

PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP IN LATVIA

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Abstract

How did geo-politics and history influence the development of biblical scholarship in Latvia in the last one hundred years (1920-present)? This essay explores the three major periods of Latvia's recent history – the first period of Latvian independence (1920-1940), the Soviet occupation (1940-1990), and the second period of Latvian independence (from 1990 onwards) – and it shows that a constant throughout these three periods is how German scholarship and the historical-critical method have shaped biblical studies in Latvia. The first period of independence was considered the 'golden age' of biblical exegesis in contrast with the period of Soviet occupation, when there was a stagnation of biblical scholarship and a disconnect with the progressive scholarly debate in the West, as well as a distorted hermeneutical framework. The revived hope of a robust biblical scholarship in the second period of independence also resurrected the long-standing dispute between the perceived liberal and conservative approaches to biblical studies and theology, and re-established the divide between the Faculty of Theology and other theological institutions. This has weakened the relationship between academic theological education and church life, and limited cooperation and biblical debate between scholars and institutions. Furthermore, long-standing German influence in biblical scholarship has been slowly giving way to a wider international scholarly community. This paper concludes that the future of biblical scholarship in Latvia needs to develop on a national and international level. Scholars and institutions need to learn how to cooperate towards robust biblical research and establish a dialogue with not just the German-speaking world but also the wider international (English-speaking) community. This will bring Latvian scholars to an environment where they can engage with and contribute to the international biblical debate.

Keywords: First independence; Soviet period; Post-Soviet period; Old Testament and New Testament scholarship; Historical-critical method; German biblical scholarship

This chapter surveys the effect of geo-politics and history on the agenda of biblical scholarship in Latvia. Since the 13th century, Latvia has been part of various empires.¹ The German empire had a particular influence because of the establishment of the Latvian Lutheran Church,² and German theology and biblical scholarship have shaped biblical research in Latvia ever since.

The first period of Latvia's independence (1918-1940) saw the establishment of the Faculty of Theology at the Latvian University (in 1920) and as a result, the beginning of formal biblical scholarship in Latvia. In the first period of Latvia's independence, we will discuss the contention between the so-called liberal and conservative approaches to biblical research and its effect on the relationship between the Faculty of Theology (labelled "liberal") and the churches in Latvia, which lead to the establishment of conservative theological seminaries. Furthermore, the geopolitical ideologies of Marxism and Nazism prompted a response from some biblical scholars.

The Second World War (WWII) and the Soviet occupation of Latvia (1940-1990) led to the closure of the Faculty of Theology and the voluntary exile of biblical scholars to the West (e.g., Germany, USA) and forced exile further East (e.g., Siberia). The scholars that remained in Latvia were cut off by the Soviet authorities from broader scholarly developments, and only a few random books (not necessarily written by Latvians) were smuggled into Latvia during this period. Nevertheless, the desire to continue with biblical research was kept alive, as seen in the works of some local scholars. This study will show how limited access to current biblical scholarship affected the research of Paulis Žibeiks, Edgars Jundzis, and others.

The second period of Latvia's independence (from 1990, after the collapse of the Soviet Union) and the re-opening of the Faculty of Theology in 1991 renewed the culture of biblical scholarship. However, this renewed culture had to come to terms with a 50-year Soviet imposed gap in exposure to wider biblical research. When the local and self-taught scholars, who had remained in Latvia during the Soviet occupation, clashed with Western-educated Latvian scholars, who returned to the faculty, long-standing issues of liberal versus conservative theology flared up once again and led to tension between the church (with the Lutheran Theological Seminary) and the Faculty of Theology.³ A new

¹ Latvia was established by the ancient people settled in the Baltic countries (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia), known as the Balts. In the 9th Century, the Vikings ruled over Latvia, and by the 12th and 13th Century, German Knights ruled and Christianised Latvia. From the mid-16th Century to the early 18th Century, parts of Latvia were divided between Poland and Sweden, and by the end of the 18th Century, Latvia was under the control of the Russian Empire. Following the Russian Revolution (1914-1923), Latvia declared its first independence on the 18th of November 1918 and was recognised as an independent country by Soviet Russia and Germany in 1920. Latvia's independence was short lived, however, as it was incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1940 and then taken over by Nazi Germany from 1941 to 1944. This was followed, once again, by the annexation of Latvia into the Soviet Union until its second independence from the Soviet Union on 21st of August 1991. Embassy of the Republic of Latvia to the United States of America. "History of Latvia: A brief synopsis". <https://www2.mfa.gov.lv/en/usa/culture/history-of-latvia-a-brief-synopsis>. Last consulted on 08.11.2021.

² The Lutheran Church of Latvia is one of the main Christian denominations in Latvia.

³ The authors of this article considered the possibility of avoiding the labels "liberal" and "conservative", as they are all too often used as clichés, squeezing a variety of theological views and practices into narrow frames. However, these notions are also undoubtedly used in internal theological discourse in Latvia; therefore, the authors choose to use them. The tension between "liberal" and "conservative" theology has long roots in Latvia. First of all, these designations are related to the theological discussion and approaches in German theology (historical-critical method) at the end 19th Century and beginning of 20th Century, and

generation of Latvian scholars have been encouraged to study for their post-graduate work abroad (particularly in Germany and Switzerland) with the aim of returning to Latvia and developing biblical research. Their education in German-speaking countries continues to reinforce the influence of German theology in current biblical scholarship.

The conclusion of this paper will present a synopsis of different trends of biblical scholarship in the past hundred years and a reflection on the future of biblical research in Latvia.

The First Period of Latvia's Independence (1918-1940)

This section is largely based on Jouko J. Talonen's forthcoming book, *Latvian Evangelical-Lutheran Theology in 1920-1940*.⁴ Since the 1200s, Latvia had been occupied by different Empires – German, Polish, Swedish, and by the end of the 18th century, Latvia was annexed by Russia. During this latter period, formal theological education (particularly of Lutheran ministers) was taking place at the University of Tartu in neighbouring Estonia (whose university was re-established by Russian Emperor Alexander in 1802, after it had been closed down by Russian forces in the Great Northern War in the year 1710). Theological education at Tartu was provided by German-speaking theologians, and the students were predominantly Baltic Germans⁵ (some native Latvians were also given the opportunity to pursue further studies in Theology) (Talonen, forthcoming: II.1a).

Following the Russian Revolution (1917-1923), Latvia declared its independence for the first time in 1918 (which period lasted, 1918-1940). After so many centuries under different external powers, there was now in Latvia a sense of national identity and socio-economic optimism. It was in such an atmosphere that the University of Latvia was established in 1919 and within it, the Faculty of Theology in 1920 (Talonen, forthcoming: III.1a).

As the Faculty of Theology was part of a state university, the government declared that the Faculty of Theology ought to be non-confessional. This meant that confessional

opportunities for theological education in the Baltics. Until the Faculty of Theology was established in Riga 1920, Latvian theologians received their education at the University of Tartu, where theology was influenced by traditional Lutheran orthodox views. Some of the Latvian theologians were educated also in German theological institutions and were therefore influenced by more liberal views, for example, the theology of Adolf Harnack and his understanding of Christianity. The different educational backgrounds, both of which were influenced by German theology, were a precondition for the development of Latvian theology and the formation of "conservative" and "liberal" camps in the interwar period. The same could be said about the 'theologies' in the Soviet era, when the theological formation from the thirties was carried on, one could say fossilised. The hostility of the Soviet authorities to the church and theology, decreased educational opportunities in theology, and the omnipotence of criticism of religion made critical theology, such as critical Bible study, look like it speaks the same language as the oppressors. All this strengthened the positions of conservative theology. After Latvia regained its independence, religious and theological opportunities in Latvia grew rapidly, and the labels "liberal" and "conservative" obtained new meaning. Likewise, the view of the biblical text and the use of exegetical methods play an important role in understanding these concepts. On the one hand, there are be defenders of the Bible as a verbally inspired text with certain ethical norms, and on the other, theologians representing critical research. However, completely clear lines between the two camps cannot be drawn. This is shown, for example, by the question of the ordination of women, whose defence is often associated with the liberal wing of theology in Latvia, but many of its advocates and even female pastors are deeply pietistic and, in many aspects, conservative theologians.

⁴ Prof. Talonen granted us permission to use his research for this this section.

⁵ This term is used to mean "German speaking people who lived in the three Baltic countries."

Dogmatics and Practical Theology were not initially taught at this faculty.⁶ Instead, historical and critical theology (implemented particularly by Kārlis Kundziņš Jr. and Jānis Sanders)⁷ were given particular prominence (Talonen, forthcoming:II.3).

Most docents⁸ and professors of the Faculty of Theology were former students from Tartu's Faculty of Theology. In the late 1800s, Tartu's Faculty of Theology saw a shift in biblical scholarship. The older generation of scholars had adhered to a conservative theology based more explicitly on the authority and inspiration of the Bible (supported by professors Friedrich. A. Philippi, Theodosius Harnack, Carl F. Keil, Johann H. Kurtz, and Arnold F. Christiani), whilst the younger generation employed historical criticism in their analysis of Scripture (supported by professors Vilhelm Volck and Ferdinand Mühlau). When the Faculty of Theology was established in Latvia, the theological approaches of Adolf von Harnack (who was himself Baltic German), Rudolf Bultmann, and Rudolf Otto shaped biblical scholarship (Talonen, forthcoming:VII).

The Faculty's theological position and the government's policy regarding the teaching of confessional dogmatics and practical theology brought opposition by the Lutheran Church (especially from bishop Kārlis Irbe), who dubbed these decisions 'liberal policies.' This inclination by its leadership led the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia (ELCL) to establish its own pastoral training, with the foundation of the Latvian Home Mission Society (1919) and later its own theological Institute (1923-1937).⁹ The latter focused on the training of clergy (1923-1933) to support its parishes, and it later supplemented other church ministries within the Luteran church (1934-1937). The Institute was also a means of preserving a conservative clergy as a response to the perceived 'liberal theology' of the Faculty of Theology (Talonen, forth-coming:III.1a). This perception, as well as tension between the Lutheran Church (which included most church denominations in Latvia) and the Faculty of Theology, continues to the present day in Latvia.

The newly-independent Latvia (1918-1940), eager to imprint its national identity and reverse the social, intellectual and economic prominence of Baltic Germans, led to ethnic tensions between the two factions of society (ethnic Latvians and Baltic Germans). This tension was manifested between Baltic Germans and the University of Latvia, as well as with the Latvian clergy in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia (ELCL). Latvians wanted their institutions no longer to be run by the Baltic German minority, but rather wanted to add their national imprint both to the university and the church. This then led Baltic Germans to found their own Institution, the Herder Institute (1921).¹⁰ From a theological point of view, the Herder Institute followed a historical-critical approach as was done at the University's Faculty of Theology.

The most notable biblical scholars that made a contribution towards biblical scholarship during this interwar period were the Old Testament scholars Immanuel

⁶ In the beginning, the idea was to teach Philosophical ethics. However, in 1923, the university allowed the teaching of Practical Theology and Dogmatics, and from 1925, Ethics was taught as Christian Ethics. Cf. Talonen (forthcoming:1a).

⁷ Kārlis Kundziņš Jr. and Jānis Sanders were the first lecturers at the Faculty of Theology.

⁸ In Central and Easter Europe, docent is an academic rank below that of a full professor.

⁹ Talonen (forthcoming:III.1b). The death of many priests as a result of the WWI created a need for pastoral training.

¹⁰ Talonen (forthcoming:III.1c). The Herder Institute was a Baltic German university in Riga. There was no other Baltic German university in Riga between the two World Wars.

Benzinger; his two students, Eduards Zicāns and Feliks Treijs; and Rudolf Abramowski. The New Testament scholars were Kārlis Kundziņš Jr., Jānis Rezevskis, Ādams Mačulāns, and Heinrich Seesemann. The German scholars Joachim Jeremias and Carl Schneider also brought valuable contributions to biblical scholarship during their tenure at the Herder Institute. The theological approaches of Adolf von Harnack, Rudolf Bultmann, and Rudolf Otto, as well as the political climate of Germany in the 1930s, influenced the contributions of Latvian biblical scholars.

Old Testament Scholarship

Immanuel Benzinger (1865-1935) (Talonen, forthcoming:IV.1a) was a German professor of the History of Israelite Religion and Old Testament at the Faculty of Theology. While studying at the University of Tübingen, Benzinger had developed a historical-critical approach, initially influenced by the exegetical school of Julius Wellhausen.¹¹ Later, Benzinger moved towards the Panbabylonian (*Panbabylonismus*) approach (see Talonen, forthcoming:IV.1a, fn. 206). Benzinger exhibited a particular interest on the archaeology and history of Israel and Middle East (Benzinger 1927);¹² his biblical research focused on source and redaction criticism of the Pentateuch and of other books of the Old Testament (Benzinger 1921; 1924a; 1924b; 1927; 1938).¹³ Benzinger's wide range of research interests made him well known internationally, and he participated in a number of conferences in Germany and elsewhere in Western Europe.¹⁴

Benzinger's scholarship on the history of Israel and Old Testament exegesis influenced his students, Eduards Zicāns and Feliks Treijs (Talonen, forthcoming:IV.1b). Zicāns was the first ethnic Latvian scholar in Old Testament studies at the Faculty of Theology.¹⁵ His doctoral thesis (1934), titled *Arābieši Vecajā Derībā un viņu attiecības pret israēliešiem* ("The Arabs in the Old Testament and Their Relations to the Israelites"), was the first doctoral work in Old Testament exegesis in the Latvian language (Talonen, forthcoming:IV.1b). According to Talonen (forthcoming:IV.1b), Zicāns' thesis proved controversial; nevertheless, his work was recognised by the academic community at the Faculty. Zicāns' (1937a) further research focused on the historical background of Israel's religious festivals; a now lost publication¹⁶ analysed the influence of Canaanites' human sacrifice on Israel's cult until the times of King David and of Israel's exile. However, Zicāns' later study on 'The Cult

¹¹ Particularly the source theory of the Pentateuch. See Talonen (forthcoming:IV.1a).

¹² Benzinger was inspired by his Tubingen professors: orientalist Albert Socin and Emil Kautzsch, the founders of *Deutsche Verein zur Erforschung Palästinas* (Talonen, forthcoming:IV.1a).

¹³ The latter is a collection of Benzinger's lectures compiled by Eduards Zicāns in 1938, after Benzinger's death in 1935. The new edition of this monograph was later published with the title *Ievads Vecā Derībā*. Red. E. Zicāns. Otrs izdevums. (Lincoln, NE: LELBA apg., 1982). Cf. Talonen, *Latvian Evangelical-Lutheran*, IV.1a.

¹⁴ Benzinger was registered in the Index of theologians of the influential *Religion in der Geschichte und Gegenwart* (RGG) series in 1927. Cf. Talonen (forthcoming: IV.1a).

¹⁵ Zicāns studied at the Faculty of Theology between 1921-1926. He pursued further his studies in Berlin (1927) under Ernst Sellin and in Leipzig (1927) under Albrecht Alt. Cf. (Talonen, forthcoming: IV.1b).

¹⁶ According to Talonen (forthcoming:IV.1b, fn. 221), Zicāns wrote a 234-page monograph on 'human sacrifice in ancient Canaanite and Israelite cult'. This monograph has been lost; however, some of its ideas are found in Zicāns' article titled "Mēleka kults Vecajā Derībā", *LNA LVV4* (5440/1 14). Cf. J.J. Talonen, *Latvian kansallisen teologian synty. Kiista teologian suunnasta ja taistelu pappiskoulutuksesta Latvian evankelis-luterilaisessa kirkossa 1918–1934*. *Studia Historica Septentrionalia* 55. (Rovaniemi: Pohjois-Suomen Historiallinen Yhdistys, 2008),197.

of Moloch in the Old Testament’¹⁷ argues that religious traditions of the Canaanites, as well as of the Israelites, were both founded on older Semitic religions. Zicāns (1939) also wrote a text-critical analysis of the book of Isaiah and prepared a compilation and translation of Old Testament terminology into the Latvian language (Talonen, forthcoming:IV.1b, fn. 225). He also participated in the translation of the Old Testament into Latvian. From the late 1930s until 1940, Zicāns changed his research focus. His particular interest in religious history and the influence of Rudolf Otto’s studies on comparative religions led him to research Latvian folk history and religion (Zicāns 1937b; 1938; Talonen, forthcoming:IV.1b). In 1944 Zicāns fled with his family as refugees to Germany, where he died in 1946.

Fēlikss Treijs (Felix Treu),¹⁸ though he did not write a doctoral thesis, proved his research abilities in his writings. Treijs (1934) wrote on the background of the Book of Ezra (*Ezras grāmatas Kritika*), and an article on archaeological research in Ras Shamra and its significance for the history of religions of Israel (Treijs 1935). His (1940) article on Deutero-Isaiah (Isa. 40-55) argues that the author was aware of other Middle-Eastern religions (including old Iranian religion), but that this was not the central element in Deutero-Isaiah’s message. After WWII, Treijs ministered as a Lutheran pastor for the ELCL exiled in the USA and contributed to the translation of the Bible into Latvian.

Rudolf Abramowski (1900–1945) was an expert in Oriental languages, Patristics and Near Eastern Early Church history.¹⁹ Like Benzinger, Abramowski contributed significantly to biblical scholarship in Europe. Abramowski’s historical-critical approach to the Old Testament was influenced by Hermann Gunkel and Martin Noth. Abramowski wrote a textual-critical paper on the Book of Ruth (Abramowski 1938a) and a religio-theological two-part commentary on the Book of Psalms (Abramowski 1939). After WWII, Abramowski was deported and conscripted to perform forced labour in Siberia, where he died in 1945.

The rise of National Socialism in Germany in the 1930s had an impact on the biblical scholarly debate on the question of the significance of the Old Testament in relation to Christ and the church; these Latvian Old Testament scholars named above contributed to this debate. Benzinger stood with the Confessing Church (*Bekennende Kirche*) and rejected Hitler’s politico-religious views (Talonen, forthcoming:IV.1a). Treijs wrote against Rafael Gyllenberg’s emphasis on discontinuity between Old and New Testament theology. Whereas Gyllenberg’s writing comported well with the politico-religious views of Hitler, as well as with the so-called *Deutsche Christen* (Gyllenberg 1938:64–68), Treijs (1939; cf. Abramowski 1937:63–93; Talonen, forthcoming:IV.1b, IV.1c) defended the unity of biblical theology, emphasising the dependence of New Testament theology on the Old Testament.

¹⁷ “Mēleka kults Vecajā Derībā”, *LNA LVVA* (5440 / 1 14).

¹⁸ Treijs is a Baltic German who studied at the University of Latvia, Faculty of Theology (1925–1929). Treijs then went on to study at the Faculty of Arts (*Faculté de Lettres*) at the University of Sorbonne, Paris, and at the Faculty of Protestant Theology of Paris (*Faculté libre de Théologie protestante de Paris*) between 1933–1934. Some of his famous lecturers in biblical research were Adolphe Lods, Charles Viroleaud, Maurice Goquel and the church historian Charles Guignebert. Treijs returned to Latvia in 1934 and lectured at the Faculty of Theology in the Old Testament. Cf. Talonen (forthcoming:IV.1b).

¹⁹ He taught Oriental and Old Testament Studies at the Herder Institute (1929–1939). For an overview on Abramowski’s work, see Talonen (forthcoming:LIV.1c fn. 252–25).

New Testament Scholarship

A key figure in the Faculty of Theology and in New Testament studies was Kārlis Kundziņš Jr. (1883–1967).²⁰ He was the first professor of the Faculty of Theology in the University of Latvia (1921). Kundziņš was strongly influenced by Adolf von Harnack and Rudolf Bultmann's form-historical criticism. He was a prolific writer, but his most important research was on the Gospel of John, the early church and the problem of the historical Jesus. Kundziņš was the most internationally known Latvian theologian of his time and was considered, along with Imanuel Benzinger, one of the great exegetes in the inter-war period. However, Talonen (forthcoming:IV.2a-c) remarks that despite Kundziņš' international attention, “he was left in the shade by the German scholars of the form-critical school”.

Kundziņš' dissertation (*Die johanneischen Abshiedsreden*) from Tartu University, as well as his first academic publication (Kundziņš 1923), became the basis for his doctoral thesis in 1925, titled *Topologiska tradīcijas viela Jāņa evaņģēlijā* ('The Topological Tradition in the Gospel of St. John').²¹ Kundziņš employed historical criticism to argue that earlier cultic traditions are behind the topological material in the Gospel of John ('holy places', and other monuments) and this explains the difference between John's Gospel and the Synoptic Gospels. Kundziņš's ground-breaking work in John's Gospel was recognised internationally.²² Kundziņš (1932) continued to build on his research on the Gospel of John (see also Kundziņš 1934; Lúčanský 1933), and his study (1929a:105–107) on the religio-historical background of Jesus' discourses in the Gospel of John drew some criticism in Germany,²³ but praise amongst Anglo-Saxon scholars (particularly, Fredrick C. Grant) (Talonen, forthcoming:IV.2c, fn. 298). He (1935) later published an article on the dependence of Matthew and Luke's Gospels on the topography of the Gospel of Mark.

Beyond his research on the Gospel of John, Kundziņš investigated early Christian tradition. Employing form-criticism, Kundziņš (1929) argued that the Gospels do not present a historical narrative of the life and teachings of Jesus but that they rather present the oral traditions of the early Church (following William Wrede's position). This study brought Kundziņš once again to the international scene, and it was translated into English (Grant 1962). Kundziņš (1928) also wrote on views of the historical Jesus. He presented Jesus as a historical figure whose life, teachings and ministry ended on the cross. Jesus' resurrection and exaltation were not part of his analysis, as he (1931; see also Talonen, forthcoming:IV.2c, fn. 328) considered these events as a ““matter[s] of faith””. Kundziņš position on the historical Jesus brought opposition from conservative Latvian scholars and clergy (even though his research was appreciated by his colleagues at the Faculty) as well as from the Social Democrats party in Latvia, who doubted the very existence of Jesus as a historical figure. After WWII, Kundziņš' contribution to the topology and

²⁰ Talonen, forthcoming:IV.2a-b. Kundziņš Jr. was of Latvian and Baltic German descent. He studied at Tartu University (1903-1907) and then obtained his doctoral degree in 1925 at the Faculty of Theology in Latvia. During his studies in Tartu, Kundziņš Jr. was mostly influenced by Philosophy of Religion scholar Karl Girsengohs and by the professor of New Testament exegesis, Alfred Seeberg.

²¹ It first came out in 1925 in the LUR-series (Latvijas universitātes raksti) and was later republished in the series *Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments* (Neue Folge, 22. Heft), edited by Rudolf Bultmann and Hermann Gunkel. Cf. Talonen, (forthcoming:IV.2a-b).

²² See Talonen, *Latvian Evangelical-Lutheran*, IV.2c.

²³ Heinz Becker criticised Kundziņš findings. See Talonen, (forthcoming:IV.2c fn.297).

discourse of John's Gospel was mentioned by different international scholars until the 1990s (Talonen, forthcoming:IV.2c, fn.328). Kundziņš last contribution to Johannine studies was his study on the 'I am' sayings of Jesus (Kundziņš 1954:95–107).

Jānis Rezevskis (1872–1941) was a contemporary of Kundziņš, but was more conservative (even though he defended historical-critical analysis) and less prominent (Talonen, forthcoming:IV.3a).²⁴ In 1930, Rezevskis (1930) wrote an article arguing that the Letter of James was not written by the Apostle James but by 'a man "in the spirit of James"', after 70 AD (Talonen, forthcoming:IV.3a). The religio-political atmosphere of the 1930s seemed to have influenced his doctoral dissertation (Kundziņš: 1933), in which Rezevskis engaged with the views of Ernest Renan, Adolf von Harnack and Karl Kautsky (the latter a Marxist). He argues that Kautsky's socialist views—rather than the religious context of the early Church—inform his interpretation of 'koinonia' in Acts 2:42 as 'communism' (*Kommunismus*). According to Rezevskis, Jesus was neither a socialist nor a capitalist because the kingdom of God transcends such values. Rezevskis's (1935:57–169) further studies included a redaction criticism of the Beatitudes (Lk. 6:20–23; Matt 5:3–12), textual and redaction criticism of the Gospel of Luke (Rezevskis:1938b), a redaction and tradition criticism on the composition of the New Testament (1940) (Rezevskis 1940) and an exegetical article on justification by faith, in which he attempted to show that justification by faith in Lutheranism was based on Paul's texts (Rezevskis 1939).

Ādams Mačulāns (1864–1959)²⁵ was a Baltic German and defended his dissertation (1933) in 1933 at the Faculty of Theology of Latvia, titled *Porozis jeb sirds apcietināšanas problema Jēzus līdzībās* ('The problem of the hardening of the heart in Jesus' parables'). He used textual and historical-critical analyses to understand the concept of 'hardening of one's heart' (*sirds apcietināšana, porozis*) in the parables found in Mark 4:11–12 and its parallels in Matt 13:10–15 and Luke 8:9–10. Mačulāns challenges the authenticity of the sayings of Jesus in Mark 4:10–13, as it differs from the teachings of Mark 4:1–34 and of the New Testament. Mačulāns further argued that the 'hardening of the heart' in the text is not a corporate description of the spiritual state of the people but is rather an individual state, meant as a warning to Jesus' disciples (Talonen, forthcoming:IV.3b). Even though Mačulāns applied textual and historical-critical approaches to his New Testament studies, he considered himself a conservative theologian, and he disagreed with the theological views of Adolf von Harnack, Rudolf Bultmann and Wilhelm Bousset. Mačulāns argued that the historical Jesus presented by these scholars was not the Jesus of the Gospels and of the early church; he also defended the divine-human cooperation in the compilation of the Bible texts (Talonen, forthcoming:IV.3b, fn. 354, 355). After WWII, Mačulāns moved to the German Democratic Republic (i.e., East Germany, during the Cold War), where he contributed to the translation of the Old Testament into Latvian.

Heinrich Seesemann (1904–1988) was the son of the Baltic German theologian Otto Seesemann, professor of exegesis at the University of Tartu (Talonen,

²⁴ He graduated from Tartu University in 1896. From 1924 onwards, he was lecturer of biblical languages at the Faculty of Theology, University of Latvia. From 1936–1940, he was professor of New Testament exegesis.

²⁵ Talonen, (forthcoming:IV.3b). Mačulāns studied at the Faculty of Theology of Tartu and in Berlin. He was a conservative theologian and was the acting director of the Theological Institute of ELCL from 1925–1931, and then director from 1931–1933.

forthcoming:IV.3c). He was a docent of New Testament exegesis at the Herder Institute (1939-1941). Like Rezevskis, Seesemann was possibly influenced by the religio-political sentiment of the 1930s, as his dissertation (1933), *Der Begriff Koinonia im Neuen Testament*, analysed the term *koinonia* from a philological and also from a theological point of view. He argues that *koinonia* has a double meaning – on the one hand, it connects the individual believer in Christ (*anteilhaben der Christus, sein in Christus*), and on the other hand, the mutual fellowship of believers (*Gemeinschaft*, fellowship) (Talonen, forthcoming:IV.3c). Seesemann's other New Testament studies did not focus on the Gospels and the problem of the historical Jesus (as previous scholars' work did), but on the theology of the New Testament. His article (1936), *Das Paulusverständnis des Clemens Aleksandrinus*, on the historical theology of the New Testament, points to the divergent view on the Christian faith between Paul and Clement of Alexandria. Seeseman's (1938:175–178) article *Die Gotteswissenschaft der Pharisäer und die Verkündigung des Paulus*, argues that the converted Paul follows the teachings of Jesus based on the understanding of the relationship between God and humanity rather than on Paul's pharisaic past. Seeseman (1939) also wrote *Zur Christologie des Hebräerbriefes*, in which he argues that the central image of the Letter to the Hebrews is Christ as the high priest (Talonen, forthcoming:IV.3c). Seesemann left Latvia for Germany in 1939.

In late 1920s, Riga was recognised as the “Centre for Baltic exegesis”, and a number of well-known scholars came to lecture in Riga (Talonen, forthcoming:IV.3c). Joachim Jeremias (1900-1979) and Carl Schneider (1900-1977) were both lecturers at the Herder Institute. During his time in Riga, Jeremias continued his research on the geography of Palestine and on the history of the New Testament, and published his (1926) book *Golgotha* (Talonen, forthcoming:IV.3c). Schneider, a supporter of Germany's National Socialism and a member of the Nazi party, published a study (Schneider 1931) on the Book of Revelation and an introduction to the New Testament (Schneider 1934, see also Talonen, forthcoming:IV.3c).

WWII & The Soviet Period (1940-1990)

The Second World War was a severe blow to the nation of Latvia, which lost between 500 000 and 600 000 people through war deaths, deportation, and the emigration of refugees. During the resulting Soviet occupation, churches were considered ‘harmful’ by the state. Soviet oppression transformed the churches in Latvia: the Lutheran Church was changed from a *Volkskirche* into a minority church, and around 55% of Lutheran pastors were forced to leave Latvia (Talonen 2009:23).

WWII and the years of the Soviet occupation thereafter also severely affected the development of biblical scholarship in Latvia. In 1940, the Faculty of Theology at the University of Latvia and the Theological Institute of the ELCL were closed. Pastors and theologians were suspended, persecuted, interrogated and expelled. Most of the theological faculty left Latvia as refugees. Only three remained: professor Alberts Freijs and lecturers Arturs Silke and Arnolds Zviņģis (Talonen 2009:23). Professors Ludwig Adamovich (1942) and Edgars Rumba (1943) were killed in Soviet forced-labour camps, suffering the same fate as many other Latvians (Talonen 2009:8).

The state repressed religious organisations, attempting to expel religion from public space and education. Since the official position of the state was to regard religion as

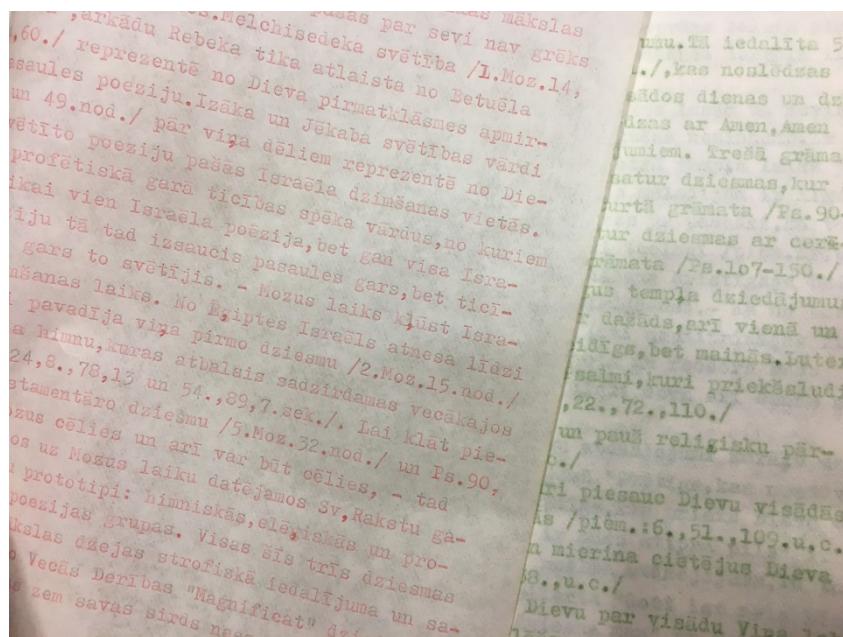
unnecessary and even harmful (“the opium for the masses” in Marxist thinking), theology as a scientific discipline had no chance of being recognised. Atheistic ideology pervaded all spheres of public life – humanities and social sciences were used to spread atheistic ideology. In this context, theology survived in isolation, as biblical scholars and theologically-educated church leaders tried to continue the academic traditions started in interwar Latvia (Sildegs 2017:126–128).

The Latvian Lutheran church tried several times to establish an institute for the education of its pastors. The first attempt was made already in 1944 by the acting archbishop Karlis Irbe, who presented the plan to the Council of People's Commissars of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR). The institute would basically follow the curricula of the Faculty of Theology, and the teaching staff would be the pre-WWII alumni of the Faculty. Unfortunately, this and other attempts were unsuccessful, as the responsible institutions, mainly the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults in Latvia and Moscow, did not support the establishment (Talonen 2009:40–42). Theological education therefore resumed only in 1954, but with limited courses. These courses were developed further towards the end of the 1960s, after the synod of the Lutheran Church decided to call these courses Academic Theological Courses. From 1976 onwards, these courses became part of the Lutheran Theological Seminary (Sildegs 2017:95).

In this context, theological/biblical research re-emerged in the 1970s for the purpose of educating pastors. This period produced biblical studies in the form of textbooks (also called Compendia) which would be considered by the authorities to be academic theology. The authors of the Compendia were concerned first of all with providing the best possible education to the pastors, not necessarily with engaging in scholarly debate. In the library of the University of Latvia, one can still find the collection of the Compendia of the Theological Seminary of the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church. This collection contains typewritten books bound in dermantine, which were reproduced by copying them by means of carbon paper. The writing and printing materials for the production and publication of the textbooks were scarce, and the authors also had limited access to biblical scholarship outside of Latvia. Pre-war biblical scholarship and resources therefore still played an important role in the compilation of biblical compendia, and these were supplemented by a few books that almost accidentally broke through the so-called Iron Curtain.



Picture 1. Part of the collection of Compendia in the library of the University of Latvia.



Picture 2. Inside of one of the typewritten books: Paulis Žibeks's *Israela literatūras vesture* (1969).

Old Testament Scholarship

The most prolific theologian of this period, was the Old Testament scholar Paulis Žibeiks (1910-2006). He had completed his studies at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Latvia in 1935. His teachers were Immanuel Benzinger and Karlis Kundziņš, who, as we have shown above, were influenced by the German theology of the 1930s. One could say that Latvian theology at this time was, if not a twin, a very close sister to German theology. Paulis Žibeiks wrote his Licentiate thesis on the "Infinitive syntax in the synoptic Gospels".²⁶ After Latvia's second independence (1990), Žibeiks was in 1992 awarded a doctoral degree for this thesis by the Latvian Academy of Sciences.²⁷

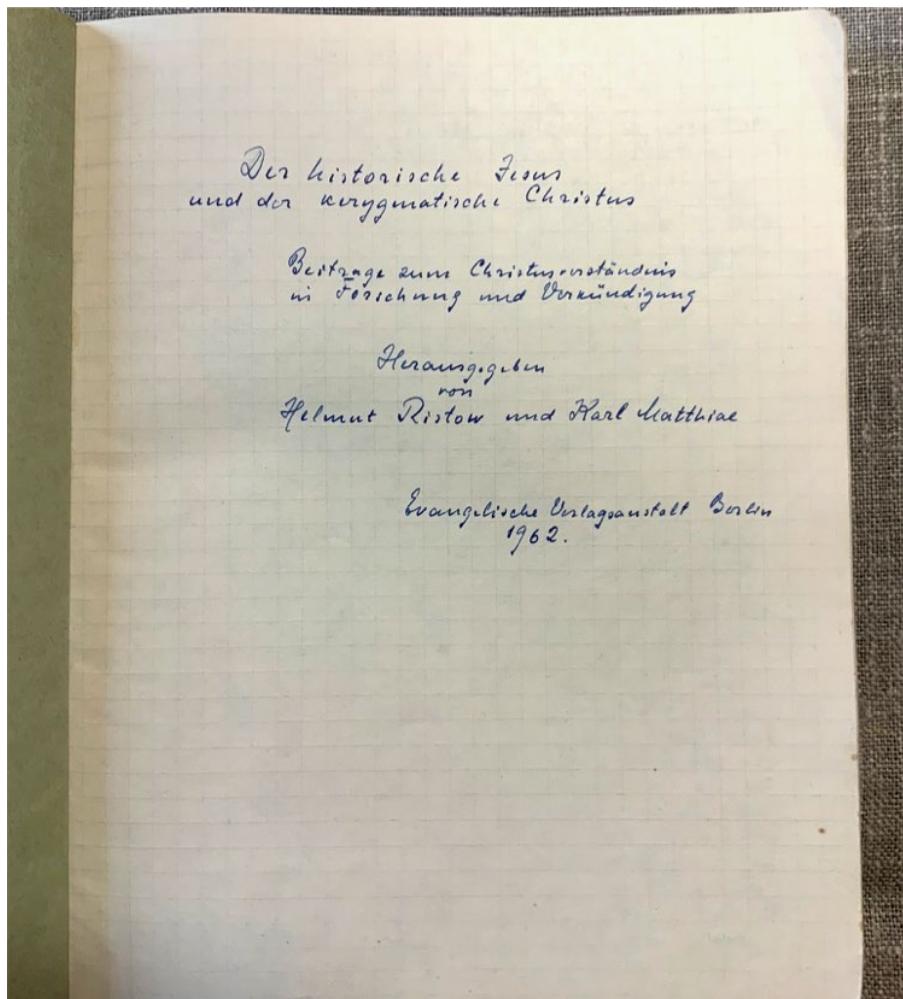
Žibeiks's long life reflects the history of theology in Latvia in the 20th century. He devoted most of his life to two tasks: working as a pastor in the church and engaging in the education of pastors and future theologians.²⁸ In 1990, at the age of 80, he continued his work at the re-established Faculty of Theology at the University of Latvia. Žibeiks's biblical research followed the same subjects of the pre-war faculty: *History of Israeli literature* (1978), *History of the peoples of Israel* (1970), *History of Israeli religion* (1973), *Proto-Isaiah* (1974), and *Exegesis of the Psalms* (1975). Furthermore, the lack of theological books to educate pastors led Žibeiks to translate some well-known German theological textbooks into Latvian.²⁹ The astonishing diligence and dedication of Paul Žibeiks to theological education is also evident in his handwritten books in his personal library.

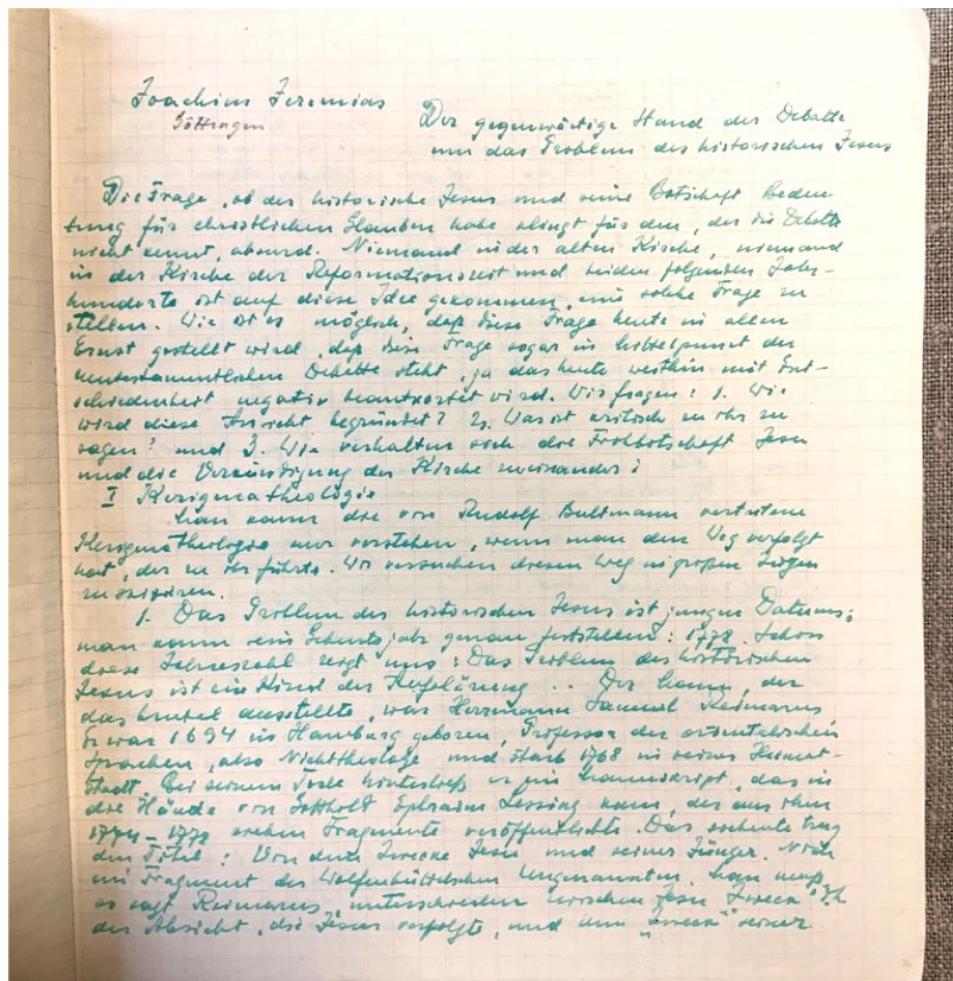
²⁶ The information about his thesis was obtained from Paulis Žibeiks's curriculum vitae, which was submitted at the University of Latvia and is stored in the archives of the Faculty of Theology. The thesis itself was not available to the authors.

²⁷ His diploma can be found in the Bauska Museum of Local History and Art, which preserves the heritage of Paulis Žibeiks, including his library. Biblical scholarship was excluded from official academic life, as there was formally no theological or biblical scholarship. There was in Theology neither an official council that would elect professors nor an academic commission that would accept dissertations for defence. Despite this, with the creation of theological academic courses and later the establishment of the seminary, there was an attempt to rebuild this academic culture using the titles "professor", "docent" and "lecturer". Two dissertations were also prepared and defended in 1980, with one of them in biblical sciences, but it should be noted that most of the participants of the academic commission were without doctoral degrees, albeit with significant theological experience in the face of oppression. The repressive structures of the Soviet regime held a particular significance for all the students of theological education. The rectors of the seminaries especially were under pressure to report to the KGB on certain students and to obey the requirements of the regime. Roberts Feldmanis, one of the professors of the seminary, remembers that the rector Roberts Akmentiņš was pressed by the Commissioner for Religious Affairs to expel one of the students. Akmentiņš stood fast, and he and student were dismissed and the work of seminary was interrupted for a period of time. Cf. Feldmanis R., *Viens ievērojams gaišums*, www.robertsfeldmanis.lv/lv/?ct=teologiski_raksti_2&fu=a&id=1280742274 (last consulted on 29.10.2021). Theological education was, we can see, a constant balancing act between conscience and power, between existence under Soviet control and non-existence.

²⁸ Ordained in 1936, he served as a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church until his death in 2006. From 1947, he participated in the church examination commission, set up for those who had not been able to complete their studies before the war. This commission later developed into the body responsible for the creation of theology courses and for the establishment of the seminary in 1968.

²⁹ For example, Karl Heussi (1965) was translated, typewritten and published in three parts - Heussi, Karl, *Baznīcas vēstures kompendijs: 1. Viduslaiki, 2. Reformācija un pretreformācija, 3. Jaunie laiki*. tulk. Žibeiks (1975). .





Pictures 3 and 4. The handwritten copy by Paulis Žibeiks of a whole book – in this case: Ristow and Karl Matthiae. 1962. (Hrsg.). *Der historische Jesus und der kerygmatische Christus. Beiträge zum Christusverständnis in Forschung und Verkündigung*. Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt. This illustrates how difficult it was for Latvian theologians to obtain theological books and how valuable such books were to them.

At the very end of the 1980's, Žibeiks decided to write his dissertation on Old Testament language (1989), but it was never defended for a doctoral degree. Looking more closely at the works of Paulis Žibeiks, it is evident that interwar Latvian biblical scholarship shaped his own biblical research; however, none of his compendia include bibliographical references and only a few have a bibliography. Sometimes there are references to an author in the text, but there is no precise reference to the cited work. An

appraisal of Žibeiks's *Introduction to Old Testament Theology* shows that it follows Immanuel Benzinger's book of the same name.³⁰

Methodologically, Žibeiks was comfortable with historical criticism; on the spectrum of Latvian biblical scholarship, he would therefore be counted among the so-called liberal theologians. Yet his range included also synchronic, theological and close readings of the Psalms.³¹

Joels Veinbergs (Joel Weinberg) is one of the scholars of Latvian origin whose work from the Soviet period is now internationally widely known. His work is exceptional in many respects, and the story of his career and the reception of his work perhaps illustrates some peculiar challenges of Latvian scholarship. Latvia's Jewish population was greatly diminished during WWII. Veinbergs (1922–2011) was a survivor of the Riga Ghetto and of concentration camps in Latvia and Germany. After the war, he became a lecturer in history at the University of Latvia and later at Daugavpils University. Veinbergs was an orientalist, one of only a few Soviet scholars permitted to work in universities on subjects such as ancient history and Jewish history—a rather different context than that of Žibeiks. Veinbergs published in Latvian, Russian and German (cf. Dion 1991:281–287), and his work was subject to scrutiny and censorship. However, publications in German journals in the 1970s, including *ZAW* and *Klio*, brought Veinbergs' work to a broader audience. Several of these German-language articles were collected and translated into English by Daniel Smith-Christopher (1992) (Weinberg 1992). Veinbergs's most important contributions to Old Testament/Hebrew Bible scholarship are these theses: Jerusalem and Yehud as a *Burger-Tempel Gemeinde*, a “citizen-temple community,” a certain kind of economic entity within the Persian Empire; and the post-exilic development of *bēt 'aḇōt* as a group in Yehud, as described in Chronicles and in the so-called Priestly literature (Dion 1991:281–287; Smith-Christopher in Weinberg 1992:10–16). Veinbergs's scholarly approach to Persian-era Yehud and the biblical texts was clearly affected by the Marxist intellectual environment in which he had to work but exhibited a historian's sensitivity to different socio-economic circumstances.³²

³⁰ For example, reporting on the sources of the Pentateuch, after a short original introduction, Žibeiks follows Benzinger's text, sometimes word for word, but also transforms the text either under the influence of another source or selecting information according to his own criteria. Žibeiks (1978:7–10); Benzinger (1982:32–37).

³¹ As a beautiful example, here is a fragment of his interpretation of Psalm 23:5–6, translated: “What a joy and joy to be a guest of God. In experiencing such feelings, the thoughts return to all the festive hours that the worshipper has already been able to spend in the church. How often God has set the table for him and glorified him as a kind host! Has he not in fact been a guest of his God all his life, or has he received from God's hands a rich blessing and joy? Even his enemies, who see it with dislike and envy, cannot disappoint his joy at the kindness of God and the nearness of the saints. The joy of God overcomes all the disappointments that arise in human relationships and opposites. Only one is not yet overcome – the enemy remains his enemy, the limit of his holiness that does not reach the peak of the New Testament: Love your enemies (Matt. 5:44). ... The fullness of God's blessing and the abundant light that the psalm poet sees as a reflection of his entire life, make him cry out with joy: Surely, goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.” (Žibeiks, 1975:122–123).

³² “Since all of this research was pursued in Eastern Europe, its inspiration might be assumed to be Marxist, and indeed Weinberg does, of course, show familiarity with the official ideology of his country, for example, in his examination of the publications by Heinz Kreissig. His method and conclusions, however, do not seem to have been greatly influenced by Marxism, and, significantly, he cautions his readers against the anachronistic reading of modern sociological concepts into the vocabulary of the ancients. Most probably, his Soviet upbringing and education contributed to his sensitivity to the socio-economic conditioning of biblical history, but, on the whole, his research appears to have been conducted according to generally accepted methods of historical criticism” (Dion 1991:282).

Veinbergs made *aliyah* in the early years after the re-establishment of Latvian statehood and thenceforth worked at Ben Gurion University of the Negev.

New Testament Scholarship

Edgars Jundzis (1907-1986) was a graduate of the Faculty of Theology (1925-1929), and his licentiate dissertation was on Albert Schweitzer's eschatological approach to the life of the historical Jesus.³³ Between 1930 and 1936, Jundzis taught in different state schools, but still continued his theological research.³⁴ In 1936, he remained at the Faculty of Theology for research purposes, and in 1937-1938, he received a scholarship to study at the Basel and Zurich universities in Switzerland (Jundzis 2013a:224). Between the 1940s and 1970s, when the Latvian Faculty of Theology was closed down and the church was 'silenced',³⁵ Jundzis focused on maintaining the survival of the Church (ELCL) and supporting Christians through pastoral work. This led to his arrest and deportation to Vorkuta (Siberia) from 1951 to 1955 (Jundzis 2013a:225).

Upon his return from exile, Jundzis pastored a number of churches, and later became responsible for New Testament studies at the Theological Seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia (1976) (Jundzis 2013a:225). Teaching at the Theological Seminary enabled Jundzis to engage with theological issues, doing so against the backdrop of an atheistic environment. As a former student of the Faculty of Theology, Jundzis adopted historical criticism in his approach to the New Testament and like most scholars of the time in Latvia, his main theological resources were from before WWII. The scientific thinking upheld by Soviet ideology in an attempt to dispel any religious beliefs in some ways fit well with Jundzis's free-thinking and scientific method of research. He was considered not only a liberal theologian but also the most radical (and controversial) scholar of Theology of the Soviet period in Latvia (Sildegs 2017:153).

Jundzis's compendia on *Pirmkristīgās literatūras vēsture* ("The History of Early Christian Literature") (Jundzis 1969), *Mateja evaņģēlija eksegēze* ("Exegesis of the Gospel of Matthew") (Jundzis 1971),³⁶ *Apustuļa Pāvila Pirmā vēstule korintiešiem* ("Apostle Paul First Epistle to the Corinthians") (Jundzis 1985), and *Romiešu vēstules eksegēze* ("Exegesis of the Epistle to the Romans") (Jundzis 1972) engage in source and redaction criticism of the Gospels and of Paul's Letters to the Corinthians and Romans. Here, Jundzis supports the view that the Gospel of Matthew was written by a group of authors after 70AD and held that the Epistle to the Corinthians was a compilation of four letters, but his position is unclear regarding the compilation of the Letter to the Romans. Jundzis shows ambiguity on his view of the virgin birth of Jesus (in "The Gospel of Matthew") and on a future resurrection of believers (in "Apostle Paul First Epistle to the Corinthians"). On the Letter to the Romans, Jundzis seems to suggest universal salvation, whereby Jews and Greeks will ultimately be saved (thus challenging the positions of Augustine and Martin Luther). His compendia do not engage in exegetical or theological

³³ This is mentioned by Adamovičs (1939). See reference in Jundzis (2013:224, fn. 9).

³⁴ In 1932, Jundzis wrote a candidate's article on "Charismati pirmskritīgajā draudzē sakarā ar Pāvila teoloģiju." Jundzis(2013:224-225).

³⁵ For a further account of the Soviet Era and its impact particularly in the life of the Lutheran Church and on the life, work and theology of Nikolajs Plāte (a systematic theologian), see Sildegs (2017).

³⁶ The 2013 publication of Jundzis's *Jēzus Dzīves* mentions his compendium on *Jāņa evaņģēlija eksegēze* (Jundzis 1978); however, the writer of this chapter, have not been able to have access to this compendium.

discussions of pre-war/current scholarship but rather present his personal explanation of the New Testament books. In some instances, he provides a pre-war bibliography (e.g. “The Gospel of Matthew”, “Exegesis of the Epistle to the Romans”), but in other instances such acknowledgement is absent (e.g. “Apostle Paul First Epistle to the Corinthians”).

Jundzis’s free-thinking and unbiased scientific approach culminated in his unconventional and revolutionary doctoral thesis (1980), titled *Jēzus Dzīve uz Sinoptiskās un Johaneiskās Tradīcijas Pamata* (“The Life of Jesus on the Basis of the Synoptic and Johannine Tradition”). Jundzis builds on his previous works (including his work on Schweitzer’s approach to the historical Jesus) to reconstruct the life-story of the historical Jesus established in the 1800s and 1900s.³⁷ Jundzis presents the inadequacies of Oskar Holtzmann, Adolf von Harnack, Wilhelm Bousset, and Frank R. Werner in their attempts to recreate the life-story of the historical Jesus based on the Synoptic traditions. Jundzis also critiques Albert Schweitzer’s imminent eschatology of Jesus’ life and ministry, and exposes the shortcomings of Dibelius, Schmidt and Bultmann’s form-critical approach (upon which exposition kerygmatic theology is based) in their endeavour to identify the traditional materials and the edited versions found in the Gospels in the search for the historical Jesus. In order to avoid the conflicting perspectives of that time, Jundzis proposed to reconstruct the historical Jesus, based not only on the Synoptic Gospels but also on the Gospel of John (including Acts 1-5).³⁸

Jundzis’ dissertation received strong opposition, particularly from Jānis Bērziņš, who stated that his thesis represented a faulty approach to the study of the historical Jesus and went so far as to label it heretical. Bērziņš (1987 in Jundzis 2013a; cf, Sildegs 2017:156) characterised it as “‘flowers’ of decadent thinking, characterised by religious primitivism”. Jundzis’s dissertation is, however, also a by-product of theological research that took place during the Soviet Era. Structural (isolation) and ideological

³⁷ The summary of Jundzis thesis here is based on the English summary of his work in *Jēzus Dzīves*, (transMežmalis 2013b:257–270).

³⁸ Here is a summary of Jundzis non-standard construction of the historical Jesus. Jundzis argues that all four Gospels (including Acts 1-5) enable the chronological reconstruction of the life and ministry of Jesus (against O. Holtzmann, A. von Harnack, W. Bousset, R. Werner). He presents the open ministry of Jesus as two distinct periods. The first period of Jesus’ public ministry commenced in Galilee, with his journey to Jerusalem via Perea. Here, Jesus is presented as the Messianic king and follower of the Torah – all Jewish religious leaders and the people of Israel acknowledge him as the Messiah. During this period, Jesus is identified as Jesus Bar-Abba (translated as the “Son of the Father”, based on the Father’s declaration at Jesus’ baptism) and the 12 disciples share Jesus’ ministry. It is during this time that Judas betrays Jesus and Peter denies him. Jesus is tried in Jerusalem by Annus Rufus (the governor, Lk. 13:1) and by Annas as high priest. However, the Sanhedrin and the people convince Annus Rufus to release Jesus Barabbas. After these events, Jesus goes into exile for 12 years, and the 11 disciples (as Judas had committed suicide for betraying Jesus), not knowing where Jesus went, believed Jesus ascended into heaven, and hence they established the first congregation (the events described in Acts 1-5). According to Jundzis, the church was established before the resurrection of Jesus, thereby refuting Bultmann and others’ kerygmatic theology. During a 12-year exile in Tyre, Sidon and Decapolis (Mk. 7:24-31; Matt. 15:21-29), Jesus had a transformative experience - he rejects the Torah and shifts from the eschatological, the hopes of the Kingdom of God and final judgement (as defended by Schweitzer) to the imminent repentance of sins. Jesus’ second public ministry starts again in Galilee, and he journeys to Jerusalem via Samaria. In this second period, the Jewish religious readers as well as the people of Israel perceive Jesus as a servant of Beelzebub and as a transgressor of the Law. He is tried in Jerusalem by Pontius Pilate (the governor) and by Caiphas (the High Priest), and is crucified. None of his initial 11 disciples were with Jesus in this final journey, but a new set of disciples (Nicodemus, Simon of Cyrene, Joseph of Arimathea) were with him. It is these new disciples that spread the news of Jesus’ resurrection (Mk. 16:10). Jundzis(2013:257-270), corresponding broadly to the Latvian version, pages 17-159.

factors contributed to this path of research (Sildegs 2017:155). The impact of Jundzis's research unwittingly supported the atheistic environment of his time. As Sildegs (2017:155) observes, "Many felt compelled to rebuke Jundzis for doing a disservice to the church. In their eyes, his research resembled the radical distortion of biblical history featured by atheistic propaganda." However, other theologians (e.g. Alfons Vecmanis, Roberts Pureniš and Jānis Liepiņš) approved of his research as scientific (Sildegs 2017:153–154). In the end, the members of the scientific committee awarded Jundzis a doctoral degree. His thesis was first published in 1993/1994, and for Jundzis's 100th anniversary (2007)³⁹, there was a second edition with an added summary in English; his book was republished in 2013.

Second Period of Latvia's Independence: the Post Soviet Period (1990–present)

A new era in Latvian biblical scholarship began with the restoration of Latvia's independence in 1990. The initiative to re-establish the Faculty of Theology (effected in 1990) originated from the Lutheran Theological Seminary with the approval of the University Council of Latvia. Most of the lecturers at the Faculty of Theology were graduates or lecturers from the Theological Seminary, but others were Latvians who had received their education in Russia or in the West while in exile.⁴⁰ The varied educational backgrounds of these theologians have shaped Latvian research and contributed to the current theological tensions between so-called "liberal" and "conservative" theologians. The faculty was initially connected with the ELCL, but due to various disagreements, the church and the faculty ultimately went their separate ways.⁴¹ After the early post-Communist years of the faculty, the teaching and biblical research was taken over by the graduates of the new faculty. German theology continued to wield great influence during this period, as all biblical scholars currently working in the faculty of theology have also been educated in German-speaking countries, influenced by German theology.

In 1999, Ralfs Kokins, the first faculty graduate of this period and with a doctorate in theology from Heidelberg, Germany, started to work at the faculty. His dissertation, supervised by the well-known German New Testament scholar Gerd Theissen, titled *Das Verhältnis von ζωῇ und αγαπῇ im Johannesevangelium: Johanneische Stufenhermeneutik in der ersten Abschiedsrede Joh. 13,31–14,31*, received the *cum laude* accolade but was unfortunately never published. In his scholarly articles, Kokins focused on various topics, as the circle of educated theologians in Latvia is relatively small; therefore, it is almost impossible to remain within one area of specialisation.⁴² Kokins's

³⁹ (Riga: Latvijas Universitātes Filozofijas un socioloģijas institūts).

⁴⁰ In biblical sciences, Paul Žibeiks continued his work at the Faculty of Theology, but Juris Rubenis (a graduate from the Theological Seminary) was responsible for New Testament studies. He played a major role in both the restoration of the country's independence and the return to biblical scholarship. After he left the faculty, Juris Cālītis (born 1939) took over New Testament studies.

⁴¹ The issue of women's ordination, which the church's leadership had decided to halt in 1993 (women's ordination in the ELCL was first approved in 1975), also played a major role in the split between the church and the faculty. The dean of the Faculty of Theology, Vilis Vārsbergs, a Latvian from the United States, was a staunch defender of women's ordination. The faculty has thenceforth been considered a bastion of liberalism and therefore unacceptable to the conservative circles of the church.

⁴² Ralfs Kokins' first published theological article (2003:16–32) focuses on the discourses of German theology. This article shows that one of the tasks of Latvian theologians is to take theology out of the isolation behind the iron curtain, to use sources and resume dialogue with scholarship outside Latvia, and to bring Latvia's theological environment closer to international biblical debate. Kokins (2006a:132–156, 200–222; 2007;

main academic interest in New Testament studies lies in the non-canonical literature and New Testament hermeneutics. Kokins, in partnership with other colleagues, therefore published the *Gospel of Thomas* (2014) and the *Gospel of Philip* (2017) in Latvian, each with a scholarly introduction and comments (Kokins et al. 2014; Kokins and Ralfs 2017). An article on the *Gospel of Philip*, published in 2012, shows that Kokin's theological views and approach to the canon are based on those of German theologians.⁴³ His own views are shown in the appraisal of this Gnostic work: he (2012:119–120) sees its value not only as one of the first Christian's perspectives but also as a secondary narrowing of early Christian thought, which points to a psychological rather than a theological expression. Kokins (2012:120) concludes as follows on Gnostic mythology: "Gnosis, as a religiously spiritual movement, is highly subjective and amorphous, it certainly does not live on revelation, much less on historical events. All the myths of gnosis are based on the same second anthropological and cosmological depth structure characteristic of pagan archetypes: humanity itself is basically the supreme God"⁴⁴ Even though Kokins's research adopted historical-critical methods, he not only approaches the canon or the Christian faith through historical lenses but also through dogmatic beliefs.

Jānis Rudzītis-Neimanis's doctoral dissertation, "Violence against children in the family in the Old Testament" (2013, supervised by Kokins), is similarly based mainly on German theology,⁴⁵ and his articles not only apply a historical-critical approach but also engage with research from the interwar period, thus forming a link with the history of Latvian theology (see Rudzītis 2010:145–166; Rudzītis-Neimanis 2015:41–53; 2017:189–202).

Dace Balode (co-author of this chapter) is also a graduate of the Faculty of Theology. She studied theology in Basel (1996–1998) and Berne (2000–2003), where her Master's and Doctoral theses were supervised by the New Testament scholar Ulrich Luz (1938–2019). Her dissertation (2011), *Gottesdienst in Korinth*, was defended in Tartu in 2006 and was published in Germany. The impetus to write about early Christian worship was the 1993 liturgical reform of the Lutheran Church in Latvia and was therefore also aimed at resolving current issues in church practice. Balode's (2003:71–84; 2008:5–18; 2014:79–97; 2016b:35–50; 2016a:5–20) research therefore focused on hermeneutics,

2018/2019:38–55) also discusses local Latvian religiosity and piety, compiling contemporary folklore stories about werewolves and horror stories. "

⁴³ Ralfs Kokins, (2012:99–122). Kokins refers in this article exclusively to German theological literature. The study is based on the classics of German theology in the relevant field, e.g., Bousset (1970), Rebell (1992), Klauck (2002).

⁴⁴ Kokins (2012:120): "Are these schools of the Great Gnostics so independent and original, and are they different from the eclectic systems of modern pagan esoterists, freely combining even elements of contradictory systems and treating all traditional Christians as narrow, primitive, and uninteresting with an elite sense of superiority? It must be admitted that the ancient Gnostics performed this compilation much more masterfully. Was the position of the ancient apostolic church so wrong and anti-intellectual, calling even the most outstanding Gnostics simply heretics? Gnostics degraded the teachings of Christ and the first apostles at various levels, especially dramatically in the areas of ethics, social action, where theology was (or in the case of the Gnostics was not) lived".

⁴⁵ His doctoral studies took him to Germany, where he spent a year and a half as a visiting student at in Mainz and in Tübingen. The time he spent there also influenced the researcher both in the choice of literature he selects for his research and in terms of methodology. This is evidenced by the research report he provides at the beginning of the dissertation, and a bibliography in which 136 of the approximately 210 listed sources are in German. Rudzītis (2011). [Janis_Rudzītis_2011.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://scriptura.journals.ac.za/jspui/bitstream/10204/1155/1/Janis_Rudzītis_2011.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y) Last consulted on 23.06.2020., 11–18, 155–173.

with a special emphasis on gender studies, as this subject led the ELCL to abolish women's ordination.

Ester Petrenko (co-author of this chapter) is a Portuguese biblical scholar and has lived in Latvia since 2006.⁴⁶ Petrenko's (2011) doctoral thesis, '*Created in Christ Jesus for good works*': *The integration of soteriology and ethics in Ephesians*, was completed under the supervision of James D. G. Dunn and John Barclay at the University of Durham. Petrenko argues that the soteriological framework of Ephesians fully integrates the so-called theological and paraenetic parts of Ephesians (Eph. 1–3 and 4–6 respectively). Petrenko (2021:58–81; forthcoming) has continued her research on Ephesians with an article on reconciliation ("A study of Ephesians: a new identity reshaped by the Gospel of Reconciliation"), and a commentary on Ephesians with contextualisation for Central and Eastern Europe.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that biblical scholarship in Latvia has been shaped by German theology and hence by the historical-critical method. In the first period of Latvia's independence (1918–1940), the main focus of research was on source and redaction criticism of the Pentateuch and the historical-critical analysis of other Old Testament books (e.g. Deutero-Isaiah, Ruth, Ezra and Psalms), including the study of ancient religions and the history of Israel in the Old Testament. In addition, the political ideology of the German National Socialist party in the 1930s prompted biblical scholars (particularly, Benzinger, Abramowski and Trejs) to defend academically the role of the Old Testament in relation to Christ and the church. In the field of the New Testament, German scholarship (including A. von Harnack, a Baltic German) continued to shape Latvian New Testament studies: the historical-critical method (particularly redaction criticism) was predominantly applied to the study of the Gospels and the reconstruction of the historical Jesus and the early Christian tradition. The religio-political sentiment of the 1930s influenced two doctoral theses on the meaning and significance of *koinonia* in the Acts of the Apostles and in the New Testament in general. Even though Rezevskis and Mačulāns applied textual and historical-critical approaches to New Testament studies, they considered themselves to be conservative theologians, disagreeing with the theological views of Harnack, Bultmann and Bousset. 1920 to 1940 was a period of prolific writing, with a certain level of original work, which raised the international profile of some of the scholars who lived in Latvia; the point that Riga was recognised as the 'Centre for Baltic exegesis', attracting a few German lecturers too.

However, WWII (1939–1945) and the Soviet occupation (1945–1990) changed the landscape of biblical scholarship in Latvia. From the major scholars mentioned above, only the New Testament scholar Kārlis Kundziņš Jr. remained in Latvia. I. Benzinger and J. Rezevskis died (1935 and 1941 respectively); Zīcāns, Mačulāns and Seesemann moved to Germany and Trejs to the USA. This is a period where we see the struggle for the survival of the church, accompanied by the stagnation of biblical scholarship. The modest amount of research done during this time was based on pre-WWII biblical

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scholarship and resources. This produced a disconnection from the scholarly debates progressing in the West and led to a distorted hermeneutical framework. The other works produced during this time were compendia on a number of biblical subjects taught at the Theological Seminary. However, the aim of these compendia was not to present a scholarly approach to the biblical books but simply to provide an overview (mostly Žibeiks's and Jundzis's own views) of these biblical books.

The second period of Latvia's independence (1990-present) has seen a renewed hope to re-establish biblical scholarship to the extent that it is as robust as it was in the interwar period (1918-1940). The Faculty of Theology of the University of Latvia was re-established as the place for training Lutheran pastors, but very soon the relationship between the faculty and the church again became difficult. The decision to halt the ordination of women in the church played a major role in the split between the faculty and the Lutheran church.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the revived dispute between perceived liberal and conservative approaches to biblical studies and theology re-established the divide between the Faculty of Theology and other theological institutions (particularly the confessional theological seminaries).⁴⁸ This weakened the relationship between academic theological education and church life, and limited cooperation between scholars and institutions and consequently mutual engagement in current scholarly biblical debates.

Biblical scholars at the Faculty of Theology acknowledge that their research has benefited from international scholarship, but the local focus has been on serving Latvian readers (particularly with the translation into Latvian of the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Philip, and with studies on New Testament methodology and hermeneutics on gender studies) which results in little international exposure. Petrenko engages with and contributes towards international scholarship on Ephesians, but her work has been mostly independent of the research interests of the Faculty of Theology or other institutions in Latvia. Therefore, the cooperation between scholars from different local institutions might prove beneficial for the advancement of biblical studies in Latvia. The fact that this chapter is written by two authors from different theological institutions in Latvia demonstrates the potential for fruitful collaboration.

From this perspective, the future of biblical research in Latvia has to develop on both a national and an international level. On the one hand, there has to be a willingness and determination for a cooperation between local scholars from different theological institutions and with different approaches to biblical research. On the other hand, biblical scholars in Latvia have to establish dialogue not only with the German-speaking academic world but also with the wider international (English-speaking) community, so

⁴⁷ This resulted in some Lutheran churches splitting from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia and joining the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad, now renamed as the "Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church Worldwide". The implication here is that the latter church continues with the ordination of women.

⁴⁸ Currently, there are the following theological education institutions in Latvia: Luther Academy (Lutheran, education of pastors), Latvian Christian Academy (Orthodox), The Orthodox Ecclesiastical Seminary (Orthodox, education of priests), Baltic Pastoral Institute (Baptist, education of pastors), Latvian Biblical Centre (a non-denomination institution that educates church leadership and lay people), and the University of Latvia Faculty of Theology. The Roman Catholic Church has two educational institutions: Riga Higher Institute of Religious Sciences (which is a branch of the Lateran Pontifical University in Rome) and The Latvian Interdiocesan Theological Seminary (Roman Catholic, education of priests). Some Roman Catholic priests are also educated at the Gregorian Pontifical University in Rome.

as to lead Latvian scholars to a climate in which they can engage with and contribute to international biblical debates.

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ADDENDUM⁵⁰

First Period of Latvia's Independence (1918–1940)

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⁵⁰ Some sources and bibliography were taken from Talonen, *Latvian Evangelical-Lutheran*. Therefore, some articles and chapters have no page numbers as the authors of this paper had no direct access to this information. Some bibliographical adjustments were made in accordance with SBL style and edited in accordance with Harvard style.

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