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## THE RESEARCH ABOUT THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH HISTORY IN ESTONIA

The bigger research projects about the contemporary church history in Estonia are led from the Faculty of Theology, University of Tartu. There is a subdivision of the Chair of Church History which is most active in this kind of research. The *Research Group for the History of Church and Religion in Estonia* headed by *dr. theol.* Riho Altnurme was established in November 2001. The main objective of the Research Group is to study the Christian religion within the current borders of Estonia in the past and present. The objects of research are the activity of religious associations (churches), the history of theological thought and individual religiosity.

Projects about contemporary church history in Estonia so far:

*The Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet State 1944–1949* (led by R. Altnurme, 1999–2000), financed by Estonian Science Foundation (ESF). The result of the project was a book that reconstructed in a systematic manner the relationships between the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet state in 1944–1949. The key question was: to which extent was the church capable of maintaining its independence and to which extent was its activity subjected to the state's purposes? The state's anti-church actions and the church's reactions were described. What were the means left for the church to influence society? What was the role of the church in the underground resistance movement and how did its cooperation with the Soviet authorities begin? How did relationships with other denominations develop against the backdrop of the governmental policy? These questions were provided with answers in the research. The results of the project can be applied in the regulation of church-state relations as well as to analogous comparative research on other East European countries. The project has served as a model for research into Soviet-era institutions.

*The Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet State 1950–1969* (R. Altnurme, 2001–2004). The research attempts to answer the key question of what was the extent to which the Lutheran church was able to ta-

ke independent action and to which was it forced to serve the political purposes of the Soviet state. During the research, the actions taken by the Soviet power concerning the church were described, focusing on two aspects of the church-state relations of the period: the clergy's contacts with foreign countries and the anti-church campaign during the Khrushchev era. The working hypotheses were as follows: 1) the clergy's contacts with foreign countries were in the interests of the state; on the other hand, they gave the clergy a favourable opportunity to restore connections with the West, and 2) the anti-church campaign launched by the state took advantage of the secular worldview gaining ground in society; the campaign was the catalyst for the process of alienation from church but not its primary cause. Relations between these two aspects is another of the issues addressed in this research. As yet uninvestigated archival materials are predominantly used as primary sources, along with some memories of contemporaries. The project will result in a study that complements the picture of Estonian history during the Soviet occupation with a more detailed presentation of a topic that has so far remained largely unresearched. In addition, the work will establish a connection with general church history and the history of the Soviet Union's policy on foreign affairs and religious matters and will compare Estonian circumstances with those in other East European countries and occupied territories that have been under Soviet rule at the same time. Subsequently, it would be possible to continue the research on similar topics to cover the time until the end of the occupation period. Under this project also Master's students Atko Remmel and Andrei Sõtšov are working with their topics concerning respondingly the history of atheism and the history of Orthodox church in Estonia.

The former projects had given ground for participation in the bigger international project: *The European Commission Fifth Framework Programme project „Churches and European Integration“* ([www.helsinki.fi/teol/khl/cei](http://www.helsinki.fi/teol/khl/cei)), 2001–2004. The main objective of this joint project of the universities of Helsinki, Glasgow, Lund, Tartu and Münster is to paint a clearer picture of the role of churches in both West and East European countries during the period of the Cold War and the European integration beginning from 1945. The University of Tartu deals with implementing the working package titled „The Political Commitments of East European Christianity since the Cold War. The Estonian case.“ This project constitutes an attempt to provide a better insight into the situation of East European churches under Soviet rule. The scarcity of ties with the West and the mental kinship with Western culture are the focuses of the research. The main subtopics are the foreign relations of the Lutheran church since the

1950s, the finding of friendship churches in the late 1980s and the contacts with the Taizé monastery. According to the working hypothesis, inward integration with the West was preserved in the face of outward isolation thanks to the mentality and culture upheld, among others, by churches and theologians. This undergirds integration with the European Union pursued by the East European candidate countries.

The archival research will be done in the Estonian State Archive, State Archive of Russian Federation, Swedish State Archive, in the archive of Lutheran World Federation and in the archives of the Consistory of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church and the exile church. Semistructured interviews with people involved will be another method of work. Changes in traditional Christianity (spirituality) that came to Estonia from the West will be examined using the religious biographies of these people. Coordinator of the project is Prof. Dr. Aila Lauha (Helsinki University); at the University of Tartu, Riho Altnurme. As a researcher works MA Lea Altnurme. The results obtained can be used as a basis for decision-makers in churches and states to find suitable methods and policies for meeting European needs in domains related to the role of churches in European societies and politics.

Thanks to the international cooperation we are now able to get more support for the research from our state as well. The new target-financed project (larger network project that includes also hiring the researchers) since 2003 at the faculty is called *Religion and totalitarianism in contemporary Estonian history* and it unites the research potential of the chairs of comparative religion, church history and practical theology. Project is coordinated by Prof. Dr. Tarmo Kulmar (comparative religion) and the responsible researcher is R. Altnurme. The objectives of the project are: 1) to shape the theoretical foundations for the creation of a religious theory for totalitarian society, 2) answer the questions: to what extent totalitarian society and its disappearance have influenced the popularity of religious associations and how totalitarian regimes were able to influence the popularity of traditional religions in a situation in which the western world was moving towards overall secularisation. The overall features of totalitarian ideologies as religions, whether and to what extent Estonia's traditional religions display features of totalitarianism and the relations of the totalitarian systems of government and ideologies that have been prevalent in Estonia with other religions will be investigated. The anticipated results of the project are: 1) further development of the theory of the totalitarian state, 2) recommendations for the avoidance of totalitarianism in Estonia in future, 3) a more precise analysis of the present religious situation in Estonia.

Another new project, financed by ESF, *The History of Theological Thinking in Estonia* (R. Altnurme, 2002–2005) includes also research about the contemporary Estonian theology. It is an exceptional among other projects financed by ESF, being a team project, which includes besides the staff members of the chair of church history (Altnurme, Marju Lepajõe, Urmas Petti) and the chair of Old Testament (Andres Gross) also church historians from Estonian Institute of Humanities (Riho Saard) and Baltic Defense College (Andres Saumets). Also there are four postgraduate students becoming small scholarships from this project each year.

*In conclusion* it can be said that the research about the contemporary church history is rather well developed in recent years in Estonia, being covered by several projects. We have also contacts with researchers from many countries, including Lithuania and we hope to continue the cooperation.

## NAUJAUSIOSIOS BAŽNYČIOS ISTORIJOS TYRIMAS ESTIJOJE

Riho Altnurme

Santrauka

Pranešime autorius pristato pastaruosiu metu Estijoje atliekamus naujausiosios Bažnyčios istorijos tyrimus. Tokių tyrimų centru yra tapusi Tartu universiteto Teologijos fakulteto Bažnyčios istorijos katedra, kur aktyviai dirba ir pranešimo autorius. 1999–2000 m. parengęs knygą „Estijos Evangelikų liuteronų Bažnyčia ir sovietų valdžia 1944–1949 m.“, šiuo metu jis toliau nagrinėja temą „Estijos Evangelikų liuteronų Bažnyčia ir sovietų valdžia 1950–1969 m.“ Tartu universitetas taip pat dalyvauja vykdant tarptautinį projektą „Bažnyčios ir Europos integracija“, kurio tikslas – parodyti, koks buvo Bažnyčių vaidmuo Vakarų ir Rytų Europoje XX a. antrojoje pusėje palaikant bendros Europos idėją. Be to, Bažnyčios istorijos katedra dalyvauja vykdant dar du bendrus projektus: „Religija ir totalitarizmas naujausiojoje Estijos istorijoje“ bei „Teologinės minties istorija Estijoje“. Pirmojo tikslas – atskleisti totalitarizmo ir religijos sąveiką Estijoje ir jos padarinius, antrojo – parodyti istorinių veiksnių įtaką šiuolaikinei Estijos Liuteronų Bažnyčios teologijai.