

## Food Packages as Anti-Communist Weapons: Oskar Schabert, the Baltic Action for Russia and the Mobilization of Christians in the Netherlands, 1924-1936

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### SUMMARY

In recent years, historiography on the relation between religion and anti-communism in the interwar period has grown rapidly. Historians have argued that anti-communism in the interwar period was a global and transnational phenomenon, an ideology shared by a wide variety of actors calling for a Christian crusade against anti-religious persecutions in the USSR. This article studies two of these anti-communist actors, the German-Baltic pastor Oskar Schabert and the Dutch pastor Frederik Johan Krop. In Riga, Schabert was the founder and leader of the Baltic Action for Russia, an anti-communist organization supporting Christians in the USSR. In the Netherlands, Krop mobilized a broad alliance of orthodox Christians in support of Schaberts' relief work. The case study of Schabert and Krop shows that the connection of religious and ideological objections against communism and relief work for Christians in the USSR turned out to be a strong narrative mobilizing Christians in the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe. Furthermore, it contributes to historiography by showing how transnational contacts between Schabert and Krop shaped the development of anti-communism in the 1930s.

**KEYWORDS:** Anti-communism, mobilization, Baltic Action for Russia, Oskar Schabert, Frederik Johan Krop, Lutheran church

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This article is based on research for my Research Master Thesis in History at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, supervised by Prof. Dr. Fred van Lieburg. Archival research was possible with financial support of the Herder Institute for Historical Research on East Central Europe, Marburg, the Stichting De Honderd Gulden Reis and the Graduate School of Humanities of the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam.



On 20 April 1932, the Dutch reformed pastor Frederik Johan Krop (1875-1945) from Rotterdam stood in front of the microphone for his monthly radio lecture, broadcasted by the Dutch Christian Radio Association (Nederlandse Christelijke Radio Vereniging). In his address, he reported about his journey to Russia, Finland, Latvia and Estonia to inspect the work of the Baltic German pastor Oskar Schabert (1866-1936).<sup>1</sup> In 1922, Schabert started charitable relief actions to support Evangelical Lutheran clergy who faced famine and suppression in Russia. Two years later, in 1924, these actions were turned into a permanent cause with the foundation of the Baltic Action for Russia (Baltische Rußlandarbeit, BRA). With help of the Evangelical Lutheran congregation of Riga, Schabert organized the sending of food packages and money transfers into the USSR. He was convinced that his food packages were “wirksame Waffen im Kampf mit der Macht der Finsternis.”<sup>2</sup> During the 1920s and 1930s, Schabert effectively managed to create a Europe-wide network for spreading his anti-communist message and raising funds for his relief campaign.

From 1930 onwards, Krop was one of Schabert’s most important connections in his anti-communist network. Through Krops radio addresses, translation of Schabert’s publications in Dutch and his own publications in brochures and journals, Dutch orthodox-Protestants became familiar with Schabert’s ideas and work. Krop repeated Schabert’s interpretation of the relief work for Christians in Russia as the religious duty of Christians to fight atheism endlessly. This struggle took the form of sending of Bibles and religious tracts to Russia and providing material support for Christians in need.<sup>3</sup> Strongly connected to this anti-communist message, Krop raised funds for Schabert’s humanitarian campaign. Krop’s activities were successful from the very start. By 1930 nearly 80 percent of Schabert’s funding came from the Netherlands and in the years thereafter the Dutch revenues remained important.<sup>4</sup> In 1935, Krop institutionalized his activities in the Dr. O. Schabert

<sup>1</sup> F. J. KROP: *Mijn reis naar de Russische grens of wat ik zag van het werk van Dr O. Schabert e.a.: Dertiende radiotoespraak van Dr F. J. Krop* [My Journey to the Russian Border or What I Saw of the Work of Dr O. Schabert et al.: Thirteenth Radio Lecture of Dr F. J. Krop], Rotterdam [1932].

<sup>2</sup> Quote from ANNA KATTERFELD: *Oskar Schabert: Ein Rufer Gottes*, Erlangen 1936, p. 66. See also OSKAR SCHABERT: *Die Baltische Russlandarbeit*, Berlin 1936, p. 6; STEPHAN BITTER: *Oskar Schabert: ein Prediger der Umkehr in Ost und West. Zum kirchengeschichtlichen Ort der “Baltischen Rußlandarbeit,”* in: HEINRICH WITTRAM (ed.): *Kirchliches Leben und Theologie in den baltischen Gebieten vom 16. bis 20. Jahrhundert: Zwölf Beiträge zum 21. Baltischen Seminar 2009*, Lüneburg 2011, pp. 190-269.

<sup>3</sup> F. J. KROP: *Plicht en roeping der Christenen ten opzichte van de vervolgd in Sowjet-Rusland: Een rondschrijven van den Heer Th. Aubert. Zeventiende radiotoespraak* [Duty and Calling of Christians towards the Persecuted in Soviet Russia: A Circular from Mr. Th. Aubert. Seventeenth Radio Speech], Rotterdam [1932], p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Eduard Steinwand to Gerhard Füllkrug, 1931-01-03, in: *Archive of the Protestant Agency for Diakonie and Development, Berlin (ADE), IV Ostausschuß*, inv. no. 118;

National Committee (Landelijk Werkcomité Dr. O. Schabert, LWC). Krop's and Schabert's correspondence and visits show that there was a strong personal connection between these two anti-communist religious leaders.

This article studies the activities and connections of Schabert and Krop to contribute to the expanding literature on anti-communism and religion. Recently, historians have called for more attention to be paid to the interaction between religion and politics and between communism and religion in the interwar period.<sup>5</sup> Historians have shown the complex interaction between Christian politics and Soviet anti-clericalism, the important role of Soviet anti-clerical and Catholic or Protestant anti-communist rhetoric and the efforts of European Christians to counter the threat of communism to the Christian faith.<sup>6</sup> Pope Pius XI, for example, called for the Catholic laity to join together in the fight for a worldwide "re-Christianization of society," campaigning against communism with a "crusade of prayer."<sup>7</sup> In this expanding historiography, Schabert and his anti-communist relief campaigns are studied, but not in their full scope. A biographical article by church historian Stephan Bitter examines Schabert in the context of German history, but does not make connections to the broader field of anti-communist history.<sup>8</sup> Stéphanie Roulin positions Schabert's work in the broader context of anti-communist propaganda in Europe, but she does not offer a thorough analysis of primary sources.<sup>9</sup> Taking this research into account, my aim is to connect new archival sources concerning the anti-communist activities with historiographical debates on the relations between religion and anti-communism.

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E. STEINWAND, P. W. ZELM: Bericht über die Tätigkeit der Baltischen Russlandarbeit, überreicht vom Internationalen Russland-Ausschuss, 1938-05-17, p. 2, in: Herder Institute for Historical Research on East Central Europe, Marburg, Dokumentensammlung (DSHI) 160 Russlandarbeit 8.

<sup>5</sup> See for example STÉPHANIE ROULIN: *Un credo anticommuniste: La commission Pro Deo de l'Entente Internationale Anticommuniste ou la dimension religieuse d'un combat politique (1924-1945)*, Lausanne 2010; NORBERT FREI, DOMINIK RIGOLL (eds.): *Der Antikommunismus in seiner Epoche: Weltanschauung und Politik in Deutschland, Europa und den USA*, Jena 2017; KOOS-JAN DE JAGER: *A Mighty Soul-Saving Army against Communism: William Fetler (1883-1957) and Twentieth Century Culture Wars*, in: *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 17 (2017), 2, pp. 7-19.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. TODD H. WEIR: *A European Culture War in the Twentieth Century? Anti-Catholicism and Anti-Bolshevism between Moscow, Berlin, and the Vatican 1922 to 1933*, in: *Journal of Religious History* 39 (2015), 2, pp. 280-306; PAUL HANEBRINK: *European Protestants Between Anti-Communism and Anti-Totalitarianism: The Other Interwar Kulturkampf?*, in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 53 (2018), 3, pp. 622-643.

<sup>7</sup> KLAUS GROSSE KRACHT: *Campaigning Against Bolshevism: Catholic Action in Late Weimar Germany*, in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 53 (2018), 3, pp. 550-573.

<sup>8</sup> BITTER, Oskar Schabert (as in footnote 2).

<sup>9</sup> STÉPHANIE ROULIN: *A Martyr Factory? Roman Catholic Crusade, Protestant Missions and Anti-communist Propaganda against Soviet Anti-religious Policies, 1929-37*, in: *Twentieth Century Communism* 7 (2014), pp. 153-173, here p. 160.

Historians have posed two theses on the nature of anti-communism in the 1930s. In the first place, historians have argued that, whether true or a product of imagination, the connection between famine, the USSR religious policy and the Christian support for persecuted believers became very powerful in Christian anti-communist networks. In her research on the anti-communist propaganda in the early 1930s, Roulin concludes that “the association of these two phenomena, famine and religious persecutions, allowed propaganda agencies like the Entente Internationale Anticomuniste (EIA)<sup>10</sup> to draw attention to flaws in the Soviet regime.”<sup>11</sup> However, based on the analysis of Schabert’s work, it has to be stressed that this connection between hunger and religion had already been made in the early 1920s. Starting in 1922, Schabert developed the idea that ideological anti-communism and charitable relief campaigns are two sides of the same coin. In addition to Roulin, I would like to show that this connection became a powerful narrative in the mobilization of Christian support all over Europe.

This point leads to the second observation of historians who have argued for the transnational character of anti-communism. The importance of transnational agents and the exchange of images and texts across national borders is underlined by various researchers.<sup>12</sup> Todd Weir, for example, writes that, in every European country during the interwar period, press and radio transmitted information from faraway places about the battle between communism and Christianity:

“This information was interpreted and emotionalized in meetings held by churches and political parties, and it was poured into semantic constructions that were translated and shared across national boundaries. Activists collected in new international leagues dedicated to the battle. All of this contributed to the widespread perception that Europe, and extending beyond it, the whole of Christendom, was a unified space of religious struggle. At the same time, however, different local traditions and constellations of forces led to remarkably different outcomes across Europe.”<sup>13</sup>

The case of Schabert and Krop highlights some characteristics of the influence of these anti-communist activists on the Christian public in the Netherlands. Stories from Russia, anti-communist pamphlets and ideas were exchanged on a frequent basis and contributed to the development of Dutch anti-communism. My research thus confirms Weir’s observation, but contrib-

<sup>10</sup> The EIA, founded in 1924 in Geneva, is described by MICHEL CAILLAT: Théodore Aubert and the Entente Internationale Anticomuniste: An Unofficial Anti-marxist International, in: *Twentieth Century Communism* 6 (2014), pp. 82-104, here p. 82, as the first transnational anti-communist organization.

<sup>11</sup> ROULIN, *A Martyr Factory?* (as in footnote 9), p. 161.

<sup>12</sup> MARIA STONE, GIULIANA CHAMEDES: Naming the Enemy: Anti-communism in Transnational Perspective, in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 53 (2018), 1, pp. 4-11.

<sup>13</sup> TODD H. WEIR: Introduction: Comparing Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Culture Wars, in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 53 (2018), 3, pp. 489-502, here p. 493.

utes to the field by showing how this transnational exchange influenced the mobilization of Dutch Christians.



Fig. 1: Dr Oskar Schabert on the pulpit of the Lutheran St. Gertrud church in Riga, in: DSHI 160 Steinwand 9



Fig. 2: Dr Frederik Willem Krop around 1940, in: Stadsarchief Rotterdam, no. 4031\_P-007235-2

Following on from this historiographical *status quaestionis*, this article seeks to answer two interrelated questions. In the first place, it asks how religion, aid programs and anti-communism were connected in the ideas and work of Oskar Schabert. To answer this question, this article first looks into Schabert's biography. His personal experiences with communism and the stories he received from pastors in Russia led him, in 1924, to establish BRA. As shown in the introduction, aid programs and anti-communism were inseparable for Schabert. The second part of this article describes the structure and development of the BRA activities. The growth of the aid program was accompanied by a search for support in international circles. Initially, Schabert found support in Germany but soon funding campaigns were started in other countries like Poland, Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands. These international contacts are discussed in chapter 3, with a special focus on the Netherlands.

Secondly, this article is devoted to the question of how the transnational contacts between Schabert and Krop influenced the development of anti-communism in the Netherlands. Transnational history is concerned with

“crossings, exchanges, movement and circulation both above and below the nation-state.”<sup>14</sup> Historians who choose this transnational approach in relation to biography writing do link historical figures to multiple contexts, through their rootedness in different national contexts and transnational social relationships.<sup>15</sup> In doing so, the dynamics of personal mobility can be understood as geographically, politically, socially and culturally coded crossings of borders.<sup>16</sup> The history writing of cultural mobility is, in the concise words of Stephen Greenblatt, “the description of ‘microhistories’ of ‘displaced’ things and persons,” representing “cultural connections between unexpected times and places.”<sup>17</sup> A key part of Greenblatt’s analysis are “mobilizers,” a specialized group of “agents, go-betweens, translators, or intermediaries” who facilitate contacts between different times and places.<sup>18</sup> This article argues that Krop can be seen as such a transnational mobilizer. In his anti-communist activities, Krop was a “go-between, translator and intermediary” between Riga, Russia and Christians in the Netherlands.

In terms of periodization, this contribution starts with the establishment of the BRA in the early 1920s and ends with the death of Schabert in 1936. After 1936, his colleague Eduard Steinwand (1890-1960) took over the principal leadership of the BRA until 1939, the year of the *Umsiedlung* of the Baltic Germans and the end of the BRA activities. The rise of national socialism in Germany in the early 1930s highly contested the anti-communist ideology and work of the BRA. For reasons of clarity, this development is not studied in this article. More historical research is needed to study the relations between the BRA and national socialism and the consequences for supporters of Schabert’s work.

The most important archival resources for this article have been found in Marburg (Herder Institute for Historical Research on East Central Europe), Berlin (Archive of the Protestant Agency for Diakonie and Development), Amsterdam (Historical Documentation Centre for Dutch Protestantism) and The Hague (National Archives). These archives contain the core documents of the BRA administration and the activities of Krop in the Netherlands. Next to this archival material, I have used publications of Schabert and Krop and a few Dutch newspapers. This source material hasn’t been studied in interna-

<sup>14</sup> TIMOTHY VERHOEVEN: Introduction, in: *Journal of Religious History* 39 (2015), pp. 175-181, here p. 175.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. SIDNEY TARROW: *Rooted Cosmopolitans and Transnational Activists*, in: IDEM (ed.): *Strangers at the Gates: Movements and States in Contentious Politics*, Cambridge 2012, pp. 181-199.

<sup>16</sup> SARAH PANTER, JOHANNES PAULMANN, MARGIT SZÖLLÖSI-JANZE: *Mobility and Biography: Methodological Challenges and Perspectives*, in: *Jahrbuch für Europäische Geschichte/European History Yearbook* 16 (2015), pp. 1-14.

<sup>17</sup> STEPHEN GREENBLATT: *Cultural Mobility: An Introduction*, in: IDEM, INES G. ŽUPANOV et al. (eds.): *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*, Cambridge 2010, pp. 1-23.

<sup>18</sup> IDEM: *A Mobility Studies Manifesto*, *ibidem*, pp. 250-253.

tional and comparative perspective before and throws light on the connections between the anti-communist activities of Schabert in Riga and Krop in the Netherlands.

### Schabert and His Confrontation with Communism

Oskar Albert Karl Schabert was born on 27 November 1866 in the small village of Grobin (Grobiņa) in Courland (current-day West-Latvia). His parents, Johann Albert Schabert (1832-1904), head of the German school in Grobin, and Karoline Juliane Emilie Eilenberg (1834-1920) originally came from the German regions of Pomerania and Mecklenburg, respectively.<sup>19</sup> As a young boy, Schabert moved to the multi-ethnic city of Riga, which, in the early twentieth century, was one of the most economically and militarily important centers of the Russian Empire.<sup>20</sup>

After his training at the gymnasium in Riga, Schabert studied theology at the University of Dorpat (Tartu) between 1886 and 1892. Traditionally this university had a strong German identity; in 1890, two-thirds of the student population was German. During his studies, Schabert came into contact with people like the Berlin court chaplain Adolf Stoecker (1835-1909), who sharpened Schabert's interest in the social conditions of his fellow citizens. He stayed for a short period at Stoecker's *Stadtmission* in Berlin. This city mission offered aid to the poorest families of downtown Berlin, who in Stoecker's view should be retained in the church and in Christian political parties. Although Schabert did not follow Stoecker's anti-Semitic ideas, the organizations for inner mission made a big impression on the young Schabert.<sup>21</sup>

In 1893, Schabert briefly worked as a teacher in religion at the gymnasium in Riga. Already in February 1893, the Lutheran St. Gertrud Congregation of Riga elected him as their new pastor. On the 3 April 1894, Schabert was confirmed as first pastor for the German congregation. Later that year, on 27 November, he married Johanna Elise (Elsa) Kaull (1872-1932). Schabert embarked on his work with burning zeal and ideals, trying to deepen the spiritual life of his congregation. In the years that followed, Schabert set up a myriad of initiatives. In 1895, he started special church services for children; in 1897, he founded the *Seemannsmission* in the harbor of Riga and started to organize special evening meetings for his congregation. In 1901, the church council decided to establish an organization for inner mission, which merged in 1907 with initiatives established by his colleagues Traugott Hahn (1875-1919)

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<sup>19</sup> WILHELM LENZ: Schabert, Oskar Albert Karl, in: *Baltisches Biographisches Lexikon*, Wedemark, 1998, pp. 672-673.

<sup>20</sup> MARK R. HATLIE: *Riga at War, 1914-1919: War and Wartime Experience in a Multi-ethnic Metropolis*, Marburg 2014, pp. 18-24, 158-159.

<sup>21</sup> BITTER, Oskar Schabert (as in footnote 2); D. A. JEREMY TELMAN: Adolf Stoecker: Anti-Semite with a Christian Mission, in: *Jewish History* 9 (1995), pp. 93-112.

from Reval and Ludwig Katterfeld (1881-1974) from Mitau. In 1905, Schabert founded a women's association within his congregation and started publishing a church journal named *St. Gertrud-Bote*. In 1909, he further expanded his inner mission work with the establishment of *Bethanien*, a house for church social welfare work.<sup>22</sup> According to his obituary, Schabert succeeded in building his congregation into a lively Christian community.<sup>23</sup>

Schabert's first confrontation with communism took place during the Russian Revolution of 1905. During this wave of political protests against the Tsarist rule in the Russian Empire, the city of Riga was struck by unrest, strikes and violence. In the Baltic provinces, the social discontent was not only focused against the power of the Tsar, but primarily against the Baltic-German landowners. The tensions between the Latvian and Estonian population and the Baltic-German minority increased against the backdrop of bloody expeditions of the German landlords against the revolutionary masses in their attempt to defend themselves and restore peace.<sup>24</sup> Schabert himself experienced the revolution when he walked through the inner city of Riga after a funeral on the outskirts of the city. He was drawn into a crowd singing the *International* after a revolutionary mass meeting and had to struggle to free himself. According to his biographer, for Schabert this was an experience of the war between secular communism and Christianity:

“Dieses Erlebnis hat ihn etwas ahnen lassen von der ‘groß Macht und viel List’ des ‘alt bösen Feindes,’ der ‘in dieser Zeit sein Werk tat in den Kindern des Unglaubens.’ Schon damals hat er es geahnt, welch ersten Kämpfen und Entscheidungen zwischen Christentum und Antichristentum wir entgegengehen.”<sup>25</sup>

The 1905 Revolution ended when Tsar Nicolas II offered reforms under pressure of the revolutionary movement. Earlier that year, he had issued the Edict of Toleration, granting legalization to dissenting religious groups other than the Russian Orthodox Church, such as Mennonites and German Baptists.<sup>26</sup> This marked the start of a relatively peaceful period where the German congregation in Riga flourished. Schabert embarked on new initiatives for inner mission and for the development of the Christian community. The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 posed new problems for the Germans in the Baltic provinces. The Germans eligible for military service fought in the Russian army against the German army. However, their loyalty to the Tsar was put under pressure by some movements within the Baltic-German population, who argued that only a victory of Germany could bring long-lasting peace for the German minority in the Russian Empire. The task Schabert was

<sup>22</sup> Notate betreffend die “Alte St. Gertrud” Kirche in Riga, in: DSHI 100 Schabert 7.

<sup>23</sup> Pastor D. Oskar Schabert zum Gedächtnis, Riga 1936, p. 16.

<sup>24</sup> WILFRIED SCHLAU: Die Deutsch-Balten, München 1995, p. 81.

<sup>25</sup> KATTERFELD (as in footnote 2), p. 22.

<sup>26</sup> ALBERT W. WARDIN: On the Edge: Baptists and Other Free Church Evangelicals in Tsarist Russia, 1855-1917, Eugene 2013, p. 325.



facing was to find an attitude towards these contested loyalties. During war-time, he tried to help Russian and German war prisoners. However, this work lasted only until Spring 1915, when Schabert and other German pastors were forced to leave the Baltic provinces for Siberia. In this period of exile, Schabert and the other clergy suffered heavily under the “satanischen Bosheit roter Machthaber.”<sup>27</sup>

The October Revolution of 1917 brought the takeover of power by the Bolsheviks. The “Germanophile” pastor Schabert was permitted to return to the Baltic provinces, but forbidden to return to Riga immediately. In February 1918, the Central Powers launched an offensive and occupied all of Latvia, Estonia, Byelorussia, and Ukraine. On 3 March 1918, facing total defeat, the revolutionary Russian government signed the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty. The Germans set out plans to make the Baltic areas into independent states under German auspices.<sup>28</sup> Schabert experienced the takeover of Riga by the German armies as a real liberation.<sup>29</sup> However, the German summer did not last long—in the autumn of 1918, the German troops withdrew from the Baltic areas and on 4 January 1919 the Red Army captured the city. After the start of the Bolshevik rule in January 1919, Schabert and a few other pastors were imprisoned on 4 March 1919. Through mediation of church members he was freed some weeks later. This provided Schabert with a unique opportunity to flee from Riga, but he decided to stay. He was again imprisoned for a longer period of time. On 22 May 1919, Schabert was freed from prison by the joint German, Byelorussian and Latvian forces. The response of Schabert to his liberation was again characterized by the idea that he and the other pastors had suffered in the front lines of the war between atheism and Christianity.<sup>30</sup>

Schabert’s war experiences led him to reflect on the losses of the Baltic Evangelical Lutheran Church. In the 1920s and 1930s, he published a series of accounts about the sufferings of Christians in Russia and the Baltic States under the Communist regime. Together with his colleague Eduard Steinwand from Dorpat he published a collection of sermons around this theme.<sup>31</sup> Schabert’s reflections were closely connected to his interpretation of the struggle between communism and Christianity. For him, the Soviet Union was the ultimate battlefield between atheist secularism and the faithful followers of Christ, which is reflected in his writings on Christian “martyrs.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> KATTERFELD (as in footnote 2), pp. 27-28.

<sup>28</sup> ALEXANDER V. PRUSIN: *The Lands between: Conflicts in the East European Borderlands, 1870-1992*, Oxford 2010, p. 75.

<sup>29</sup> KATTERFELD (as in footnote 2), p. 33.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>31</sup> OSKAR SCHABERT, EDUARD STEINWAND: *Des Glaubens Not und Sieg in Rußland: Predigten und Ansprachen*, Riga 1936.

<sup>32</sup> OSKAR SCHABERT: *Baltisches Märtyrerbuch*, Berlin 1926; *IDEM: Märtyrer: Der Leidensweg der baltischen Christen*, Hannover-Döhren 1973, reprint of the edition 1930.

Recently, the German historian Henning Bühmann has shown that the collective memory in Germany regarding the Baltic “martyrs” was a synthesis of nationalist, (political) anti-communist and religious motives. The Baltic “martyrs” were on the one hand real Christian “martyrs” who died for their faith but on the other hand also positive real German counterimages against the negative images of the Bolshevik enemy.<sup>33</sup> With his selection and description of “martyrs,” Schabert became part of a European transnational community who “drummed out the martyrdom of the believers in Russia for propaganda purposes.” In this transnational anti-communist “martyr factory” life stories of Christians in the Soviet Union were instrumentalized to serve the anti-communist propaganda. The idea of “martyrs” turned out to be very strong, since it leads back to the first Christians in the Roman Empire, to a time when Christianity was not yet divided. It therefore fostered cooperation between Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox Christians in their actions against the secularist movements within the Soviet Union.<sup>34</sup>

### The Foundation and Development of the BRA

Between 1921 and 1933, two great famines struck parts of the Russian population. In January 1919, Lenin and his government decided to issue heavy decrees on the villages and took all the harvest surplus for the State. Lenin declared this grain monopoly of the State as one of the most important methods in the transition towards a socialist state based on product-exchange for the common interests. Every year, a requisition campaign was held to claim the grain surplus for the population of the Russian cities. The peasants were left with almost nothing. The Civil War between 1917 and 1923 worsened the situation for the peasantry. Combined with bad climatological circumstances, these events disrupted the social and economic order, producing a great famine in 1921/22.<sup>35</sup> After long considerations and negotiations, the Soviet government allowed foreign aid campaigns to alleviate the need of its hungry population in July 1921. In Geneva, Red Cross societies established the International Committee for Russian Relief, led by the League of Nation’s High Commissioner for Refugees Fridtjof Nansen. They offered humanitarian aid

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Cf. BJÖRN MENSING, HEINRICH RATHKE: *Widerstehen: Wirkungsgeschichte und aktuelle Bedeutung christlicher Märtyrer*, Leipzig 2002, p. 122.

<sup>33</sup> HENNING BÜHMANN: *Die Rezeption der “baltischen Märtyrer” von 1919 im deutsch-baltischen und deutschen Protestantismus bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg*, master thesis Eberhard Karls Universität, Tübingen 2008; IDEM: *Die “baltischen Märtyrer” von 1919: Zur Konstruktion eines protestantischen Märtyrergedächtnisses in der Zwischenkriegszeit*, in: *Mitteilungen zur Kirchlichen Zeitgeschichte* 3 (2009), pp. 13-42.

<sup>34</sup> ROULIN, *A Martyr Factory?* (as in footnote 9).

<sup>35</sup> DOUGLAS SMITH: *The Russian Job: The Forgotten Story of How America Saved the Soviet Union from Famine*, New York 2019, pp. 12-13.

from more than 20 countries.<sup>36</sup> However, the largest aid campaign was launched by the United States of America. The American Relief Administration (ARA), led by Herbert Hoover, set up a humanitarian program to feed the Russian people. By 1923, the Americans had fed over ten million men, women and children in the largest humanitarian operation in history.<sup>37</sup>

The second great Soviet famine took place in 1932/33, in which at least five million people died. In 1929, the second Five-Year Plan started, aimed at a rapid industrialization and forced collectivization of agriculture. Especially in Ukraine and other regions in Southern Russia, the creation of collective farms was highly problematic. Most of the farmers in this region, including a large population of German-Russian farmers, were relatively prosperous and independent. The collectivization program of the Soviet government was accompanied by a dekulakization campaign, which involved the expropriation, exile or imprisonment of rich peasants. At the same time, these collective farms were an opportunity for the Communist Party to control the peasantry. This collectivization thus led to a great confrontation between the peasantry on the one hand and state and the police on the other. In Bolshevik ideology, this clash was presented as part of the historical class struggle.<sup>38</sup>

In May and June 1922, frightening messages from the Evangelical Lutheran clergy reached Oskar Schabert in Riga. The letters told of the imprisonment of the clergy, fear of communist terror and starvation and asked for foreign help. In response to these letters, Schabert started to collect money among the members of his own congregation in Riga and used the money to send food packages to the distressed clergy in Russia. In this early stage, Schabert only supported friends and acquaintances with whom he had studied in Dorpat. However, every package provoked new requests for help.<sup>39</sup> This led in 1924 to the foundation of the BRA, giving the relief work a permanent character. During the 1920s, Schabert's parsonage grew into the coordinating center of the charitable relief actions. Over the years, thousands of letters arrived from Evangelical Lutherans in the USSR and were registered and stored on shelves. According to contemporaries, there was no room on earth where so many testimonies of deep suffering were collected than in the archive of the BRA.<sup>40</sup> Every letter was answered by sending the necessary money, food and other requested goods. In this work, Schabert was assisted by the pastors Julius Fastena (1865-1944) and Walter Zelm (1904-1944) and staff members.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, p. 38; on Nansen see VINCENT CHETAIL: Fridtjof Nansen and the International Protection of Refugees: An Introduction, in: *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 22 (2003), 1, pp. 1-6.

<sup>37</sup> ROBERT CONQUEST: *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine*, Oxford 1986, pp. 43-57; SMITH (as in footnote 36), p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> TIMOTHY SNYDER: *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, London 2010, p. 25.

<sup>39</sup> Notate (as in footnote 22).

<sup>40</sup> KATTERFELD (as in footnote 2), p. 66.

The central focus of the aid programs was on Lutheran clergy with an ethnic German background and their families. As mentioned above, these families were described by Schabert as martyrs for Christ. In funding campaigns, he stressed the fact that these families were not only in need because of the historical circumstances, but that this was a result of their belief in Christ. Their situation was caused by the brutal policies of the Soviet Union towards clergy, since they did not have access to the governmental food distribution. According to Schabert, it was necessary to support the people who “um ihres kirchlichen Amtes willen ihre bürgerlichen Rechte verloren hatten.”<sup>41</sup> By supporting pastors, parish clerks and members of the church councils, Schabert aimed to maintain the religious life of the Lutheran church in the Soviet Union.<sup>42</sup> “Den Trägern des geistlichen Amtes sollte die Existenzgrundlage gegeben werden, die ihnen von Seiten ihrer Gemeinden nicht mehr oder nur in ungenügendem Masse zuteilwerden konnte.”<sup>43</sup> Schabert repeatedly stressed that the material aid should not have an occasional, but a regular and reliable character. Some of the receivers of the packages or money transfers declared to him that they would rather receive nothing than to go to ruin with unreliable or inadequate help.

Secondly, other persecuted believers were also supported. The Russian Orthodox Church was not initially harassed by the Bolshevik government, but when they started to be suppressed, the BRA supported them as well.<sup>44</sup> The decision to support the Orthodoxy in Russia from a Lutheran organization was partly religious charity (“Samariterdienst”)<sup>45</sup> and partly politics. The Catholic Church also tried to get a grip on the Orthodox Church in the Soviet Union, trying to unify with this church. The idea of a unified Orthodox-Catholic church was frightening for Schabert. He therefore easily defended his move to support the Orthodox clergy and church members.<sup>46</sup> In theory, Schabert aimed to unite all “Gottgläubigen,” whether Muslims, Jews or Christians, in a front against the godless “rote Sturmflut.”<sup>47</sup> However, the definition of “believers” was in practice confined to Lutheranism, Orthodoxy and other small Evangelical groups like the Baptists.

<sup>41</sup> STEINWAND/ZELM (as in footnote 4).

<sup>42</sup> E. STEINWAND: Märtyrerhilfe für Rußland durch die Baltische Rußlandarbeit [manuscript, 1938], in: DSHI 160 Russlandarbeit 8.

<sup>43</sup> STEINWAND/ZELM (as in footnote 4).

<sup>44</sup> STEPHAN BITTER: Steinwand, Friedrich Eduard Heinrich, in: Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon, vol. 38, Nordhausen 2017, cols. 1347-1379.

<sup>45</sup> STEINWAND/ZELM (as in footnote 4).

<sup>46</sup> WILHELM KAHLE: Die Begegnung des baltischen Protestantismus mit der russisch-orthodoxen Kirche, Leiden—Köln 1959, p. 245.

<sup>47</sup> BITTER, Oskar Schabert (as in footnote 2); KAHLE (as in footnote 46), p. 241.



Fig. 3: Schabert working on the administration of BRA, in: DSHI 160 Russlandarbeit 3

Initially, the packages were dispatched from private addresses of members of the Evangelical Lutheran community in Riga. They gathered at the parsonage to receive addresses and after the shipment they reported to Schabert.<sup>48</sup> Later, other intermediaries were also used and, in 1926, a second office was opened in Dorpat, Estonia, where Eduard Steinwand coordinated the work. The money transfers, which constituted another important branch of the aid campaigns, were mostly sent out via the Russian organization Torgsin (acronym for trade with foreigners) or the German firm Fast. In the state-run stores of Torgsin the Soviet citizens could get food and goods in exchange for foreign currency, which the Soviet government desperately needed.<sup>49</sup> Because of the strict Soviet policies on foreign interference in the famines, it was important for the BRA to keep the relief work secret and private. The packages had to be kept anonymous and free from any reference to the BRA organization or Schabert, since this could endanger the receivers. The packages were thus always sent from private addresses to the private addresses of the receivers in Russia. Confirmation of receipt was therefore very important to prevent the shipments falling into wrong hands.<sup>50</sup> Because of these necessary precautions, the aid campaigns of the BRA remained relatively small compared to the humanitarian work of the ARA. Schabert himself described the aid as “ein

<sup>48</sup> KATTERFELD (as in footnote 2), p. 65.

<sup>49</sup> ELENA OSOKINA: *Zoloto dlia industrializatsii: “Torgsin”* [Gold for Industrialization: “Torgsin”], Moskva 2009.

<sup>50</sup> STEINWAND, *Märtyrerhilfe* (as in footnote 42).

Tropfen auf den heißen Stein.”<sup>51</sup> However, the BRA administration reveals that, in the period between 1929 and 1938, no fewer than 8,050 families were supported regularly, among which 283 were families of clergy, with more than 32,000 packages in total.<sup>52</sup>

An example of the results of the BRA relief work and the connections between hunger and religion is found in an anonymous letter of a Lutheran Probst from the Crimea. In his letter, the Probst describes the miserable circumstances he and his family live in. Hunger and suffering is everywhere, all possible animals have been eaten and the corpses of people who have died from hunger are lying on the streets for days. Church life is strongly restricted by the Soviet government. According to the Probst, the church is becoming a ruin “unter der Geißel des rohesten Atheismus.” However, he writes, he and his family have survived so far because of the BRA support. As Probst and pastor, he has been counted as one of the “entrechteten Klasse der Bürger unseres Landes” which has made it impossible for him to get the necessary food from state supplies. His only chance for survival is the BRA. The BRA supplies are sometimes endangered by the government too, especially when they are not completely anonymous. There are also examples of the BRA money transfers being confiscated by the communists. To prevent for these damages, the Probst has decided that he would function as the receiver and distributor of all relief aid for his Lutheran congregation. In his letter, the Probst expresses his deep gratitude for the received aid:

“Ich sage Ihnen für diese hochherzige und reiche Spende meinen tiefempfundenen Dank. Der Herr, unser Gott, wolle Ihnen alles in seiner reichen Gnade tausendfach vergelten. Ich habe eine Familie von 10 Personen, und wie groß war da im Laufe der letzten 8-10 Monate die Not. Hätten uns nicht liebe, gute Menschen aus dem Auslande unterstützt,—wir wären alle verhungert.”<sup>53</sup>

Selections of these letters from Russia were published in the newspaper of the BRA, the *Russische Evangelische Pressedienst* (REVP; later *Evangelium und Osten*). The REVP started as a small pamphlet covering the Soviet press with some comments by Schabert. In the following years, the series grew to one of the leading documentary sources about the situation of religion in the Soviet Union, the relief actions of Schabert and the evangelization campaigns among the Russians. The REVP was distributed in the Soviet Union and in Western Europe, trying to build a bridge between East and West.<sup>54</sup> One of its central goals was to distribute reliable information about the situation of reli-

<sup>51</sup> Attachment to letter from Eduard Steinwand to Gerhard Füllkrug, 1931-01-03, in: ADE, IV Ostausschuß, inv. no. 118.

<sup>52</sup> STEINWAND/ZELM (as in footnote 4).

<sup>53</sup> Letter of an anonymous Probst, 1933-07-26, in: DSHI 160 Steinwand 9.

<sup>54</sup> E. STEINWAND: Die baltische Rußlandarbeit, in: Beiträge und Berichte zum kirchlichen Leben der deutschen evangelischen Gemeinden Estlands 3 (1934), pp. 24-34; cf. KAHLE (as in footnote 46), p. 238.

gion in the USSR and to raise funds and attention to the relief campaigns.<sup>55</sup> As we shall see in the two following chapters, the REVP became a major source for European anti-communist leaders who cited quite extensively from this newspaper.

The brotherly cooperation between Lutheran and Orthodox clergy in the BRA activities led to remarkable initiatives of early ecumenism.<sup>56</sup> One of the principles of the BRA, Steinwand argued, was not to attack the Orthodox church but to offer it support in the difficult situation.<sup>57</sup> According to Schabert, this attitude was part of the charisma of the evangelical churches, which holds “ein Verständnis für das geschichtlich Gewordene und Wertvolle der andern Kirchen.”<sup>58</sup> The absence of proselytizing removed the initial suspicion of the Orthodox clergy towards the relief actions of the BRA. Two conferences in Narva in 1932 and 1934 strengthened the cooperative attitude of both Lutheran and Orthodox clergy. At these conferences, they studied the Bible together and discussed frankly the work being done in the churches.<sup>59</sup> Protestant pastors were even allowed to take an active role in the Orthodox religious services. However, Steinwand stressed that the cooperation did not blur the boundaries between Lutheranism and Orthodoxy.<sup>60</sup>

The ecumenical initiatives were contested by another task of the BRA: the evangelization among the youth and students in the Baltic States by Schabert and his staff members. He also sent evangelists to the Soviet Union and set up programs for evangelization in the border areas between the USSR and the Baltic States.<sup>61</sup> However, Schabert and Steinwand did not see these initiatives of evangelization as contrary to their ecumenical efforts. The BRA was aimed at “Evangelisierung” instead of “Missionierung.”<sup>62</sup> This crucial, but somewhat artificial distinction is made clear by Schabert in a letter to the Swiss theologian and founder of the Central Bureau of Relief Adolf Keller (1872-1963), who supported Russian refugees in Europe, in August 1926.<sup>63</sup> The Orthodox Russians, he wrote, should not be converted to the Lutheran faith, which is “missionierung,” but filled with the spirit of the gospel, which is a

<sup>55</sup> O. SCHABERT: Die baltische Russlandarbeit 1924-1934, Riga 1934, in: DSHI 160 Steinwand 7.

<sup>56</sup> BITTER, Steinwand (as in footnote 44); KAHLE (as in footnote 46), p. 245.

<sup>57</sup> EDUARD STEINWAND: Lutheranism and the Orthodox Church, in: Lutheran World. Publication of the Lutheran World Federation VI (1959), p. 137.

<sup>58</sup> SCHABERT, Die Baltische Russlandarbeit (as in footnote 2), p. 10.

<sup>59</sup> Minutes of Conferences with Orthodox and Lutheran clergy in Narva, in: DSHI 160 Steinwand 9.

<sup>60</sup> STEINWAND, Lutheranism (as in footnote 57), p. 137.

<sup>61</sup> SCHABERT, Die baltische Russlandarbeit (as in footnote 55).

<sup>62</sup> Entstehung, Entwicklung und Zukunftsmöglichkeiten der Baltischen Russlandarbeit, in: DSHI 160 Steinwand 9.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. MARIANNE JEHL-WILDBERGER: Adolf Keller: Ecumenist, World Citizen, Philanthropist, Eugene 2013.

correction of their worship of saints and icons. Orthodoxy, he maintained, is not an enemy of the gospel, but only “evangeliums-fremd,” alienated from the message of the gospel.<sup>64</sup>

These evangelization campaigns in the border areas of the Soviet Union did have an explicit political goal. Schabert feared the rapid growth of communism in the poor villages in these border areas, which implied a march of communism towards Western Europe:

“Die Zielsetzung dieser Arbeit war nicht, Propaganda unter Andersgläubigen zu treiben, sondern diese Bevölkerung mit der Kraft des Evangeliums zu stärken, so daß sie ein Schutzwall für Westeuropa würde und einen Deich bildete gegen die rote Sturmflut, die dort brandet.”<sup>65</sup>

### Entering European Networks

The continuous growth of help requests from Russia urged Schabert to look for international support. He first turned towards the ecclesiastical authorities for help, but failed to convince them for the need to support Christians other than their own church members.<sup>66</sup> Schabert thus looked for support in the International Federation for Inner Mission and Diaconia (Internationaler Verband für Innere Mission und Diakonie). This organization was founded in 1923 and was led by German board members of the Central Association for Inner Mission (Central-Verband der Inneren Mission) of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Germany. In 1925, Schabert asked the International Federation for help at a conference in Bonn. He expressed the need to help the suffering believers in the Soviet Union, the continuation of the “spiritual war” against Bolshevism and the organization of evangelization campaigns among Russians in the border areas.<sup>67</sup> In the years thereafter, Schabert travelled frequently through Europe trying to find supportive organizations in the field of inner mission or influential individuals for his plans. Through his efforts he founded a network of supporting organizations, churches and committees in Western Europe and the USA.<sup>68</sup>

Over the years, the Netherlands became an important part of Schabert’s network. Already in May 1924, the Dutch Central Office for Inner Mission (Centraal Bureau voor Inwendige Zending, CBIZ) published a circular by Schabert and his colleague Werner Gruhn (1887-1961), in which they ap-

<sup>64</sup> Entstehung, Entwicklung und Zukunftsmöglichkeiten (as in footnote 62).

<sup>65</sup> SCHABERT, Die Baltische Russlandarbeit (as in footnote 2), p. 6.

<sup>66</sup> KATTERFELD (as in footnote 2), pp. 62-63.

<sup>67</sup> Attachment to letter from Eduard Steinwand to Gerhard Füllkrug, 1931-01-03, in: ADE, IV Ostausschuß, inv. no. 118.

<sup>68</sup> Notate (as in footnote 22).



pealed to the Dutch Protestant churches for support.<sup>69</sup> The CBIZ responded by conducting a few campaigns for Schabert in the Netherlands. These were temporary campaigns organized directly on Schabert's request. He visited the Netherlands in 1926 for the first conference of the Continental Congress for Inner Mission in Amsterdam and presented to his audience a glimpse into the religious Soviet life. His lecture was broadcasted on Dutch radio which meant that people across the entire country heard of Schabert's charitable campaigns. The visit was reported widely in the Dutch press, which also makes it reasonable to assume that a considerable number of Dutch citizens knew about his work.<sup>70</sup> The political and religious fear for communism in the Netherlands created a basis for broadly organized philanthropic relief actions for the oppressed believers in the Soviet Union. Between 1924 and 1929, the CBIZ organized a few limited campaigns for Schabert in the Netherlands, directly at his request. Notwithstanding communist critique on Schabert's "capitalist" relief actions<sup>71</sup>, in 1930 at least three Dutch committees were active in the European charitable network for Russian believers.<sup>72</sup>

The period between 1929 and 1933 marks a turning point in the history of Russian relief campaigns in Europe and the Netherlands. Religious persecutions in the USSR intensified and the Western abhorrence towards Soviet communism also grew. The tragic Ukrainian famine of 1932/33 tarnished the image of the USSR, which appeared as an atheist political power.<sup>73</sup> Christian churches and organizations all over Europe protested against the persecution of believers in the Soviet Union. Protests started on 19 December 1929, when the Christian Protest Committee organized the first mass protest meeting in the Royal Albert Hall, London.<sup>74</sup> No fewer than 8,000 visitors condemned the Soviet policy towards religion. The speakers, among whom was EIA-president Théodore Aubert, illustrated the atrocities that had been inflicted on the clergy and religious groups in the USSR. Aubert told his audience an eyewitness story from a Siberian camp, where a group of about one hundred Christians was imprisoned. They distinguished themselves from their fellow prisoners by their peaceful attitude. Their resignation provoked the ire of the camp commander, who accused them of mounting a conspiracy. The camp guards then forced the group of believers to dig a common grave. The sol-

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<sup>69</sup> Circular of O. Schabert and W. Gruhn to the Protestant churches in Holland, May 1924, in: International Institute for Social History Amsterdam, ARCH00258, Archief Centraal Bond voor Inwendige Zending.

<sup>70</sup> Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant from 1926-05-04; Het Vaderland from 1926-05-04.

<sup>71</sup> De Tribune from 1927-11-21.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. KOOS-JAN DE JAGER: Contested Crossing of Missionary Borders: William Fetler and the Russian Missionary Society in the Netherlands, 1931-1936, in: *Trajecta: Religion, Culture and Society in the Low Countries* 26 (2018), 2, pp. 320-343.

<sup>73</sup> ROULIN, A Martyr Factory? (as in footnote 9), p. 161.

<sup>74</sup> GILES UDY: *Labour and the Gulag: Russia and the Seduction of the British Left*, London 2017.

diers cut off the prisoners' arms and legs and pushed their battered bodies into the grave where they died slowly. Although evidence of this massacre was not available, the story proves the efforts of Aubert and his colleagues to show the cruelties against Christianity. The goal of these stories was to raise a worldwide protest in condemnation of such atrocities.<sup>75</sup>

In response to Aubert's lecture, the following resolution was therefore adopted at the conclusion of the meeting:

"That this meeting of worshippers of Almighty God vehemently protests against the persistent and cruel persecution of our fellow worshippers in Russia and calls upon believers in God and lovers of liberty throughout the world to pray and work unceasingly for the religious freedom of the people in Russia."<sup>76</sup>

The London protest meeting started a wave of protest all over Europe. In the Netherlands, Catholics organized a protest meeting in Amsterdam's Concert Hall on 4 March 1930, where the city's Jewish and Protestant communities also participated and an enormous crowd attended. Among the speakers were Catholic priests, Orthodox-Protestant pastors and a chief rabbi. Together they called for a passionate and unified Christian protest. This meeting marked the start of a series of meetings in the Netherlands, all expressing an abhorrence of communism and the religious persecutions in the USSR.<sup>77</sup>

### Transnational Mobilization of Dutch Protestants

After 1930, Frederik Johan Krop became the most vehement anti-communist opinion leader in the Netherlands. In 1929, he became the secretary of the Geneva-based Fraternal Entente for the Defense against Bolshevism in the Moral and Religious Field (Entente fraternelle pour la défense contre le Bolchévisme sur le terrain moral et religieux, EFB). In this conservative right-wing anti-communist organization, affiliated with the EIA, Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox groups were represented. They organized meetings and tried to influence public opinion in Western Europe against the growing threat of Soviet communism. Krop was seen as the ideal candidate to spread the anti-communist message in the Netherlands because of his strong network in the conservative Dutch churches.<sup>78</sup> But at the same time, he participated in large European networks of people like Adolf Keller. Krop's protest meetings, like the one in Amsterdam's Concert Hall on 4 March 1930, raised funds and he

<sup>75</sup> According to the press coverage in Krop's newspaper *Geloof en vrijheid* [Faith and Freedom], 1930.

<sup>76</sup> UDY (as in footnote 74).

<sup>77</sup> Het Centrum from 1930-03-05; De Tijd from 1930-03-04.

<sup>78</sup> ROULIN, *Un credo anticommuniste* (as in footnote 5), pp. 132-135; BEN KNAPEN: *De lange weg naar Moskou: De Nederlandse relatie tot de Sovjet-Unie, 1917-1942* [The Long Way to Moscow: The Dutch Relation to the Soviet Union, 1917-1942], Amsterdam—Brussels 1985, pp. 202-203.

had to find a destination for the money. He thus entered the existing Dutch networks supporting Schabert's BRA. As Krop always did, he immediately tried to build up a long-lasting relationship with Schabert. In May 1930, Krop travelled to Riga, where he met Schabert and his family and learned to appreciate the work of the BRA.<sup>79</sup>

In this period, Krop will have thought of the comments of Adolf Keller, who concluded that it was very hard to secure the positive effects of the protest movement for the believers in the Soviet Union. Keller was present at a meeting in London after the first wave of protests, where he witnessed a strong decline in the desire among Christians to protest against the Soviet religious policy. He therefore asked to turn the anti-communist energy that peaked in the early 1930 protests into a structural form of support for the persecuted Christians in Russia, both on the level of political pressure and charitable relief actions. In Krop's Dutch journal Keller's request was reported, aimed at the creation of a sustainable backing for Krop's work.<sup>80</sup> In the Netherlands, Krop tried to find substantial backing for his anti-communist propaganda, which he found in the first place in the Rotterdam men's association All Ye Are Brethren (*Gij zijt allen broeders*, GZAB).<sup>81</sup>

The GZAB had been founded by Krop himself in November 1920.<sup>82</sup> After 1930, Krop reorganized the GZAB into a central anti-communist organization in the Netherlands and the leading publishing house of anti-communist literature. The publications of the association consist of a few hundred brochures, pamphlets and printed speeches. In this library, the works of Krop on the dangers of communism are central; Krop also translated and edited lots of leaflets from German, French and Russian authors. The central goal of the series of publications was to denounce the terrible conditions of believers in the Soviet Union for Dutch Protestants.<sup>83</sup> Krop's mobilization campaign against Russian Bolshevism found its zenith in the travelling exhibitions against Bolshevism in the period between 1935 and 1940. These exhibitions were modeled on the Swiss anti-communism protest committees. Between January 1934 and May 1935, an exhibition visited nineteen towns and cities in Switzerland. The recipe was simple: "banners and reproductions pinned up in haste on makeshift boards, or even on the wallpaper of an apartment rented out for the occasion; a defensive tone; and a curious combination of religious, economic and political arguments."<sup>84</sup> The exhibition travelled to Delft in

<sup>79</sup> According to *Geloof en vrijheid*, 3th Extra Issue 1930, not dated.

<sup>80</sup> *Geloof en vrijheid* from 1931-03-15.

<sup>81</sup> This name is a reference to Matthew 23:8: "But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren" (King James Version).

<sup>82</sup> F. J. KROP: *Waarom en hoe wij het wettig gezag steunen* [Why and How We Support the Legal Authorities], Rotterdam 1921.

<sup>83</sup> Many of these pamphlets are available in digital format in the online newspaper database of the Dutch Royal Library, URL: [www.delpher.nl](http://www.delpher.nl) (2019-12-02) (2019-12-02).

<sup>84</sup> ROULIN, *A Martyr Factory?* (as in footnote 9), p. 164.

1935, then on to Leeuwarden and Groningen. In the period between May 1935 and April 1940, the exposition was exhibited 36 times, in The Hague, Assen, Ede, Utrecht, Kampen and many other Dutch cities. Press reports on the protest meetings describe the large crowds attending Krop's meetings. The travelling exhibitions in their turn were an excellent example of local mobilization, involving both members of the elites and citizens from different backgrounds.



Fig. 4: Part of an anti-communist exhibition organized by Frederik Johan Krop in the Netherlands. On the right, some parts of “hunger bread from Russia” is visible, in: Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, University Library, Historical Documentation Centre for Dutch Protestantism (HDC), coll. no. 775 (F. J. Krop), inv. no. 4

The transnational contacts between Schabert and Krop regarding their anti-communist mobilization were multi-layered. In the first place, Krop's transnational exchanges with Riga and Geneva delivered him the necessary information for his anti-communist speeches, articles and pamphlets. Krop also used methods of his transnational contacts to mobilize the Dutch Christians, for example the protest meetings (cf. the London example), travelling exhibitions (cf. the Swiss example) and stories of “martyrs” (cf. Schabert's example). The brochure series and journal *Geloof en vrijheid* were packed with references to and translations of texts written by Schabert, Aubert or Lodyginsky. Krop also published a few books of Schabert and Steinwand in Dutch. Schabert's REVP delivered factual information about the situation of the churches in the Soviet Union, which were translated for the Dutch audience to point at their responsibilities towards their fellow believers. The importance of Schabert was recognized by Krop himself, when he described the

German-Baltic pastor in 1932 as an “honest, faithful champion of the truth, the eminent connoisseur of all things Russian.”<sup>85</sup>

This is the second aspect of transnational exchanges. Krop not only tried to convince his audience with rational arguments against communism, but instrumentalized stories of “martyrs” and persecuted Christians in an emotional appeal to the Christian responsibility of Dutch Protestants. Krop used the martyr figures, which circulated in Europe in the 1930s, to show the sacrifices these people made for the sake of Christian faith.<sup>86</sup> Especially the martyr books of Schabert delivered hundreds of examples of “martyrs” who died in their struggle with “godless communists.” In 1934, the Dutch publishing company J. N. Voorhoeve in The Hague published the second Dutch edition of Schabert’s *Baltisches Märtyrerbuch*,<sup>87</sup> for which Krop wrote an introduction and epilogue with strong appeals to the moral duty of the Dutch public. There he argues that Schabert was the best contact of Western Christianity with “our oppressed Russian brothers” and that his tireless labor informed Western Europe with the highest accuracy about the situation in the “mysterious land of Lenin and Stalin.”<sup>88</sup> The Dutch population, he maintained, should therefore support Schabert’s BRA both materially and spiritually. “Thousands, yea millions, stretch out their hands to us, begging for bread and prayers. Will we remain insensitive?”<sup>89</sup>

Thirdly, Schabert became the authoritative voice in the Dutch political and religious landscape on issues about religious persecution in Russia, Christian suffering and the charitable relief campaigns. Krop presented him, and with him other anti-communist opinion leaders, as the ultimate argument against communism. Their knowledge of the subject, their personal experiences with communism and their fierce commitment to the cause of Christ proved their reliability and made them into authorities in Dutch anti-communism. The same process is visible in Krop’s use of foreign guests, mostly Russian, Finnish or Baltic opinion leaders and refugees who stayed for a period in the Netherlands. These guests, among whom were Schabert and Steinwand, met Krop and delivered lectures on meetings organized by the GZAB. Krop himself translated their messages into Dutch. In some cases, the “foreignness” of these guests was strengthened by the mysteries surrounding these people. The case of the Russian woman Alexandra Anzerowa, who fled the USSR shortly

<sup>85</sup> F. J. KROP: Is One in Russia Exposed to Severe Persecution, Without Any Political Motive, Merely on the Ground That One Is a Believer? A Wireless Address, Rotterdam 1935, p. 6.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. ROULIN, A Martyr Factory? (as in footnote 9).

<sup>87</sup> OSKAR SCHABERT (translated by TRUIDA DE PIJPER): Martelaren van onzen tijd: Met een woord vooraf en een naschrift van Dr F. J. Krop [Martyrs of Our Time: With a Foreword and Postscript of Dr. F. J. Krop], The Hague 1934.

<sup>88</sup> Ibidem, pp. 5-6.

<sup>89</sup> Ibidem, p. 176.

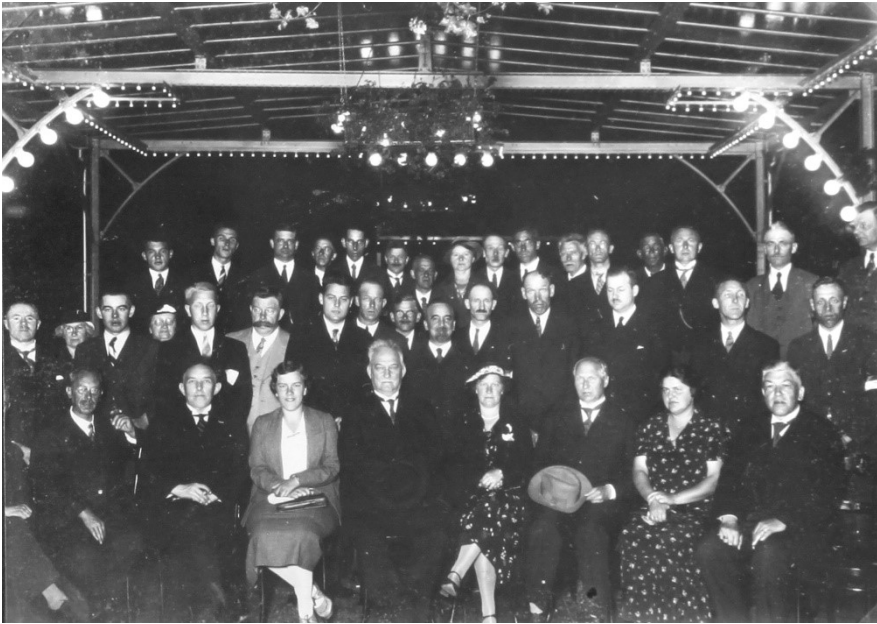


Fig. 5: 20 July 1934, after Schabert, Steinwand and Krop had delivered lectures on the situation in Russia for Dutch Christians in Rotterdam, in: HDC, coll. no. 775, inv. no. 6

before and was invited by Krop to deliver speeches on private meetings with a small audience, supports this point. In 1936, Anzerowa had published the book *Aus dem Lande der Stummen* in Germany, which was translated into Dutch in 1937.<sup>90</sup> According to Krop, the fact that she fled the USSR and told her life story in public was enough proof for the reliability of their stories and her denunciation of Soviet communism.<sup>91</sup>

The fourth aspect is somewhat contradictory to the third point. On the one hand, Krop presented his transnational contacts as foreigners, who stood for the repressed churches under the Soviet regime. However, on the other hand, Krop tried to convince his audience that these Christians from faraway Russia were members of the same Christian community that transcended national and cultural borders. They were, according to Krop, also heirs of the Christian civilization in Europe. This strengthened his moral appeal to the Dutch Christians to support these people as “brethren and sisters in Christ.”

<sup>90</sup> ALEXANDRA ANZEROWA: *Waar de stem wordt gesmoord: De verschrikkingen uit het leven eener gevangen vrouw in Sovjet-Rusland* [Where the Voice is Smothered: The Horrors of the Life of an Imprisoned Women in Soviet Russia], Rotterdam 1937.

<sup>91</sup> Photo album “Exhibitions against Communism,” picture of 1937-04-06, in: HDC, coll. no. 775, inv. no. 5.

## Conclusions

In this article, I have shown that philanthropic aid campaigns for Christians in the USSR constituted a part of the anti-communist ideology in the 1930s. The case of Schabert shows that ideological anti-communist critique and efforts to organize charitable aid missions did develop in conjunction, both temporally and ideologically. This idea was not typical for Schabert and Krop alone, but more widespread in European anti-communist networks, as the lectures of Aubert on the protest meetings of 1930 suggest. According to Christian opinion leaders all over Europe, philanthropic aid campaigns should necessarily be combined with ideological education and critique for the wider public. This point was excellently summarized by Schabert in a letter to Krop:

“Ich kann für die Not nicht werben, ohne auf die Ursache dieser Not hinzuweisen, und ich kann als Christ nicht gegen das gottlose Regiment kämpfen, ohne zugleich in der Liebe derer zu gedenken, die durch diese Gottlosigkeit leiden.”<sup>92</sup>

The struggle between communism and Christianity has mostly been studied from an ideological perspective and on the macro level of important actors who had executive positions in the church, politics and society. However, in this article I have provided reasons to revise this historical image and incorporate the philanthropical side of European religious anti-communism more deeply in historiography. Schabert's largescale relief actions mobilized German and Dutch Christians in their war against the communist enemy, which they viewed as a godless ideology. The anti-communist narrative of Schabert, which was a combination of ideological and philanthropic aspects, had a powerful mobilizing force in the Baltic States and Germany. In the Netherlands, Krop succeeded in engaging a broad coalition of religious denominations from all over the country in his anti-communist protest movement.

At the same time, this article has shown that these philanthropic campaigns should not be studied in isolation, but seen as transnational shared efforts transcending borders of nationality, language and religious denomination. This approach offers insights into the dynamics of exchanging people, texts and ideas across borders as well as the specific particularities of the different countries studied. In the Dutch context, Krop's successful mobilization was only made possible by his excellent contacts with Oskar Schabert. Schabert became the authoritative voice in the Dutch political and religious landscape on issues about religious persecution in Russia and Christian “martyrdom.” In Krop's media campaign, Schabert became the ultimate “warrior” against communism. Their knowledge of the subject, their personal experiences with communism and their fierce commitment to the cause of Christ proved their reliability and made them into authorities in Dutch anti-communism.

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<sup>92</sup> Letter of Schabert to Krop, 1935-03.07, reprinted in: Pastor D. Oskar Schabert zum Gedächtnis (as in footnote 23), p. 21.

The anti-communist network not only transcended national borders, but also religious and denominational ones. The war against the communist enemy unified Christians all over Europe in a broad front against “godlessness.”<sup>93</sup> The protest meetings of 1930 marked for the Netherlands the start of an ongoing campaign of a coalition of Catholic, Protestant—both liberal and orthodox—and Jewish religious communities. This conclusion corrects the common historical narrative of the Netherlands as a segregated, isolated and conservative country with no interaction between different religious confessions.<sup>94</sup> This shows that Dutch anti-communism was clearly internationally oriented and became a fertile ground for interconfessional cooperation and encounters which were strongly contested by other religious groups.<sup>95</sup> The case of Schabert and Krop shows that the future research agenda relating to anti-communism in the interwar period should not be restricted to national boundaries, but should take a transnational approach. This would reveal the dynamics of exchange of people, texts and ideas as well as the specific particularities of the different countries studied. More research is needed to compare the findings of this article, which focus on the Dutch historical context, with other European and non-European countries.<sup>96</sup> This research is already done partly, for example in the work of Paul Hanebrink, who concluded that Protestants perceived Europe’s culture war against secularism differently, depending on their geopolitical location.<sup>97</sup>

As stated in the introduction, the rise of National Socialism posed new questions for the anti-communist activists. Anti-communist leaders like Krop found themselves trapped between two ideologies. The end of the Second World War would herald a new phase in the history of religious anti-communism. Schabert’s and Krop’s organizations were dissolved and the new political order posed new challenges and questions for European Christianity. In this period, the role of America as an anti-communist stronghold of freedom would become more important.<sup>98</sup> This final observation raises new ques-

<sup>93</sup> Cf. YVONNE MARIA WERNER, JONAS HARVARD: European Anti-Catholicism in a Comparative and Transnational Perspective: The Role of a Unifying Other. An Introduction, in: IDEM (eds.): *European Anti-Catholicism in a Comparative and Transnational Perspective*, Leiden 2013, pp. 13-22.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. the arguments of PETER VAN DAM: Constructing a Modern Society Through “Depillarization”. Understanding Post-War History as Gradual Change, in: *Journal of Historical Sociology* 28 (2015), 3, pp. 291-313.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. DE JAGER, *Contested Crossing* (as in footnote 72).

<sup>96</sup> Cf. the challenge for intercultural and international comparative research by HARTMUT LEHMANN: The History of Twentieth-Century Christianity as a Challenge for Historians, in: *Church History* 71 (2002), pp. 585-599, here p. 598.

<sup>97</sup> HANEBRINK (as in footnote 6).

<sup>98</sup> Cf. ERIC JARVIS: The Creation of a Controversial Anti-Communist Martyr in Early Cold War America: Reactions to the Arrest and Show Trial of Cardinal Joseph Mindszenty of Hungary, 1948-1948, in: *The Historian* 78 (2016), pp. 277-307; DIANNE KIRBY: The Cold War, the Hegemony of the United States and the Golden Age of



tions about the long-term connections between interwar and post-war religious anti-communism for the research agenda on the history of anti-communism.

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Christian Democracy, in: HUGH MCLEOD (ed.): *The Cambridge History of Christianity*. Vol. 9: *World Christianities c. 1914 – c. 2000*, Cambridge 2006, pp. 285-303.

