

**“RELIGIOUS CULTS”, PARTICULARLY LUTHERANISM,  
IN THE SOVIET UNION IN 1944-1949**

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**Abstract.** This article deals with the attitude of the Soviet state towards the so-called religious cults (all religious associations except the Russian Orthodox Church) in 1944-1949. Following a change in Stalin’s policy on religion in 1943, a special Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC) was established for the regulation of the relations between “religious cults” and the state. At first (1945), “religious cults” were categorized only on the basis of their political views they had adhered to until then (neglecting Marxist ideology). In 1946-1949, religious associations were increasingly classified on the basis of their influence in society. Several organizations, including the Lutheran Church, improved their reputation due to their greater political loyalty. Traditional churches attained a better position thanks to their relatively low public activity, whereas active free churches came under attack. The CARC was quite independent in its policy; however, it primarily expressed the views of the Soviet government.

In 1943, there was a certain shift towards tolerance in Stalin’s policy on religion; the plans of direct annihilation of religion and churches were scrapped. This was one of the preconditions set by the Allies for the provision of aid in World War II. Due to these foreign policy considerations, the state maintained outward correctness in its relations with churches during and after the war. The Russian Orthodox Church, which voluntarily promulgated patriotic exhortations right from the beginning of the war, enjoyed greater rights than the others. Apparently, this was partly due to Stalin’s newly acquired affection for everything pertaining to Great Russia, as well as his plan to take advantage of the Orthodox Church in binding the soon-to-be-conquered East-European territories to the Soviet Union. The subject of this article is the attitude of the state towards other confessions and religions immediately following the change. The author focuses on the most important church from the Estonian perspective – the Lutheran Church.

### **The establishment and structure of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults at the Council of People's Commissars/Ministers<sup>1</sup>**

Two new organs were created at the then Council of the People's Commissars (CPC) of the USSR for dealing with issues of religion: the Council for the Affairs of Russian Orthodox Church (CAROC) in 1943 and the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC) in 1944 (the latter was founded on the basis of Decree No. 572 of the CPC on May 19, 1944). These organs were merged into the Council for Religious Affairs in 1965 (or 1966 at the latest) (GARF R-6991-3-12:13, Anderson 1992:399, Paul 1996:500, Walters 1993:17). The CARC was to take care of all the Christian confessions except the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as of relations between non-Christian religions and the Soviet state. The generic title given to these was "religious cults". The membership of the above mentioned Council was made up of representatives to all Soviet republics, regions [oblasts] and districts [krais], (except for those where only the Russian Orthodox Church operated). A formal exception was the Armenian SSR, where the institution of the representative was named the Council for the Affairs of Armenian-Gregorian Church at the CPC of the Armenian SSR, chaired by Oganessian (GARF R-6991-3-3:59).

Although the CARC has played an important role in shaping relations between the state and the churches – mainly mediating the government's viewpoints yet in simpler cases taking the initiative itself – it is difficult to find materials of scientific research on the CARC. In their treatments of the Soviet Union, both local and foreign researchers have focused on the affairs of the Orthodox Church, largely ignoring the other confessions and religions. The articles dealing with the topic (Anderson 1991, Luchterhandt 1993) make a passing mention of the establishment of the two different councils in the 1940s and then proceed with investigating the Council for the Affairs of Russian Orthodox Church. More attention has been paid to the activity of the two councils after their merger at a later time, particularly in connection with the so-called Furov's reports (a set of documents written by V. G. Furov, the chairman of the Council for Religious Affairs that were smuggled to the West in 1979), which has been one of the few sources for western researchers (before access to archives was granted) to follow the activity of the Council for Religious Affairs from within (Oppenheim 1991). The scientists studying the Lutheran Church have therefore been ignorant of the fact, assuming that only one council was established (Lotman 1995:124, Salo 1997:56) or that separate councils had been established in each Soviet republic (Talonon 1997:24, Viise 1995:123).

I. V. Poljanski was appointed chairman of the CARC. He held this position until 1957 (Fondy 1997). Second to Poljanski in the Council was his substitute J. Sadovski, whose signature adorns many letters sent to the representative to Estonia. In addition, the board of the Council included (at least in 1946) two

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<sup>1</sup> On March 15, 1946, the Council of the People's Commissars of the USSR was renamed the Council of Ministers (CM).

members and a secretary in charge. The Council was segmented into three main divisions: 1) Armenian, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic and Lutheran churches, 2) Islam, Judaism and Buddhism, and 3) Old Orthodox believers and evangelical congregations (free churches) (GARF R-6991-3-34:42). In the period under study, Karlis Pugo, of Latvian descent, was in charge of the division of Lutheranism, Roman Catholicism and Greek Catholicism at the Council. In 1946, the Council held 43 positions, yet the actual number of employees was 34. The number of positions allotted to representatives throughout the Soviet Union was 145, but only 131 of them were filled (GARF R-6991-3-34:42), apparently due to low activity of the local authorities. By the early 1947, the Council employed 146 representatives, of whom 32 worked part time (GARF R-6991-3-47:67). In the early 1948, the number of part-time employees at the Council had risen to 40 out of the total of 152 (GARF R-6991-3-53:38). Thus, the number of representatives had increased; however, part of them was not employed full time, implying lower professional quality.

In his address to the representatives at the meeting of July 25, 1945, Poljanski justified the establishment of the Council as follows: “... many petitions have been mailed to the Government in connection with religion” (GARF R-6991-3-12:17). Obviously, this was a rhetorical statement, which did not disclose the actual reason. Poljanski found a suitable citation from Lenin (dating from 1903), claiming that “everyone shall be granted the full right to confess whatever faith” (GARF R-6991-3-12:15). This gives the impression that the attitude of the state towards religion and believers was very favourable. Obviously, however, the actual reasons were foreign and domestic policy needs, which had also compelled the state to recognize the Russian Orthodox Church. First and foremost, it was necessary to demonstrate to the western military allies that religious freedom is a reality in the Soviet Union. At the same time the state wanted to take advantage of the foreign connections of religious organizations, in Eastern Europe as well as elsewhere in the new spheres of influence of the Soviet Union, to completely subjugate these territories.

According to the chairman, the Council had actually commenced its activity on July 1, 1944. Poljanski told the representatives that the main task of the Council is to establish ties between the government of the Soviet Union and the leaders of religious associations for the resolution of issues requiring a governmental decision, such as the opening of cultic (that is, worship) buildings (GARF R-6991-3-12:13). Poljanski stated that the Council would contribute to the normalization of the state’s relations with religious associations (GARF R-6991-3-12:17).

### **The attitude towards “religious cults” in 1945**

Under Lutheranism, the government of the Soviet Union primarily meant the Latvian and Estonian Evangelical Lutheran churches (the LELC and the EELC). According to the CARC, there were 406 Lutheran churches on the territory of the

Soviet Union as of January 1, 1946, of which 287 were in Latvia, 83 in Estonia, 33 in Lithuania, and one in Krasnodar, Odessa and Rovno (GARF R-6991-3-34:34). In the report of April 1, 1946, the number of Lutheran churches was corrected, being increased to 146 in Estonia and decreased to 27 in Lithuania; in this report, Calvinist churches were also taken into account (GARF R-6991-3-39:62). The statistics of that period, when the primary issue on the political agenda was the reopening of previously closed cultic buildings, were based on the buildings rather than the congregations.

At the above-mentioned meeting, Poljanski also gave his judgment on all the religious movements and churches operating in the USSR, including the EELC, and outlined the main rules of conduct in dealing with them in the future. Poljanski based his judgment on the behaviour of religious organizations during World War II: “Such religious organizations as the Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic<sup>2</sup> and Lutheran churches defected to the enemy and started to almost entirely defend the interests of German imperialism” (GARF R-6991-3-39-18:19). Consequently, they could be regarded as enemies. The report did not pay much attention to the Lutheran Church (since it was, after all, a fairly peripheral phenomenon in the context of the USSR). In the 53-page report, only one page is devoted to Lutheranism (as follows).

*The clergy of the Lutheran Church was extensively taken advantage of by the Germans to serve their goals of conquest. Part of the clergy took the path of active cooperation with the Germans, appearing in both the radio and the printed press, as well as in churches, with sharply anti-Soviet sermons and prayers. Part of the clergy fought the Red Army with arms in their hands-joining the police battalions. [---].*

*According to incomplete data, almost one half of the Lutheran clergy in Estonia, headed by Bishop Johan Kõpp, his substitute Johan Lauri and General Secretary of the Consistory Alve Rosmees [Roomees], have fled to Sweden and Germany together with the Germans. The situation is similar in the Lutheran Church of the Latvian SSR ... (GARF R-6991-3-39:25).*

*Many Latvian pastors have a German orientation, because they were educated either in Germany or “the University of Jurjev [Tartu], where until 1915 the teachers were Germans and all the instruction was in the German language. The Lutheran Church as a whole, like the Roman Catholic Church, is not loyal to the Soviet power” (GARF R-6991-3-39:26).*

Poljanski drew the conclusion: the attitude of the Council cannot be the same towards all the cults. It shall promote the normalization of relations with the Armenian and Old Orthodox churches and Muslim, Buddhist and sectarian organizations, “trying, in certain cases, to strengthen these churches and religions; however, the Council cannot do anything like that today with respect to the Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches.” As regards the Uniate Church, the punishment

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<sup>2</sup> Here and elsewhere in the article, the Greek Catholic Church stands for the Uniates of West Byelorussia and West Ukraine.

for their anti-Sovietism, assimilation into the Orthodox Church, was already being executed (GARF R-6991-3-39:25).

Poljanski continued: “While not placing obstacles to the existence of the latter [that is, the Roman Catholic and the Lutheran Church] and performing the registration of the already existing congregations of the said cults, the Council and its local employees shall implement all the measures to the effect that the administration of the said churches and other prominent figures among cultic servants and believers take the path of the full recognition of the Soviet power, together with all the consequences arising from that” (GARF R-6991-3-39:25).

Thus, a serious attack against these churches was to be launched, with the aim of achieving their political loyalty.

Even worse was the attitude of the state towards religious movements practising only “extreme mysticism”, such as Skoptsy, Hlysty, Pentecostals and *bodachy* (Ukrainian Jehova’s Witnesses). Extending recognition or support to these “could not even be considered”, as the report put it. If they were to disturb public order, they could be denied their license, based on the decree of January 23, 1918, on the separation of church and state and of school and church (GARF R-6991-3-39:27).

Addressing the problem of centres for religious organizations, Poljanski said that by then the Lutheran Church in the Estonian SSR had its central council (*tsestralnõi sovet*), “created late last year”, while the establishment of its counterpart in Latvia was still under way. Poljanski found that most of the [Lutheran] pastors were anti-Soviet and that “it is necessary to more intensively learn to know these individual pastors and more authoritative and influential believers who, being loyal to the Soviet power, might lead the Lutheran Church” (GARF R-6991-3-39:56). In general, the chairman of the CARC was fairly keen on establishing new centres for religious organizations and strengthening the existing ones in order to make it easier to control them. Therefore, he also intended to facilitate the establishment of centres for Muslims and Old Orthodox believers – *bezpopovetsy* (GARF R-6991-3-39:58).

In conclusion, it may be observed that the judgment given on religious movements in the report was first and foremost political, relatively detached from the Marxist ideology. It was based on the attitude of religious organizations towards the Soviet state and their position taken during the war. Extreme religious movements incurred the worst judgment due to their hostility towards the state. Lutheranism and Roman Catholicism were the ones that had the closest ties with the enemy defeated in the war, thus having a hostile predisposition. Indeed, the recently annexed territories in the west of the Soviet state, where these confessions were widespread, were not too friendly to the Soviet power.

It is important to stress that distinction was made not so much between the theological views or religious customs, as simply the political bias of the religious organizations. Poljanski found that “in the final analysis, everything depends on the political positions taken at this moment by each church or confession” (GARF R-6991-3-39:35). For instance, the report “The Situation of the Evangelical Church in Today’s Germany”, received on December 15 that year by Georgi

Karpov, chairman of the Council for the Affairs of Russian Orthodox Church, from the political department of the Soviet military administration in Germany, although emphasizing the anti-National Socialism actions of the Church, found that the Roman Catholic Church had been more noticeable in this respect and that the Evangelical Church was predominantly oriented towards the West at that time. The proofs presented to verify the claim included, among others, the fact that one of the leaders of the “Witness Church”, Martin Niemöller, did not stay in Berlin but moved to Stuttgart. The Church’s standpoint that Silesia, Pomerania and East Prussia were not completely lost by Germany was considered dangerous (GARF R-6991-3-17:40–56).

The then political approach may be illustrated by the survey of relations between the Vatican, the Orthodox Church and the Old Roman Catholic Church<sup>3</sup> drawn up by Poljanski on March 13, 1945. Poljanski found that the anti-papal Old Roman Catholicism might play an important role in the weakening of the Vatican and that, furthermore, it had historically good relations with the Orthodox Church. The Vatican had compromised itself because of its ties with fascism, for which reason its position in the eyes of the international community was considered weaker than before WWII (GARF R-6991-3-17:57–63). The Vatican was seen as an ideological enemy of Communism, thus it was necessary to weaken it.

In his survey of Uniatism drawn up on the same day, Poljanski found that the Vatican had always seen Uniatism as a temporary phenomenon, as “[an instrument of] intelligence reaching deep into the enemy – Orthodox – lands, the main objective of which is to cause divisions within the Orthodoxy and pave the way for the triumph of Roman Catholicism.” This gave ground to believe that the Uniate Church was the instrument of the enemy. Furthermore, Uniatism had fought for the independence of the Ukrainian nation in Galicia, been “an assistant to the SS” (GARF R-6991-3-17:64–66).

These documents reveal that the treatment of religious issues was based not so much on Marxist ideology as on Great Russian ideology, one component of which was supporting the Orthodox Church. Great Russian ideology demanded the expansion of the Russian Empire and a strong state with the Orthodox Church to support it.

On December 7, 1945, Poljanski sent to Molotov the report “Of the Activity of Some Religious Organizations and the Actions Planned by the Council”. As regards the Lutheran Church, it was again asserted that the Lutheran (as well as the Roman Catholic) clergy had taken an anti-Soviet position during the war and that approximately 30% of them fled together with the retreating German army. The vast majority of the clergy that remained had “an anti-Soviet bias even today” (GARF R-6991-3-10:97-98).

Such arguments imply that in 1945, the central authority of the Soviet power saw religious organizations as friends or foes depending on their political stance,

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<sup>3</sup> Old Roman Catholic Church or Old Roman Catholicism means here a group of bishop-headed churches in the West, who denied the papal primacy and left the Roman Catholic Church in the 19th century.

irrespective of Marxist ideology. In this period, Lutheran churches belonged to the enemy camp. The anti-Soviet attitude among the churches cannot be denied – Soviet power did not see ghosts. At the same time, such a clear distinction along political lines was a temporary phenomenon, a remnant from the period of direct warfare.

### **A change in the attitude in 1946–1949**

The attitude of the CARC towards religious organizations changed along two lines. First, a more favourable treatment was granted to those who demonstrated loyalty to the state authority (if disloyalty was observed the attitude changed again). Second, towards the end of the period under study, consideration was increasingly given to the public influence and activity rather than the political position of religious organizations. The less influential and the more passive a religious organization, the more favourable the judgment passed on it by the state. The reasons for the first change were obvious; for the second, however, it was the fact that an increasing emphasis was laid on the development of a homogeneous society by means of ideology. The ideology propagated by religious organizations was a stumbling block on this path.

As early as since 1946, a slight change could be observed in the overall tone of the members of the CARC as they described Estonian and Latvian Lutheran churches. Nevertheless, in his report “Of the Work of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults and the Situation of Religious Cults” sent to Kliment Voroshilov on April 5, 1946, Poljanski still listed all the “crimes” of the Lutheran clergy committed before, adding that “the remaining part of the clergy as a whole has not rejected their hostile position and continues to offer assistance to Estonian and Latvian nationalists in their fight against the Soviet power, in one way or the other.”

At the same time, he had reason to say that there was a certain minority within the Latvian and Estonian clergy that, after making a realistic assessment of the political situation, would take a position loyal to the Soviet power. “In January 1945<sup>4</sup>, following the escape of the bishop of the Estonian Lutheran Church, some of these pastors elected a new church administration, putting a substitute bishop, pastor Pähn, in charge of it. The latter has repeatedly made public addresses to believers in 1945 and 1946, calling them to conscientiously fulfil all the ordinances given by the Soviet power.” As for Latvia, Poljanski held that the change of church administration there had lingered. “Only in March 1946 did a group of pastors more loyal to the Soviet power elect a new substitute bishop, Pastor Turs” (GARF R-6991-3-34:51–52). The attitude towards Lutheran churches

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<sup>4</sup> In January 1945, a deputy bishop had indeed been elected. The then bishop Johan Kõpp had fled from Estonia already in September 1944.

softened due to the fact that they were able to put persons willing to cooperate with the state authority in charge of themselves.

The same document reveals the benefits a church might reap from being loyal to the Soviet power: the Armenian Church was allowed to open an ecclesiastical academy and a seminary, issue a newspaper and an almanac, open a foreign currency account in the state bank, receive parcels from abroad, meet with wealthy Armenians-in-exile, etc. These favours were granted due to the fact that the *katolikos*, the head of the church, had participated in a campaign aimed at incorporating the territories of Armenia belonging to Turkey into Soviet Armenia (GARF R-6991-3-34:51).

There were problems with the Latvian Lutheran Church. Latvia had been more active in ecclesiastical work than Estonia: the Lutheran evangelization campaign – daily divine services, initiated by Deputy Archbishop Karlis Irbe – was a thorn in the side of the authorities. On October 25, 1945, Sadovski also made an inquiry to the representative to Estonia about whether there was anything like that going on in Estonia (GARF R-6991-3-17:16). The Latvian archbishop was seen as the initiator of the evangelization campaign, therefore they wanted to remove him from the administration of the church. Utilizing an oppositional grouping within the clergy, the following operation was planned to reach this goal: 1) An initiative group was to be formed; 2) The group was to draw up a political declaration to be submitted to the CPC of the Latvian SSR, which would justify the taking over of the administration of the church from Irbe; 3) The declaration was to be published in the local newspapers, together with the representative's explanation, which would permit the activity of this provisional organ; 4) At a later time, when an opportunity would present itself, the initiator group was to convene a meeting of provosts, who would elect the head of the church and the permanent body of administration.

The plans did not materialize as was expected and the state security organs arrested Irbe on February 21, 1946. Thereafter, on March 8, 1946, the remaining members of the Consistory of the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church elected Gustav Turs, a candidate pleasing to the local representative, as a new deputy archbishop (Talonen 1997:89,99).

After Turs became the church's head, the CARC's view of the Lutheran Church seems to have become more favourable. The report presented to the leadership of the USSR (to Kliment Voroshilov, Sergei Kaftanov, Georgi Alexandrov and Viktor Abakumov) on July 1, 1947, mentions a turn towards loyalty in the Lutheran church and promises:

- a) to open churches in the eastern part of the USSR for the Estonians, Latvians and Germans who ended up there in the war [possibly, the deported are meant];
- b) to open Lutheran seminaries – in Tallinn with 60 students, in Riga with 90 students;
- c) in answer to believers' pleas, and with the aim of bolstering the prestige of the new church leadership, to permit the issue of a prayer book in the scope of five sheets;



- d) not to hinder the groupwise preparation of 16-year-old and older youths for confirmation in their off hours, with the duration of four weeks;
- e) not to hinder the celebration of traditional Lutheran feasts at cemeteries;
- f) to allow the printing of leaflets containing religious hymns [songsheets] for the confirmands, and in the event of religious feasts, giving the local authorities permission to grant the application in each individual case (GARF R-6991-3-47:213).

The work statement for 1947 and the first quarter of 1948, which was approved by the CARC on June 9, 1948, and sent to the Bureau of Culture of the CM of the USSR (GARF R-6991-3-53:12-49), Voroshilov, the secretaries of the All-Russian Communist (bolshevist) Party (AC(B)P) Alexei Kuznetsov and Mikhail Suslov, and M. Turkin at the personnel department of the AC(B)P (GARF R-6991-3-54:88-125), confirmed the transfer of the Lutheran Church to the division of the religious organizations loyal to the state. Religious organizations had been divided into four divisions: the first included Muslims, the Armenian Church, Old Orthodox believers, Evangelical Christians and Baptists, who “gave up fighting against the Soviet power during the Civil War and the first years of the building of Socialism”; the second Lutherans and Calvinists, who “are only just turning to this path”; the third Roman Catholics and Uniates, who “try to continue resistance to the Soviet power, mostly in a passive form”; and the fourth “all kinds of extremely mystical and superstitious underground groups”, who “although being small in number, offer resistance of every conceivable kind to the actions of the Soviet power” (GARF R-6991-3-53:13).

As it appears, the judgment on churches continued to be based on political grounds, but it was followed by the judgment on the public role of different religious organizations and the position of the clergy within them.

The report “Of the Forms and Methods of Religious Propaganda” of July 7, 1947, addressed to Zhdanov, Voroshilov and Turkin (head of the personnel department of the AC(B)P) emphasized the need to restrict religious propaganda, in which respect Baptists and Adventists had become particularly prominent (GARF R-6991-3-47:242). Here a shift of attitude can be observed. Previously, Baptists had been regarded as loyal from the political perspective and favored for their relationships with the USA, whereas now, when foreign relations with western countries started to cool down, more attention was paid to other aspects of Baptist activity. Even their numerous foreign connections could not spare Baptists from persecution. Foreign relations were encouraged only in case of the Armenian Church and Muslims – “both for the propagation of religious freedom existing in the USSR and for the fulfilment of certain tasks assigned to them”. Obviously, the Near East direction in foreign policy was still seen as promising at that time. As for other confessions and religions, their foreign relations were to be determined by the current needs (GARF R-6991-3-47:300).

At the same time, the rights of the churches were not completely restricted; it was emphasized that the state is not opposed to the opening of new ecclesiastical seminaries. The promises made to Lutherans were repeated, and it was specified

that the Latvian Lutherans would receive their prayer book with a circulation of 10,000 copies (GARF R-6991-3-47:304).

Thus, Lutherans were gradually becoming the favourites of the state. From the perspective of public role, the Soviet ideology had placed Lutherans into the highest and most favoured category among “cults”, which also included Muslims, the Armenian Church and Old Orthodox believers, who “attach the highest importance to the performing of the cult (*otpravlenie kulta*)” and evidence nearly no proselytism, that is, “an excessive zeal to convert anyone into their faith” (*išresmernaja revnost k obraščeniju kovo libo v svoju veru*). In the eyes of Soviet officials, a negative example in this respect was set by, for instance, Evangelical Christians and Baptists, who “do active work through their followers in order to bring new members into their churches”, and Jews, who “are trying to convert synagogues into community centres for Jews (GARF R-6991-3-53:13).

In the opinion of the authorities, the influence of the clergy was smallest in hierarchically structured churches – in the Roman Catholic, Uniate and Armenian-Gregorian Churches, and partly among Muslims and Old Orthodox believers – where the clergy was a professional “caste”, ruler of the church both formally and factually. In other churches – for instance, those of Baptists and Adventists – the clergy was closely related to believers and in many respects dependent on them, as stated in the document. (GARF R-6991-3-53:13). Churches that had close relations with people were dangerous in the eyes of Soviet authorities.

Here, again, a shift of emphasis can be observed from the political to the social sphere – Baptists and Adventists became the particular targets of government attacks. The context may be illustrated by a statement in the sermon held by the Berlin pastor Otto Dibelius in Marienkirche, Berlin, on April 28, 1947 (which had obviously alarmed the authorities), that the church’s duties were social rather than political. This statement was referred to in the report “Church Life in Today’s Germany” of May 31, 1947, signed by Colonel Tyulpanov, head of the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (GARF R-6991-3-49:243).

For Lutherans, only the first three items on the list of promises made in the CARC report of the previous year (see above) had remained in effect. Concerning churches in the eastern part of the Soviet Union, it was specified that they had been planned to be established in the provinces where Lutherans (Germans, Estonians, Latvians) had been resettled during the war. The Lutheran seminaries of Tallinn and Riga were not allowed to accept more than 25 new students each year. No mention was made of confirmation classes, cemetery services and songsheets. The permission to issue a prayer book for Latvian Lutherans was, however, granted (GARF R-6991-3-53:43).

No explanation was given of why the fulfilment of the promises were withheld. Instead, attacks were launched against the Lutheran Church. A comment to the yearly report of the Estonian representative, signed by Poljanski on January 21, 1949, included a demand to form an oppositional group against the substitute bishop Pähn. The group was to be headed by the “front-line combatant pastor” Edgar Hark (GARF R-6991-3-1340:38). Consequently, problems rooted in

political loyalty had again surfaced. The exact nature of these is not specified in the CARC documentation. However, it may be inferred from the sharp response of the security organs to the protest by August Pähn and the Consistory of the EELC against the speech by the Minister of Education Arnold Raud in September 1947 deriding the clergy and religion that this had been the very reason for the loss of governmental trust (ERAF 131-1-211:89,92-93). Towards the end of that period, the state launched decisive actions to solve the problems so far being investigated, such as confirmation classes and the Moravian Brethren.<sup>5</sup> The representative had made a fairly thorough investigation into these. Obviously, both confirmation classes and the activity of Moravian Brethren (whom the representative called “a Lutheran sect”) were considered typical of Lutherans and at the same time closest to people by the Soviet authorities.

Consequently, towards the end of the period, the leadership of the Lutheran Church (this time in Estonia) was again considered not loyal enough, and the solution was deemed to be the election of a new archbishop and the adoption of new statutes. The state started to pay more attention to the influence of religion on society. This directed the CARC’s attention to other religious organizations. However, it also led to the prohibition of confirmation classes in the Lutheran Church and the subordination of the Moravian Brethren prayer houses to the Lutheran Church in order to reduce the influence of the Brethren on society.

From this fairly general line of attitude, the CARC developed concrete courses of action. It seems that the CARC was a fairly independent organ; at the same time, it is undoubtedly important to investigate the actual relations between the Council and the government.

### **The main courses of action of the CARC and its relations with the Government**

The CARC dealt with the normalization of relations between the state and religious organizations by way of regulating the activity of religious associations, bearing in mind political expediency. The Council’s activities included the preparation for the submission to the government of petitions received from leaders of religious associations and the learning to know the religious movements in the state (GARF R-6991-3-53:12).

Initially, the main activity of the CARC was granting permission for the reopening of the previously closed cultic buildings, in which particular attention was paid to mosques and Old Orthodox churches. The first action of major importance was the registration of religious associations, followed by the conclusion of contracts with them on the use of cultic buildings, by which the

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<sup>5</sup> Moravian Brethren (Unitas Fratrum) is a pietistic movement which has its roots in the 15th century and which was renewed by Count Zinzendorf in the 18th century. In Estonia it was quite influential in the 18th and early 19th centuries. In the 20th century the congregations were already rather small.

latter were essentially nationalized, along with the rest of the property. In the government, the matters pertaining to the CARC were primarily dealt with by Voroshilov, Deputy Chairman of the CPC/CM of the USSR.

The preferred strategy was tolerance, “the policy of patience,” as formulated by Poljanski in his conversation with Voroshilov on January 4, 1947. In the opinion of the chairman of the CARC, it was important to do “political work with the masses”, since brutal administrative pressure would not yield any results. Voroshilov seconded him, adding that the task of the Council was not to “erase” religion but instead: “[--] you must “lead” religious movements, reducing their harmfulness using specific techniques that are characteristic of you.” Voroshilov permitted bolder action (obviously meaning bolder obstruction), provided that he be informed more frequently (GARF R-6991-3-8:103-105).

The “regulation” of the activity of religious associations may be illustrated, in the case of the EELC, by such actions as the prohibition of confirmation classes, the registration of Moravian Brethren congregations as ones subordinated to the Lutheran church, and the replacement of the administration of the Lutheran church.

Not all the initiatives of the CARC were granted governmental approval. For instance, on August 30, 1944, the preparation of a reference book on “religious cults” was started. Karlis Pugo was to write articles on the Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches for it. The reference book was intended for the use inside the CARC, the volume of an article was not to exceed half a page. The list of headwords was to be completed as early as by September 8 (GARF R-6991-2-2:1). On January 4, 1947, however, Voroshilov found, for some reason, that “in this form it is absolutely unnecessary”, and the reference book was never actually finished (GARF R-6991-3- 8:108).

The CARC also argued with Voroshilov on the establishment of centres for religious organizations, the purpose of which was to effect better control over the activity of religious associations. The CARC found that “religious centres almost always play a decisive role in the activity and orientation of cults.” If a religious centre is better organized and has greater authority, the processes occurring in the religious association are more liable to regulation” (GARF R-6991-3-53:14). In a telephone conversation with Poljanski on April 16, 1947, Voroshilov suggested that the establishment of an all-Soviet Union centre for the Old Orthodox believers-*bezpopovetsy* be suspended for five months, expressing doubt as to whether “a centre for self-burners-fanatics is really necessary”. Poljanski objected, claiming that a centre would render it easier to maintain contact with them (GARF R-6991-3-53:127-128).

Voroshilov also displayed the same attitude towards the establishment of a centre in Moscow for Muslims at his meeting with Poljanski on February 12, 1949. Until then, Muslims had had four spiritual leaderships, who had played their own role in international relations. Justifying his opposition, Voroshilov asserted that they would then need to found a centre for Jews and Old Orthodox believers as well. “Previously, there have been no such centres; these would activate

believers,” he claimed. Finally, Voroshilov held that “we have enough of one centre, the head of which we have to reckon with.” Added to the script of the conversation was a comment that Voroshilov meant the patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church (GARF R-6991-3-53:175-177).

The attitude of Voroshilov towards Baptists was extremely negative; towards the end of the 1940s, this obviously started to influence the policy of the CRCA. Perhaps it was Voroshilov’s positions that the CRCA built on in taking its official stand on the dangerous proselytism of Baptists. In 1947, Voroshilov, when expressing his views on Baptism, said that “it is a contagious scab that is difficult to treat,”<sup>6</sup> but that due to Baptists’ international ties, one must be careful in dealing with them (GARF R-6991-3-53:107). Obviously, he was unwilling to launch decisive action. Poljanski’s data for 1946 showed that the Baptists of the USSR had relations with 14 foreign organizations, apart from seven Russian organizations in exile (GARF R-6991-3-34:125-129). On June 15, 1948, Voroshilov interrupted Poljanski, who was delivering a report at the Bureau of Culture of the CM of the USSR, and proposed to perform a more careful study of Baptists, since their “aggressive proselytism is most harmful.” In Voroshilov’s opinion, it was much more difficult, in many cases, to cope with Baptists than with Roman Catholics, who never disguised their animosity (GARF R-6991-3-8:153).

The legal foundation for the activity of the CARC was weak. In 1947, statements were made on the preparation of a draft Religious Cult Act (GARF R-6991-3-47:301); however, the government was obviously again opposed to that. The respective act came into effect in the USSR as late as 1977, when it was clear that Communism is a matter of a more distant future (Chumachenko 1999:233).

In 1949, the general trend started to change towards the closing rather than reopening of cultic buildings. At his meeting with Poljanski on February 12, 1949, Voroshilov declared that from that time on cultic buildings might be opened only if this was desired by at least 1,000 people. As for the future, Voroshilov authorized the CARC to close churches attended by only 5–10 people, as well as churches where “counter-revolutionary” activity was taking place (GARF R-6991-3-8:180). In the following years, however, these actions were never put into practice.

The political (foreign policy) situation had changed: there was no need to preserve good relations with western countries, since ties with the Allies had broken and the Cold War had started. Congregations had been registered and their property nationalized. Now it was time to start with the second stage in the work of the Council, “a planned, systematic and purposeful regulation of the activity of religious cults.” These were the words written by Poljanski to the representative to Estonia at the CARC on January 21, 1949 (GARF R-6991-3-1340:37).

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<sup>6</sup> “*Eto priliptšivaja, trudno poddajuštšajasja letšeniju “korosta”.*”

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