constitution of the church, would be within the competence of the synod and the executive board.”³⁹

This is a particular form of integration of the Latvian Lutheran church with the nation-state. The “leader” form of autocratic government which characterized the secular regime was imposed on the church resulting in a high degree of hierarchical authority vested in the person and office of archbishop. It represents, in the context of the democratization of the church, a significant departure from the tradition of democratic and congregational principles of ecclesial governance practiced by the Moravians and which, to a large extent, the Latvian Lutheran church had adopted.

The Second World War and occupation

On June 17, 1940 Soviet troops moved into Latvia and annexed Latvia into the Soviet Union. Wholesale terror directed against the entire Latvian population culminated in June 13-14, 1941 of mass deportation of Latvians to Soviet labor camps in Siberia. More than 35,000 Latvians were deported and almost 1,500 were executed under the Soviet regime, among them many pastors and church leaders. During the Soviet occupation, all church buildings were seized,

worship services were severely restricted, religious instruction removed from the school curriculum, and pastors driven from their churches.⁴⁰

By late July of 1941, German troops had driven the Soviets out of Latvia and, although initially greeted as liberators, established the same repressive regime as in other Nazi-occupied areas. The Nazi regime intended to regain the Baltic area as a German colony and to this end also confiscated property, terrorized the population and deported more than 10,000 Latvians to Germany for forced labor. The Lutheran church was severely restricted in its activity and the Theological Faculty was forced to remain closed until 1943.⁴¹

The Soviet offensives on the eastern front in the spring of 1944 quickly led to the Soviet re-invasion of Latvia. With the German capitulation on May 8, 1945, the Soviet re-occupation of Latvia was complete. The Soviets again began large-scale deportations to Siberia of the Latvian population. To escape the Soviet terror, more than 150,000 Latvians left their homeland and fled to Sweden or Germany.⁴²

During the last months of 1944, many pastors had to decide whether to remain in Latvia with their congregations, or leave their churches for an unknown exile. In his last sermon to his congregation in Aizkraukle in August of 1944, Rev. Arnolds Lūsis, who later became archbishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia in exile, explains his reasons for leaving Latvia and illustrates the later claim of the church in exile to be the only truthful and free voice for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia:

I know that many will not understand me. Many will never forgive me. They will call me a “hired hand” (Jn. 10:12), and will criticize my cowardice and shirking from suffering and the cross. And nevertheless, - I have decided to leave the congregation, because the Red army will be at the borders of Aizkraukle. I will do this, so that I do not have to become a liar and a hypocrite. All these years I have tried to preach God’s word in it’s unchangeable truth. I have not judged anyone, because my Savior has not done so. But I have exposed the sins which we must all avoid, and the evils against which we must all fight. With the return of the communist regime, I will no longer have this opportunity. I do not believe that I will be allowed to continue my work as pastor. But, even if that were to be allowed, I will no longer be free. I will not be able to say what I think. I will be forced to speak lies and untruths. Standing in the pulpit, I will be forced to praise those who have caused unimaginable suffering for my country. I will be forced to call “liberators” those who have come to put us in chains...But that would be spiritual suicide, by which I would kill my conscience...I leave with great pain.⁴³

Moments of separation such as these not only mark the separation of a pastor from his congregation, but also the separation of the Evangelical Lutheran church of Latvia into two distinct entities. It is a particularly tragic form of system differentiation whose consequences lingered after the political end of the exile. From the perspective of the exile church, the issues raised in this sermon also mark the boundaries which defined both churches. These boundaries were set in the contrast between freedom and captivity, truth and lies, honesty and hypocrisy.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia in Exile

The exile of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia can be seen as beginning on October 10, 1944 when the leader of the church, archbishop Dr. Teodors Grünbergs, (*photo below right*) under threat of arrest by the Soviets, was forced to flee Latvia to Germany.⁴⁴ Many other pastors also were forced to leave their homeland at this time. Of those, 14 crossed the Baltic to Sweden and 125 fled to Germany. There, with archbishop Grünbergs at the center, the church began its work among the Latvians in exile.

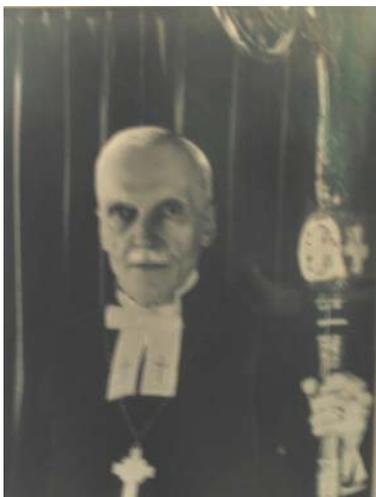
The Latvian Lutheran Church quickly became the focal point of the exiled Latvians in the displaced person camps of post-war Germany. Through the efforts of archbishop Grünbergs,

Latvian refugees and prisoners of war were spared a forcible return to the Soviets, as was the case with some prisoners of war in Sweden, who were given back to the Soviets and executed by them.⁴⁵ The church was also the primary facilitator of assistance offered by IRO (International Relief Organization), LWR (Lutheran World Relief) and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA).⁴⁶ The church also facilitated sponsorship of Latvian refugees for emigration to other countries. In addition to establishing congregations with a regular worship and sacramental life in the DP camps, the Latvian Lutheran Church assisted the Red Cross in re-uniting families and gathering information about the fate of lost relatives and friends. The Latvian Lutheran church also established schools in the camps, organized social activities and youth programs, established libraries, and in general proved the truth of archbishop Grünberg's often quoted observation that "our home in exile is our church."⁴⁷



The processes of differentiation between Latvian exile culture and the culture of host countries begins in the Displaced Person camps of Germany. The gathering and care of the Latvian church and community was the primary pre-requisite for the survival of a distinct Latvian culture in an exile of indeterminate duration. Seen in the context of differentiation, the work of the church among the refugees in the DP camps re-established the social and cultural boundaries of the Latvian Lutheran church and people. By reproducing the institutions of the homeland, the church and the Latvian community defined their identity and created social and cultural cohesion within itself. This process of gathering, defining boundaries and developing cohesion within the society is the process of differentiating itself from all that is something else. At this early stage of the exile period there is a low degree of differentiation among the various sectors of Latvian society while there is a correspondingly high degree of differentiation between Latvian culture and the indigenous culture.

The threat of differentiation within elements of Latvian society was very present and real. Already in 1947 the re-settlement of Latvian refugees to Great Britain, Canada, Australia, South America, and the United States had begun and threatened to fragment Latvian society. To respond to this Diaspora, the Latvian Lutheran church organized itself to serve Latvians in these countries. Archbishop Grünbergs, who remained in Germany, appointed his personal representatives to each region: two in the United States, one each in Canada, Australia, England and Sweden. The smaller Latvian exile communities in Brazil, Argentina and Venezuela each had one Latvian pastor, as did France and New Zealand.



This soon evolved into a formal structure of regional jurisdictions, each headed by an synodically elected Dean and an regional executive board. In 1957, the 3 districts in the United States and the Canadian district merged to form LELDAA (The Federation of Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Congregations in America), which, in 1975 became LELBA (The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), a separate synod of the Lutheran Church in America. The nine deans (the leaders of the church in Germany, Great Britain, Sweden, and Australia, together with the 4 regional deans of LELBA and the president of LELBA), a lay representative from each region, and the archbishop constitute the executive board of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia Abroad.⁴⁸ With the death of archbishop Teodors

Grünbergs in 1962, prof. Dr. Kārlis Kundziņš (*above left*) was named successor. In 1966 he was succeeded by Rev. Arnolds Lūsis, (*photo left*) who served until his death in 1993. The current archbishop is Elmārs Ernsts Rozītis, (*photo below right*) who resides in Esslingen, Germany.



The international structure of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia in exile was an organizational measure designed to maintain a high level of differentiation between the Latvian community in any given country and its indigenous culture, and a low level of differentiation among all aspects of Latvian exile society.

The threat to the long-term existence of a separate and distinct Latvian Lutheran church and Latvian culture became immediately



apparent with the process of re-settlement which created differences of opinion between the Latvian Lutheran church and the Lutheran churches in host countries, particularly with the Lutheran churches in the United States and Canada.

Although many churches did want to help sponsor and re-settle the refugees,⁴⁹ most expected the ethnic Lutheran refugees to be absorbed into existing Lutheran congregations and discouraged the establishment of separate Latvian Lutheran congregations.⁵⁰

Although the Missouri Synod was active in assisting Latvian Lutherans, their exclusive communion practice and the disenfranchisement of women in Missouri Synod congregations were contrary to the goals of the Latvian Lutheran church as a gathering place for all Latvians. Many congregations refused financial assistance from the Missouri Synod and left the Synod rather than accede to the restrictions imposed on them.⁵¹

The mood of this conflict may be reflected in the oft-told and perhaps apocryphal anecdote:

At an American Lutheran synod meeting, an American pastor declared that Jesus had spoken to him in a dream and revealed to him that the establishment of Latvian congregations must not be allowed. A Latvian pastor rose to answer him and said that there must have been some misunderstanding, because the Lord had also appeared to him and had expressed His joy over the newly founded Latvian congregations.⁵²

Each side defended their interpretation of the church by appealing to revelation and each revelation had proposed a different interpretation of system and cultural differentiation.

The prevailing opinion of the churches in North America maintained that, even if the Latvian Lutheran church and other post-war ethnic exile churches were allowed to establish their own congregations, this venture would not last and they would be eventually assimilated into the North American Protestant mainstream.

There is likely to be permanent opposition to the establishment of enclaves of nostalgic ethnic groups in new countries, and it seems most likely that the process of selection and resettlement will create a diaspora which will, from the start, be impossible to serve and, in a short time, difficult to identify. At the moment the vitality of the Churches in Exile depends upon the inspiration of trusted leaders consecrated to their calling in freer days by laws now abrogated, upon the convenient ethnic grouping of refugees and upon outside help. The former will pass away, and resettlement will break up the

grouping...The Refugee Commission has already decided as a principle that the responsibility for the spiritual care of refugees resettled lies with the churches of the receiving countries...In countries where confession matches confession there should be no insuperable difficulties. Thus in the United States it should be easy for an Estonian Lutheran to become American and remain Lutheran...⁵³

This interpretation assumes that differentiation of the Latvian ethnic church from the indigenous Lutheran churches is an administrative one based on “trusted leaders” who will soon pass away. It assumes that “resettlement will break up” ethnic groups because in this interpretation the boundaries which define Latvian society and church identity - language, history, culture, - are completely ignored. It asserts that there is no differentiation of lasting value among all Lutherans and implies that such differentiations are harmful to the larger Lutheran church body.



*Photo right:
The Exectutive Board of the
Evangelical Lutheran Church
of Latvia Abroad (with other
clergy and lay workers) at
their general meeting in
Annaberg, Germany, May
2004.*



The opinion that separate ethnic churches and church bodies would be detrimental to the indigenous churches persisted for several decades. As late as 1980, the prominent Lutheran historian and theologian George Linbeck observed that

The mergers of the last two decades...have eliminated almost all ethnically organized Lutheran church bodies. Except for small groups and individual parishes, conscious stress on ethnicity will in the future be a handicap rather than a help to American Lutheranism.⁵⁴

Such negative opinions of the necessity and viability of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia had already in 1949 prompted archbishop Grünbergs to declare, that “our enemies want to destroy us; our friends want to assimilate us; but we want to live.”⁵⁵

¹ Reinhard Wittram, “Die Reformation in Livland,” in *Baltische Kirchengeschichte: Beiträge zur Geschichte der Missionierung und der Reformation, der evangelischen-lutherischen Landeskirchen und des Volkskirchentums in den baltischen Ländern*, ed. Reinhard Wittram (Göttingen: Vanderhoek & Ruprecht, 1956), 45. For a cultural history of Latvia and the Baltic region, see Anatol Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Path to Independence*. 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), ch. 1-5. Also, Maria Gimbutas, *The Balts*. (Frederick A. Prager: New York, 1963). For a history of all Lutheran parishes in Latvia until 1944, see Edgars Ķīplokis, ed. *Dzimtenes draudzes un baznīca*

illustrations, (Lincoln, NB: Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1987). s [The churches and congregations of the land of our birth], with 545 illustrations, (Lincoln, NB: Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1987).

² Eberhard Treulieb, "Die Reformation der kurlandischen Kirche unter Gotthard Kettler," in Wittram, ed., *Baltische Kirchengeschichte*, 85.

³ Edgars Dunsdorfs and Arnolds Spekke, *Latvijas Vēsture 1500-1600* [The history of Latvia 1500-1600]. (Stockholm: Daugava, 1964), 101.

⁴ Ernests Blese, *Latviešu literatūras vēsture* [The history of Latvian literature]. (Hanau, West Germany; 1947), 65. The significance of Latvian preaching for the development of the Latvian language and national self-awareness is examined by Jānis Krēsliņš, *Dominus narrabit in scripturis populorum: A Study of Early Seventeenth-Century Lutheran Teaching on Preaching and the "Lettische Lang-gewunschte Postil" of Georgius Mancelius* (Ph.D. diss. University of Stockholm, 1989).

⁵ Jānis Andrupis and Vitauts Kalve, *Latvian Literature* (Stockholm: Zelta Ābele / The Golden Appletree, 1957), 62.

⁶ Edgars Dunsdorfs, *Latvijas vēsture 1600-1710* [The history of Latvia 1600-1710]. (Uppsala: Daugava, 1962), 425.

⁷ Wilhelm Kahle, *Lutherische Begegnung im Ostseeraum*. (Gutersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1982), 97-110, 129-154. See also Wilhelm Lenz, "Zur Verfassungs- und Socialgeschichte der baltischen evangelisch-lutherischen Kirchen 1710-1914" in Wittram, ed., *Baltische Kirchengeschichte*, 110-129.

⁸ Ludvika Adamovičs, *Dzimtenes baznīcas vēsture* [Church history of the homeland]. 2nd ed. (Soest, West Germany: Mantnieks and Ķiploks, 1947), 45, 53.

⁹ Andrejs Johansons, *Latvijas kultūras vēsture 1710-1800* [The history of Latvian culture 1710-1800]. (Stockholm: Daugava, 1975), 134 ff.

¹⁰ Johansons, *Latvijas kultūras vēsture 1710-1800*, 207.

¹¹ Guntram Philipp, *Die Wirksamkeit der herrnhuter Brüdergemeinde unter den Esten und Letten zur Zeit der Bauernbefreiung*. (Bohlau Verlag: Köln, 1974), 250. For an introduction to the history of the Moravian Brethren, see the old but nevertheless informative Edmund Alexander Schweinitz, *The History of the church known as the Unitas Fratrum, or, The Unity of the Brethren...*, (Bethlehem, PA: The Moravian Publishing Concern, 1901). For church and social polity of the Moravian church, see Hans Joachim Wollstadt, *Geordnetes Dienen in der christlichen Gemeinde dargestellt an den Lebensformen der Herrnhuter Brüdergemeinde in ihren Anfängen*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966).

¹² Horst Garve, *Konfession und Nationalität: ein Beitrag zum Verhältnis von Kirche und Gesellschaft in Livland im 19. Jahrhundert*. (J.G. Herder-Institut: Marburg/Lahn, 1978), 44-45.

¹³ Garve, *Konfession und Nationalität*, 251.

¹⁴ Garve, *Ibid.*, 46-47.

¹⁵ Philipp, *Die Wirksamkeit der herrnhuter Brüdergemeinde*, 337 ff.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 261.

¹⁷ Ludvika Adamovičs, "Latviešu brāļu draudze dzimtbūšanas laikos" [Latvian Moravian Brethren congregations in the period of serfdom] in Edgars Ķiploks, ed., *Raksti par Latvijas baznīcas vēsturi* [Essays on Latvian church history]. (Lincoln, Nebraska: Latviešu Ev.-Lut. baznīca Amerikā, 1978), 92.

¹⁸ Philipp, *Die Wirksamkeit der herrnhuter Gemeinde*, 268.

¹⁹ Adamovičs, *Dzimtenes baznīcas vēsture* [Church history of the homeland], 90. The views of the German-dominated Lutheran church were expressed by Karl Bergholz, pastor of St. James church in Rīga and editor of the official church publication, *Mitteilungen und Nachrichten für die evangelische Kirche in Russland*. He believed that a Latvian could become educated only by separating from the Latvian people and language. In 1861 he declared that "an educated Latvian cannot remain a Latvian because Latvians are merely a peasant class. It is not necessary for their language to survive - it is not necessary to know Latvian to plow." Arnolds Švābe, *Latvijas Vēsture 1800-1914* [Latvian history 1800-1914]. (Uppsala: Daugava, 1958), 370.

²⁰ For a discussion of the religious philosophies of Latvian writers active in the National Awakening movement, see Fredrich Scholz, "Die Behandlung religiöser Fragen in der lettischen Literatur," *Kirche im Osten*, nr. 21/22 (1978/1979), 34-62, and Arvīds Ziedonis, Jr., *The Religious*

Philosophy of Jānis Rainis, Latvian Poet. (Waverly, Iowa: Latvju Grāmata/Latvian National Publishers, 1968).

²¹ Toivo U, Raun, “*The Latvian and Estonian National Movements, 1860-1914*”, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, v. 64, (January, 1986), 74.

²² Most parishes consisted of all the declared Lutherans the local area and were often served by only one pastor. For example, in 1902, St. Gertude’s church in Rīga counted 52,000 parishioners and St. John’s parish in Rīga had 42,000. Adamovičs states that the average size of parishes in the Lutheran church in Rīga was around 20,000 members, with even many rural congregations exceeding 10,000 members. In the province of Vidzeme, the average congregation was 6,800 members and in Kurzeme the average was around 4,500. Adamovičs, *Dzimtenes baznīcas vēsture*, 91. “For those reasons workers whose needs were not served by the church sought comfort for their souls and spiritual community in secular organizations.” Švābe, *Latvijas vēsture 1800-1914*, 525.

²³ Adamovičs, *Dzimtenes baznīcas vēsture*, 91.

²⁴ Švābe, *Latvijas vēsture 1800-1914*, 656.

²⁵ Švābe, *Latvijas vēsture 1800-1914*, 656.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 639-658. The *Berliner Tagesblatt* on December 17, 1905 commented that “The sins of the Baltic barons against the Latvians and Estonians are now being bitterly repaid. The slaves are throwing off their chains.” Švābe, *Ibid.*, 641.

²⁷ Wilhelm Neander, “*Das Martyrium der baltischen Kirchen*” in Reinhard Wittram, ed., *Baltische Kirchengeschichte*, 300-301.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 301. “In almost all cases the pastors were not persecuted by their own church members, but by strangers outside of the congregation. Nevertheless, several pastors were not spared the bitterness of having seen their own former confirmands among their persecutors. That this was an impulse of resentment against the Christian faith is evident by the fact that several Latvian pastors, themselves Latvian nationalists, experienced the same fate [as German pastors].” *Ibid.*, 300.

²⁹ Adamovičs, *Dzimtenes baznīcas vēsture*, 91.

³⁰ Švābe, *Latvijas vēsture 1800-1914*, 668-669.

³¹ Ādolfs Čops, “*Baznīca un teoloģijas studijas Latvijā*” [The church and theological studies in Latvia] in Ārijs Arājs, ed., *Garīgs Apskats II: informācija par reliģiskas dzīves notikumiem* [Spiritual views: information about events in religious life], vol. 2, (Toronto: Rīga Press, 1985), 195.

³² Ādolfs Šilde, *Latvijas vēsture 1914-1940: valsts tapšana un suverēnā valsts* [History of Latvia 1914-1940: the creation of the nation and a sovereign nation]. (Stockholm: Daugava, 1976), 181.

³³ *Ibid.*, 182.

³⁴ *Izglītības Ministrijas Mēnešraksts* [Ministry of education monthly], nr. 4, 1934 quoted in Šilde, *Latvijas vēsture 1914-1940*, 462.

³⁵ On 93 pastors active in the province of Vidzeme in 1914, 19 had been executed by the Bolsheviks, 9 had left their parishes and 9 had died, leaving only 56 pastors in 1919. In Kurzeme and Zemgale, of 103 pastors 7 had been executed, 31 left their parishes and 11 had died, leaving 54 pastors. Šilde, *Latvijas vēsture 1914-1940*, 464.

³⁶ Ludvika Adamovič and Edgars Ķiploks, *Latvijas Universitātes Teoloģijas Fakultāte, 1919-1939, otrais izdevums ar papildinājumu, Teoloģijas Fakultāte 1939-1944* [The theological faculty of the state university of Latvia 1919-1939 with supplement: the theological faculty 1939-1944]. (Lincoln, NB: LELBA, 1981), 1-8.

³⁷ Šilde, *Latvijas vēsture 1914-1940*, 463 ff.

³⁸ Šilde, *Latvijas vēsture, 1914-1940*, 623-624.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 624.

⁴⁰ Arnolds Spekke, *History of Latvia: an outline*, (Stockholm: M. Goppers, 1957), 393-397.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 398-404.

⁴² Perhaps the best personal account available in English of the fate of Latvian refugees is by Agate Nesaule, herself the daughter of an exiled Latvian Lutheran pastor, in *A Woman in Amber: Healing the Trauma of War and Exile*, (New York: Soho Press, 1995), particularly ch. 4-7.

⁴³ Arnolds Lūsis, *Cilvēks bez mājas: mācītāju bēgļu gaitas dienas grāmata* [A person without a home: a pastor’s diary of the refuge journey], (Minneapolis: Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1976), 9.

⁴⁴ Elmārs Ernsts Rozītis, “*Geschichte und Aufbau der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche Lettlands im Exil*” *Kirche im Osten*, 21-22 (1978-1979), 64. See also Paulis Urdze, “*Die evangelische-lutherische Kirche Lettlands ausserhalb der Heimat*”, *Acta Baltica*, 6 (1966), 129-156. For a brief overview of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia in Exile, see E. Theodore Bachmann, *Lutheran Churches in the World: a Handbook*. *Lutheran World*, 24, nos. 2&3, (1977), 286-287. Also E. Theodore Bachmann and Marcia Brenne Bachmann, *Lutheran Churches in the World: a Handbook*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1989), 321-324, 334-335, 605.

⁴⁵ Rozītis, *Geschichte und Aufbau der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche Lettlands im Exil*, 66. For a report of refugees and prisoners of war forcibly returned by the Allies to the Soviets and for conditions in Germany at the end of the war, see Douglas Boulting, *In the Ruins of the Reich*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), particularly ch. 9. See also Michael R. Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 296-345.

⁴⁶ Elfan Rees, “*The Churches in Exile*,” *Congregational Quarterly*, 27 (1949), 31-36.

⁴⁷ Rozītis, *Geschichte und Aufbau der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche Lettlands im Exile*, 69.

⁴⁸ The name “The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia in Exile” was changed to “The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia Abroad” in 1993 to reflect the political reality created by the re-establishment of an independent Republic of Latvia in 1991.

⁴⁹ Roland Elliott, “*Our Duty Toward Displaced Persons*”, *Christianity and Crisis*, 9, no. 8 (May, 1949), 58. See also Stewart W. Herman, “*Lutheran Service to Refugees*,” *Lutheran Quarterly*, 2 (February, 1950), 3-16.

⁵⁰ Peter Wukash, “*Baltic Immigrants in Canada, 1947-1955*” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, 50, no. 1 (Spring, 1977), 4-22. Wukash’s account of the role of Missouri synod congregations is illuminating, if not always accurate. He maintains that the establishment of exiled refugees of their own church and social institutions is the reason why “they have never been fully acculturated into Canadian society.” *Ibid.*, 21. The Lutheran church in North America is itself uncertain as to the merits of ethnicity. Mark Noll maintains that while some aspects of Lutheran theology inhibit incorporation into mainstream American culture, some elements conversely facilitate that process. He also believes that the uniqueness of Lutheran theology may help ethnic Lutherans maintain their identity. “*Ethnic, American, or Lutheran? Dilemmas for a Historic Confession in the World*,” *Lutheran Theological Seminary Bulletin*, 71 (Winter, 1991), 17-38. The Missouri Synods’ ambivalence about its German heritage and the benefits of ethnic identity are discussed in Charles K. Piehl, “*Ethnicity, the Missouri Synod, and the Mission of the Church*” *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 3 (August, 1976), 239-244.

⁵¹ As one example, in 1962 the Missouri Synod denied a loan to St. John’s Latvian Lutheran Church of Toronto for the building of a new church because the congregation would not accept changes in its constitution which would subject it to the constitution of the Missouri Synod. The congregation raised the money through increased donations and with assistance from The Aid Association for Lutherans. *Preīm Gaišām Dienām: Sv. Jāņa ev.-lut. draudze Toronto 30 gadus, 1948-1978* [Towards brighter days: St. John’s evangelical Lutheran church of Toronto 30 years, 1948-1978], (St. John’s Latvian Church: Toronto, 1978), 16.

⁵² Rozītis, “*Geschichte und Aufbau der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche Lettlands im Exil*,” 68.

⁵³ Elfan Rees, “*The Churches in Exile*,” 35-36.

⁵⁴ George Lindbeck, “*Lutheran Churches*” in *Ministry in America*, eds. David S. Schuller, Merton P. Strommen, Milo L. Brekke (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 433. Linbeck does concede that “the erosion of the ethnic base raises doubts, however, about the long-run viability of Lutheran distinctiveness.” *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Bachmann and Bachmann, *Lutheran Churches in the World*, 335.