

The Baltic Churches and the National Revival

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The rapid growth of national revival movements in the Baltic republics over the last three years has not been just a political phenomenon. The assertion of their national identity and rights by the Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians, their demands for reform and democratisation, have been accompanied by a noticeable revival of interest in religion and increased commitment to religious causes. The involvement of religious activists in national political movements and the founding of some specifically Christian parties are merely part of this change in the churches' position. As recently as July-August 1987,¹ Dean Modris Plate and a number of other influential clergymen in the Latvian Lutheran Church were dismissed from their positions by Archbishop Mesters because they had founded a 'Rebirth and Renewal' movement to 'defend openly the right of Latvians to lead a Christian life;' they had called for alternatives to military service, legalisation of religious instruction for children, legal status for the church and authorisation of religious activities in hospitals and old people's homes. The archbishop, yielding to pressure from the Council for Religious Affairs, had stated 'there are authorities we cannot ignore'. In November 1986, the Lithuanian CRA official P. Anilionis had refused to allow the Lithuanian Catholic bishops to visit Rome for the 600th anniversary of Christianity in Lithuania, because of their support for 'extremist priests' and 'illegal literature'. He rejected their 'impossible demands' for the return of confiscated churches such as Vilnius Cathedral and St Casimir's church (a well known museum of atheism) and told them to discipline clergymen who wrote petitions to the CRA asking for the release of imprisoned priests.

The changes since then have been substantial. The CRA officials in both Latvia and Lithuania have been replaced. In 1988 Lithuanian priests imprisoned for their participation in the Catholic Committee

¹See Marite Sapiets, ' "Rebirth and Renewal" in the Latvian Lutheran Church', *RCL*, Vol. 16 No. 3, p. 237-49.

for the Defence of Believers' Rights were released — Fr A. Svarinskas was made to leave the country for the West but Fr S. Tamkevicius was allowed to return to his parish. They were among the large number of religious prisoners of conscience released in the USSR in 1987-88. Vilnius Cathedral and St Casimir's were restored to religious use in October 1988, as was the Lutheran Cathedral, the *Dom Church*, in Riga. The Russian Orthodox community in Riga, which then took the opportunity to apply for restoration of their former cathedral (now a planetarium and restaurant) have been promised that the building will be returned.

Latvia

Archbishop Mesters and the entire former Lutheran Consistory were voted out of office at a General Synod convened in April 1989. The Lutheran Consistory in Latvia now includes Dean Modris Plate and most of the original members of 'Rebirth and Renewal'. The new Archbishop, Karlis Gailitis, was not a member of 'Rebirth and Renewal' but sympathised with its aims. The Latvian Lutheran Synod's final statement made not only religious but political demands: it called for the return of confiscated churches and an alternative to military service for conscientious objectors, but also for the establishment of a just and free society and 'the annulment of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the self-determination and independence of Latvia'. It expressed support for the Latvian Popular Front (the national revival movement founded in 1988) and the Latvian National Independence Movement (a more radical group campaigning for immediate independence) because of their declared aims 'regarding freedom of conscience and independence for religious organisations'. A few months later, in July 1989, the new Lutheran Consistory expressed its 'full support' for the 'aim of national independence in Latvia', as proclaimed by the Latvian Popular Front on 31 May. The Lutheran hierarchy considered that 'only in an independent Latvian state, free from the dictates of any imperial centre, will our people be able to realise fully either its national values or the universal values given to us by the Christian faith'. This statement was published on the front page of the newspaper *Padomju Jaunatne* on 13 July.

These declarations in themselves show how far matters had gone in three years. From being a body largely subordinated to the Council for Religious Affairs, the Latvian Lutheran Church had become the ally of two parties whose aim was national independence (which could formerly have carried a charge of treason). Such an alliance was

perhaps more surprising in Latvia than in Lithuania, where religion had been linked with national identity for centuries and the Catholic religious rights movement of the 1970s-80s had such widespread support precisely because of its association with national loyalties. In Latvia the movement for human rights before 1986 did not have a strong religious element — apart from the activities of certain Baptists, such as Lidija Doronina-Lasmane. It was mainly nationalist in orientation, but not as large or well organised as that in Lithuania. In both Latvia and Estonia the Lutherans as a denomination had largely kept out of human rights activities disapproved of by the state and had the reputation of being submissive to the authorities, largely because of the careful attitude adopted after the war by the depleted Lutheran hierarchy. The movement that was to surface as 'Rebirth and Renewal' began in about 1983 among the younger Lutheran clergy in Latvia. Originally concerned with reform and revival within the church, it gradually acquired contacts among Latvian human rights activists, especially the Helsinki-86 group, who later supported Plate and other dismissed clergymen against Archbishop Mesters and the attacks of the Soviet media. During the first mass demonstration of Latvian national feeling against the Soviet regime on 14 June 1987, a meeting in Riga in remembrance of Latvians deported east of the Urals under Stalin, one of the main speakers was Rev. Juris Rubenis, a member of 'Rebirth and Renewal'. In June 1988, he and Modris Plate united with members of Helsinki-86, reformist members and ex-members of the Latvian Communist Party, journalists (official and unofficial) and members of the Defence of the Environment Club (the Latvian 'Greens') in order to form the Latvian Popular Front. In its first public appeal for members, the LPF declared its aims — democracy, pluralism and recognition of Latvia's sovereignty as a state — and called for a moral revival in society.

Like the other 'popular fronts' being formed at the time in Estonia and Lithuania, the Latvian Popular Front held a founding congress in October 1988, at which it agreed on a political programme. This included a substantial section on 'the democratisation of religious life in Latvia': freedom of conscience was declared an essential component of democratisation and the LPF called for changes in the present 'unsatisfactory' Law on Religious Associations, in consultation with representatives of religious associations. It also demanded the creation of a revised Council for Religious Affairs in which religious associations would be represented and called for the church in Latvia to be guaranteed 'the same rights as all public organisations'. The Estonian Popular Front and the Lithuanian Restructuring Movement (*Sajudis*) also declared their support for religious rights and values. The EPF recognised 'the church's role in

imparting moral health to society and spreading universal human values' and planned to 'restore the national, cultural and religious self-respect of the Estonian people'. *Sajudis* favoured legal status for religious organisations and demanded the return of property 'illegally expropriated' from the church. It would strive to ensure that the church had 'the right to arrange its internal affairs according to its own canons' and called on the state to cease financing atheistic activities. *Sajudis* also declared that 'atheist education must not be imposed on the children of religious parents, contrary to their convictions'.

The Baltic popular fronts increased in size very quickly as it became clear that the authorities were observing the spirit of *glasnost*² and would not arrest even people calling for secession from the USSR. The Latvians, Estonians and Lithuanians were also encouraged to join the 'fronts' by the appearance of opposing movements — the 'International Front' in Latvia, the 'International Movement' in Estonia and 'Unity' (*Yedinstvo*) in Lithuania. Despite their names, these organisations are overwhelmingly Russian in membership, uniting Russian settlers' opposition to the nationalist revival in the Baltic republics with a defence of Stalinism and its consequences. However, the popular fronts are now the largest political movements in the Baltic states, with at least 100,000 members in Estonia and over 200,000 in Latvia and Lithuania. They are umbrella organisations, uniting a number of different groups and parties that range politically from reformist communists who have not left the party to radical nationalists like the Lithuanian Freedom League or the Latvian and Estonian National Independence Movements. They also include some religious and ecological groups. Their uniting principle is the call for democracy, human rights and national independence — at first the word used was 'autonomy', then 'sovereignty', but by the second half of 1989 all popular fronts were openly referring to 'independence' as a national ideal. Disagreements between the various groups and parties have been largely over how soon independence should be declared and by what means. The other main dispute is over the admission of communists by the popular fronts: members of the party are accepted into the fronts but not by the more radical national parties or specifically Christian groups, such as the recently created Christian Democratic Party in Lithuania.

Clergymen of various churches, as well as Christian lay people, have become active in almost all the new national parties, although recently the leaders of the main denominations have discouraged their clergy from standing as candidates in elections.² Juris Rubenis and

²A spectacular exception was the Latvian Lutheran Archbishop Gailitis, who stood — unsuccessfully — as a candidate in the recent elections to the Latvian Supreme Soviet.

Modris Plate have been members of the central council of the Latvian Popular Front since 1988, as 'Rebirth and Renewal' was one of its founding organisations; Rubenis speaks at many LPF meetings, undertakes visits to Latvian communities abroad, as a representative of both the Latvian Lutheran Church and the LPF, and is closely connected with the LPF's publications: he is on the editorial board of *Atmoda (Revival)*, the LPF's semi-official newspaper, and has written a number of articles for *Padomju Jaunatne (Soviet Youth)*, recently rechristened *Latvijas Jaunatne (Latvian Youth)*, which is theoretically still the newspaper of the Latvian Komsomol but has long since become a mouthpiece for the LPF. The Communist Youth movement in the Baltic republics is fast losing its membership and will probably be replaced to some extent by the more broadly based national youth movements that are now being created.

The most well-known supporter of the Latvian National Independence Movement is Archbishop Gailitis, who opened its congress in May 1989 with prayers. In an interview with a representative of Keston College in August 1989, he stated that the church should use its present opportunity to influence society through the moral values of the Gospel, by helping to establish justice. The involvement of church leaders in national movements was not essentially political, in his view, nor was it aggressively nationalist (the national movements were against violence). Church members simply felt their country should regain the rights it unjustly lost in 1940.

The Latvian Popular Front held a religious service at the beginning of its founding congress on 9 October 1988, in Riga's *Dom* church; it was conducted by Rubenis and Plate and was the first to be held in the national Lutheran cathedral since its confiscation and conversion into a concert hall in 1959. It had been Rubenis's idea that the LPF should apply to the authorities for permission to hold the service — 'at first I did not have much hope', he said later, 'but the proposal was in fact supported by a great many people'. To everyone's surprise, permission was granted by the state, after which the building reverted to religious use, with an occasional organ concert to pay for renovation. Rubenis felt the first service, which was seen all over Latvia on television, 'had the effect of an earthquake . . . It marked a completely new era in the evolution of our society, a break with the past. A lot of people revised their values that day, as well as their attitude towards faith in God.'³

³Interview with Radio Free Europe, 6 October 1988.

Lithuania

In Lithuania, the return to the Catholic Church of Vilnius Cathedral (used as an art gallery since the 1950s) also coincided with the founding congress of the national movement, *Sajudis*. The delegates supported Cardinal Sladkevičius's request for the cathedral's return and thunderously applauded when it was announced that the state had finally agreed. The mass held by the cardinal outside the returned cathedral in the huge Gediminas Square was attended by many of the *Sajudis* delegates and about 20,000 other people, but even that number was surpassed in February 1989, when the cathedral was reconsecrated by the aged Archbishop Steponavičius, who himself had only recently been permitted to return to the diocese after being exiled to a small village in the 1960s. This service, broadcast on radio and television a few days before the anniversary of Lithuanian independence on 16 February, was undoubtedly an inspiring moment in the national and religious revival.

As prisoners of conscience were gradually released after February 1987, the emerging political movements in the Baltic republics, particularly in Lithuania, began to acquire activists. Former Catholic prisoners, such as Nijole Sadunaite and Robertas Grigas, were occasionally still detained, searched or threatened by the police after attending demonstrations or helping to organise meetings of Catholic groups, but they were no longer actually arrested or charged. The returning prisoners were often more attracted to the Lithuanian Freedom League than to *Sajudis* itself, as the League was seen to be avoiding compromise with the communists. Well-known former prisoners — Vytautas Bogusis, Antanas Terleckas and various members of the reconstituted Lithuanian Helsinki Group — began to work actively for the League, while Viktoras Petkus, probably the most famous Catholic nationalist in Lithuania, who had been serving a fifteen year sentence for his samizdat activities, decided after his release from a camp in 1988 to 'revive' the Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party. Cardinal Sladkevičius and Bishop Vaičius were made honorary members of the new party, probably because of their sympathetic attitude to unofficial Catholic activities before *perestroika*. In May 1989 the Lithuanian Christian Democrats held their first congress.

In March Petkus was also instrumental in refounding the Lithuanian Catholic youth organisation *Ateitinkai*, which received public support from Bishop Zemaitis and other members of the Catholic hierarchy. Bishop Zemaitis called on Catholic parents to encourage their children to join and to demand an end to compulsory atheism in schools. In 1989 a Christian Union was established at

Vilnius University. Other non-communist youth organizations with religious overtones, such as the Scouts, were re-established in all the Baltic republics in 1988-89, thus depleting the ranks of the Pioneers.

In some ways, the Lithuanian Catholic Church's involvement with *Sajudis* has been less close than might have been expected. Though at the founding congress of *Sajudis*, a Catholic priest, Fr Vaclovas Aliulis, was elected to its council, further direct participation by the Catholic clergy in the movement's political activities appears to have been discouraged by the episcopate. This is despite the fact that Cardinal Sladkevičius has made more than one statement in 1989 expressing his own support and that of the other bishops for an independent Lithuanian state: 'The well-being of believers can best be achieved in an independent Lithuania,' he said in June 1989, specifically linking his hopes for the official revival of Catholic monastic orders with Lithuanian political independence. However, the Roman Catholic Church guards its own independence, even from a national movement that almost all Lithuanian Catholics passionately support. It supports many of the ideals of *Sajudis* as potentially beneficial to the Church but it will not identify itself with the national movement as such. In a recent interview with the Russian semi-official journal *Glasnost*, Cardinal Sladkevičius acknowledged the support given by *Sajudis* to the church in calling for the return of religious instruction in schools, which he said he would regard as 'a genuine miracle'. However, he felt that the national movement should be careful lest it fall into the same error as the Communist Party in putting its own ideology in place of God.

'People like referring to spiritual values such as goodness or mercy without acknowledging the Author of those values . . . In order to dispel the shadows before us, we must turn towards the sun.'⁴

Here the Cardinal may be showing some disappointment that the *Sajudis* movement as a whole, rather than the smaller group led by Petkus, has not developed into a Christian-Democratic Party. As he has discerned, the uniting factor in the various political and social viewpoints held together by *Sajudis* is not Catholicism, although most of its members are certainly Catholics: it is Lithuanian nationalism which, like nationalism in the other two Baltic states, has rushed to the surface after long years of repression. This does not mean, however, that the Catholic Church is irrelevant or weak in relation to Lithuanian nationalism. The church has a strong position as a revered national treasure, reinforced by respect for its own past resistance to Soviet persecution. None of the national parties can ignore the church

⁴*Glasnost*, January-March 1990, No. 28, pp. 29-32.

— they merely differ in the degree to which they identify with it. All support its demands for abolition of Soviet legal restrictions on religious activity. Even the Lithuanian Communist Party recently felt it necessary to refer positively to the Catholic Church, though emphasising its calls for patience rather than its support for national causes. Thus First Secretary Algirdas Brazauskas quoted Cardinal Sladkevičius in a speech in October 1988: 'Let us learn to wait and not step on each other's toes.' Certainly the Catholic hierarchy, while upholding Lithuanian national aspirations, has advised caution: the Cardinal advised Lithuanians to 'grow while waiting, so that we shall be worthy of freedom when it comes'. At the same time, however, he made it clear to the Council for Religious Affairs, as soon as he thought it possible to do so, that the church did not accept its overlordship: in August 1988 he told a conference of clergy and seminarians to proceed with catechism classes without asking for permission from the CRA and announced that he himself would make church appointments without consulting the CRA.

Estonia

In Estonia, the links between the national and religious revivals have not been as close as in Lithuania and Latvia. Neither the reformers inside the Estonian Communist Party nor the active Estonian nationalists were closely connected with the churches in the past. There had been no upheaval inside the Estonian Lutheran Church comparable to the 'Rebirth and Renewal' movement in Latvia. Changes in the Estonian Church were made easier by the death of the aged Archbishop Hark in November 1987 and the election of Kuno Pajula as the new Estonian Archbishop. The formation of an ecumenical Council of Churches at the beginning of 1989, allowing more consultation between representatives of the Lutheran, Russian Orthodox, Methodist, Baptist and Adventist churches, also made it easier to formulate demands for changes in the laws on religion, which were passed on by church leaders to the new Estonian Communist Party leader, Vaino Valjas.

The new national movements in Estonia have, however, formed links with some religious groups. The Estonian National Independence Movement, led by former prisoners Tiit Madisson and Lagle Parek, have received support from the Baptist 'Word of Life' group, who identify strongly with the Estonian national cause and in 1987 were expelled from the official Baptist Church in Estonia for rejecting the view that the church should have nothing to do with politics. The 'Word of Life' group, whose original leader Rein Mets emigrated to

Sweden in 1988, is now led by pastors Teima Toivo and Raimond Rosenfeld and considers that Christians have political duties in the present situation. A more recent development was the creation in 1989 of the Estonian Christian Alliance, a party formed by Villu Jurie and six other Lutheran pastors on a Christian Democratic platform, with hopes of developing further their interdenominational membership and putting Christian policies before the Estonian voters.

Religious Life

The Baltic national movements have also been co-operating with the churches over the publication of religious periodicals. In Latvia, the Lutheran newspaper *Svetdienas Rīts* (*Sunday Morning*) began as a religious supplement to the Latvian Popular Front's paper *Atmoda*. The religious children's magazine *Zvaigznīte* (*Little Star*) is produced with the help of the Latvian Independence Movement's religious section. The reappearance of religious periodicals in certain shops, streets and churches is part of the emergence of a semi-official press linked with the national movements. In Lithuania there are now two religious journals — *Kataliku Pasaulis* (*Catholic World*), which appeared in spring 1989 and was the first officially permitted Catholic periodical in the USSR since the war, and *Tikybos Zodis* (*Word of Faith*), an ecumenical publication largely run by Sigitas Geda, a poet known as a supporter of *Sajudis*. In Latvia, in addition to the Lutheran newspaper and the children's magazine, there is now a Catholic journal, *Katolu Dzeive* (*Catholic Life*), as well as a Lutheran theological journal, *Cels* (*The Way*) and a Russian Orthodox publication, *Vestnik* (*Messenger*). An evangelical publication — *Pakapieni* (*Little Steps*), edited by former prisoner Lidija Doronina-Lašmane, among others, is popular with the state published newspaper *Padomju Jaunatne*, which occasionally publishes extracts from it, such as moral advice on sex or the memoirs of a converted criminal.

The concessions made to the churches over the last three years by the supreme soviets of the Baltic republics are undoubtedly due partly to the growing influence of the churches in the national movements, as well as to the increasing number of reformists and nationalists in the wilting Baltic Communist parties. However, in some ways, yielding to the demands of local religious believers rather than to those of the nationalists was an easy option for the communists. This was Cardinal Sladkevičius's view of the state's change of mind over returning well known churches, such as Vilnius Cathedral and the Queen of Peace Church in Klaipėda:

the communists were in a no-win situation. So they chose the most appropriate moment to make concessions . . . They made many Lithuanians quite happy and earned a modicum of gratitude.

As the changes promised by the Moscow government in the Law on Religious Associations were put off for discussion until the end of 1990, the local Baltic governments began to anticipate the expected legal changes. Punitive taxation of the clergy was ended in Estonia in September 1989. In December 1989 full legal status was restored to the churches in Lithuania. This implied the restoration of their right to own property, though there was some dispute on the subject in the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet. Of course, the recent declaration of Lithuanian independence will invalidate all Soviet laws, if it is successful.

The church festivals of Christmas, Easter and All Souls Day became public holidays again in the Baltic republics in 1988-89, at first *de facto*, then by decree of the Supreme Soviets. For example, Christmas in Lithuania was allowed to be a public holiday in 1988, with broadcasts of services on radio and television, but was only legally declared a holiday in 1989. In Latvia, the official legalisation of Christmas in 1989 described it as the 'feast of sun-return'⁵, giving it a 'folk' flavour that fitted in with the 'national' festivals that were legalised at the same time. Both religious and national holidays owed their re-adoption largely to the fact that they had existed under the independent Baltic governments between the wars and would probably have been treated as holidays anyway by a great part of the native population if they had not been officially recognised.

The recognition by the authorities of *de facto* changes in social behaviour as legally acceptable has benefited the churches in a number of ways, particularly on the question of Sunday schools and religious charities. According to Soviet law, the organization of Sunday schools for the religious instruction of children was and remains illegal. Nevertheless, as supporters of the national revival spread into some of the main newspapers and churches began to act independently of the local authorities, articles began to appear in the Baltic press referring positively to religious instruction of children and describing Sunday schools in particular. This trend reached a new stage on 15 June 1989, when the Latvian newspaper *Padomju Jaunatne* published an article by a self-confessed Sunday school teacher, calling openly for the legalisation of religious instruction. Vera Volgemute, head of a Lutheran Sunday school in Liepaja, attacked the atheist Soviet system of state education as a cause of moral decay and 'spiritual

⁵ *Literatura un Maksla (Literature and Art)*, 18 November 1989, p. 3.

enslavement' in society and suggested that Sunday schools could help to provide the ethical and religious values Latvian society needed. It is clear from this and other press articles that the revival of Sunday schools in 1986-87 had begun 'quietly and timidly' but rapidly gained support among parents. Volgemute's school had about 80 children and a Catholic Sunday school in Varaklani, recently mentioned in the Latvian press, had 117 children being taught by a nun.⁶ In Lithuania, the daily paper *Tiesa* published a speech by V. Domarkas, head of the state commission on education and culture, stating quite clearly that 'catechisation of groups of children' was being permitted. In preparation for the local elections in Latvia in autumn 1989, the LPF took up the cause of Sunday schools in its latest party programme, upholding the right to religious instruction and to exemption from atheist education. However, the present interest in religious education among the Latvian population is not necessarily only a religious reaction; it is part of the nationalist reaction against official atheism (which is seen as part of the Soviet imposed cultural system). Religious values are then seen as part of pre-Soviet European civilization.

The Churches and Social Action

One section of the forthcoming law on 'freedom of conscience' that is almost certain to be passed is the proposed legalisation of charitable activities by religious associations. In the last three years, the charitable organization *Miloserdije*, which emerged in the USSR as a whole, has been largely taken over by religious groups of various denominations. In the Baltic republics, independent religious charities now probably have more members than the original *Miloserdije* but religious believers also make up most of the membership of the organisation itself. This was admitted by Aron Solovei, one of the founders of *Miloserdije* in Estonia, during an interview with the newspaper *Sovetskaya Estoniya* (6 December 1989). Solovei, a former atheist lecturer, revealed that religious believers had been the first to respond to his attempts in 1987 to unite people for charitable ends. He had not really met believers before and was struck by their 'kindness and caring attitude to others . . . very rare in our society despite 70 years of trying to create the new man and the new morality.' Although he had not become a believer, he now felt a real respect for the various faiths to which the *Miloserdije* workers belonged and felt that charity could unite believers and unbelievers through their work in hospitals, old people's homes, children's homes and prisons.

⁶*Tevzemes Avize*, 15 February 1990, p. 9.

Charitable activity is no longer officially considered 'humiliating', as an article in *Molodezh Estonii (Estonian Youth)* declared on 16 December 1989. At Christmas a number of appeals to people to 'do a good deed' were published in the Baltic papers, some describing gifts required by members of certain churches for their visits to hospitals and children's homes, others printing appeals by official church leaders for contributions to charities that would have been inconceivable formerly. On 14 December 1989, the Latvian Lutheran Consistory made an appeal in *Padomju Jaunatne* to the Supreme Soviet, for inmates of penal colonies to be granted access to 'spiritual aid', particularly to help from the clergy. This was followed by a long article, explaining 'why a pastor is needed in prison'. To some extent, such assistance to prisoners had already been granted in practice in Latvian and Estonian penal establishments. Members of the Latvian Christian Mission, founded in December 1988 by Baptist, Orthodox and Lutheran Christians, have held services in penal colonies, given out religious literature and tried to help prisoners in tracing their families. Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the reports published in the Latvian press on these activities was the approval expressed by some prison governors and officials of the Ministry of the Interior, who felt it had reduced violence among criminals.

In Lithuania and Catholic areas of Latvia, charitable activities are now being carried out by the Catholic *Caritas* movement. Re-established in Lithuania as a Catholic women's movement in 1988-89, it held its first official congress on 18 April 1989, in a sports centre in Kaunas, to the accompaniment of an approbatory article in the newspaper *Sovetskaya Litva*. One reason for the present official approval of revived religious charities, as the Latvian Archbishop Gailitis has pointed out, is simply that

the state is serving its own interests . . . it cannot meet its own needs in hospitals, old people's homes and so on, it cannot get enough selfless staff because of the low pay offered and is now trying to recruit unpaid workers.

Church voluntary workers are now dealing with the problems of released criminals, lonely old age pensioners or disabled invalids in need of assistance. The fact that church soup kitchens have appeared in some Baltic towns shows that a considerable number of destitute people in need of such a service exist — and, under *glasnost*, it can be made known in the press.

Conclusions

The churches are playing an increasing role in various aspects of life in

the Baltic republics, as a result of *glasnost*, *perestroika* and their own participation in the national movements. 'Mothers' organisations' linked with the churches have been taking part in the campaign for an alternative to the present form of military service. Church buildings, both Lutheran and Catholic, have been used in Latvia and Estonia for the unofficial 'registration of citizens' (i.e. of persons wishing to register as prospective citizens of an independent republic). 600,000 people who had registered as citizens of Estonia in 1989 took part in an unofficial election in February this year, voting for delegates to an Estonian Congress that met on 11 March. It would be a rival to the Estonian Supreme Soviet, if the latter had not supported its creation. A similar election took place in Latvia in April, involving about 730,000 'registered citizens'. However, it is not on such good terms with the Supreme Soviet as the one in Estonia.

Clergymen are now being regularly asked to officiate at many different kinds of official events and national celebrations, ranging from the remembrance of the war dead to the beginning of the school year. As Dean Modris Plate recently said: 'We have more opportunities in this situation than we have the ability to seize.'

The church is one of the forces in the Baltic republics that can unite people from various ethnic groups, although it is still far too easy for a particular nation to be identified with a certain religion. A recent article in *Svetdienas Rits* displayed the headline 'Can a Russian be a Lutheran?' It revealed that the Lutheran revival had attracted enquiries from Russians living in Latvia but implied that the first reaction of many Latvian Lutherans would be to direct them to the nearest Orthodox church. However, Latvian and Russian religious believers do cooperate in both the religious and political sphere: one of the most well-known Russian Orthodox believers in Latvia, for example, is Marina Kostenetskaya, a newly-elected deputy to the Supreme Soviet and one of the organisers of *Miloserdiye* in Latvia, together with Lutheran clergymen such as J. Rubenis and A. Akmentins; she is also a leading figure in the Russian Cultural Association, a group of ethnic Russians who largely support the aims of the Latvian Popular Front and reject the International Front.

The problems of the church's 'emergence from hiding and integration into society' have been discussed by Modris Plate in an interview with the Swedish periodical *Ljus i Oster* (No. 6-7, 1989). In Plate's opinion, the church lacks experience in the social work it is now undertaking and needs training in mission work as well. It was in order to bring Christian values into the national revival movement in Latvia that Plate and Rubenis became active in the Latvian Popular

Front: Plate feels this is important to combat the general ignorance of Christianity in society.

If we can unite with the national revival, by uniting the people's renewal with true Christianity, then I shall be satisfied. The question is — can we manage it? There are certain deep-rooted characteristics in our people — we cannot call ourselves a very religious nation. Many of those campaigning for Latvia's freedom in all sincerity are ignorant of the Christian faith. I believe our future is directly dependent on how far our nationalism becomes Christian.

This could perhaps be said of all the Baltic nations and their churches.