

RAIN SOOSAAR

The Process of Secularization
in Rural Communes of Estonia and
Latvia (1920–40)

Case Studies of Lutheran–Majority Parishes



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50

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ABBREVIATIONS

EAOOC	Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church (Eesti Apostlik-Õigeusu Kirik)
EELC	Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (Eesti Evangeeliumi Luteriusu Kirik)
EELKKA	Eesti Evangeelse Luterliku Kiriku Konsistooriumi Arhiiv (Archives of the Consistory of Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church)
EKLA	Eesti Kirjandusmuuseumi Eesti Kultuurilooline Arhiiv (Estonian Cultural History Archives in Estonian Literary Museum)
EAA	Eesti Ajalooarhiiv (Estonian Historical Archives, former name of the branch of Estonian National Archives in Tallinn)
ERA	Eesti Riigiarhiiv (Estonian State Archives, former name of the branch of Estonian National Archives in Tallinn)
ERM	Eesti Rahva Muuseum (Estonian National Museum)
LELC	Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church (Latvijas evaņģēliski luteriskā Baznīca)
LNB	Latvijas Nacionālā bibliotēka (Latvian National Library)
LNVM	Latvijas Nacionālā Vēstures Muzejs (National History Museum of Latvia)
LSDSP	Latvijas Sociāldemokrātiskā Strādnieku Partija (Latvian Social Democratic Workers' Party)
LVVA	Latvijas Valsts vēstures arhīvs (Latvian State History Archives)
ÜENÜ	Ülemaaline Eesti Noorsoo Ühendus (All-Estonian Youth Association)
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

1 INTRODUCTION

Secularization has been a lively debated topic among both the general public and scholars for more than a century now. While once the focus was on searching for reasons for the seemingly inevitable decline of both the religiosity of individuals and the social relevance of Christian churches in Europe, in recent decades secularization has become a contested conception. For a long time, other parts of the world seemed not to follow the European path, and doubts emerged about the supposed link between modernization and the declining importance of religion in society. But it was also questioned whether we could, even in the case of Europe, speak about secularization or rather about transformation of religiosity (e.g. its de-institutionalization or individualization). At a time, one of the most stubborn proponents of the secularization thesis called it even an “unfashionable” theory in the title of his apologetic book.¹ Recently, the topic has attracted much attention again, not least because of what seems to be a relatively rapid decline of the relevance of religion in the societies that had been for a long time perceived immune to it, such as Ireland and Poland. At the same time, there has been renewed impetus for both theoretical and empirical studies of the topic. But, as an author of the most authoritative recent overview of the state of research on secularization admitted, several important questions still remain unanswered.² Therefore, historical evidence is essential for corroborating and correcting the secularisation theories, interpreting the present and, to some extent, predicting the future.

Estonia and Latvia are the countries that should attract interest of scholars of secularization. Both, but especially Estonia, are among the most secularized countries in Europe. They have similar historical backgrounds, as the core part of both countries has been profoundly influenced by the dominance of the German-speaking upper class and, since the 16th century, Protestant heritage. Both Estonia and Latvia gained independence from Russian Empire as a result of the First World War, and also their post-independence trajectories have been remarkably similar, including the experience of almost fifty-years-long Soviet atheist rule, and the following endeavour to join the West, resulting in admission into the European Union in 2004.

As for the confessional background, both Estonia and Latvia have been historically Lutheran-majority countries, but with significant minorities – largely because of the sizable ethnic minority population and different historical and confessional background of Eastern territories.

However, there are notable differences between Estonia and Latvia regarding the contemporary religious situation. According to the latest wave of the European Values Survey, 34.4% of respondents in Estonia and 56.3% in Latvia claimed to be religious persons. To a large extent, the difference is due to the fact that the share of ethnic minorities is higher in Latvia, and also, a sizable minority of Latvians are Roman Catholics, who have formerly been much less susceptible

¹ Bruce 2011.

² Stolz 2020.

to secularization than Lutherans. Still, it is highly remarkable that also the share of Protestants in Latvia is nowadays significantly higher than in Estonia (see Figure 1).³ Therefore, why are indicators of religious identification (though not so much those of individual practice⁴) remarkably different in neighbouring and otherwise relatively similar societies that share a common history? Supposing that there was no profound difference in religious policies of Soviet authorities in Estonia and Latvia, the answers to the question should be sought in earlier history, especially from the late Tsarist era and first decades of independent statehood, which were crucial from the point of view of the formation of contemporary Estonian and Latvian national identities.

This study aims to make a contribution to the research by concentrating on the relevance of religion and church in public and private life in selected parishes from different parts of the countries in the interwar years.

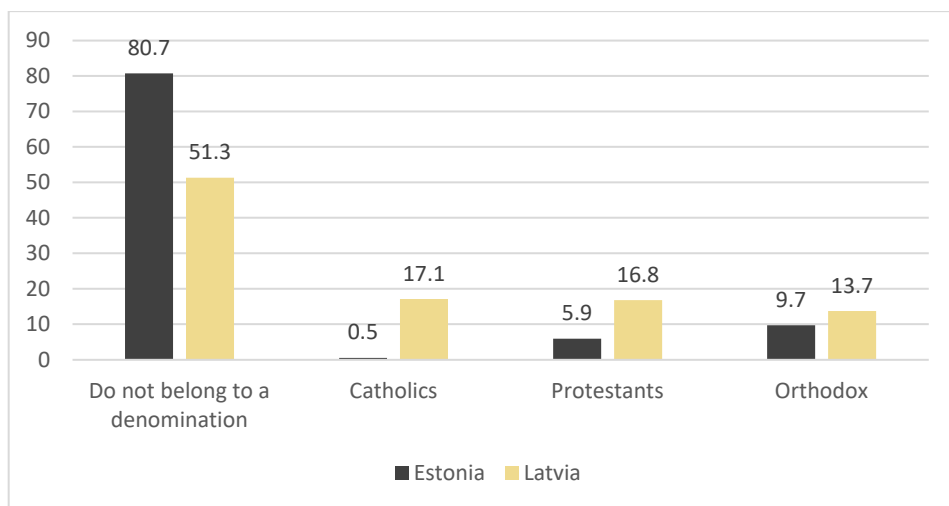


Figure 1. Religious denominations in Estonia (2018) and Latvia (2021). *Data: European Values Survey, source: <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp>, retrieved 26.02.2024.*

³ <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp>, 06.02.2024. In case of Estonia, the question of religious affiliation has been included in national censuses. According to the latest census data (2021), 16% of the population older than 15 years were Orthodox (most of them ethnic Russians, Belarusians or Ukrainians), and 8% Lutherans (mostly Estonians). In sum, only 29% of respondents in this age group had a religious affiliation: <https://rahvaloendus.ee/et/tulemused/rahvastiku-demograafilised-ja-etno-kultuurilised-naitajad>, 29.02.2024. As for Latvia, questions about religion are not asked in censuses, but according to a 2015 survey, about 1/5 of the population were Lutheran and another 1/5 Catholic, while 29% of the population were Orthodox (Roht-Yilmaz 2023, 17).

⁴ According to the same European Values survey, 3.7% of respondents in Estonia and 5.9% in Latvia attend religious services at least once a week, while 54% in Estonia and 40.4% in Latvia do it never or practically never.

Secularization Theory

Secularization is a much-debated and also contested concept. Its roots are in the attempts to explain the decline of the influence of the institutional church in the European context, with the simultaneous decline of Christian religious practice and religious beliefs. There have been widely differing attempts to define secularization – not least because there is a lack of consensus about how to define religion itself and how to measure its rise or decline. Confusion is increased by the fact that one can speak about secularization on different levels: of societies, individuals, and religious institutions.

As for the level of society, contemporary proponents of the secularization thesis concentrate on its declining importance to the functioning of the social system. Thus, for Peter Berger, secularization means the “process by which sectors in society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols.”⁵ According to him, this ongoing process had been triggered by modernization. For Bryan Wilson, secular society can be called any society where religion is not used to legitimate political power, it has less domination over cultural life, and is no longer used for interpretation of world events.⁶ In that sense, modern Western societies are largely secular, indeed, but it remains disputable for many other parts of the world. Particularly, the Islamic revolution in Iran and the surge of the evangelical right in both the USA and Latin America seem to show that religion can still play an important role also in modern societies.⁷ It gives credit to the arguments of Jose Casanova about religion possibly preserving its role in public life, even in societies where “differentiation between religious and secular spheres” has taken place.⁸ Also, Berger revised his views, arguing that pluralism does not necessarily lead to secularization. Even though the existence of a secular sphere is necessary for modern society to function, there remains also space for religion, and boundaries between secular and religious spheres vary across cultural contexts.⁹

Whether the society is secularized or not, religious beliefs may still preserve an important role in the private lives of individuals. Recent evidence, including that provided by World Values Surveys, shows that it is still clearly the case almost everywhere except in Europe and some Far Eastern countries. But even in the case of the latter, sceptical scholars have expressed the opinion that instead of the decline of religiosity, one should speak about its transformation, notably individualization and deinstitutionalization. Thomas Luckmann coined the term “invisible religion”, designating the alleged spread of non-ecclesiastical forms of

⁵ Berger 1969, 107.

⁶ According to Furseth 2007, 84; *cf.* Wilson and Bruce 2016.

⁷ A staggering recent example about it is the case of the justice in the state of Alabama, USA, who had quoted the Bible as a proof of embryos being human beings: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/alabama-justice-embryos-biblical-seven-mountains-rcna139969>, 28.02.2024.

⁸ Casanova 1994.

⁹ Berger 2014.

religiosity, which can easily be misinterpreted as secularization.¹⁰ Another eminent scholar, Grace Davie speaks about “believing without belonging” and “vicarious religion” as new phenomena of religiosity in Europe.¹¹ Her claims are vehemently disputed by the supporters of the traditional thesis of secularization, notably Steve Bruce, who has found evidence of the ongoing marginalization of religion in Europe (and possibly beyond it) from recent empirical works of Roland Inglehardt, David Voas and others.¹²

To sum up, there are wildly differing claims about whether one can speak about the process of secularization, at least in Europe, and the discussions about it are often exacerbated by a lack of conceptual clarity. A valuable step towards improvement was made by Karel Dobbelaere, who developed his synthesis of main contributions to the field in the 1980s (and updated it at the beginning of the 21st century).¹³ It is still useful as a flexible framework, enabling assessment of the changes in the influence of religious institutions while avoiding controversial disputes about the essence and future of religiosity as a such.

According to Dobbelaere, three different levels of the secularization ought to be distinguished:

1. Societal secularization as “a process, by which overarching and transcendent religious systems of old are confined in modern functionally differentiated societies to a subsystem alongside other subsystems, losing in this process their overarching claims over these other subsystems”. In other words, as a result of this process, religious institutions lose their control over politics, economy, family, education, science, arts and law, and the like.¹⁴ This *differentiation* is seen by Dobbelaere as a process triggered by modernization, which creates the need for “functional rationality” in the political, economic and cultural spheres. As a result of this, secular subsystems achieve autonomy from religious institutions.
2. Organizational secularization as the adjustment of religion to new conditions of the secularized society.¹⁵
3. Individual secularization, which “means that the religious authorities have lost control over the beliefs, practices, and moral principles of individual persons”. According to this definition it does not necessarily mean decay of individual religiosity.¹⁶ Dobbelaere treats secularization at all these levels not as a mechanical process but as dependent on the actions of “secularizing” and “sacralizing” social groups. Accordingly, it may also be reversible.

¹⁰ Luckmann 1970.

¹¹ Davie 2000.

¹² Bruce 2011.

¹³ Dobbelaere 2004.

¹⁴ The definitions are derived from a shorter introduction to his approach to secularization: Dobbelaere 2011, 602.

¹⁵ Dobbelaere 2011, 608.

¹⁶ Dobbelaere 2011, 606.

Following this framework, this study does not intend to make claims about the waning of “religiosity” (whether defined by belief in the supernatural or otherwise) in public life or for individuals. Instead, it is concerned about the influence the church was able to exercise, firstly, on the secular sphere of public life, and secondly, on the behaviour of individuals.

Recent advancements in the quantitative study of the secularization process have been summed up by Jörg Stolz. He refers to fruitful new approaches that have emerged in the field and to plenty of important new empirical studies on issues like the impact of education, social deprivation, secular competition, socialization, secular transition, pluralism, and state regulation to secularization process. In his opinion, secularization studies have left behind the “contentious phase”, when scholars who represented rational choice and individual religiosity theories challenged the secularization thesis. However, evidence is still inconsistent on some important issues, and possible causal relationships need further investigation. For example, correlation between existential insecurity and religiosity is strong at the country level, but not at all at the individual level. The same is true for the link between the level of education and religiosity. In a similar vein, it is quite clear that decreasing religiosity in western countries is, among other factors, related to replacement of cohorts and spread of religious pluralism but the mechanisms behind that are not known. There are also claims that seem to contradict each other but have both relatively strong empirical support (long-term “secular transition” and the impact of the “crisis of the 1960s”). On the other hand, the secularization process in non-Western societies is still largely unexplored.¹⁷ Stolz’s contribution has considerably inspired this study as well in terms of looking for explanations of the secularization process.

Research on the History of Secularization

Historical studies have made a major contribution to the development of secularization theory. It is especially true for David Martin’s large-scale study, though in some details disputable and superficial synthesis of the history of secularization, based on a comparison of virtually all European countries. From the point of view of this study, Martin’s observations about the important impact of protestant heritage and nationalism on secularization proved especially valuable.¹⁸

As for historians, Hugh McLeod has been the most prolific author on secularization in the 19th and 20th centuries. His comparative research on secularization in England, France and Germany before the First World War has been especially inspiring for this study.¹⁹ McLeod, as well as Lucian Hölscher,²⁰ have especially emphasized the role of professional and class differences to secularization, while Owen Chadwick²¹ has paid attention to the combined effect of modernization and

¹⁷ Stolz 2020.

¹⁸ Martin 1978.

¹⁹ McLeod 2000.

²⁰ Hölscher 2005.

²¹ Chadwick 1990.

ideological changes. It is now generally acknowledged that while secularization affected some sections of society earlier, significant erosion of the influence of the church did not happen in Western European countries before the 1960s. However, not everyone agrees with the bold claims made by Callum Brown that religion played an important role in British society until the mid-century. His works are also remarkable for the ingenious use of autobiographical sources and the importance he attributes to gender issues.²²

Finally, also scholarship on the church history of other European countries provides important insights for research of secularization in Estonia and Latvia. Particularly valuable in that regard are comparative studies with other most secularized countries of Europe, such as Czechia, Eastern Germany, and Sweden.²³ In further research, a comparison of Estonian and Latvian findings with those of other countries is essential, as well as making use of impressively numerous studies from the neighbouring country, Finland.

Secularization in the History of Estonia and Latvia

Historical Background

Comprehensive short overviews about general and church history are available in English for both Estonia and Latvia.²⁴ Therefore, the following short overview is limited only to the most essential knowledge to understand the following chapters of Estonian and Latvian parishes.

Earlier background. Newly independent nation-states of Latvia and Estonia were made up of territories with significantly different historical, socioeconomic, as well as cultural and religious backgrounds. The core part of the new states were former Baltic governorates of the Russian Empire: Estland (annexed in 1721), Livland (1721), and Kurland (1795). In contrast to these three provinces, some Eastern territories of the new states (Petserimaa in Estonia, Latgale in Latvia) were backward in socioeconomic terms, had ethnically mixed populations, and influences of both German culture and Protestantism were absent there. Integration of these areas demanded considerable effort from Estonian and Latvian authorities. As this study concerns parishes that were situated in former Baltic governorates, the following short overview deals mostly only with this core area of newly independent states.

Since the 17th century, Lutheranism has been the dominant religion in these areas. In Estland and Livland, Herrnhutians (also known as Moravian Church or *Brüdergemeine*) started their activities in the 18th century and gained remarkable popularity in some parts of the provinces. Herrnhutian folk piety and its in-

²² Brown 2009.

²³ Cf. Altnurme, R. 2021, 140–149.

²⁴ Standard overviews of general history are Kasekamp 2018 and Plakans 2011. Overviews of Estonian recent church history are provided by History of Estonian Ecumenism 2009 and by Altnurme, R. *et al.* 2021; for the history of religion in Latvia, see Krūmiņa-Koņkova and Misāne 2018.

fluences on the development of culture, self-esteem, and social activism of local peasants have been a much-celebrated topic for church historians both in Estonia and Latvia. The movement acted in the framework of the Lutheran church here and not as an independent denomination. Its relations with the official church and its pastors varied but became, in the 19th century, increasingly uneasy, especially in Livland. As a result, its influence waned, though it still preserved its vitality in some localities of Northern Estonia in the interwar period.

Societies were ethnically stratified in former Baltic governorates. The vast majority of the population were Estonian- or Latvian-speaking peasants, while educated and wealthy classes (including nobility and urban elite) were German-speaking. The early abolishment of serfdom (1816–19), which were followed by other agrarian reforms, had led to rapid social change as new opportunities for obtaining wealth and education opened up for lower strata. While some of the socially mobile peasants became Germanized, a sizable and growing part of them developed Latvian or Estonian national consciousness. Since the mid-19th century, Estonian and Latvian national movements emerged, which at the turn of the century influenced the masses and had developed political ambitions. The emergence of the national question created serious challenges for the Lutheran church, which had so far been dominated by Germans.

At the same time, relations between the local German upper class and Russian central authorities had become uneasy due to the latter's centralizing policies. Local peculiarities in the legislation were removed, and the Russian language replaced German in education and official use. As for the Lutheran church, it lost its previous considerable influence over education and had to tolerate its secondary position *vis-à-vis* the Orthodox state church.

But during the 19th century, important changes also happened in the religious landscape. Since the 1840s, mass conversions to the Orthodox church occurred, mostly in the Southern part of Estonia and in the vicinity of the town of Madona in Latvia. These were triggered, as most historians agree, by social motives, notably vain hopes to get land. In addition, in coastal Kurland and Western Estonia, conversions to free churches (mostly to Baptism) occurred in the second half of the 19th century.

Legacy of the Wars and Revolutions (1905–20). In 1905, a revolution broke out in the Russian Empire, and it had especially major repercussions in Latvia. As Riga had become one of the industrial and commercial centres of the Empire, a significant number of Latvians had become supporters of radical and socialist ideas. In some parts of the country, armed struggle broke out, and members of privileged classes, especially lords of the manors, but also some pastors, were intimidated and murdered by the revolutionaries. In most of Estonia, the revolutionary events were somewhat less widespread and less violent in character. In both countries, the revolution was brutally suppressed by punitive expeditions, with widespread use of capital and corporal punishment. The events had a direct impact on church life, as the rates of church attendance and partaking in Communion dropped abruptly, and several pastors were accused of taking sides in the conflict and justifying the brutality of the punitive expeditions.

But the revolutionary year was also the first opportunity to voice publicly political grievances, make demands, and envision the future of society. The lively discussion took place both in newspapers and in meetings of different kinds, including in all-Estonian and all-Latvian gatherings of representatives of peasants, folk school teachers, and others. Democratization of the church and the future of religious instruction were also among the questions discussed, though not central ones.

The First World War also exerted much more profound impact in Latvia, where active warfare took place in 1915–18. Hundreds of thousands of refugees left for other parts of the Russian Empire, and some church buildings, as well as church properties, were damaged. Direct war damage was much smaller in Estonia, which was occupied by Imperial German forces in 1917–18 with little resistance.

As the revolution of 1917 broke out, radical moods became once more prevalent, and again more so in Latvia than in Estonia. During stints of Bolshevik rule in 1917–18 and 1918–19, the public role of the church was abolished, churches were occasionally used for political rallies, and pastors were persecuted. In Latvia, the last period of Bolshevik rule lasted longer, and at one point they controlled almost the whole country; in Estonia, their power lasted for a shorter period and was limited only to the eastern part.

But besides that, the Russian revolution also gave renewed impetus for demands of church reforms, especially democratization of the church administration and ending the German domination over it. The ideas that were voiced at that time by the nationalist Estonian and Latvian pastors as well as some laymen were carried out in independent Latvia and Estonia.

Independent Statehood. Unexpectedly for the contemporaries, Estonian and Latvian nationalists were able to emerge as victors from the chaos of wars and revolutions. Estonian and Latvian independence was proclaimed in 1918, and after the departure of German occupation forces due to the defeat in the First World War, the independence was successfully defended in wars against Bolshevik Russia. Assistance from the side of Entente powers played a crucial role in it, and in the case of Latvia also military contribution of (Baltic) German voluntary units. However, the attempt of the latter to obtain influence in the newly founded state was successfully thwarted. Thus, Latvia and Estonia emerged from their Wars of Independence under the rule of their young nationalist elites. During the period of the next twenty years before the occupation of the Soviet Union, they were able to change profoundly the societies. Democratic republics were established, large land property was liquidated by means of radical land reforms, and educational opportunities expanded considerably. Baltic Germans (and to some extent Russians) lost entirely their hitherto dominant position in social and cultural life, as all the key positions were now held by representatives of titular nationalities.

Almost everybody in the new nation states still belonged to some major Christian denomination. According to the Estonian national census of 1934, 77.6% of the population was Lutheran, and 18.9% Orthodox. According to Latvian census

of 1935, 55.2% of the population were Lutheran, 24.5% Roman Catholic, and 8.9% Orthodox.

However, previously uneasy relationship with Estonian and Latvian nationalists meant for the churches, especially Lutheran and Orthodox ones²⁵ that their political impact in the newly independent states remained weak. Especially at the beginning of the period, the situation was exacerbated by the considerable popularity of left-wing political forces. In Estonia, it led to an unsuccessful attempt to abolish religious instruction in public schools, as well as to the separation of church and state in a manner which was perceived unfavourable by both Lutheran and Orthodox churches. Notably, the central authorities of the churches had limited opportunities to discipline the congregations and their members. Also, civil registration was introduced, although the clergy could also fulfil the task of personal status registration along with secular clerks. The position of the Lutheran Church was somewhat strengthened only by the frequent involvement of the Christian People's Party in governments, as well as successful referendum on religious instruction in 1923.

In Latvia, the situation was more complicated due to the need to integrate large and staunchly Catholic Latgale. In addition, it was believed that establishing good relations with the Holy See would help to strengthen Latvia's vulnerable international position. Therefore, the leading political forces of the republic were keen to please the Catholics; as a result, the Concordat was concluded in 1922, and the Lutheran St. James church in Riga was turned into a Catholic cathedral, causing grievances for the Lutheran church. Like in Estonia, religious instruction was made voluntary and civil registration was introduced, but a formal separation of state and church was not accomplished due to political disagreements.

Considerable change happened when, following the overall trend in Central and Eastern Europe, authoritarian regimes were established in both countries in 1934 (by Konstantin Päts in Estonia, and Kārlis Ulmanis in Latvia). The regimes were generally benevolent towards the main churches, and their importance to society was now in various ways highlighted by the authorities. In Latvia, religious instruction was made mandatory, and atheistic propaganda was banned. In Estonia, some of the grievances of churches regarding the law of religious associations were addressed. In exchange, the authorities established stricter control over church matters and expected public support for the regimes.

In sum, the introduction of civil registration, the declining impact of the church on education, and weak ties with nationalism deserve particular attention as possible factors that could foster societal and individual secularization in the interwar Latvia and Estonia. Besides that, the declining prestige and symbolic importance of the church, as well as the lowering social status of the clergy, were evident.

²⁵ In the Tsarist era, separate consistories administered the Lutheran church in particular governorates. After establishing nation-states, Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC) and Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church (LELC) were formed. Since 1923 the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church was under the jurisdiction of Patriarchate of Constantinople as an autonomous church. Latvian Orthodox Church remained formally under the jurisdiction of Moscow until 1936, when it was also subordinated to the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Even during the post-1934 authoritarian era, the Lutheran churches had not regained the place in the society they had held in imperial Russia.

Historiography of Secularization in Estonia and Latvia

Regarding the research on secularization, more has been done in the case of Estonia. Usually, the topic has been touched upon in studies that focus on the legacy of Soviet-era atheism or contemporary individual and non-church religiosity. Thus, Lea Altnurme has highlighted the formation of the anticlerical national narrative as a factor contributing to secularization, which originates from opposition to the Baltic German upper-class. She also refers to the importance of the spread of scientific-materialist worldview and left-wing ideas. However, Altnurme emphasizes that the church had not yet lost its importance in social life during the first period of independence, and a large part of the people continued to be connected to Christian practices and identity.²⁶ In a similar vein, also other authors have emphasized the connection of nationalism with church-critical attitudes as the most important reason why Estonia is exceptionally secular today.²⁷ As for overviews of interwar church history, Priit Rohtmets and others have paid attention to the drop in individual religious practice and frequent complaints about declining religiosity and churchliness of the people by the representatives of the church.²⁸

The topic in question includes also some approaches to church history from a local perspective, which have so far been published only for Western Estonia. Thus, Jaanus Plaat understands secularization mainly as a decrease in the activity of congregational religious life, which was especially noticeable among Lutherans already in the first period of independence.²⁹ In his research on religious life in Hiiumaa, however, Riho Saard shows how the authority of the Lutheran Church was undermined there by the popularity of free churches.³⁰ The topic of secularization is somewhat reflected in studies devoted to other topics of church history of the interwar period.³¹ The results of research on secularization in Estonia up to nowadays are summarized in a collection of articles on the topic.³² Several of its contributions also deal with the interwar era.

In the case of Latvia, the topic of secularization in the 1920s–30s has been only briefly covered in studies devoted to other issues. Importantly, Inese Runce explains the low turnout in the 1923 referendum on the ownership of the St. James Church in Riga with the secularization that had already taken place to a significant extent in society.³³ In a similar vein, Agita Misāne emphasizes in her work on the relationship between religion and Latvian nationalism that the secularism of

²⁶ Altnurme L. 2006, 51–63; Altnurme, L. 2021, 14–15.

²⁷ Hošek, Rimmel and Riistan 2019.

²⁸ Rohtmets *et al.* 2021, 31–33.

²⁹ Plaat 2001 and 2003.

³⁰ Saard 2009.

³¹ *Cf.* Vihuri 2007, 214–215.

³² Altnurme R. *et al.* 2021.

³³ Runce 2013, 211.

Latvian society was not the result of the anti-church policy of the Soviet era but stems from the processes that started already in the first period of independence. She refers to statistical data and the opinions expressed by Catholic and Lutheran clergy at that time.³⁴ In his work on archbishop Kārlis Irbe, Voldemārs Lauciņš also touches on the topic of the secularization of society, which he explains, similarly to the researchers of Estonian church history, with the connection of the church with the Baltic German upper class and the spread of left-wing ideas among the intelligentsia.³⁵ In a recent article about the history of freethinking in Latvia, the ideological and political impacts on secularization are briefly dealt with, and religious education and family legislation referred to as the most controversial issues regarding the role of the church in society of interwar Latvia.³⁶

In sum, there are remarkable gaps in the study of secularization in Estonia and Latvia. In both cases, it would be necessary to explain more in detail why and how the anticlerical national narrative spread among the people and how important factor it actually was in the alienation from the institutional church. Also, what role did personal contacts with the church and local social and political contradictions play in this process? Why the attempts to connect nationalism with the church in both Estonia and Latvia did not find wider support? To what extent the process of secularization resembled to other European (especially Protestant) countries, and would it be analysable by means of secularization theories? Answers to these questions could be provided by a micro-level research, which, if we do not consider the relatively exceptional Western Estonia, has not been undertaken so far.

Task of the Research

One of the most important tasks of the research on the secularization of Estonia and Latvia in the 20th century should be to find out the extent of influence the churches actually had in society and on the individuals before falling under the pressure of the Soviet atheistic regime. To achieve this ultimate goal, it is necessary to conduct research on different regions and social groups. This study focuses on the rural areas of the former Baltic provinces with ethnic Estonian/Latvian and Lutheran majority.

Most of Estonia and Latvia were part of the so-called Baltic governorates during the tsarist era. When the independent states were created, however, the eastern areas that had been parts of Russia Proper (St. Petersburg and Pskov governorates in the case of Estonia and Vitebsk governorate in the case of Latvia) were merged with them, which differed significantly from the main territories of the new nation-states in terms of the level of socio-economic development as well as cultural and religious characteristics. The integration of these areas was an exceptionally difficult task, especially in the case of Latvia. From the point of

³⁴ Misāne 2016b, 88–89.

³⁵ Lauciņš 2015, 158–163.

³⁶ Kiopa *et al.* 2020.

view of the current study, it is important to emphasize that these areas differed from the rest of Estonia and Latvia both in terms of religious composition (predominantly Orthodox in the case of Estonia, multi-confessional with a Catholic majority in the case of Latvia) and in terms of the significantly greater role of religiosity in the community and in the lives of individuals. As such, they should be studied separately and have thus been omitted from this study.

Religious life and secularization in cities and in the countryside also differed significantly. This is especially true for large cities such as Riga, Tallinn, Liepāja, and Tartu. Based on the existing literature and ecclesiastical statistics, it can be concluded that church life was more diverse and intense in these cities, but on the other hand, a large part of their population became alienated from the church during the interwar period. The cities contained concentration of the social strata especially prone to secularization – the intelligentsia and the working class. Therefore, it is reasonable to study rural areas separately from these cities.

Smaller towns and boroughs (*alev, miests*) were, in turn, different from both big industrial cities and villages. In this study, only Tukums and Rūjiena in Latvia and Mõisaküla in Estonia would be treated to some degree because they formed a common parish with the surrounding rural municipalities.

To make putative generalizations about the whole country, the parishes were selected from different parts of Estonia and Latvia. The selection criteria of the parishes were regional religious peculiarities, their level of socio-economic development and political preferences. All these aspects have been highlighted by the literature as possible factors that could influence the secularization process in other countries.³⁷

All the parishes involved into the study had Lutheran majority population. In the area of the former Baltic governorates, there were also about two dozen rural municipalities located in Southern Estonia and several around Madona in Latvia, where the majority of the population was Orthodox. There is no reason to believe that the role of churches in local life there would have been significantly different from parishes with a Lutheran majority, but this topic deserves further research. In turn, several communes in Ilūkste county (Sēlija) as well as area around Alsunga in Western Kurzeme had a Catholic majority. These areas are not included into this study as the importance of church and religion there was profoundly different compared to neighbouring Lutheran areas, being reminiscent of those of Latgale.

However, two parishes where non-Lutherans made up a significant part of the population are represented in this research – Aizviķi commune in Gramzda parish in Latvia (1/5 of the population were Baptists) and Paadremaa commune in Varbla parish in Estonia (nearly 1/3 were Orthodox).

Finally, while this study is dedicated exclusively to ethnic Estonian and Latvian communes, in several municipalities ethnic minorities constituted a major part of population. It is known that among Coastal Swedes, Peipus Russians and German colonists in Latvia the role of the church in community life has been

³⁷ Studies from Finland, such as by Paavo Kortekangas (1967) and by Hannu Suni (2005), have been especially inspiring for this study.

quite important. Still, they constitute only a small proportion of the population in those counties of rural Estonia and Latvia which have been a part of Baltic Governorates.

To get a complete picture of the secularization process in Estonia and Latvia, it is still necessary to study other milieus as well, especially large cities that set the tone for the society of the time culturally and partly also politically. Only then we can get convincing answers to the final question –how was it possible for the Soviet regime to destroy so easily the ties with the church of those who had grown up in the independent Estonia and Latvia. Conclusively, generalizations about secularization in Estonia and Latvia as a whole can not be made based on this study alone. However, the study deals with one of the most important milieus of socialization of Estonians and Latvians in the interwar years. Namely, at that time the majority of ethnic Estonians lived in rural areas with a Lutheran majority, which is somewhat less in the case of Latvians.³⁸

In the case of Estonia, the results of the religious education referendum of 1923 have been taken into account when selecting the cases. Three parishes, where there were unusually few supporters of religious education, and two parishes, where support for religious education was overwhelming, have been investigated. In the case of Latvia, given the low preservation of church history sources, the availability of a source base has been an important criterion for selecting cases.

Research Questions

1. To what extent did the “secular” spheres of life, such as politics, economics, culture, and education become independent of religious influences and control of the church in rural Lutheran-majority areas of Estonia and Latvia?
2. To what extent had the church in rural Lutheran-majority areas of Estonia and Latvia lost its authority in the eyes of individuals, i.e. to what extent had the population there given up abiding to religious and behavioural guidelines of the church?
3. To what extent are the explanations provided by the historiography of Baltic church history as well as by theories of secularization usable to explain the process of secularization in Lutheran-majority areas of rural Estonia and Latvia?

³⁸ According to the 1922 census, ethnic Estonian rural population outside Petserimaa was 691,972, or 71.3% of all ethnic Estonians living in Estonia. The number of Estonians living in the Lutheran-majority communes was somewhat lower from that as there were 19 rural communes in these regions with non-Lutheran (all Orthodox) majority with total population of 41,448 people. (1922. a. üldrahvalugemise... 1923, 64.) According to the 1935 census, ethnic Latvian rural population in Kurzeme, Vidzeme and Zemgale taken together was 696,314, or 47.4% of all ethnic Latvians living in Latvia. The number of Latvians living in the Lutheran-majority communes was somewhat lower from that as there were 22 rural communes in these regions with non-Lutheran (Catholic or Orthodox) majority. (Ceturtdā tautas skaitīšana... 1937, 346).

Methodology

The study involves systematic analysis of both ecclesiastical and secular history sources of local history in order to find evidence in the following:

1. Indicators of secularization at the societal level:
 - the usage of religious argumentation, references to God, the Bible and the church in sources dealing with “secular” topics (politics, economy, culture, education).
 - the involvement of the church and its representatives in decision-making in “secular” questions and carrying out “secular” tasks.
2. Indicators of secularization at the individual level:
 - rates of religious practice and their changes according to ecclesiastical statistics.
 - in the case of Estonia, the results of the 1923 referendum on religious instruction in public primary schools can be used, albeit with some caveats, as indicators of the strength of individual ties with the church in different localities.
 - the assessments in following the guidelines of the church in religious and moral matters by pastors, but also by schoolteachers, journalists, representatives of state authorities, and the like.
3. Variables that fostered or restrained secularization:
 - 3.1. Level of modernization: the higher level of socio-economic development, the spread of voluntary associations and higher level of education is expected to foster secularization.
 - 3.2. Character of congregational and religious life.
 - It is expected that secularization would be slower in case lay people had more say in the congregational life, more religious gatherings were organized, and new branches of work, such as children and youth work, libraries, clubs, church choirs, and the like, had been introduced.
 - It is expected that secularization would be slower in localities with a strong tradition of popular piety, notably Herrnhutian heritage.
 - It is expected that difficulties in the life of the congregation, such as long-term vacancy of the pastoral seat, internal conflicts, material hardship, would loosen the ties between the parishioners and the congregation and thus foster individual secularization.
 - 3.3. Personality of the pastor. It is expected that a pastor who met role expectations which were prevalent among the parishioners, could prevent the loosening of the ties between the locals and the church. In the case of Estonia and Latvia, the nationality of the pastor might have been relevant, along with his theological and social views, moral integrity, political allegiance, and personality traits such as openness and eloquence.
 - 3.4. Relations between confessions. On the one hand, the presence of several confessions in the parish provided alternatives so that people who were

alienated for some reason from their home church could join another one. On the other hand, awareness of confessional differences could lead to undermining the truth claims of the particular churches.³⁹

- 3.5. Active participation of the church in the life of the community. It is expected that in case the pastor and other representatives of the congregation co-operated with other community leaders and the church was involved in organizing of important events in the life of the local community, it helped to restrain secularization at both societal and individual levels.
- 3.6. The involvement of the church in social and political controversies. It is expected that if political tensions ran high in the parish and the church became associated with a particular political option, it could prompt the alienation of some parishioners from the church. In the case of interwar Estonia and Latvia, it was mostly related to political rivalry between socialist and bourgeois (especially agrarian) parties but also to rivalries of local character.
- 3.7. Relations between church and school. It is expected that in case folk school teachers had a positive attitude towards religion and church, it fostered socialization of the youth in the spirit of the church. However, if the teachers were indifferent or hostile towards church and religion, it created a favourable environment for secularization.

Sources

Sources of Church History

In Estonia, the **Archives of Consistory of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church** (EELKKA) is the most important repository of ecclesiastical documents. The most important sources from it are as follows:

- Statistical data about communicants, church rites, and paying of membership fees are especially valuable to gauge the spread of secularization. Unfortunately, gaps and minor inaccuracies are frequent in these sources.⁴⁰
- Annual verbal reports from the congregations.
- Correspondence of the consistory with the congregations.
- Personal files on pastors.

The documentation of Latvian congregations was similar in character. Unfortunately, due to a fire that broke out after the capture of Riga by the Soviet army in 1944, the archives of the Latvian Lutheran Church perished almost entirely,

³⁹ Cf. Stolz 2020, 13–15.

⁴⁰ Similar data can also be derived from other sources, especially from song sheets for the congregation's New Year's Eve services and in some cases, from newspapers. However, the data of the official reports and of other sources do not match often. Probably the reports are more accurate, as they were completed later than other annual reviews of congregational life. Also, the data of the song sheets covers at least sometimes the time period from December 1 to November 30 next year, while the data of reports appear to be for the regular year from January 1 to December 31.

which makes investigation of Latvian church history much more difficult. Essentially, it may be compared with piecing together a puzzle from numerous fragmentary sources, being located in several different places.⁴¹

Some of the ecclesiastical documentation has been preserved in **Latvian State Historical Archives** (LVVA). In this study, LVVA fund of Rūjiena Northern and Southern congregation has been used. Some congregations have managed to preserve some of their historical documents and make them accessible to the public; this study has benefited considerably from previous studies about congregations of Tukums and Jaunpiebalga, which are based on such collections.

Besides that, Baltic German and Latvian exile archives (notably the Archive of Latvian Church History in Chicago) contain many valuable sources.⁴² Unfortunately, it was not possible to consult these documents for this research. Statistical data about congregations for the years 1924–38 can be found from the calendars of Latvian Lutheran Church, and have similar shortcomings as noted in the case of Estonia. Short overviews of annual reports of particular congregations were also occasionally published in newspapers.

Archival funds of Lutheran congregations and church institutions in **the Estonian National Archives** (EAA, ERA) contain sources mostly from earlier times, but in some cases, valuable data can also be found about the interwar period. Regarding this study, the archives of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC) Pärnu and Võru deaneries proved to be useful, and also the funds of EELC Halliste and Karuse congregations. As for the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church, the archives of the central administration (Synod) are preserved in the national archives and provide one of the most important sources regarding the history of this church. There are also several funds of particular Orthodox congregations available in the national archives, but in general, reports and correspondence of the Orthodox Church are more superficial than that of Lutheran and contain less valuable information on the topic of secularization.

Sources of Secular History

In the interwar period, data about local historical, economic, cultural, and geographical features was collected by several institutions and individuals. Often, university students were assigned to gather it, and they travelled around parishes, interviewed people and made observations about nature and sites of cultural heritage. The data they gathered as well as their assignment diaries have been used for some Estonian case studies, mostly regarding the socioeconomic and cultural peculiarities of the parishes. Religious topics are marginal in these sources, but some of them still contain important insights.

As for school history sources, they contain little information about religious and church topics, usually regarding the teaching of religion. In the case of Estonia, trainee teachers' reports are among the important sources of local circumstances in Estonia. Students of teachers' seminars and pedagogical institutes

⁴¹ Talonen 2011, 168.

⁴² Talonen 2011, 169–170.

(*pedagoogiumid*) were obliged to spend 1–2 years as trainees in a primary school. In order to get the teacher certificate, they had to write a report about their experiences showing their fitness for executing the tasks of the teacher. Besides pedagogical observations, several of them also include local characteristics of economic, social and cultural situation in the surrounding area, being thus important, but so far little used sources of social history. On rare occasions, such reports reveal valuable information about religious life and the role of the church in the community. However, it is largely true only about locations where piety was widespread and thus could not be ignored by educators. As a rule, there is not much interesting data in these sources for the scholar of church history, as schools had become thoroughly secular institutions at that time already.

Archival funds of schools have not been well preserved and contain usually also not much valuable data, including typically the lists of school property, lists of pupils, copies of school certificates, etc. A notable exception is Rūjiena parish school (*draudzes skola*), whose archival funds in LVVA, containing valuable official correspondence, exam papers of pupils and other valuable sources, have extensively been used for this study.

As for school administration of counties (*maakonnad, apriņķi*) and ministries of education, their funds contain statistical data, correspondence, overviews and annual reports of inspectors, and the like. In the case of Latvia, these sources contain important data about how religious education and religious allegiance of teachers became a relatively important political issue.

Overall, in rare cases, non-church-related sources provide crucial evidence about secularization (or rather, about the persistence of piety in some locations). But usually, they have little to offer for a scholar of religious studies, in effect proving vividly that differentiation between religious and secular spheres of life was well advanced in both countries at that time already.

Electoral and Census Data

In the case of Estonia, an important criterion for choosing the case studies were the results of the referendum on religious instruction (February 17–19, 1923), which have in historiography been interpreted as proxies for secularization.⁴³ Accordingly, the introductory part is added to the chapter on Estonia, which introduces the background of the referendum and possible ways of interpreting its results. Besides the published voting results on the communes, minutes of the electoral commissions have been used, as they enable information about internal differences in the communes where several polling stations operated.

In the case of Latvia, also two Lutheran Church-related referenda were held, but their results can hardly be interpreted as proxies of secularization. In 1923, the Lutheran Church initiated a referendum to prevent handing over St. James church to the Roman Catholic Church for establishing its cathedral there. Only 21.3% of the voters took part in it, of those 99.7% opposed the move. There is a lack of research about the possible motivation for turning out or abstaining in the

⁴³ Gortfelder 2021a and 2021b.

referendum, and the results on the level of administrative units have not been published. In 1931, another referendum was held on the issue of expropriation of Riga Dome Cathedral from a German congregation; only 32.3% turned out, and 97.9% voted in favour of expropriation. In that case, there were differing opinions inside the church itself on how to vote.

However, there is an indirect possibility to gauge regional differences in attitudes towards the secularization of schools also in Latvia. In 1921, the Ministry of Education conducted a survey of representatives of teachers and parents from schools throughout Latvia about some contentious educational issues. Among others, it was asked if religious instruction was to be mandatory for schools, and if so, was it to be mandatory also for pupils. Replies were obtained from 76.7% of the elementary schools, and in 59.7% of them, it was opined that religious instruction should be mandatory only for schools. 31.2% of the schools supported mandatory religious instruction for pupils, while 9.1% of the schools stated that religious instruction should not have been taught at school in the first place. There were significant variations across the regions and counties. For example, in Latgale 59.8% of the schools supported mandatory religious instruction for all pupils, while in the city of Riga 18.2% of the schools were against teaching the subject altogether. Interesting are also substantiations which several schools added to their opinion.⁴⁴ The answers to the survey from particular schools can be found in Latvian State History Archives and have been used for Latvian case studies.⁴⁵ As the study is concerned with relations between church and politics, data from elections and selected referenda were also used for this study.⁴⁶

National census data enables us to get an overview of the religious composition of the communes.⁴⁷ In the censuses of Estonia, people was asked them-

⁴⁴ Izglītības Ministrijas Mēnešraksts, 1921, no 6, pp. 577–580.

⁴⁵ LVVA 6642-1-126, LVVA 6642-1-127.

⁴⁶ Elections results for Latvia are derived from: Latvijas Satversmes Sapulzes... 1920; Skujenieks 1923, Skujenieks 1926, Skujenieks 1929, Skujenieks 1932. Elections results for Estonia are derived from: II Riigikogu valimised, 1923; III Riigikogu valimised, 1926; IV Riigikogu valimised, 1929; V Riigikogu valimised, 1932. The results of the elections to Constituent Assembly and I Riigikogu were not published in separate publications but are available in Estonian National Archives. Several referenda were held in Latvia, but their results are not relevant from the point of view of this study. In Estonia, besides the results of the referendum on religious instruction of 1923 (Eesti Statistika, 1923, 14(3), p. 58–74), in some chapters, the results of two more referenda are referred to: on bill of Constitution by Independence War Veterans (*Vabadussõjalased*), held in 1933, as well as referendum on summoning National Assembly (*Rahvuskogu*) in 1936, as they enable to gauge respectively opposition to pre-1934 democratic regime and support for the authoritarian regime of Konstantin Päts. The data are derived from Eesti Statistika, 1933, no 145(12), pp. 605–618, and Eesti Statistika, 1936, no 176(7)–177(8), pp. 402–407.

⁴⁷ Census data used in the study are derived from following volumes: In case of Latvija: Otrā tautas skaitīšana... 1925, Trešā tautas skaitīšana... 1930, Ceturtā tautas skaitīšana... 1936. In case of Estonia: 1922. aasta üldrahvalugemise... 1923, 1922. aasta üldrahvalugemise... 1924a, 1922. aasta üldrahvalugemise... 1924b, 1922. aasta üldrahvalugemise... 1927

selves about their religious affiliation.⁴⁸ In Latvia, it was asked which religion they were born in, by baptism or other rites, or formally converted later.⁴⁹ So, in the Latvian case, the census data does not reflect the genuine religious identity of individuals. For example, one could not consider himself to be a Lutheran, but in case (s)he was baptized in the Lutheran church (and had not later formally left it), (s)he was still registered as a Lutheran. In Latvian case studies, data from the censuses of 1925, 1930 and 1935 have been used. As for the census of 1920, it does not give an adequate picture of the permanent population, as the war had just ended, and many soldiers and refugees had not yet returned to their homes. In the case of Estonia, only national census data from 1922 is used because published census data from 1934 contains no data from the level of communes.

Newspaper Sources

Hundreds of newspapers and magazines were published at that time in Estonia and Latvia, and were widely read by peasants as almost all of them were literate in Lutheran-majority areas. Newspaper content provides a great opportunity for studies about societal secularization. Especially studies with a long time frame would enable us to gauge the secularization process in Estonia and Latvia, as church-related themes appear to have been paid less attention in time and were less and less related to secular spheres of life, notably education.

As for the interwar years, reports about religion and church were already relatively rare in secular newspapers of both Estonia and Latvia (resp. its Lutheran part). However, information about services in local Lutheran congregations were published regularly, and often also names of baptized and wed congregation members. On occasion of major church holidays, sermons or reflections by local pastors were often published as well. Very common are references to the participation of the pastor in patriotic events and other major celebrations, such as the consecration of schools and other public buildings.

Other church-related newspaper content includes occasional annual overviews of church life, articles about the history of the congregation on the occasion of major anniversaries, and accounts of internal conflicts and other controversies. But otherwise, secular newspapers rarely dealt with religious issues.

Most of the newspapers were politically affiliated, and thus, their church-related content was biased. Left-wing newspapers tended to turn less attention to the church, but if they did, they were usually critical towards it. Bourgeois newspapers (including relatively few which were independent from the political parties, such as *Päevaleht* in Estonia and *Jaunākās Ziņas* in Latvia) were broadly supportive of the church as an institution, but often critical of *status quo*, demanding its thorough reform in liberal and nationalist lines.

⁴⁸ However, the wording of the 1922 census instructions was ambiguous, and thus many respondents may have still declared their formal church affiliation rather than personal identification. In 1934, it was explicitly asked about confessing a certain religion, and not about belonging to religious organisations. (Plaat 2001, 149)

⁴⁹ *Otrā tautas skaitīšana... 1925*, p. 5.

Regarding research on local church history, the usefulness of newspapers varies significantly. In major national newspapers, reports from smaller parishes are rare. Slightly more useful are local newspapers, which often have covered the area of a county (*maakond, apriņķis*). More information about local church life and the role of the church in the community can be found in rare cases when a newspaper was published in the parish itself (in the case of this study, in Rūjiena and Tukums). Most of the periodicals of interwar Estonia and Latvia are available via internet, respectively on the websites of DIGAR.ee and periodika.lv. As for searching for relevant articles, in the Bibliographic Department of the Estonian Literary Museum, record cards of newspaper articles arranged according to parishes and communes of Estonia can be found. Unfortunately, only two major national newspapers (Postimees and Päevaleht) have been systematically bibliographed. As for Latvia, a bibliography about the history of the congregation of Jaunpiebalga by Vēsma Johansone proved helpful, though it is incomplete. Besides that, for the years 1920–36, bibliographies of articles about literature and science have been published by the Latvian National Library. Despite the title, these also contain information about articles of another character, including opinion pieces, and some overviews about the life of the congregations.⁵⁰

In addition, search engines of DIGAR and periodika.lv were systematically used for this study. Searches were made according to names of the congregations, pastors, and occasionally also other keywords. This method of search has obviously serious limitations, as optical character recognition is imperfect,⁵¹ and besides that, there are a lot of false matches. Thus, despite all the efforts, it is possible that some relevant articles are still missing. It is true especially for secular media, as the official newspapers of the church Eesti Kirik and Svētdienas Rīts were systematically browsed for this study year by year.

Autobiographical Sources

Autobiographies are key sources regarding the study of religious socialization, which is, according to many contemporary theorists, crucial in understanding the secularization process, and have been ingeniously and fruitfully used by Callum Brown, Hugh McLeod and others. Besides that, additional information can be found from there about the importance of religion in the life of individuals and local community, interconfessional relations, local peculiarities, but also socio-economic and political background.

There are a variety of autobiographical sources: oral history (less used in that study), interviews, memoirs written down with various intentions, with some social groups (notably educated people) usually overrepresented in collections of autobiographies. Both in Estonia and Latvia semi-academic organizations have called upon to write down and send their life stories to be stored in memory institutions. Thanks to their efforts, many “rank and file” people have written down

⁵⁰ “Latviešu zinātne un literatūra”, since 1925 “Latvijas Zinātne un Literatūra”.

⁵¹ Especially regarding the interwar years, the Gothic script was still widely used, and in the case of Latvia, some newspapers were published using old and some using new orthography.

their autobiographies (especially in Estonia). Local museums (notably in Tuukums) have also collected life histories, as well as pupils in some schools have done under the supervision of their teachers. For this study, the fund of *Eestimaa Elulood* (f. 350) in Estonian Literary Museum was extensively used. As for other museums, there are databases and other resources available (MUIS, e-varamu in Estonia, NMKK and Digitālā Bibliotēka in Latvia), but their usefulness in finding autobiographical sources is limited. Notably, in Latvian case, a remarkable part of the data about collections of museums is not yet available online.

Usual limitations of autobiographical sources include personal bias, memory errors, ideological influences and the impact of later life experiences in selecting and interpreting the events. But specific limitations appear in case of Estonia and Latvia. The authors of memoirs written for publishing in Soviet Estonia/Latvia were cautious in dealing with religious or church-related topics. However, there are valuable memoirs from that time that were not intended to be published. Additionally, the fact that these autobiographies were written down in highly secularized societies may have also made an impact. Writers may have presumed that readers were not interested in religious matters. Religion was seen as a private matter, and the separation of “religious” and “secular” spheres of life was self-evident at the time of the writing, while it might not have been so at the time, which is dealt with in the memoir.

Outline of the Study

The main part of the study involves five case studies about parishes in Estonia and four case studies of parishes in Latvia. In addition, the introduction is added to the chapter on Estonia, which is dedicated to the referendum on religious instruction (1923) and its relevance from the point of view of secularization research.

In each case study, selected data is presented about the general background of the parish, church life of the Lutheran congregation, individual practice, activities of major other confessions and interconfessional relations, as well as the role of the church in community life, education and local politics. Based on this evidence, an assessment of the extent to which the church was able to influence the “secular” spheres of public life as well as the beliefs and behaviour of individuals is provided at the end of each case study.

The volume, focus, and, in some cases, structure of particular case studies vary significantly because of different aspects of the topic relevant in different parishes. Also, availability of sources mattered. Thus, Estonian chapter is considerably more voluminous than Latvian one, firstly, because of much better availability of sources, and secondly, due to necessity to cover the issue of referendum on religious instruction of 1923. However, the most extended case study is dedicated to Rūjiņa parish in Latvia, as the role of the church in public life was unusually important there (including the establishment of a Christian elementary school).

Following the chapters on Estonian and Latvian case studies, the concluding chapter makes generalizations based on the ten parishes and discusses the possible interpretations of the findings. Comparable evidence from other parishes is

provided to make tentative conclusions about the generalizability of the findings of the whole of Estonia and Latvia and discuss the opportunities for further research.

A Note on Terminology

There is no consistency in translating historical terms from Estonian and Latvian into English, and it can produce considerable confusion for the readers. While using ‘county’ for bigger administrative units (*maakond*, *apriņķis*) is common, smaller rural municipalities (*vald*, *pagasts*) have been sometimes translated into English as parishes. However, the same English term is also used for the church district (*kihelkond*, *draudzes novads*). Therefore, *vald* and *pagasts* are referred as “communes” in this study. As for compulsory elementary schools, direct translation from each of the languages is used (*algkool* as primary school, *pamatskola* as basic school). A territorial district consisting of several congregations (*praostkond*, *prāvesta iecirknis*) is called deanery, and its leading pastor (*prāvests*, *praost*) a dean. The buildings of religious meetings of Herrnhutians (*palvemajad*, *saiešanas nami*) are meetinghouses.

In most other cases, original Latvian or Estonian terms (especially names of organizations) are added to the translation in parentheses or have been left untranslated. For example, *ķesteris* and *köster* (German *Küster*) are used for lay assistants of the pastor, who used to play the organ, teach children and confirmands, and occasionally substitute pastor in conducting religious services and performing some rites. In a similar vein, lay assistants who helped to prepare the church for religious services, collected donations, and served as intermediaries between the pastor and particular parts of the parish, are referred to as *pērminderi* and *vöörmündrid* (German *Vormünder*).

2 SECULARIZATION IN RURAL ESTONIA

2.1. Estonian referendum on religious instruction (1923) in the context of secularization process

The referendum on religious instruction in public primary schools, held in Estonia on February 17–19, 1923, has been treated in the historiography as an important source of public attitudes on religion and church in Estonia, enabling to assess regional differences in the pace of secularization and factors having impact on it.⁵² As this study also draws partly on the results of the referendum, an introductory chapter about its relevance from the point of view of secularization research is necessary.

Background of the Referendum

Origins of the Opposition to the Religious Instruction in Estonia

The political conflict over the role of the religion and church in public life was common in Europe at that time. One of the most prominent issues in those debates was also the future of the religious instruction. From the point of view of Estonia, influences from Russia were important in that regard, but also from Germany and Finland as fellow Protestant countries, whose events were closely watched.

As for Estonia, the earlier history of teaching religion is poorly studied.⁵³ Notably, in a comprehensive general overview of the school history of Estonia, only a few lines have been dedicated to the subject, which was the most important of all until the beginning of the 20th century.⁵⁴ However, critical attitudes towards religious instruction are common in memoir literature.

Firstly, in the late Tsarist era religious instruction was largely based on rote learning of the catechism, texts of Lutheran hymns, and Bible stories. Understanding the texts was often not required, nor was asking questions encouraged. In hindsight, it was often assessed as a waste of time by the representatives of the future national elite.⁵⁵

Secondly, ideological influences of the era influenced young educated Estonians: “Slightly simplified, religio-critical thinking in Estonia in the late 19th century was a mixture of four elements: 1) Marxist and Social-Democratic thinking originating from Russia; 2) Western European anticlericalism and freethinking; 3) the development of sciences (especially the theory of evolution) and, finally, 4) Estonian nationalist identity politics.”⁵⁶ As, importantly, for both the Baltic German upper class and state authorities, prevention of the spread of revolutio-

⁵² Gortfelder 2021a, Gortfelder 2021b.

⁵³ As for religious education in the interwar years, see Valk 1997.

⁵⁴ Laul *et al.*, 2010.

⁵⁵ Soosaar 2023, 47–49.

⁵⁶ Rimmel and Friedenthal 2020, 86.

nary ideas was one of the main aims of education, indeed,⁵⁷ the issue of religious instruction inevitably obtained a strong political flavour.

Thirdly, besides leftist journalists and political activists, many younger folk school teachers emerged as opponents of religious instruction. Among the reasons were radical views acquired in teachers' seminars, as well as conflicts with local pastors over the content of the education and the ambitions of the latter to subordinate teachers.⁵⁸

For the first time, the future of religious instruction at schools was publicly discussed during the revolution of 1905, when it was one of the main educational issues besides the language of instruction.⁵⁹ The liberal circles, represented by the daily *Postimees*, proposed reforming the subject, while socialists demanded removing it from the school altogether. In some communes, resolutions were adopted by peasants' meetings to turn religious education into a voluntary subject, while in others, such a decision was not supported.⁶⁰ Some teachers ceased to teach religion, and some pupils also demonstrated against it.⁶¹ However, no major change in teaching religion was made after the suppression of the revolution.

Debates of 1917–23

Next time, the issue was publicly raised in 1917 after the breakout of the February revolution.⁶² At the second folk education congress, held in Tartu in June 1917, 20–23, the future of religious instruction was one of the hotly debated issues. Nearly 400 representatives of elementary and secondary school teachers from all over the country discussed for many hours whether religious instruction should be in the school curriculum altogether and, if so, under which circumstances. Resolutions were adopted, stipulating that in teaching religious instruction, freedom of conscience should be taken into account, no teacher should be obliged to teach it against his or her will, it should be interconfessional, and no grades should be given for it. Also, the subject should be supervised by “pedagogical bodies” and not by the church.⁶³

The discussions continued in the following years both in pedagogical journals as well as secular and church media. Leftist politicians and publicists, as well as organizations of schoolteachers, were among the opponents. Religious instruction was supported by the Lutheran church and – often conditionally – also by right-wing political forces. However, deep disagreements also surfaced among

⁵⁷ Laul *et al.* 2010, 472.

⁵⁸ Kiirats *et al.* 1929, 202–206. About the positions of Estonian Teachers' Union in the questions of secular school and religious instruction in newly independent Estonia, see Kasvatus 1922, no 14, pp. 210–211 (Jüri Annusson), *cf.* Valk 1997, 24.

⁵⁹ For arguments of the opponents, see *Teataja*, 15.–17.11.1905.

⁶⁰ *Teataja*, 08.12.1905, p. 2 (Põltsamaalt); Rimmel 2004, 22.

⁶¹ For a comprehensive overview of the controversies over the issue of religious instruction during the 1905 revolution, see Laul *et al.* 2010, 460 and 464–465.

⁶² Valk 1997, 18.

⁶³ *Kasvatus ja Haridus* 1917, no 7/9, pp. 207–209 and 212.

the supporters of the subject. Only some representatives of conservative clergy dared publicly to defend the traditional way of religious instruction based on memorizing doctrinal truths.⁶⁴ As for the rest of the supporters of religious instruction, the need for thorough reform was admitted, taking into account modern pedagogical thought and the needs of modern society. Also, the role of the church in teaching religion was a bone of contention.

The Abolishing and Re-introduction of Religious Instruction in Public Primary Schools

In politics, however, leftist political forces set the tone in the following years, leading also to the attempts to abolish religious instruction. The first attempts to remove religious instruction from the school were made by Bolsheviks in January 1918.⁶⁵ In independent Estonia, leftist parties that gained the majority in the first general elections,⁶⁶ were committed to the separation of state and church.⁶⁷ Removing religious education from public schools was an important part of their agenda. The Public Elementary Schools Act (*Avalike algkoolide seadus*, adopted on May 7, 1920) stipulated that there was no religious instruction in these schools. In real life, religious instruction was continued in some of the schools privately, often on demand of parents.⁶⁸ Besides that, supporters of religious education in public schools decided to make use of the citizens' initiative option (*rahvalgatus*), introduced by the constitution of 1920. According to it, 25,000 citizens could propose a bill. In case parliament rejected it, a referendum was to be held. If the majority of the voters supported the bill, it was enforced, and the parliament was to be dissolved.⁶⁹ Making use of that option, a referendum was initiated by the Christian People's Party (*Kristlik Rahvaerakond*) on re-introducing religious education as a voluntary subject for pupils and teachers but compulsory for schools.⁷⁰

About 90,000 signatures were collected in support of the bill. After some disputes in *Riigikogu* about the formalities, the referendum was decided to be held from 17 to 19 February, 1923.⁷¹ According to official results, 66.2% of the eligible

⁶⁴ Meie Kirik, 29.11.1922, p. 380.

⁶⁵ Valk 1997, 19–20.

⁶⁶ To *Asutav Kogu* (Constituent Assembly, 1919) and to 1st *Riigikogu* (State Assembly, 1920).

⁶⁷ Rohtmets 2018, 23.

⁶⁸ Valk 1997, 26–27.

⁶⁹ Eesti Vabariigi Põhiseadus, § 31: Riigi Teataja, 9.08.1920, p. 243. Also, the total amount of the votes casted in support was to be bigger than half of the turnout in previous general elections: Riigikogu valimise, rahvahääletamise ja rahva algatamise õiguse seadus, § 30: Riigi Teataja, 30.07.1920, p. 830.

⁷⁰ The changes in the Act, which were put to the voting, were as follows: “(1) §2, kus seisab „Algkool on emakeelne ilma usuõpetuseta ja maksuta” tuleb ära jätta sõnad „ilma usuõpetuseta”. (2) §35, kus seisab „Algkoolis õpetatakse järgmisi õppeaineid: 1) kodulugu, 2) emakeelt jne.” tuleb juurde lisada „järgmisi õppeaineid: 1) kodulugu, 2) emakeelt, 3) usuõpetust jne” (3) §35 juurde lisada kahele olevale märkusele: Märkus 1. „Usuõpetus on õpetajaile ja õpilastele vabatahtlik õppeaine.” Haava 2007, 35–36.

⁷¹ Valge 2016, 71–75.

citizens participated and 71.9% of them voted in support of the re-introduction of religious instruction to the syllabus of public primary schools.⁷²

Historiography of the Referendum

Pille Valk (1997) and **Ursula Haava** have interpreted the referendum as a plebiscite about the role of religion in society. According to Haava, the results showed the victory of Christian sentiments in society.⁷³ **Jaak Valge** has, however, seen the conflict mostly in terms of ideological confrontation between left-wing and right-wing political forces. The victory of the supporters of religious instruction led according to him to the decline of support for left-wing parties in the following general elections.⁷⁴ **Mark Gortfelder** was the first to thoroughly analyse the referendum results across the communes.⁷⁵ According to him, both religious and political considerations influenced the formation of voting decision, and support for the leftist parties and (in case of ethnic Estonians) non-Lutheran religion were the most important correlates of voting against religious instruction. Besides that, he presumes that the socio-economic status of the voters and the experience of being under Bolshevik rule⁷⁶ might have had an impact, but his findings are inconclusive in these respects.

The Referendum Campaign

In order to interpret the referendum results, it is necessary to establish what motivated people to turn out and vote in favour or against. What was the message of the supporters and the opponents of religious instruction, and how was it communicated? The following attempt to answer these questions is mostly based on evidence from newspaper accounts.

As virtually every adult person even in rural Estonia could read, the newspapers had wide circulation, the most popular among them selling tens of thousands of copies daily. However, it is not clear to what extent they were authoritative sources for the readers in political matters. Also, they are unrepresentative, reflecting the viewpoint of educated people and urban dwellers, and are directed to the people who were engaged more than average in the matters of politics and society. However, there is lack of other sources on that matter. Regarding archival sources, reports of deans of EELC contain only short subjective assessments about how to interpret the voting results, and these have been occasionally used

⁷² The referendum results were published in *Eesti Statistika*, 1923, 14(3), pp. 58–74, and were reprinted in Valk 1997.

⁷³ Ursula Haava. „Kristliku poliitika õnnelik aasta.“ *Kirik ja Teoloogia*, 2013: <https://kjt.ee/2013/09/kristliku-poliitika-onnelik-aasta/>, 14.02.2024.

⁷⁴ Valge 2016.

⁷⁵ Gortfelder 2021a, Gortfelder 2021b.

⁷⁶ Communes of the Eastern part of Estonia were under Bolshevik rule during the Estonian War of Independence (1918–20). In most cases, it was limited to no more than a couple of months.

for the case studies in this study. Additional hints about voting motivations can also be found in diaries, memoirs, and oral history sources. Those are, however, rare, and difficult to find. In sum, newspaper articles remain limited, but still the best option to find out *rationale* of people voting in support or against religious instruction. Importantly, as the voting results indicate, the ideas promoted by the newspapers seem indeed to have influenced the voting decisions of many, though not all, citizens.

Most of the daily and weekly newspapers in Estonia were more or less related to political parties at that time, the major exception being *Päevaleht*. Coverage of the referendum was in most cases highly biased in them and consisted mainly of following:

1. Longer opinion pieces endorsing the views in favour or against religious instruction in public schools.
2. Highly biased reports on agitation, mostly describing meetings organized by the supporters or opponents of the religious instruction.
3. Reports on technical questions, arrangement of the referendum and counting the votes.
4. Assessment of results, their meaning and importance.

Arguments in Support of Religious Instruction

In the case of the 1923 referendum, most of the bourgeoisie media supported consistently voting in favour of religious instruction.⁷⁷ The following evidence is derived from all-Estonian newspapers *Kaja* (Farmers' Assemblies, *Põllumeestekogud*), *Päevaleht* (independent), *Postimees* (People's Party, *Rahvaerakond*), and several local newspapers, of those Saaremaa was closely related to Farmers' Assemblies. The most important arguments were as follows:

1. Interests of the Society and the Nation

1.1. Religious Instruction as the Foundation of Moral Upbringing

Typically, it was argued that religious instruction was essential for boosting morality, law and order, and the assistance provided by the church was vital in this regard.⁷⁸ Some explained plainly that religious instruction was needed to prevent the spread of stealing and murdering⁷⁹ or avert children growing up as savages.⁸⁰ It was claimed that religion was so far the only known way to boost morality and, therefore, religious instruction should not have been abandoned. Particularly, it was noted that secular morality instruction was by far not yet in a

⁷⁷ However, during the collection of signatures the editor-in-chief of *Päevaleht* Georg Eduard Luiga, while being supportive of religious instruction in public schools, did not endorse the initiative to arrange the referendum. According to him, the parliamentary process was the best way to achieve it: *Päevaleht*, 26.08.1922, p. 2. During the referendum campaign Luiga and his newspaper endorsed „yes“-voting.

⁷⁸ *Päevaleht*, 11.02.1923, p. 2.

⁷⁹ Saaremaa, 23.02.1923, pp. 2–3.

⁸⁰ *Kaja*, 11.02.1923, p. 7 (“Viljandimaalt”).

position to take over the role of the religious education in this regard.⁸¹ Besides that, in *Postimees*, the role of religious instruction for “deepening national culture” was highlighted in the editorial, but the idea was not elaborated further.⁸²

Interestingly, truth claims of Christianity (or particular interpretations of it) seem often not to have been relevant for those who highlighted the cultural and moral importance of religious instruction. In some cases, it was stated openly: “One needs not to be a believer to say: those who threw religious instruction out of our schools have not done our nation any good.”⁸³ More often the question about the truth of the teachings of Christianity was simply ignored.

1.2. Curbing the Influence of the Church

On the other hand, the newspapers rejected the conservative interpretations of the faith, which were, according to their mind, dominant at that time among the Lutheran clergy. It is especially true for *Päevaleht* and *Postimees*. Indeed, many of the opinion pieces in these newspapers that endorsed religious education were at the same time explicitly critical of the Lutheran Church. It was seen as an out-of-date conservative institution, not capable of playing any positive role in society and not reliable as an educator of the nation’s youth. Indeed, it was claimed that the very way the church had conducted religious instruction so far was probably one of the reasons why so many people were against the subject – especially as it was usually dull and based on rote learning while critical thinking was not accepted.⁸⁴

By co-incidence, during the referendum campaign, an annual conference of Lutheran pastors was held in Tartu, where conservatives prevailed over liberals in voting over the bylaws of the church.⁸⁵ The outcome seemed to confirm the negative image of the church, raising concerns that the conference might have a negative impact on referendum results. Georg-Eduard Luiga, the editor-in-chief of the *Päevaleht*, argued, however, that it had shown, to the contrary, the very need to cast the vote in favour of religious instruction: “The congress of Tartu forces us urgently to take religious education in school from the hands of the church and all kinds of random teachers and to subordinate it to the centralized regulation and supervision of the Ministry of Education.” In other words, contrary to the intentions of initiators of the referendum, the re-introduction of religious instruction to the public schools would enable to free it from the control of the church, argued Luiga. However, if the outcome of the referendum was negative, the church would retain its monopoly of religious education of the children with all the non-desirable results.⁸⁶

⁸¹ *Päevaleht*, 08.01.1923, p. 2–3; *Kaja* 03.02.1923, p. 2.

⁸² *Postimees*, 10.02.1923, p. 1.

⁸³ “Ei ole tarvis usklik olla, et ütelda: need, kes usuõpetuse meie koolist välja visanud, ei ole meie rahvale head teinud.” *Päevaleht*, 11.02.1923, p. 2.

⁸⁴ *Päevaleht*, 08.01.1923, p. 3.

⁸⁵ *Rohtmets* 2012, 190–195.

⁸⁶ “Tartu kongress sunnib meid ruttama usuõpetust koolis kiriku ja kõiksuguste juhusliste õpetajate käest ära võtma ja haridusministeeriumi ühise korralduse ning järelevalve alla

Similar was the line of reasoning of Jaan Tõnisson, chairman of the People's Party (*Rahvaerakond*) and editor-in-chief of its daily *Postimees*: "By ensuring the possibility of religious education at school for those who want it, we also want that religious education does not fall under the private control of the church, who would start teaching it to our young people according to its own aims and its own interests. Religious instruction, as a free subject in the school, must be subordinated to state educational supervision and meet the pedagogical requirements."⁸⁷ Besides that, Tõnisson used the opportunity of the referendum campaign to call upon forming a national Estonian church (*rahvuslik kirik*), which would be free of reactionary influences.⁸⁸

2. Ideological and Political Considerations

2.1. The Referendum as a Part of Political Struggle

Especially newspapers linked to Farmers' Assemblies (*Põllumeestekogud*) described the fight over religious education as being primarily about the choice between leftist and rightist worldviews. Therefore, the outcomes of the referendum would have serious political consequences: "If now the supporters of religious instruction should not get the necessary majority in the referendum, the political mood can undoubtedly change to the left, and the political scales will inevitably start to tilt to the left." If so, even communists might eventually be invited into the government. Accordingly, the negative outcome of the referendum might have grave consequences, which would also afflict "even the greatest unbelievers and opponents of churches and pastors".⁸⁹

At least on one occasion, it was even claimed plainly that, in fact, the pragmatic class interests of the farmers were at stake: "All to the referendum! If religious education wins the referendum, the current *Riigikogu* will be dissolved, and new elections will be held. In the new elections, the right-wing parties will get a majority in the *Riigikogu*. Then, the salaries of schoolteachers and other state expenditures will be reduced. At the same time, taxes will also decrease. /.../ The Labour (*tööerakond*) is a party of schoolteachers and officials, and socialists are [the party of] factory workers, whose interests are directly opposed to the interests of agricultural workers. The victory of the socialists and the Labour party means

andma." *Päewaleht*, 31.01.1923, p. 2. Georg Eduard Luiga's anti-church attitude may have been significantly influenced by his conflict with the pastor of Äksi at the end of the 19th century, when he worked as a schoolteacher there. (*Päewalehe Luiga* 2021, 39–40) See also similar opinions, expressed by Theodor Tallmeister, the leading Lutheran pastor of the liberal camp, in *Päewaleht*, 02.02.1923, p. 2. *Cf.* Saaremaa, 10.02.1923, p. 2.

⁸⁷ "Usuõpetuse võimalust koolis soovijatele kindlustades tahame meie ühtlasi, et usuõpetus ei jääks kiriku koduse meelevalla alla, kes teda meie nooresoole andma hakkaks oma sihtides ja oma huvides. Usuõpetus kui vaba õpeaine koolis peab riikliku haridusülevalve alla käies vastama kasvatuslistele nõuetele." *Postimees*, 10.02.1923, p. 1.

⁸⁸ *Postimees*, 13.02.1923, p. 2.

⁸⁹ „Kui nüüd rahvahääletamisel ei peaks usuõpetuse hääletamine tarvilikku häälteenamust saama, siis võib poliitiline meelsus kahtlemata pahempoolseks muutuda ja poliitilised kaalud hakkavad paratamata pahempoolse kalduma." *Kaja*, 15.02.1923, p. 2.

a great harm for the farmer and the agricultural worker! That is why you should put a ballot with the title “In support [of the bill]” to the ballot box.”⁹⁰

2.2. Religious Instruction as an Ideological Tool

On the other hand, teaching Christianity was seen as an antidote against the pernicious socialist ideas. That was exactly the reason why arguably almost all the leftists were against the religious instruction: “They cannot like it when children are taught religion and virtue, because the core and content of Christian teaching is love of neighbour, helping him in all trouble, justice and self-restraint for the benefit of others.” However, if socialists would gain the upper hand, it would result in disorder and the spread of the desire to live off the hard work of others.⁹¹

2.3. East vs West

Notably, quite a few authors linked the abolishment of religious education in public schools to the destructive revolutionary moods of the recent past, and particularly Communist influences. As it was, in turn, associated with the barbarous ‘East’, the re-establishment of religious instruction could be presented as a civilizational choice in favour of Europe.⁹² The fact that religion was taught at school in all European countries except Portugal, France and Soviet Russia was among the favourite arguments of the ‘yes’-campaign.⁹³

3. Referendum as a Choice About Endorsing Christianity

Articles which explicitly referred to religious motives in making voting decisions were rather rare. Only relatively few politicians and publicists used to focus on them. One of them was professor Peeter Pöld, a prominent educationalist⁹⁴ and politician of People’s Party. In his lengthy opinion article for Postimees, he argued that religiosity was a natural part of being human and, therefore, its instruction at school should have been essential, under the condition that it was

⁹⁰ “Kõik rahvahääletamisele! Kui usuõpetus rahvahääletamisel võidab, siis läheb praegune Riigikogu laiali ja tulevad uued valimised. Uutel valimistel saavad parempoolsed Riigikogus enamuse. Siis hakatakse kooliõpetajate palkasid ja muid riigi väljaminekuid vähendada. Sellega ühes vähenevad ka maksud. /.../ Tööerakond on kooliõpetajate ja ametnikkude ning sotsid vabrikute töölise erakond, kelle huvid põllutöölise huvidega otse vastu on. Sotside ja tööerakonna võit on põllupidajale ja põllutöölisele suureks kahjuks! Sellepärast laske valimiskasti sedel pealkirjaga “poolt.” Appeal in the front page of Saaremaa, 14.02.1923, p. 1.

⁹¹ “Neile ei või see meeldida, kui lastele usuõpetust ja vöörust õpetatakse, sest ristiusu õpetuse tuum ja sisu on ligimese armastus, tema aitamise kõige häda sees, õiglus ja enese piiramine teise kasuks.” Saaremaa, 10.02.1923, p. 2.

⁹² Importantly, it was used by the initiators of the referendum themselves: “See hääletus peab otsustama, kas maksab meie koolis Euroopa kultuur või Aasiast pärit enamlus, mis oma sündimismaal juba pankrotis on.” Päewaleht 11.02.1923, p. 5. It is also worth mentioning that in exceptional cases, anti-communist rhetoric was mixed with antisemitic one. For example, see Saaremaa, 17.02.1923, p. 2 (“Eksam on alanud!”).

⁹³ See, for example, Päewaleht, 04.02.1923, p. 5.

⁹⁴ Laul et al. 2010 refers to him as the most outstanding representative of Estonian pedagogical thought at that time, see p. 638–643.

conducted according to appropriate methodological means. Besides that, Põld highlighted the cultural and historical importance of religion. Notably, religious instruction should have been based on Christianity, partly due to Estonian historical heritage but also because Christianity was the most perfect religion according to Põld.⁹⁵

Otherwise, religious rhetoric was occasionally used in *Kaja* and other newspapers of Farmers' Assemblies. For instance, in one of the articles, it was claimed that genuine Estonians had always held their faith dear since the times they made their sacrifices in sacred groves, and later also "sacred ideals" of Christianity became close to their heart: "The Estonian nation is a spiritual nation. She has recognized and knows that faith is one of the most powerful feelings and is carrying her in the higher world."⁹⁶

However, such religious arguments were more commonly used not by the editorial staff of the newspapers but rather by external authors, such as representatives of Christian People's Party (*Kristlik Rahvaerakond*) and Lutheran pastors. For instance, EELC pastor Artur Sommer highlighted in *Kaja* the positive role Christianity and the church had arguably played in the lives of individuals and society. According to him, evil attributed to Christianity was not the fault of the faith but of "morally and religiously uneducated man". Thus, he concluded: "The decisive moments are approaching. On February 17, 18 and 19, the Estonian people will take their matriculation exam. More than that, he raises his hand either to bless or to curse her youth, to sign a life or death sentence. /.../ Then decide, the citizen of the Republic of Estonia, whether you want to live with Christ or without Christ!"⁹⁷

Similar rhetoric was used in an appeal of Christian People's Party, which claimed that „moral laxity and propaganda of archenemies of Christianity” had led Estonia to the brink of the abyss: "Estonia will soon have to decide whether it sticks to Christianity, whether it still wants to love and protect its dearest and most solemn religious heritage, or whether the empty claims of its opponents are closer to her heart." Also, it was claimed in the appeal that if the opponents of the religious instruction would prevail, the children would not be able to get authentic knowledge about Christianity and thus make up their own minds about it.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Postimees 15.02.1923, p. 1; 16.02.1923, p. 1; 17.02.1923, p. 1. The same arguments were used by Põld in his presentation about religious instruction at the Congress of Teachers' Union, held in 1923. Most of his proposed theses were rejected by a large majority of the delegates (see Kasvatus, 1923, no 8 and 9/10). Despite that, the Ministry of Education assigned Põld to develop the syllabi of religious instruction.

⁹⁶ "Eesti rahvas on hingeline rahvas. Ta on ära tundnud ja teab, et usk üks vägevamatest tunnetest on, ja teda kõrgema ilma kannab." *Võru Teataja*, 17.02.1923, p. 1–2.

⁹⁷ "Otsustavad silmapilgud lähenevad. 17., 18. ja 19. veebruaril teeb Eesti rahvas oma küpsuseksami. Veel rohkem, ta tõstab oma kätt oma noorsoole õnnistuseks ehk vandeaks, elu ehk surmaotsuse allakirjutamiseks. /.../ Otsusta siis Eesti vabariigi kodanik, kas tahad elada Kristusega ehk Kristusetal!" *Kaja* 14.02.1923, p. 2.

⁹⁸ "Varsti peab Eesti otsustama, kas tema hoiab ristiusu poole, kas ta tahab veel armastada ja kaitsta oma kallimat ja kõrgemat usuvara, või on temale vastaste tühised väited armsamad." *Päewaleht*, 04.02.1923, p. 5.

Interestingly, even arguments in favour of Christianity are mostly related to a positive role of religiosity for an individual and the society, as well as traditions of the nation. Hardly ever it was claimed that eternal life or salvation were at stake, even by the clergy.⁹⁹ Importantly, also in a speech delivered by bishop Jakob Kukk in concert hall of “Estonia” theatre,¹⁰⁰ as well as in his appeal to the church members to go to the polls,¹⁰¹ he resorted mostly to the argumentation about the high value of religion for society.

Indeed, only the representatives of the pietist and the conservative wings of the church seem to have made extensive use of religious arguments during the campaign. For instance, *kõster* Adam Hürri said in a sermon held immediately before the referendum in Peeterristi church: “Woe to those, whose children have to raise a complaint before God against their negligent parents! What will you say when your child says to you in tears: because of you, I must now go into eternal damnation? Think about it! It is a serious matter.”¹⁰² In a similar vein, the leading conservative pastor Harald Pöld reproached the politicians of the Christian People’s Party for putting emphasis on the cultural and not on the religious importance of the religious instruction.¹⁰³

In conclusion, secular right-wing media was unanimous in endorsing voting in favour of religious instruction in public schools. On several occasions, the articles are directed towards people who were hesitant about voting in support of religious instruction due to their critical or indifferent attitudes towards the church. Most often, arguments referring to the utility of religious instruction for the society were used, especially in promoting the moral upbringing of the youth. Secondly, the referendum was seen as a contest between left and right-wing worldviews and political parties. Only in some articles, it was claimed that the vote was about accepting or rejecting religion, particularly Christianity.

Arguments of the Opponents of the Bill

1) Left-wing Media (Tulevik, Vaba Maa, Tööline)

There were significant differences regarding the coverage of the referendum campaign between the left-wing parties. The Labour Party (*Tööerakond*) and its daily newspaper, *Vaba Maa*, focused on arguments related to freedom of religion. Though critical of the church’s political ambitions, their attitude towards religion was generally benevolent. After the referendum, the Labour Party was even

⁹⁹ Cf. argumentation of pastor Jaan Lattik in *Päewaleht*, 13.01.1923, p. 2.

¹⁰⁰ ERA 4381-1-13.

¹⁰¹ Saard 2018, 287.

¹⁰² „Häda neile, kelle lapsed Jumala ees oma hooletumate vanemate peale peavad kaebust tõstma! Mis sa ütled, kui sinu laps nuttes sulle ütleb: sinu pärast, pean mina nüüd igavese hukatuse sisse minema? Mõtle järele! Asjad on tõsised.” Meie Kirik, 28.02.1923, pp. 65–66. According to biased reports of leftist media such arguments were used also by some pastors in local agitation meetings: *Tulevik*, 17.02.1923, p. 4 (about pastor Joosep Liiv in Rapla).

¹⁰³ Meie Kirik, 24.01.1923, pp. 27–28.

accused of a passive campaign, which arguably hampered the cause of the ‘no’-camp.¹⁰⁴

Estonian Social Democratic Workers’ Party (*Eesti Sotsiaal-demokraatline Töölise Partei*, newspaper: *Tulevik*) and the hard left coalition Common Front of the Working People (*Tööraha Ühine Väerind*) with links to the illegal Communist Party (newspaper: *Tööline*), on the other hand, launched vitriolic attacks on church, and, in rarer occasions, on religion. Still, conspicuous is the much more active engagement of the hard left. In February, almost every issue of *Tööline* contained propaganda articles and numerous reports on campaign meetings organized by the party.

Unlike in the case of *Tulevik*, the referendum was also treated as an important battle of the class struggle by *Tööline*.¹⁰⁵ Both supporters and opponents of the religious instruction noted the extraordinarily active involvement of the hard left in the campaign; its repulsively militant character was also seen as contributing to the failure of the ‘no’-campaign.¹⁰⁶

1.1. Freedom of Religion and Consciousness

It was the main argument for the centre-left Labour Party and its daily *Vaba Maa*. It was emphasized that private teaching of religious instruction was, in fact, already available for those wanting to pay for it themselves. If so, positive outcome of the referendum would mean only that its costs would be covered by the state. So, the referendum was interpreted as an attempt to overturn the separation of church from the state by stealth and to undermine religious freedom: “As elsewhere, factions with reactionary political views are trying to regain their former influence through the church. Faith, which should be untouchable and sacred to everyone, is dragged into the political struggle. They want to replace the preaching of faith and justice, which comes from the heart, with paid and mandatory religious instruction, for the benefit of which even those who believe differently and who cannot receive religious instruction according to their views, have to sacrifice their farthings.”¹⁰⁷

1.2. Anticlerical Arguments

In some of the articles of *Tulevik* and especially *Tööline*, the church was depicted as an utterly immoral institution, playing a detrimental role in the life of society.

¹⁰⁴ *Tulevik*, 28.02.1923, p. 1. Cf. Gortfelder 2021a, 70.

¹⁰⁵ See e.g. *Tööline*, 05.02.1923, pp. 2–3 (“*Taevast asjust*”).

¹⁰⁶ “Kommunistid nagu harilikult panid oma masinavärgi käima, s.o koosolekutel lasti lahti vilistamine, trampimine ja vänged vahelhüüded. Kodanlised lehed märkisid õieti, et kommunistid neile hääli aitasid koguda.” *Tulevik*, 28.02.1923, p. 1.

¹⁰⁷ “Nagu mujal, nii katsuvad ka meil tagasikiskuva poliitilise vaatega kildkonnad enesele kiriku kaudu endist mõju tagasi võita. Usk, mis peaks olema igähele puutumata ja püha, kistakse poliitilisse võitlusse. Südamest tulnud usu ning õigluse kuulutamise asemele tahetakse asetada maksulist ning sunduslikku usuõpetust, mille kasuks isegi need peavad oma veeringud ohverdama, kes teisiti usuvad ja kellel ei ole võimalik oma vaadetekohast usuõpetust saada.” *Vaba Maa* 14.01.1923, p. 2.

Colourful descriptions of fanaticism, greed and licentiousness of the clergy were evoked from throughout history, added by references to the reactionary attitudes of the pastors from the recent past, especially from the 1905 revolution and Imperial German occupation of 1918. Also, it was claimed that pastors did not follow the Gospel, which they preached themselves nor necessarily believed in it. Militant rhetoric was regularly used, and not only by the hard left.¹⁰⁸

1.3. Class Struggle

The ambitions of the church to regain its pre-revolutionary privileges were, as especially the hard left constantly repeated, contrary to the interests of the poor classes. According to it, bourgeois parties were supporting the initiative exactly because religious instruction was a means to inculcate into the children ideas, which would help to subjugate the working class.¹⁰⁹

1.4. Anti-Religious Arguments

Both Tulevik and Tööline published some articles which can be interpreted as anti-religious. In one of them, it was claimed that as religion was in contradiction to science, religious instruction was useless or even detrimental to the development of the children.¹¹⁰ And in one of the appeals to the female voters, Tööline stated: “The proletariat sets against the religious instruction of bourgeoisie its own religious instruction – scientific Marxism.”¹¹¹

However, most authors in the socialist newspaper Tulevik denied its anti-religious attitudes despite very strong opinions about the church: “If faith is of God, then the church is of the devil. If Jesus Christ was indeed the Son of God, then the fathers of the church and religious authorities have been children of Satan. Accordingly, they must be dealt with, and the Estonian people must give this clear testimony about them.”¹¹² Similar opinions can also be found from Tööline: “It will not be voting against faith, because faith cannot be voted down, but against religious instruction that has nothing in common with the faith, according to which all people are the same, where rich and poor are not known, where a believer leaves his home, house and property and gives it to the poor, to become an equal member in the Christian congregation.”¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ A good example is a series of articles (possibly by Karl Ast): Tulevik 24.01.1923, p. 2, 27.01.1923, p. 2, 31.01.1923, p. 2, 03.02.1923, p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ Tööline 07.02.1923, p. 1.

¹¹⁰ Tulevik, 27.01.1923, p. 2.

¹¹¹ “Kodanluse usuõpetusele seab proletariaat vastu oma usuõpetuse – teaduslise marksismi!” Tööline, 17.02.1923, p. 5.

¹¹² “Kui usk on jumalast, siis on kirik kuradist. Kui Jeesus Kristus tõepoolest oli jumalapoeg, siis on kirikuisad ning vaimulikud võimukandjad olnud saatana lapsed. Sellekohaselt tuleb nendega ka ümber käia ja selle kindla tunnistuse peab eesti rahvas nendele andma.” Tulevik, 14.02.1923, p. 1.

¹¹³ „Mitte usu vastu ei minda hääletama, sest usku ei saa maha hääletada, vaid usuõpetust, millel mingit ühist pole usuga, mille järele kõik inimesed ühesugused, kus rikkaid ega vaeseid ei tunta, kus usklik jätab oma koja, maja ja varanduse ning annab selle vaestele, et ise niisamasuguseks kristliku koguduse liikmeks saada.” Tööline, 07.02.1923, p. 1.

Overall, unambiguous atheist rhetoric was, as it seems, considerably less used during the public campaign before the referendum than during the debates in *Riigikogu*.¹¹⁴ Apparently, leftist politicians and publicists did not want to risk on alienating their voters. It is not surprising, as leading leftist politicians came usually from families of peasants or folk school teachers, and therefore they were well aware that religious attitudes were still strong among the rural population.¹¹⁵

1.5. Tax Hikes

One of the most actively used arguments by all three leftist newspapers was the economic one. It was argued that the re-introduction of religious education would be a heavy burden on the state budget, which would mean raising taxes for the voters. The argument was never specified, although the sum of 50 million marks per year was mentioned in an article.¹¹⁶ Although far-fetched, the argument could be convincing for the many peasants who struggled to make their ends meet, as some of the supporters of religious instruction observed.¹¹⁷

1.6. Quality of the Teaching of Religion Questioned

It was also argued that as most of the folk school teachers were against teaching religious instruction, there was a lack of qualified people willing to teach it.¹¹⁸ Even worse, the conservative spirit, prevalent in the Lutheran church, would inevitably make a detrimental impact on teaching religion at school. The outcome of the above-mentioned pastors' conference in Tartu was evoked as proof of it.¹¹⁹

2) Representatives of Minority Confessions

Several representatives of minority faith leaders voiced their hesitation about the re-introduction of religious education into public schools. Especially influential seem to have been in that regard the stances of Anton Laar (1885–1933), the Orthodox archpriest from Tallinn and a former deputy of the Christian People's Party in Constituent Assembly (*Asutav Kogu*).¹²⁰ In a widely discussed newspaper article published some weeks before the voting, Laar declined to support religious instruction in public schools as long as its interconfessional orientation was not clearly emphasized. He expressed his deep distrust of the Lutheran church, claiming that some of its pastors, as well as some secular politicians,

¹¹⁴ For arguments used in parliamentary debates, see Valk 1997, 41–46 and Altnurme L. 2021, 10–12.

¹¹⁵ Hans Kruus, a leading member of independent socialists in 1919–21, mentions in his memoirs the surprise and confusion after he, as a student of the teachers' seminary, happened to acknowledge to the people of his village that he did not believe in God anymore. Therefore, he decided to avoid talking publicly about his atheist views. (Kruus 1979, 72–73) Several other leftist politicians have written about disagreements on religious issues with their parents. Cf. Soosaar 2023.

¹¹⁶ *Waba Maa*, 14.01.1923, p. 2.

¹¹⁷ *Võru Teataja*, 10.02.1923, p. 3.

¹¹⁸ *Tulevik*, 27.01.1923, p. 3.

¹¹⁹ *Tulevik*, 31.01.1923, p. 1 and 2.

¹²⁰ Rimstad 2012, 110.

dreamt about “religious unification” of the country within 10–15 years under the aegis of the Lutheran church. Laar suspected that the introduction of religious instruction in public schools was seen as an important tool to achieve it. Besides that, he referred to demeaning remarks on Orthodox faith allegedly not infrequently made in Lutheran religious education classes.¹²¹ Similar concerns were voiced publicly by other representatives of Estonian Orthodox church¹²² and numerous priests also agitated against religious instruction among their parishioners, even though the Orthodox archbishop Aleksander had explicitly called upon them to support it.¹²³

Laar’s article was widely cited by left-wing media.¹²⁴ Similar grievances about the issue had been issued also earlier.¹²⁵ Despite that, the pastor Jaan Lattik, one of the leaders of the “yes” campaign, had just recently denied any divergency of opinions among the churches on the question of religious instruction.¹²⁶ Now, Laar’s article prompted the Christian People’s Party to emphasize interconfessional character of the initiative.¹²⁷ However, as indicated below, many Orthodox seem still to have voted against religious instruction.

As for the stances of the representatives of free churches, there are differing accounts, which are sometimes based on sources with dubious trustworthiness. In general, it seems safe to conclude that opinions were divided among them, with some supporting religious instruction, but others opposing it or abstaining from voting.¹²⁸

¹²¹ Waba Maa, 30.01.1923, p. 5.

¹²² Rimestad 2012, 110–112.

¹²³ Päewaleht, 29.01.1923, p. 2; for the appeal of Aleksander, see Võru Teataja 13.02.1923, p. 2.

¹²⁴ Tööline, 01.02.1923, p. 2.

¹²⁵ The disagreements between the Lutherans and Orthodox on religious instruction started already in 1917 – see Kasvatus, 1922, no 14, p. 214. See also dispute in the newspaper Saaremaa between Nikolai Kann (04.11.1922, p. 2), Aleksander Tasso (02.12.1922, p. 2) and the Orthodox priest Aleksander Aar (03.01.1923, p. 3).

¹²⁶ Päewaleht, 13.01.1923, p. 2 (argument no 6).

¹²⁷ Päewaleht, 04.02.1923, p. 5.

¹²⁸ The leadership of the Baptist union allegedly endorsed voting in favour of religious instruction, but the decision was not recognized as valid by at least some of the faithful (Gortfelder 2021a, 72). Two contradictory accounts were published about the stance of Evangelical Christians (Päewaleht, 17.02.1923, p. 7; Waba Maa, 20.02.1923, p. 7; cf. Päewaleht, 23.02.1923, p. 6). On confusion over the stances of the free churches, see also Sakala, 05.02.1923, p. 3; 12.02.1923, p.3.

Conclusion

The referendum was initiated by the politicians closely related to the Lutheran church. Its leadership and clergy were very actively involved in the campaign. Therefore, the referendum may be, to some extent, seen as a plebiscite on the public role of the church and its results as an indicator of the capability of the church to mobilize people for its cause. Indeed, the opponents of the bill sometimes framed it as being about the role of the Lutheran church in public life.

However, in secular media the referendum was often interpreted as a political rather than a religious issue. In bourgeois newspapers, the supporting of the bill was seen as compatible with negative attitudes about the church. Left-wing newspapers, in turn, tried to lure also religious voters, emphasizing the economic and political rather than religious aspects of the problem. Therefore, it is plausible that also for some voters the referendum was primarily not a vote about the role of church in public life, but rather about the prevalence of left- or right-wing political forces in the newly independent state.

To conclude, for some the referendum might have been about public endorsement of faith in God, for others rather about the public role of the Lutheran church and yet for others, primarily about the future political direction of the newly independent state – and these motivations were not mutually exclusive. Therefore, the results of the referendum can, at best, only in due caution be interpreted as reflecting the progress of the secularization process in Estonia.

From the point of view of the following analysis of the referendum, it is also important to note that deliberate omission of the contentious issues about the nature of the religious instruction may have had a considerable impact on the voting results. On the one hand, it enabled to mobilize the supporters of both confessional and interconfessional as well as both liberal and conservative religious instruction. However, on the other hand, it might have prompted some people to abstain from voting (or even to vote against it), as they were not sure if their vision about how the religion should be taught would prevail. And in that case, they would have preferred religion not to be taught at all.

Analysis of the Results¹²⁹

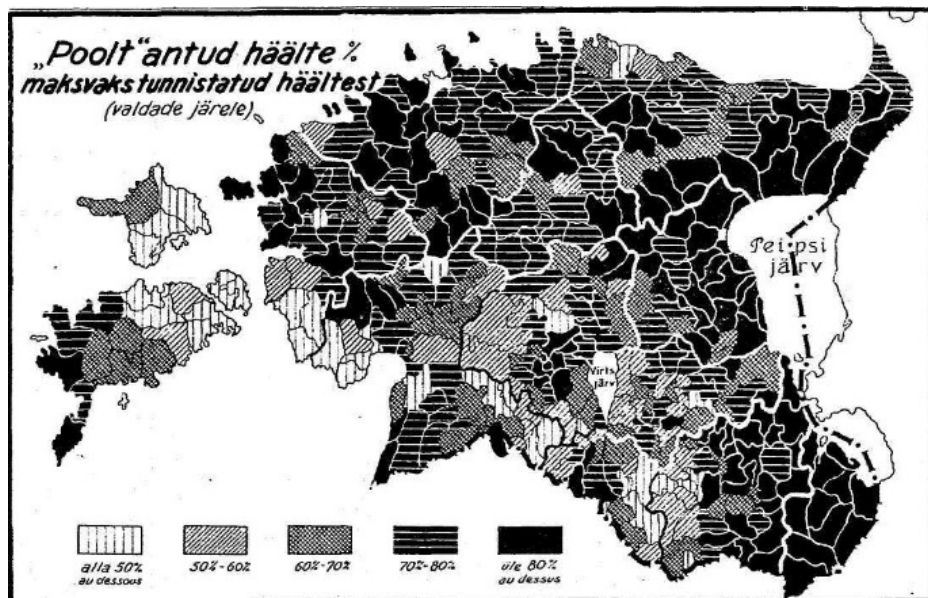


Figure 2. Results of the referendum, held on February 17–19, 1923 in Estonia. Share of votes, casted in support of religious instruction in communes. *Source: Eesti Statistika, 1923, no 14(3), p. 74.*

Three different voting patterns may be distinguished in the referendum:

- 1. Urban settlements (towns and boroughs):** the results of the referendum correlated heavily with the support for leftist parties in the following general elections (in May 5–7, 1923).
- 2. Ethnic minority communes:** exceptionally high turnout and nearly consensual support for religious education.
- 3. Communes with ethnic Estonian majority:** remarkable variation in both turnout levels and support for religious education. Election results correlated there with the religious composition of communes and support for the leftist parties. Regional patterns are evident: support levels for religious instruction were higher in Northern and especially in Eastern Estonia, while most of the communes where the opponents of religious education prevailed, were situated in the western and southern parts of the country.

¹²⁹ The following analysis deals only with the aspects of the results which are relevant for this study. For a more comprehensive analysis, see Gortfelder 2021a and 2021b.

Urban settlements

There were 13 towns and 18 rural towns (boroughs, *alevid*) in 1923 in Estonia. Supporting the bill in towns correlated negatively with the support for leftist¹³⁰ political parties (-0.70). In small towns with no remarkable industry and with low support for leftist parties, supporters of religious education got convincing victories (Rakvere 84.8%, Haapsalu 81.7%). In bigger and more industrialized towns, to the contrary, the share of 'yes' votes was remarkably lower (Narva 56.8%, Pärnu 54.0%, Valga 57.1%). However, in the capital city, Tallinn, which was a major industrial hub and support base for the radical left, 68% of the voters still supported religious instruction. Such surprising result may be linked to high support for religious instruction in nearby rural communes.

However, there were significant differences across the neighbourhoods in the cities. In Tallinn, the lowest support for religious instruction was in the polling stations of Kalamaja, a district, which was inhabited by industrial workers (15. station in Telliskivi street – 46.2%; 2. station in Vabriku street – 52.1%.) The latter was also the only station in the city where less than 50% of the voters turned out.¹³¹ Also, in Narva, less than a half of voters in workers' districts voted supported religious instruction (*Kreenholm* – 34.1%, *Kalevi- ja linavabrik* – 45.5%), while in the city centre, 79.3% did so.¹³²

Boroughs were smaller settlements that emerged at the end of the 19th century, mostly around parochial churches, some railway stations and small industrial plants. They were inhabited by petty shopkeepers and craftsmen, as well as workers and landless odd-jobbers. According to the Act of Boroughs, adopted by Provisional Government of Russia in 1917, some of them (usually the bigger ones) were granted the rights of separate administrative unit.¹³³ In those settlements, support for religious instruction was usually below the average, and the correlation between voting for leftist parties and opposing religious education was especially high (0.87). In some cases, voting against religious education in boroughs reflects the strength of the organized labour movement. Remarkably, in Sindi, where the majority of the voters worked for the local textile plant, 90% of the voters casted the vote, and only 24% supported religious instruction. In following general elections leftist parties garnered 89% of the vote there. Similarly can the outcome of the referendum be explained in Kunda, the borough in Virumaa, which had emerged around a cement factory – 44.1% voted in favour

¹³⁰ Here combined support of the parties which appealed to vote against religious instruction, which were all, more or less, leftist in orientation: Eesti Sotsiaal-demokraatiline Töölise Partei, Iseseisev Sotsialistlik Töölispartei, Tööerakond, and Töörahva Ühine Väerind.

¹³¹ The calculations are based on data from Päewaleht, 20.02.1923, p. 2; The locations of the polling stations of Tallinn can be found in Päewaleht, 18.02.1923, p. 3.

¹³² The calculations are based on data from Põhja Kodu, 20.02.1923, p. 1.

¹³³ Uuet 2002, 27–28.

of religious instruction, and 2/3 voted later for the leftist parties.¹³⁴ Surprising, however, is the result from Kärddla (Hiiumaa island), where the voters, mostly workers of the local broadcloth plant, supported religious instruction by a wide margin (63.7%), while three months later, 57.5% voted for hard left (*Töörahva Ühine Väerind*). The result is even more surprising if taken into account that the rest of Hiiumaa was one of the most significant strongholds of opponents of religious instruction.

Negative attitudes to religious education may be explained by means of the social composition of the population also in the boroughs with no significant industry. A remarkable share of their population was made up of landless people, who were employed in the summer in nearby farms and often had almost no employment during the winter. Such boroughs were often hubs of poverty and social problems. Previous studies from Western European countries have shown that marginalized people were often religiously indifferent or seldom practising but also cynical about all social institutions, including religious ones.¹³⁵ However, in the case of Estonia, it is noteworthy that turnout in the religious instruction referendum was usually rather high in boroughs. Interestingly, the Christian People's Party was also significantly popular in many boroughs in the following *Riigikogu* elections, including in some of those where a majority voted for leftist parties and support for religious instruction had been weak (Kunda 10.9%, Tõrva 11.1%).

Over 90% was the support for religious instruction only in boroughs with ethnic Russian majority – in Kallaste (98.3%) and Mustvee (95.4%), both with strong Old Believers' presence. Very high (86.4%) was the share of 'yes' votes also in the small borough of Võõpsu. It was situated on the ethnic border of Estonians and Setus, in a region remarkable for significant support for religious instruction. Remarkably, the Christian People's Party gained 17.0% of the vote also in Võõpsu in following general elections. Higher than the national average was the support for religious instruction also in Jõhvi (78.0%), Nõmme (76.7%) and Jõgeva (72.8%). However, two last of them were also remarkable for very low turnout (respectively 47.9% and 54.8%).

National Minority Communes

According to the data of 1922 census,¹³⁶ 87.6% of the population of newly independent Republic of Estonia were Estonians. The largest national minority, Russians (8.2% of population) was a heterogenous ethnic group, consisting both of illiterate peasants and emigrants from Soviet Russia (who were often representatives of educated and formerly wealthy classes). Most of Germans (1.7%) and Jews (0.4%) lived in urban areas.¹³⁷ Swedes (0.7%) inhabited several small

¹³⁴ In fact, the support for the left was even higher, as more than 1/5 of the votes were spoiled in Kunda. Namely, the pro-communist hard left (*Töörahva Ühine Väerind*) had been denied the right to run in Virumaa and called therefore upon their supporters to spoil the ballots.

¹³⁵ McLeod 2000, 86–94.

¹³⁶ Data is derived from 1922. aasta üldrahvalugemise... 1924, vol. II, pp. 64–65.

¹³⁷ Pullat 1978, 138.

islands, but also some rural communes near to town of Haapsalu. Latvian minority lived predominantly by the southern border. At the right bank of the Narva river lived Ingrian Finns and other Baltic Fennic ethnicities.

Besides that, in Petserimaa lived Setus, who were generally regarded as ethnic Estonians. According to 1922 census, 15,033 of them was registered in Petserimaa (26.5% of the county population).¹³⁸ The Setus spoke a dialect that was not easily intelligible by standard Estonian speakers¹³⁹ and were, unlike the majority of other Estonians, Orthodox. Importantly, referendum voting patterns in Setu majority communes were similar to that of other ethnic minorities, differing sharply from ethnic Estonian communes.

National minorities constituted the majority of the population in 23 rural communes of Estonia. Six of those were Swedish, five Setu and twelve Russian communes. Besides that, Russians had a majority in the town of Petseri (Pechory) and in two boroughs at the coast of Lake Peipus – Kallaste and Mustvee. The average turnout in the ethnic minority administrative units was 79.2%, and teaching religious instruction in public primary schools was supported by 93.8% of the voters. There were no significant differences across ethnic lines. Only in four ethnic minority communes was the support level below 90% – in Senno (Russian-majority 88.0%), Pakri (Swedish, 87.3%), Paslepa (Swedish with considerable Estonian minority, 84.4%), and Narva (77.0%). Last one of them was an Orthodox-majority (63%, mostly Russian) commune with a remarkable Lutheran minority (29%, mostly Ingrian Finns).

The nearly consensual support of ethnic minorities to religious instruction is probably related to the importance of religious identity for them. They often lived in peripheral areas, which lagged in terms of modernization. Petserimaa is a prime example of it, with widespread illiteracy and poverty, the importance of pre-modern folk culture, as well as religious practices. Tellingly, on one occasion, parents of the children attending a Setu primary school were highly critical of the curriculum, arguing that only literacy and religious instruction were necessary for their children.¹⁴⁰ In a similar vein, some Setus reportedly demanded that their children should be taught in Russian, not in Estonian, as they were “Russians according to their faith”.¹⁴¹ But also in other areas populated by minorities, religious identities may have prevailed over ethnic ones. It is especially true for the Russian Old Believers in Peipus region, for whom Orthodox Russians were as alien as ethnic Estonians.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ See Setumaa 1928, 42. According to the data of the next, 1934 census 13,438 Setus lived in Petserimaa (20.8% of the county population). *Rahvastiku koostis ja...* 1935, 1 and 47.

¹³⁹ According to a report of an ethnic Estonian teacher working in Petserimaa, it was a very serious obstacle in teaching: EAA 2102-2-1115, 68v. See also: Kalkun 2015, 198.

¹⁴⁰ EAA 2102-2-1115, 62 (trainee teacher report from Meremäe primary school, 1926); Compare Setumaa: *maadeteaduslik, tulunduslik...* 1928, 101.

¹⁴¹ Setumaa: *maadeteaduslik, tulunduslik...* 1928, 101; see also Kalkun 2015, 202, and Elu, 16.11.1938, p. 6.

¹⁴² *Plaat* 2005, 13-14.

Ethnic Estonian Communes

The overwhelming majority of communes in Estonia were populated almost entirely by ethnic Estonians.¹⁴³ Other ethnicities – mostly Baltic Germans – usually made up only 1–3% of the commune population. Only in thirteen Estonian-majority communes was the share of ethnic minorities (Russians, Swedes or Latvians) higher than 10%. The voting results in those communes did not differ significantly from those of other ethnic Estonian majority communes. The turnout of the referendum in ethnic Estonian majority communes was 67.1%, and average support for religious education was 70.8%, both close to the national average.

As shown before, during the campaign, bourgeoisie parties more or less supported religious instruction, while leftist parties urged voters to vote against it. Besides that, some non-Lutheran religious leaders expressed their doubts about the bill. Thus, it is not surprising that support for religious instruction in ethnic Estonian communes correlates negatively with the support for the four left-wing parties and positively with the ratio of Lutherans in the commune population.

1) Impact of religious composition

Overall, in 1922, there were 19 ethnic Estonian communes, out of which the Orthodox constituted the majority of the population, all of them in former Livland (Setu communes not included here). Other faiths and persons “without faith” made up only a tiny minority of the population in all Estonian-majority communes. However, especially the influence of the free churches was presumably somewhat higher than the census data suggests, as many people who frequented their religious meetings had not formally left the Lutheran church.

The results of the referendum reflect divisions among the religious minorities, with a considerable part of them evidently voting against religious education. Importantly, the share of non-Lutherans in the commune correlates moderately negatively with support for religious instruction in the referendum (-0.49). Of nineteen ethnic Estonian communes with the Orthodox majority, the opponents of religious education prevailed in twelve. The average share of the ‘yes’ votes in the ethnic Estonian Orthodox-majority communes (46.6%) was considerably lower than the national mean, while the average turnout there (63.4%) was not significantly different from other communes. However, across the Orthodox-majority communes, remarkable differences in voting patterns occurred. While the correlation between the share of non-Lutherans in the commune population and support for religious education was especially high in Saaremaa county, it was much lower in Pärnumaa, where in three outlying Orthodox-majority communes (Häädemeeste, Laiksaare, Orajõe) the share of ‘yes’ votes was even above the national average. Such divergencies (also evident, to a lesser extent, in the case of Orthodox-majority communes of Valgamaa) are probably explainable by the stances of local opinion leaders, especially Orthodox priests. Besides that, it seems that also earlier experience of interconfessional relations mattered. Pre-

¹⁴³ To reiterate, in this section, the notion of “ethnic Estonians” excludes Setus.

sumably, these were more tense exactly in Saaremaa, where Orthodox voters tended to oppose religious instruction more than elsewhere.¹⁴⁴ However, also at the level of individual communes, there seems not to have been often a clear-cut consensus among the ethnic Estonian Orthodox population about how to vote. For instance, on the island of Kihnu, where virtually all the population was Orthodox, 1/3 of the voters supported religious education.

Divergent opinions among ethnic Estonian Orthodox believers are notable, regarding that Orthodox Russians and Setus, as shown previously, voted in unison in support of religious instruction. The different voting patterns reflect deep ethnic cleavage inside the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church.¹⁴⁵

Besides that, the remarkable defeat of supporters of religious education in three communes of four in Hiiumaa island is most probably linked to the influence of free churches, although according to the census data a sizable majority of the population in all of them was still nominally Lutheran. Yet at the end of the 1920s, Emmaste commune was rather exceptional in the scale of the whole of Estonia in that a remarkable part of the children did not take part in the religious instruction classes (in one of the schools even as much as 70% opted out).¹⁴⁶ It is known that before the referendum, several free congregations-related “itinerant preachers” agitated against voting in support for religious instruction at public schools.¹⁴⁷ They may well have been able to convince also many conservative Lutherans, who were worried that the newly introduced religious instruction would not be based on their interpretation of the faith.

2) Impact of Political Preferences (Voting for the Left).

There were four political parties, representing social democracy (*Eesti Sotsiaaldemokraatiline Tööliste Partei*), radical left (*Eesti Iseseisev Sotsialistlik Tööliste Partei, Tööraha Ühine Väerind*) and non-Marxist “bourgeois radical”¹⁴⁸ ideology (*Tööerakond*), whose representatives had urged to vote against religious instruction. The sum of the support for all four parties in the following general elections correlates with the support of religious instruction significantly. Still, there were also communes with high support for *both* religious instruction and leftist parties (for example, Kuigatsi, Krabi, Koorküla).¹⁴⁹

3) Regional Differences

3.1. Former Governorate Divide

Significantly different were the results in the northern and southern parts of the country, which had belonged until 1917 to two separate governorates of Tsarist

¹⁴⁴ Vihuri 1997. About divisions based on religious identities in Saaremaa, see also Ränk 2010, 112–113. About alleged prejudices against the Orthodox there, see Usk ja Elu 1923, no 3, pp. 2–3.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Schvak 2015, 57; Rimestad 2012, 96–104.

¹⁴⁶ Eesti Kirik, 31.12.1929, p. 410–411.

¹⁴⁷ Meie Kirik, 31.01.1923, p. 36.

¹⁴⁸ Gortfelder 2021b, 774.

¹⁴⁹ For more on the impact of political preferences, see Gortfelder 2021a, 76–77.

Russia – respectively Estland and Livland. In former Estland, the turnout of the referendum in rural areas was 70.6% and support for religious education 75.2%, in former Livland respectively 65.8% and 68.3%. Of ethnic Estonian communes with a share of support for religious education of over 90%, fourteen were situated in former Estland and thirteen in Livland. However, only seven of the 35 communes, where the majority of voters opposed the religious instruction, were situated in northern Estonia.¹⁵⁰ These differences are related to the fact that ethnic Estonian Orthodox lived mostly in southern Estonia, and besides that also leftist parties garnered more votes there.¹⁵¹ On the other hand, the North was economically and culturally less developed, and, importantly, also the influence of Herrnhutians was much stronger in the North, making people more sympathetic towards the church. Bruno Eberhard, a pastor who came from southern Estonia but worked later as a pastor in northern Estonia and, besides that, had taught religion in both parts of the country, stated: “Despite the small size of our homeland, its religious life is not uniform. Northern Estonia is much deeper, more sensitive and sympathetic in religious matters than southern Estonia. In southern Estonia, a teacher of religion often needs to explain the importance of religious instruction, it is necessary to apologetically defend the need for religious instruction and the necessity of a religious worldview. In northern Estonia, there is no objection to religion as such, here we have to build on the already existing religious basis.”¹⁵²

3.2. Outlying Regions

3.2.1. High Support

- a) Especially high was the share of ‘yes’ votes in the communes of Eastern Estonia (around Lake Peipus).** Noteworthy is that in the case of ethnic Estonian communes of Southern Virumaa and Eastern Võrumaa, religious instruction was supported usually by over 80%, but often even by over 90% of the voters (the result comparable to the ethnic Russian communes nearby). Rather high was the support also in many communes of Eastern Tartumaa, but with significantly lower turnout. In those areas, encounters of Lutheran Estonians with Orthodox Setus and Russians, or Russian-speaking Old Believers, were common.
- b) Other ethnic Estonian communes with higher than 90% share of the ‘yes’ votes are scattered around Northern Estonia** (former Governorate of

¹⁵⁰ In turn, six of these seven communes were situated in the parts of Lääne county, which were known for religious dissent.

¹⁵¹ Combined support for the left-wing parties (ESDTP, EISTP, Töörahva Ühine Väerind and Tööerakond) in general elections of 1923 was 33.6% in former Estland and 45.2% in former Livland.

¹⁵² „Kodumaa väiksuse peale vaatamata ei ole tema usuolu ühtlane. Põhja-Eesti on usulistes küsimustes palju sügavam, tundelikum ja osavõtlikum kui Lõuna-Eesti. Lõuna-Eestis on usuõpetajal tihti tarvis ära seletada usuõpetuse tähtsust, on vaja apologetiliselt kaitsta usuõpetuse vajadust ja usulise ilmavaate tarvilikkust. Põhja-Eestis ei vaielda usu kui niisuguse vastu, siin tuleb juba olemasolevale usualusele edasi ehitada.” Eesti Kirik, 03.04.1930, p. 99.

Estland) and are often known as Herrnhutian strongholds (Kiiu, Nabala, Oru, Riisipere).

- c) **Smaller clusters of communes with moderately high support may be found in different parts of both Northern and Southern Estonia** (Western Saaremaa, around Haapsalu, around Rakvere, around Viljandi, North-Western Pärnumaa, etc.).

3.2.2. Low support

Three clusters of regions with a concentration of low support for religious instruction are discernible:

- 1) **A compact area in Western Estonia:** most of the Hiiumaa island, Eastern Saaremaa, a part of the South-Western coast of Pärnumaa. Low support is presumably related to religious motivation (Orthodox, influence of dissenting free congregations).
- 2) **A part of Mulgimaa.** Low support supposedly related to socio-economic reasons and class conflicts – there was also strong support for leftist parties, including hard left.
- 3) **An area on the border of Valga and Võru counties.** In the western part of the area, there are Orthodox-majority communes. In the eastern part, the outcome is not easily explainable. Some communes with low support for religious instruction in Southern Tartumaa may also be related to that cluster.

Besides that, it is conspicuous that several communes in different parts of the country voted against religious instruction (or very narrowly in support of it), while the share of ‘yes’ votes in all the neighbouring communes was close to average or even above it. In some cases, voters in rural boroughs (*alevikud*) presumably tilted the outcome (for example, in Kohila, Elva, Tsirguliina).

Some interpretations

A thorough quantitative analysis of the referendum results, as well as some possible interpretations, have been provided by Mark Gortfelder.¹⁵³ Here only some additional remarks should be added that are relevant to this study:

1. Comparison of indicators of ecclesiastical statistics with the voting results would be a major contribution, helping to find out to what extent the referendum results reflect the secularization process in Estonia. Noteworthy is in that respect the fact that participation in Lutheran Holy Communion in the year 1922 was indeed higher in the deaneries with generally solid support for religious instruction, such as Lääne-Harju (51.9%), Ida-Harju (39.4%), Lääne (45.4%), and Narva-Alutaguse (40.2%), while the average in Estonia was 31.8%.¹⁵⁴

2. Notable is that support for religious instruction was relatively low in the polling stations of the army.¹⁵⁵ There was a conscript army in Estonia. Therefore,

¹⁵³ Gortfelder 2021a, 2021b.

¹⁵⁴ Reiman 1930, 729.

¹⁵⁵ In Tallinn, only 49.8% voters in the army polling station supported religious instruction – Päewaleht, 20.02.1923, p. 2. However, the results were significantly different across the parti-

it can be assumed that the preferences of those in active service could be generalized to all young men in Estonia.¹⁵⁶

3. As for educated people, it is telling that, at least in some cases, local intelligentsia seems to have been notably less supportive of religious instruction than the population at large. For instance, in the parish congress in Jüri, the delegates who represented local folk school teachers, commune clerks and voluntary associations, were evenly divided in the question of religious instruction.¹⁵⁷ However, in the following referendum, respectively, 95.2% (Nabala), 76% (Rae) and 71.5% (Kurna) of the voters in the communes of the parish supported the re-introduction of religious instruction to the public primary schools. In a newspaper report about a similar congress in Räpina, it was noted that younger deputies found the church to be intolerant and argued that knowledge about different religions ought to be taught at religious instruction classes, while older deputies “defended Christianity and the church.” The fierce arguments lasted for two hours; in the end, the decision was made in favour of religious education.¹⁵⁸

4. The lack of correlation between socioeconomic indicators and the voting results is possibly explainable by means of the low level of stratification among the peasantry, even though differences in income and status were slowly becoming more relevant. However, common dislike of the German lords of the manor still united different strata of peasants at the beginning of the 20th century.

cular army units. For example, in Harjumaa units support for religious instruction was as follows: Harjumaa Rannapatarei 31.0%, Naissaare 40.9%, Inseneripataljon 45.7%, Aegna 64.5%. (Own calculations, based on ERA 80-1-1976.)

¹⁵⁶ On the other hand, the fact of being in military service could in itself have influenced the voting results. Lucien Hölscher, writing about the situation in Germany, has named military officers among the professions that tended to be indifferent or critical of the church (Hölscher 2005, 307–308). In some Estonian autobiographical writings dating back to that time, military service is also characterized as an environment distant from faith: “Religiously, it was without a doubt the emptiest society I have ever been in. It seemed that faith and the church did not exist for these people at all, a lifestyle that knew nothing of faith prevailed.” (“Usuliselt oli see kahtlemata kõige lagedam ühiskond, kus ma kunagi elus olen viibinud. Usku ja kirikut ei näinud sellel rahval üldse olemas olevat, valitses elustiil, mis usust midagi ei teadnud.” Raudsepp 1982, 39). However, Tõnis Nõmmik’s research on military chaplains does not confirm the general spread of anti-church sentiments in the Estonian army. He only mentions that there was a “small but influential” circle of neo-pagan Taara faith inheritors among the senior officers. On the other hand, the role of the church in military life was mainly ceremonial according to Nõmmik, as religious interests were not common among the military. (Nõmmik 2006, especially 109 and 131–132). On the other hand, the result could also be influenced by the political sentiment prevailing in the military units. In this regard, the exceptionally overwhelming (69–85%) support of Tartu military units for religious education is noteworthy, while in the voting station of the 2nd division headquarters located in the same city the support was only 43% (Own calculations, based on ERA 80-1-1972).

¹⁵⁷ Päewaleht, 11.01.1923, p. 5.

¹⁵⁸ Postimees, 11.01.1923, p. 4. The deputies represented voluntary associations operating in the parish (Postimees, 05.01.1923, p. 5), but in the first day of the congress also all university students who came from the parish, were granted voting rights. Besides that, all local adult residents as well as secondary school students could take part after paying a small fee and were granted the right of speech. (Postimees, 09.01.1923, p. 5)

Besides that, most of the farms were small in size and, therefore, used paid labour only irregularly. In those farms, where it was used, though, the status difference between the farmer's family members and the labourers was yet rarely emphasized.¹⁵⁹ However, in some exceptional areas, there were already remarkable class differences noticeable in rural Estonia, and those might have also had an impact on the referendum results. According to the data from 1881–83, presented by Gea Troska, household members and paid labourers still ate dinner together around the same table almost everywhere in Southern Estonia at that time. Only in parishes of Paistu, Helme and Halliste was separate dining already widespread (respectively in 79%, 29% and 20% of all farmer households).¹⁶⁰ Interestingly, in the communes of two of these parishes – namely Halliste and Helme – the majority of the voters usually voted against religious instruction or only narrowly in support of it. There are also several reports about class-based political tensions in these parishes.¹⁶¹ Also, it is worth noticing that of only fourteen Estonian rural communes, where the radical left *Tööraha Ühine Väerind* garnered more than 30% of the votes in the 1923 general elections, five were situated in Halliste and one in Helme. Therefore, it cannot be ruled out that class tensions in these particular parishes indeed influenced the outcome of the referendum.

5. Calculations of activity of participation in the national movement from the end of the 19th century provide some insights.¹⁶² Nearly all the authors emphasize more active participation in Southern Estonia (Livland) than in Northern Estonia (Estland), while the western parts of the country lagged most behind. It is also remarkable that Viljandimaa, which was by far the most active county during the so-called national awakening period (roughly, the 1860s–1880s), had the lowest turnout during the religious instruction referendum of 1923.

2.2. ESTONIAN CASE STUDIES

The five case studies represent five regional clusters of the referendum of 1923, and its results in Lutheran-majority parts of the country:

Haljala parish (Viru deanery of EELC, Viru county, Aaspere, Haljala, Varangu, and Vihula communes, a part of Käsmu commune) is exceptional in the whole of Northern Estonia for low support for religious instruction. The parish stood out for the high activity of national movement in the 19th century, which was also very unusual for Northern Estonia.

¹⁵⁹ Jansen 2007, 280–285.

¹⁶⁰ Referred in Jansen 2007, 285. Sadly, similar data from later time appears not to be available.

¹⁶¹ Pärnumaa maadeteaduslik, tulunduslik... 1930, 203; Soosaar 2013, 15 and 51.

¹⁶² Methods of different authors (Ea Jansen, Ants Viires, Mart Laar) vary, but usually their estimations are based on participation in the activity of nationalist societies, reading and contributing to the nationalist newspapers, participation in the campaign of collecting folklore, donating to the nationalist causes, especially for establishing Estonian-language secondary school (*Aleksandrikool*), etc. See Laar 2006, 167–217.

Halliste parish (Pärnu deanery of EELC, Pärnu county, Abja, Kaarli, Penuja, Pornuse, Uue-Kariste, Vana-Kariste communes) represents another cluster of low support for religious instruction in wealthy Mulgimaa region, where the referendum results might have been related to class and political tensions. Also, remarkable from the point of view of secularization are low indicators of religious practice and serious internal conflicts in the congregation.

Jüri parish (Ida-Harju deanery of EELC, Harju county, Kurna, Rae, and Nabala communes) is an example of a North Estonian parish with high support for religious instruction. There were also remarkable internal differences in voting results. Notably, in one of its communes, Nabala, which was known for its Herrnhutian heritage, support for religious instruction was nearly consensual.

Karuse and Varbla parishes (Lääne deanery of EELC, Lääne county, mainly Paadremaa, Paatsalu, and Saulepi communes) were selected for their record low support for religious instruction in Paatsalu commune (13%). The chapter covers two parishes, because part of Paatsalu belonged to Karuse and another part to Varbla; both were small and had similar socioeconomic backgrounds. The parishes represent a wider area on the coast of Western Estonia, where a majority voted against religious instruction.

Vastseliina parish (Võru deanery of EELC, Võru county, Lasva, Loosi, Misso, Orava, and Vastseliina communes) represents the belt on the ethnic (Estonian vs Setu and Russian) and confessional (Lutheran vs Orthodox) border region with overwhelming (often more than 90%) support for religious instruction.

2.2.1. HALJALA PARISH

Introduction

Historiography

Overview written by the local *köster* **Gustav Sandberg**¹⁶³ is a valuable source of the history of the parish. It is based partially on written sources but largely on a large amount of oral information provided by locals, as well as the author's own impressions and observations. Professional historian **Enn Tarvel** has written a thorough and reliable overview of the history of the parish. However, it ends with the second half of the 19th century.¹⁶⁴ Recently a comprehensive collection of writings about the history of the parish has been published, which consists also a valuable overview of the sources and previous research.¹⁶⁵ **Margit Nirgi** has written a bilingual overview in Estonian and German languages of the Chapel of Esku, which also includes some information about religious life in other parts of the parish.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Sandberg 1959.

¹⁶⁴ Tarvel 1989.

¹⁶⁵ Karmin *et al.* 2017.

¹⁶⁶ Nirgi 2016.

General Overview

Within the parish, the coastal area differed markedly from the inland due to its livelihood (small-scale farming combined with fishing) and its openness to the wider world. Firstly, there were regular contacts with the islanders of Finland, which involved the bartering of grain and fish (*sõbrakaubandus, sepralaitos*). Secondly, especially Vainupea and Karepa had become summer resorts. The holidaymakers included earlier some wealthy people from St. Petersburg and Moscow, later representatives of the cultural elite of the newly independent Republic of Estonia. Thirdly, there were traditions of ship-building and long-distance seafaring, especially in Käsmu.¹⁶⁷ Besides that, the heritage of trade and smuggling in the coastal area is worth mentioning. Especially active was the smuggling of alcohol during the Finnish Law of Prohibition (1919–32).¹⁶⁸

Religious Background

Lutheran church had a nearly monopolistic position in Haljala.¹⁶⁹ There was no Orthodox church in the parish, and also the influence of free churches remained marginal.¹⁷⁰ Herrnhutians had been active only in the vicinity of the village of Haljala. In 1846, they had built their meetinghouse there, but their importance declined at the end of the century – partly probably due to conflicts with pastor Willingen. Pastor Nurm had reportedly tried to revive its activities but with no lasting success.¹⁷¹

Pastors

Konstantin Leodimir Willingen (in office **1880–1914**, lived 1848–1941) had a reputation of excessively demanding and unfriendly clergyman who had conflicts with the locals based on economic interests.¹⁷²

Martin Nurm (in office **1915–39**, lived 1870–1943) was son of an Estonian peasant and had earlier served as a pastor in Avinurme 1903–15. According to *köster* Gustav Sandberg, who appears himself to have had close relations with the pastor, Nurm was well received in Haljala as he was an ethnic Estonian and remained popular for being a good-humoured, sociable person, as well as a skilled orator. Unlike the previous pastors, he had allowed people to walk through the yard of the pastorate and use water from its spring. Besides that, he introduced services with the Holy Communion during New Year's Eve as well as cemetery festivities (*surnuaiapäihad*), both of which proved popular with people.¹⁷³ On the other hand, Nurm had a reputation for being close to Germans, which provoked

¹⁶⁷ Karmin *et al.* 2017, 239–262

¹⁶⁸ Pullat and Pullat 2011, Sandberg 1959, 60.

¹⁶⁹ According to the data of 1922 census, Lutherans constituted 97.8% of the population in Aaspere commune, 95.7% in Haljala commune, 97.4% in Varangu commune, and 97.2% in Vihula commune.

¹⁷⁰ Sandberg 1959, 105.

¹⁷¹ Sandberg 1959, 101.

¹⁷² Sandberg 1959, 112–113; Nirgi 2016, 89.

¹⁷³ Sandberg 1959, 114.

political controversies. He was a member of Baltic German Neobaltia student corporation and had married a German lady Erna Meuschen, whose father was a secondary school director in Riga.¹⁷⁴

Results of 1923 Referendum

Table 1. Support for Religious Instruction Across Polling Stations in Haljala Parish

Commune	Polling station
Aaspere 75.8%	Aaspere 75.8%
Haljala 73.2%	Haljala I 68.5% Põdruse 81.3%
Palmse ¹⁷⁵ 66.5%	Käsmu 74.8%
Varangu 52.5%	Kandle 60.5% Karepa 39.2% Varangu 55.4%
Vihula 46.9%	Karula 45% Kavastu 41.7% Vainopea 36.5% Vergi 52.3% Vihula 48.6%

Source: own calculations, based on minutes of electoral commissions (ERA 80-1-1981).

While overall support for religious instruction in the parish was exceptionally low for Northern Estonia, there were remarkable differences across the communes. In the communes of Aaspere and Haljala, support for religious instruction was close to the national average, and in the Põdruse polling station of this commune, it was even significantly higher. Quite probably it was related to the Herrnhutian heritage of this part of the parish.

On the other hand, support levels were exceptionally low in Vihula and Varangu communes. Especially noteworthy is the low support in coastal polling stations (Vainupea and Karepa). Notably, the opposition to religious instruction was strong in some other coastal areas as well – particularly in Hiiumaa and South-Western Estonia, but also in several, though not most, polling stations in coastal Harjumaa.¹⁷⁶ It raises the question of whether something in coastal community life or culture could, in certain circumstances, make people susceptible to anticler-

¹⁷⁴ Karmin *et al.* 2017, 164.

¹⁷⁵ Most of the Palmse commune belonged to the parish of Kadrina. Only the surroundings of Käsmu were part of Haljala parish.

¹⁷⁶ See ERA 80-1-1976.

rical attitudes.¹⁷⁷ Interesting, however, is relatively strong support for religious instruction in another coastal area, in the westernmost exclave of Haljala parish around Käsmu, which is surrounded by Kadrina parish.¹⁷⁸ Notably, in 1937, the church was also involved in the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the local seamen's association there. "During the celebrations, several sailors said that they would not dare to sail out of the harbour without hope in God because a sailor is in God's hands every moment," was noted in the annual report of the dean of Viru.¹⁷⁹

Religious Life

Individual Practice

According to *köster* Gustav Sandberg, participation in Sunday services used to be high before the revolution of 1905. The old and small church was usually packed, and latecomers had to stand during the service. True, going to church was arguably seen rather as participation in a social gathering and therefore it is not necessarily an indicator of widespread piety. Sandberg notes that many people were mostly interested in announcements – and following socializing in the pub (*kõrts*). After the 1905 revolution, church attendance declined abruptly; in 1915, as the new pastor Nurm arrived to serve the parish, it rose again, but only for a short time.¹⁸⁰ Kustav Weinmann, *köster* of Esku chapel, in turn, noted that attendance of services dropped significantly there after Estonia gained independence, and about half of the services were not held due to lack of faithful hereafter.¹⁸¹

On regular Sundays, still about 10% of the parishioners took part of the Sunday service in 1922, while during Christmas, New Year's Eve, and Pentecost the church was full.¹⁸² In 1921, 1/5 of all communicants were registered for New Year's Eve service¹⁸³ and in 1924, Nurm noted that according to common

¹⁷⁷ A note of a teacher, who worked in Leesi (Kuusalu parish in Ida-Harju deanery), seems to hint at it: "The fisherman does not care much about God and faith, some children are even forbidden to attend classes of religion. The small chapel, where I played the organ on Sundays, was mostly empty". („Jumalast ja usust ei hooli kalur palju, mõnele lapsele isegi keelatakse ilmuda usuõpetuse tundi. Veike kabelike, kus pühapäeviti orelit mängisin, seisis enamasti tühjalt", ERA 1830-1-240, p. 176).

¹⁷⁸ Kadrina had a reputation of a pious parish and a strong Herrnhutian legacy. See the annual reports of the parish in EELKKA.

¹⁷⁹ "Pidustustel tähendas nii mõnigi merimees, et nad ilma lootuseta Jumala peale sadamast välja sõita ei julge, sest et merimees seisvat iga silmapilk Jumala käes." EELKKA, Viru praosti aruanne 1937.

¹⁸⁰ Sandberg 1959, 102. Also Aleksander Timm in his history of Pehka village claims that going to church was a rooted tradition in the Haljala parish at the beginning of the 20th century, although the local people were not particularly religious (only a few "prayed, read and sang" also at home). Even people from coastal villages located 15–18 kilometres away from the church used to attend. (ERM KV 489, pp. 111–114)

¹⁸¹ Nirgi 2016, 90.

¹⁸² EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded 1922, Haljala koguduse aruanne.

¹⁸³ EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded 1921, Haljala koguduse aruanne. In 1937, dean Beermann remarked that in the whole deanery, many parishioners were accustomed to taking

understanding among the locals, it sufficed for a religious person to go to the church a couple of times a year and have Communion once a year.¹⁸⁴ In 1940, the church attendance was, according to the new pastor, Talvar, already significantly lower – 2.5% on regular Sundays and only 10% on the feast days.¹⁸⁵

According to statistics of church rites, Haljala was not significantly different from the other parishes of the deanery. However, the number of baptisms started to decline after civil registration was introduced. In the annual report for 1932, dean Beermann noted: “Our nation is probably not going to die out, but the congregations are going to die out, which means that many children probably remain unbaptized. The number of births and baptisms is already for the fourth year in a row the lowest in Haljala compared to other parishes, but so low it has not been yet.”¹⁸⁶ Next year, he added: “Regarding births, the difference between the ecclesiastical and statistical data is quite large. This is partly because baptism notifications are not brought to the pastor, or the children are left unbaptized, thinking that everything is fine with “naming” the child [i.e., civil registration].”¹⁸⁷

In 1939, according to the data of the dean, 758 people born in the whole of deanery were registered by pastors (of those, there were 24 stillbirths and 734 baptized babies), but 83 people were registered by secular clerks.¹⁸⁸ However, it does not necessarily mean that more than 1/10 of the children in the deanery remained unbaptized, as several of them were probably baptized later; in the year 1940, allegedly as many as 1/3 of the children were baptized when they were already more than one year old.¹⁸⁹ Pastor Nurm explained in 1935 that baptisms in his own parish were sometimes simply postponed as it was not always possible to arrange family celebrations soon after the child was born. On the other hand, he rushed to insist that people still appreciated religious importance of baptism and the rite was not less important for them than the following party.¹⁹⁰

Secular weddings also began to spread during the interwar years. Drawing on the data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, dean Beermann argued that in 1938, there were 359 church marriages and 111 marriages registered by the

Communion either on Good Friday, Memorial Day of the Dead (the last Sunday before the Advent Sunday), or New Year’s Eve. In case there were bad weather conditions these days, the yearly number of communicants was also considerably smaller. EELKKA, Viru praosti aruanne 1937, p. 22.

¹⁸⁴ EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded 1924, Haljala koguduse aruanne.

¹⁸⁵ EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded 1940, Haljala koguduse aruanne.

¹⁸⁶ „Meie rahvas vist ei hakka välja surema, aga kogudused hakkavad välja surema, tähendab: vist jäävad mitmed lapsed ristimata. Sündinute ja ristitute arv on juba neljas aasta teiste kogudustega võrreldes kõigemadalam Haljalas, aga nii madal ta veel ei ole olnud.” EELKKA, Viru praosti aruanne 1932.

¹⁸⁷ „Sündinute kohta on vahe kiriku ja statistika andmete vahel kaunis suur. See on osalt sellest tingitud, et ristimisedeleid ei tooda õpetaja kätte, ehk jäätakse lapsed ristimata, arvates, et „nimepanemisega” on kõik korras.” EELKKA, Viru praosti aruanne 1933.

¹⁸⁸ EELKKA, Viru praosti aruanne 1939.

¹⁸⁹ EELKKA, Viru praosti aruanne 1940.

¹⁹⁰ EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded 1935, Haljala koguduse aruanne.

secular clerk in Viru deanery.¹⁹¹ The data about the parish of Haljala is not available, but pastor Nurm confirmed in 1935 that almost all people still wanted to marry in the church and took the ceremony very seriously. Only those who had “some specific obstacles” (*mõnesugused takistused*) which prevented church ceremony, opted for civil registration.¹⁹²

According to Nurm’s assessment, few people were buying the Bible in his parish, but on the other hand, in almost every home there was a copy of it already (or at least that of the New Testament). “When asked if the Bible is read [at their homes], the confirmands usually answer that older people still do it while young people have other interests in the foreground and do not have time to read the Bible.”¹⁹³ Next year, Nurm noted again that older people showed good knowledge of the Bible and asked the pastor questions about it, while younger people did not have such interest in the Bible.¹⁹⁴ The dean added that in neighbouring Kadrina, on the contrary, younger and also Herrnhutian-related people excelled in knowledge of the Bible.¹⁹⁵

In his annual reports, pastor Nurm acknowledged that he had no overview of how many people held private prayer gatherings at home, as it was not a matter that was spoken publicly. Only sometimes during conversations, it was occasionally mentioned to the pastor.¹⁹⁶ After his arrival in Haljala, the next pastor, Talvar, noted that more people than before were inviting the pastor to visit the sick. The previous pastor had expected a pay for the visit, while Talvar did not consider it a decent thing to do. However, calling for pastor was still seen as a sign of imminent death and therefore people were hesitant to do it in case there was still hope of recovering.¹⁹⁷

According to the reports by pastor Nurm from 1920s, moral guidelines of the church were largely ignored by parishioners, prompting him to cite Rom 3:10: “There is none righteous, no, not one”. What was especially worrying for him was working on Sundays. It was a common sight that especially new farmers were working in the fields on Sundays, and due to milk processing in dairies on Sundays, some were not able to come to church even if they wished. Besides that, meetings and courses of different kinds were scheduled to the time of church service: “Things are discussed, which sometimes can be of great importance for

¹⁹¹ EELKKA, Viru praosti aruanne 1938.

¹⁹² EELKKA 44-1-45.

¹⁹³ “Küsimuse peale, kas piiblit loetakse, vastavad leerilapsed harilikult, et vanemad inimesed seda veel teevad kuna noortel teised huvid esiplaanil olevat ja piibli lugemiseks aega üle ei jäävat.” EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded, Haljala koguduse aruanne 1934.

¹⁹⁴ EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded 1935, Haljala koguduse aruanne.

¹⁹⁵ EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded 1940, praosti aruanne 1935.

¹⁹⁶ EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded 1925, Haljala koguduse aruanne.

¹⁹⁷ EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded 1940, Haljala koguduse aruanne.

temporal life, but still prevent people from seeking contact with the eternal God.”¹⁹⁸

In the course of time, Nurm’s assessments became more benevolent. In 1929, he noted that some people who had been afar from the church for years had already argued openly that life still had no sense without religion. Overall, people had lost interest in anti-religious and especially anti-clerical propaganda: “Maybe the declining level of moral life, the increase in crime, suicides, abuses, etc. have made soberer people think about where we will end up when we destroy religious life, and with it also the foundations of a moral life.”¹⁹⁹ In the reports from 1930s, lamenting over moral decline is largely lacking.

Autobiographical Sources

As for the reminiscences of people, who grew up in the families of ordinary peasants and fishermen, the picture of religious beliefs and practices is comparable to other parishes where Herrnhutian influences were weak. Religious and church topics are seldom mentioned, usually shortly in the context of family feasts or referring to the peculiarities of the older generations.

For instance, **Lembit Valter**, a son of a fisherman from Eisma (1921–2004), mentions that his grandfather used to read Bible. His father performed baptisms and burials of the locals in agreement with the pastor Nurm, and Valter had sometimes accompanied him as a small boy. The only longer excerpt dealing with the church in his memoirs is dedicated to the confirmation. Valter describes it as a splendid opportunity to get to know other young people of the parish and to have a good time by playing volleyball and dancing at night – even though the latter was denounced (by the pastor?). Teaching was carried out mostly by the pastor, but also by *kõster* Sandberg. The author also remembers naughty boys who hindered the teaching, leading to interrupting it at one point by the irritated pastor. As for the confirmation service, Valter writes about festive clothing, the lengthy ceremony, as well as its meaning of becoming adult and the opportunity to get married. The description ends with a celebration back home, which, according to the author, was very modest in character compared with later times. The first time of partaking of the Holy Communion is mentioned, but otherwise, there are no religious motives mentioned in the description.²⁰⁰ Nor refers Valter to religious topics in his lengthy description of his home village, Eisma, in which all the farms and their inhabitants are shortly characterized.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ “Arutatakse asju, millel vahest ajaliku elu kohta suur tähtsus võib olla, aga ometi inimesi takistavad igavese Jumalaga ühendust otsimast.” EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded 1925, Haljala koguduse aruanne.

¹⁹⁹ “Võib-olla on siin kõlblise elu tasapinna langemine, kuritegevuse kasvamine, enesetapmised, kuritarvitused jne kainemaid inimesi mõtlema pannud, kuhu viimaks jõuame kui usu elu ja sellega ühtlasi kõlblise elu alused ärahäavitame”. EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded 1929, Haljala koguduse aruanne.

²⁰⁰ Valter 1998, 171–172.

²⁰¹ Valter 2003.

Similar is the account of **Ella Kaljuvee** about her childhood in Pikassaare from the western border area of the parish, written for Estonian National Museum in 1978. According to her, church was appreciated by village people mainly as the retainer of traditions: “All religious holidays, such as Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, St. John’s Day, were celebrated. It was common to go to the church, on confirmation days and other holidays, and to take part in Communion. And in this way the children also grew up in this spirit, respecting all these traditions.”²⁰² However, she refers only in passing to church-related issues in describing old wedding rituals. Much more references to religion can be found in the description of the death-related rituals, including the consecrating of the casket, held usually by a local schoolteacher, and finally, funerals conducted by the pastor.²⁰³

However, in her memoir, written after Estonia had regained independence, Kaljuvee also mentions religious practice as a source of spiritual strength and moral life: “God was referred to when instilling the basics of life. Faith and the church were the means that kept the people in check in former times. Everyone lived a decent life, there were no family splits or divorces. I am a churchly person. I drew my strength and power from that. I have been that since I was young. This is what my parents have been and they demanded and brought up their children as well. No government has shaken my faith. My assessment of life is a life beautifully lived. A person must choose his own path. My way is the way of truth and work. God has given me many years,” and adds that she prays to God to live as long as other people need her. (p. 17). However, religion is not a prominent topic in her memoir, and is rarely mentioned elsewhere in her 26-pages long handwritten memoir. She only cites once the Bible, regarding her decision to marry (Gen 2:18a; p. 18) and on another occasion a church hymn, thanking God for her guidance and the happy marriage (p. 25).²⁰⁴

In the memoir of **Ruth Talpsepp** (born in 1920 in Läsna in Aaspere commune) there are only two short references to religious topics.²⁰⁵ Firstly, she was

²⁰² „Pühadest peeti kõik usupühad ära nagu jõulud, lihavõtted, nelipühad, jaanipäev, Käidi korralikult kirikus, leeripühadel siis teistel pühadel, lauakirikus. Ja nii kasvasid lapsed ka selles vaimus, kes neist lugu pidasid kõigest kommetest.” ERM KV 324:1, p. 67.

²⁰³ ERM KV 324:1, p. 78–83. Similar description from Pihlaspea by Juline Olman: ERM KV 644:14, p. 190–192. She mentions, however, that as funerals by pastors were expensive, most locals invited local *kõster* instead.

²⁰⁴ “Elu põhitõdede sisendamisel viidati Jumalale. Selleks oli usk ja kirik, mis endisi inimesi vaos hoidis. Kõik elasid korralikku elu ei olnud perekondade lõhenemisi ega lahkuminekuid. Olen kiriku inimene. Säält ammutasin väge ja jõudu. Seda olen olnud noorest saadik. Seda on mu vanemad olnud ja nõudsid ja kasvasid ka oma lapsed sellised. Mu usku pole kõigutanud ükski valitsus. Minu hinnang elule on kaunilt elatud elu. Inimene peab ise oma tee valima. Minu tee on tõe ja töö tee. Jumal on andnud mulle juba palju aastaid.” The memoir is submitted to Estonian Literary Museum in 1995, and contrasts Kaljuvee’s idealized youth in interwar period with perceived decline in the time of writing. Besides the church, Kaljuvee also appreciates the role of school, literature and voluntary associations for instilling values which were important for her, including good manners, patriotism, and serving society and other people. EKM EKLA f. 350 m 1:369.

²⁰⁵ Talpsepp’s handwritten memoir (EKM EKLA f. 350, M. 1:489) consists of 22 pages.

frail after birth and therefore it was decided to baptize her immediately: “According to the belief of the old people, one should not let a child die without being baptized /.../ I do not know if the word of God and baptismal water helped, but I did not die.”²⁰⁶ The baptizer was a local schoolteacher, as was common there at that time. Second reference is related to the fate of Talpsepp’s close ones who were able to return to Estonia after having been repressed by Soviet authorities: “If having faith in God, it was perhaps his love that saved them from the ravages of Siberia and they were able to rest on the soil of their homeland.”²⁰⁷ It is worth of attention here that linking with God brings relief in difficult life situations, which is, however, hesitant on both occasions. Secondly, it is notably claimed that only older people were concerned about possible death of an unbaptized child.

In some texts, other religion-related topics are shortly mentioned. **Jüri Parijõgi** (1892–1941) describes how he saw that an old fisherman from Eisma, before starting catching the fish, bared his head and looked at the sky: “Did he ask the blessing of the Heaven to his catch? I have seen old men beginning the sowing in the countryside in that manner.”²⁰⁸ Ella Kaljuvee also remembers such a ritual at the beginning of sowing work each spring.²⁰⁹ Besides that, she tells two stories about supernatural punishment. One man had allegedly cursed God for rain showers during haymaking, and next morning awaking he was dumb, remaining so until his death.²¹⁰ Another man had found a bird nest and cut off the tongues of nestlings; later, his own children were born dumb.²¹¹

Two memoirs mention that the thunder was explained as God (or Jesus) being angry with bad people. On the one hand, it was supposed to exhort the children to obedience, but on the other hand, it was supposed to provide reassurance that good children do not need to be afraid of thunder.²¹² As for mealtime prayers, they were held only in some families, and are on several occasions associated mostly with older people.²¹³

Unchurched and Irreligiosity

Peculiar to the parish of Haljala are several accounts of locals, who had explicitly cut their ties with the church. Especially untypically, not all of them belonged to intelligentsia. According to memoirs of the former headmaster of Annikvere

²⁰⁶ “Vanarahva uskumuse järgi ei tohtinud lasta last ristimata ära surra /.../ Ei tea, kas aitas jumalasõna ja ristimisvesi, aga ära ma ei surnud.” (p. 1).

²⁰⁷ “Kui uskuda Jumalat siis vist oli see tema armastus, et päästis neid ära Siberi vintsutustest ja nad said puhkama oma kodumaa mulda.” (p. 8).

²⁰⁸ “Kas palus oma loomusele taevas õnnistust? Olen nii näinud maal vanaisasid külvi alustamas.” Parijõgi 1937, 32.

²⁰⁹ ERM KV 644:14, p. 219.

²¹⁰ ERM KV 324:1, p. 26.

²¹¹ ERM KV 324:1, p. 41.

²¹² ERM KV 729:1, p. 15 (Alise Ivask, Marinu village, born 1923). ERM KV 729:11, p. 232 (Ella Kaljuvee).

²¹³ ERM KV 729:2, p. 34 (Harald Kadari); ERM KV 729:3, p. 53 (Aliise Pikkamäe); ERM KV 729:4, p. 64 (Linda Tinnuri, born in 1920, Kavastu).

primary school **Juhan Saare** (1902–91)²¹⁴ it was related to appreciation of education among the locals: “It was not [even] remembered when full literacy and freedom from the clutches of superstition had been achieved. There were those who were critical of the Christian cult, who went to the grave without the grace of the pastor of Haljala parish (for example, the owner of Uustalu farm in Metsiku). I buried the old sailor, captain Lemet, in Esku cemetery with a secular speech and secular songs. It had been the old sailor’s wish before his death. Overall, the pastor had this locality as a thorn in his side. Many farmers – especially from the villages of Salatse and Metsiku – had enabled their children the education of ministerial school, city school or gymnasium already several decades ago. Several of them obtained higher education and have contributed to the field of science and culture.”²¹⁵

There are indeed many examples that thirst for knowledge led several local peasants to read extensively, which made them exposed to new ideas. In some cases, they were able to make a significant impact on local opinion. So, a peasant from Karula, called Uukareda, had independently obtained knowledge of German language, acquired remarkable private library and, as a result of reading his books, became a convinced socialist. Reportedly he had so much authority among his fellow peasants that Karula became widely known as a “red village”, despite its inhabitants being rather affluent. An eyewitness, who was collecting oral heritage for the Estonian National Museum, remembered: “While stopping on our expedition in the farms of Karula, in many places instead of the board with the Word of God, the pictures of Karl Marx caught the eye above the bed of the old farm owner.”²¹⁶

More known is the case of self-educated farm owners from the family of Pruuls who lived in Metsiku. The forefather of the family, David Pruul, had excelled in holding public speeches, initiating amateur acting activities, and establishing a reading circle with a library. The library was later supplemented by David’s son Hans Pruul. Yet in 1930s, it attracted nationwide attention as one of the largest private book collections in rural Estonia, encompassing thousands of volumes.²¹⁷ The collection has been preserved almost entirely along with many valuable documents (diaries etc.) from the farmstead. It has been thoroughly researched and is currently preserved in the Estonian National Library in Tallinn.²¹⁸

Hans Pruul was also an influential local personality, serving in 1919–24 as the head of the commune administration (*vallavanem*) of Vihula. The lists of books indicate that he bought mostly fiction and popular science titles but also books on radical philosophy and politics (including by Friedrich Nietzsche and Karl

²¹⁴ Before the Estoniaization of his first name and surname in 1936, Juhan Saare was called Johannes Hammer.

²¹⁵ EKLA F 350, 1:249, pp. 7–8.

²¹⁶ “Peatudes oma küsitlemiskäikudel Karula taludes, torkasid mitmel pool silma vanapere-mehe voodi kohal jumalasõna tahvli asemel Karl Marxi pildid”. <https://www.folklore.ee/radar/story.php?area=Haljala&id=1522>, 12.08.2022.

²¹⁷ Uus Eesti, 31.05.1939, p. 4.

²¹⁸ Lusmägi 2015.

Kautsky). Religious or spiritual books, however, are very rare. On the other hand, in the 1920s, Hans Pruul was a subscriber to both the official weekly of the Lutheran church *Eesti Kirik* and the mouthpiece of liberal Lutherans *Protestantiline Ilm*.²¹⁹ In Pruul's diary, one can find mostly short notes about daily farm work, health, weather, and also participation in local social events. Religious and spiritual topics are rare; it seems that the Pruuls did not go to church even during Christmas and on other festive occasions. However, there is a short and somewhat enigmatic entry about the referendum on religious instruction from February 19, 1923: "Today was the last day of voting. I also cast my vote, but against the religious instruction, but in my heart, I support religious instruction, and I wish that it would win". He added that his stepdaughter Betti voted probably also against.²²⁰

Not everyone who had turned their back on the church adopted a consistently rationalist or atheist worldview. Harald Kadari, an assistant of architects and local history researcher, born not far from Metsiku in 1911, writes in his autobiography in the 1980s: "Like my forefathers, I believe in the power of the Great Nature since my conscious age. With His help, I have been able to cope with my undertakings. When I am exhausted, I turn to Nature, and also to Her, whom I no longer have, and I have had enough health and strength to act."²²¹

Notably, pastor Nurm was also the only pastor in the deanery who mentioned in his annual reports from 1921–40 occasions of people rejecting church burials²²² or leaving the church. However, not all of them were related to the surroundings of Metsiku. For instance, according to Nurm, a certain professor of philology at Tartu University had left the Lutheran church in 1925. His father, a *vöörmünder* of Haljala parish, who had reportedly not been in contact with his son for a long time already, had commented that excessive knowledge had probably driven him mad.²²³ The professor was almost certainly Julius Mark (1890–1959), who came from Idavere near Haljala.

Congregational Life

Not much happened in the congregation besides the usual weekly church services. Still, according to the reports, occasionally some services for children and youth

²¹⁹ The fund of family of Pruuls, Estonian National Library: „Raamatute ja Ajalehtede ostmine Meie raamatu kogusse ja Lugemiseks”: <https://www.digar.ee/arhiiv/et/raamatud/45287>, 12.02.2024.

²²⁰ "Täna oli viimane healetamise päev. Ka mina antsin oma heale ära aga usu opetuse vastu südames aga olen mina usu opetuse poolt ja soovin sellele võitu." Hans Pruuli päevik 1923, p. 167 (19. veebruar); Eesti Rahvusraamatukogu: <https://www.digar.ee/viewer/et/nlib-digar:124285>, 12.02.2024.

²²¹ "Esiisade kombel usun enda teadlikust ajast peale Suure Looduse jõusse. Tema abil olen suutnud oma ettevõtmistega toime tulla. Kui olen puruväsinud, siis pööran Looduse poole ja ka Tema poole, keda mul enam ei ole ja mulle on jatkunud tegutsemisteks tervist ja jõudu." EKM EKLA f. 350 M 1:30, p. 17–18. The mysterious "She" (or "He") mentioned was probably his late wife (see p. 22).

²²² For a case in Vainupea, see EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded 1923, Haljala koguduse aruanne.

²²³ EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded 1925, Haljala koguduse aruanne.

were held. Pastor Nurm mentioned also local religious gatherings for youth (with co-operation with youth organizations as ÜENÜ and the *Noorkotkad*) and harvest feasts. The latter were organized in 1934 in six different locations and followed by a gathering with tea, “where economic questions were discussed”. Apparently, here is talk rather about events organized by voluntary associations that were mainly secular in character but included a religious part (more on that below).²²⁴ In 1938, six services for children and two for youth were held, and there was a Sunday school in the congregation (but only 30 children took part).²²⁵ Since 1939, the new pastor Talvar made attempts to initiate regular youth work, organizing discussion events, Bible studies, handiwork evenings, and choir rehearsals.²²⁶

However, besides the church, religious services were also held in remote villages, including chapels in Vainupea and Esku, but also elsewhere, usually a couple of times yearly. School buildings, village halls (*rahvamajad*), and some private houses were used for services there, and occasionally those were also held in free air.²²⁷ For example, on the occasion of Victory Day celebrations in 1936, as many as four services were held, one in church, the others in Vergi beach, “on a sea island,” and in Arkna school of agriculture.²²⁸

In Esku and Käsmu, local *kösters* were in office. However, meagre resources did not enable to hire a *köster* for Vainupea, that hampered religious life in that part of the parish. The tasks of *köster* were taken on by two local men there.²²⁹ People from Vainupea and Vihula had appealed for hiring permanent pastor for that part of the parish, but it was not possible due to lack of funds.²³⁰

In 1935, a letter of complaint was sent to the consistory, where it was claimed that while the congregation demanded membership fees, the religious needs of people in Vainupea were neglected. Services were allegedly held three times a year, the dead were not buried according to the church rites and children had been left unbaptized. The authors of this anonymous complaint threatened to remind the negligence of the church on Judgement Day. In response to this complaint, Nurm wrote to the dean that the chapel had been erected for the families of local fishermen who had no horses and thus could not go to the church which was situated 15 kilometres away. Initially, prayer meetings were held there more often (although not every Sunday), but after the land reform, there was no more material support for that coming from the lord of the manor. However, prayer meetings were still held from time to time in Vainupea (including by Herrnhutians from Kunda). Until the beginning of the year, schoolteacher Siiak had used to hold

²²⁴ EELKKA, Viru praosti aruanne 1934.

²²⁵ EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded 1938, Haljala koguduse aruanne.

²²⁶ EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded 1940, Haljala koguduse aruanne.

²²⁷ In 1935, Nurm mentioned that he held services in Esku 6–7 times in a year, in Käsmu 3 times, and in Vainupea, Toolse, Vihula, Varangu, Kavastu, Kihlevere, Võipere, Loobu and Liiguste 2–3 times in a year. EELKKA 44-1-47.

²²⁸ EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded 1936, Haljala koguduse aruanne.

²²⁹ EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded 1921 and 1925, Haljala koguduse aruanne. For the history of Esku chapel, see Nirgi 2016.

²³⁰ EELKKA, Viru praosti aruanne 1935.

those, but as his school in nearby Kandle was closed off, he had to move away. It was hard to find anyone to replace him because only 4–6 *kroons* could be paid monthly for that, and it was not possible to find a side job in the area. As for the pastor, he was already too busy due to visiting other localities in the large parish. According to Nurm there was an agreement with some local men to baptize and bury locals; so the accusation about the non-availability of the rites was not founded. Nurm also claimed that the complaint had been written by the sympathizers of “sects” who hoped to take the chapel over, but the people of Vainupea were strongly against it.²³¹ According to the annual report of the pastor, the new person holding religious meetings in Vainupea was still found in 1935 already.²³² At the end of the period, Käsma area was merged with the new congregation of Ilumäe, whose controversial pastor was reportedly trying to annex with his parish large parts of Haljala parish.²³³

Public Role of the Church

Community Life

The aforementioned anti-clerical attitudes seem to date back to the 19th century. Unlike in most of the regions in Northern Estonia, in some manors of the parish (Metsiku, Sagadi) which had financial difficulties at that time, farms were sold to peasants relatively early. It boosted their independence and self-confidence, as well as their interest in education. Participation in the activities of Estonian national movement was exceptionally high here in terms of Northern Estonia. Importantly, there was a considerable number of subscribers and correspondents of the radical nationalist newspaper *Sakala* in the parish. The society “Kalevi-poeg” and its private school in Salatse became focal points of the local social life, and also in Liiguste a folk school was established by the peasants themselves.²³⁴ Already during the vacancy of the pastoral seat in 1880, Hans Veinmann, the folk school teacher from Sagadi, had written to Mihkel Veske, asking for guidance on how to get an ethnic Estonian pastor for their parish.²³⁵ The next pastor Konstantin Willingen, however, had unfavourable attitude towards Estonian nationalism, and it led to uneasy relations with the national activists. He did not allow the new *köster* of Esku, Kustav Weinmann, to participate in any “nationalist” societies. A folk school teacher was dismissed for writing for *Sakala* and a ban of public speeches was imposed on another activist.²³⁶

As the local peasant leaders seem to have had at least periodically tense relations with the pastor, it may well have influenced the attitudes of the community

²³¹ EELKKA 44-1-47.

²³² EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded 1921.

²³³ Nirgi 2016, 99.

²³⁴ Tarvel 1989, 107–111.

²³⁵ Nirgi 2016, 87–88. Mihkel Veske (1843–90), a philologist and poet, was among the leaders of the Estonian national movement at that time.

²³⁶ Karmin *et al.* 2017, 118–119.

towards the church. So it is probable that many people, especially in Vihula commune, voted against religious instruction exactly because opinion leaders as school teachers, aforementioned Uukareda or commune elder Pruul suggested them to do so. On the other hand, the significant number of voluntary associations²³⁷ in the parish seem also to have boosted “secular competition” with the church. Notably, the *köster* Gustav Sandberg argued explicitly, that associational life had contributed to the alienation of local people from the church: “They [i.e. associations] all had their own noble aims and beautiful goals. Unfortunately, there were too many of them, due to which not all of them had full vitality. It was also a pity that with permanent meetings, exercises, parties and gatherings that normally took place on Saturday and Sunday evenings, the people stayed away from our oldest organization – the church. And although bigger associations often also organized religious services themselves, either for the consecrating of flags or for anniversaries, it was not born out of religious interest, but those were the attractions for the party that followed the service.”²³⁸

There are newspaper accounts of branches of ÜENÜ (All-Estonian Youth Association) having arranged such events. In 1936, the ÜENÜ branch of Kihlevere arranged the celebration of its 10th anniversary, which started at 2 p.m. with a religious ceremony and the consecration of the venues of the association by pastor Nurm. Then followed secular ceremonial meeting (*aktus*). In the evening, there was a tea gathering, amateur musical and theatre performances, and at the end, dancing.²³⁹ In a similar event in Kavastu, the flag of the local ÜENÜ branch was consecrated.²⁴⁰ Pastor Nurm was also invited to conduct religious ceremonies for the celebration of 70th anniversary of Kavastu primary school²⁴¹ and 10th anniversary of land reform in Vihula²⁴² and Kloodi.²⁴³ In the 1930s, secular harvest festivals became popular, and also the pastor was often invited to take part in these.²⁴⁴

According to newspaper reports, the Farmers’ Assemblies (*Põllumeestekogud*) – the party representing the interests of relatively well-to-do farmers – were espe-

²³⁷ Karmin *et al.* 2017, 308–319.

²³⁸ “Neil kõigil olid oma õilsad sihid ja kaunid eesmärgid. Kahjuks oli neid liig palju, mille tõttu ei olnud neil kõikidel täit elujõudu. Kahju oli ka sellest, et alaliste koosolekutega, harjutustega, pidude ja koosviibimistega, mis toimusid ikka laupäeva- ja pühapäevaõhtuti, jäi rahvas kõrvale meie kõige vanemast organisatsioonist – kirikust. Ja kuigi suuremad seltsid sagedasti ka ise korraldasid jumalateenistusi, kas lippude õnnistamise või aastapäevade puhul, siis ei sündinud see mitte usulisest huvist, vaid need olid tõmbenumbriks jumalateenistusele järgnevale peole.” Sandberg 1959, 91.

²³⁹ Virumaa Teataja, 25.11.1936, p. 6. See the add at the bottom of the page. An event with a similar program had also taken place five years earlier on the occasion of the association’s 5th anniversary (Virumaa Teataja 05.12.1931, p. 3).

²⁴⁰ Virumaa Teataja, 30.12.1935, p. 2.

²⁴¹ Virulane, 16.11.1932, p. 5.

²⁴² Kaja, 20.08.1931, p. 4.

²⁴³ Kaja, 15.06.1932, p. 4.

²⁴⁴ Pastor Nurm conducted religious services in Undla (Kaja, 19.09.1931, p. 2) and Loobu (Kaja, 11.11.1932, p. 5).

cially eager to seek the participation of the pastor in their events. Relations with the church would have perhaps helped legitimise their political cause, especially for elderly voters, but besides that was pastor Nurm, according to the account of *köster* Sandberg, personally highly valued by the representatives of the party.²⁴⁵

Also, the consecration of public buildings and monuments by the pastor was expected by the public. For example, the opening ceremony of the new schoolhouse in Vihula in December 1931 included a consecration ceremony by pastor Nurm.²⁴⁶ But an especially noteworthy event for the church was the unveiling of monument of the War of Independence. The erecting of the monument was initiated by the church council itself in 1921. It was opened on September 7, 1930, in the presence of the EELC bishop Jakob Kukk, general Aleksander Tõnisson, Viru county governor Karl Pajos and other dignitaries. The event attracted large crowds.²⁴⁷

Like elsewhere in Estonia, the pastors of Viru deanery had also ambiguous sentiments about their participation in such festive events with a secular character. As dean Hoffmann put it in 1928: “However, report from Rakvere also suggests rightly that pastors are often required as figurants. Is not it the case, that there is an intention to attract religious circles to the secular cause by means of the participation of the pastor? In any case, there is a downside to this.”²⁴⁸ Similarly argued the new dean Beermann in 1937: “The pastor is often invited to attract elderly people to the event and contribute to the solemnity of the ceremony,” while the focal point of the event was entirely secular.²⁴⁹

Martin Nurm seems to have been more tolerant in that regard. In the report of 1935, he noted that there was increasing demand for holding religious services in schools and in the venues of voluntary associations, and “all organizations” were willing to have religious ceremonies on the occasion of their festive events. He had been obliging regarding such pleas: “Although such festive events are connected with the secular entertainment that usually follows the ceremonies, it must be said that the word of God, which has been preached in the religious ceremony, does not return empty, but fulfils the task why God has had it preached.”²⁵⁰

Finally, the pastor was also seen as an important public figure. When, in 1931, the head of the state (*riigivanem*) Konstantin Päts was on a round trip in Northern

²⁴⁵ Sandberg 1959, 114.

²⁴⁶ EAA 5361-1-14, p. 5.

²⁴⁷ Kaja, 09.09.1930, p. 7 See also Virumaa Teataja 12.09.2020, p. 11 (Andres Pulver).

²⁴⁸ „Rakvere aruanne soovitab aga vist ka õigusega, et õpetajat tihti nõutakse statistina. Kas ei taheta õpetaja osavõtmise läbi usklikke ringkondi ilmlikule asjale ligi tõmmata. Igatahes on sellel asjal oma varjukülg juures.” EELKKA, Viru praosti aruanne 1928.

²⁴⁹ „Õpetaja kutsutakse sageli selleks, et vanemaid inimesi kokku tõmmata ja kogu talituse pidulikkusele kaasa aidata.” EELKKA, Viru praosti aruanne 1937.

²⁵⁰ „Kuigi sarnased aktused seotud on ilmalikkude lõbustustega, mis aktustele harilikult järgnevad, siiski peab ütlema, et Jumala sõna, mida vaimulik talitusel on kuulutatud, mitte tühjalt tagasi ei tule, vaid korda saadab, mispärast Jumal teda kuulutada on lasknud.” EELKKA 44-1-45.

Estonia with diplomats, he was reportedly greeted by a large crowd in Haljala, and pastor Nurm gave a speech.²⁵¹

Church and Schools

There was widespread criticism of how religion was taught at school in the deanery. In 1931, the dean complained in his annual report: “Religious education in schools is still our headache. Exceptional are schools from where children come to the confirmation classes fully prepared. Probably the promises of parties and politicians, and people in general, do not help here. We all should probably take it upon ourselves to carry this before God in the prayer in our church.”²⁵² Similar assessments were repeated in the following years. However, in 1938, the dean claimed that the situation was improving. Specifically, he noted very good co-operation between church and school in the parish of Kadrina.²⁵³

Pastor Nurm was among the most critical pastors regarding the religious instruction at schools in the deanery. In 1921 he noted that people were widely complaining that religion was not taught anymore in the manner it was common before, but only with few lessons in a week and in some schools not at all: “Especially older people are very angry about this, why the government does not watch over the education of the youth more closely and why such schoolteachers are tolerated in schools who themselves do not confess [faith in] God and who use derisive words about the Scripture in the presence of the children. Parents are full of fear for the future of their children, who are being taught in our contemporary schools, because the decline of moral life is already remarkably noticeable among the youth.” Specifically, he referred to an example from Vihula school. A female teacher had reportedly told her pupils that she would give birth soon and also explained “very graphically” how the baby had got into her belly. In conclusion, the pastor suggested that the state should thoroughly investigate the suitability of all Estonian schoolteachers to the office and dismiss those who did not fit. He opined that teacher education also needed urgent improvement but added that there was no hope that it would be done during “the current regime” (*praeguse korra juures*).²⁵⁴

In the report about 1922, Nurm argued that there were no teachers in the parish who were willing or who, regarding the stances of their colleagues, had the

²⁵¹ Kaja, 26.07.1931, p. 1.

²⁵² „Usuõpetus koolides on ikka meie valulaps. Koolid kust lapsed õieti valmistatult leeri tulevad on erandid. Siin vist erakondade ja poliitika meeste, üldse inimeste lubadused ei aita. Meie vist peaksime kõik enestele ülesandeks tegema, et meie seda meie kiriku palves kanname Jumala ette.” EELKKA, Viru praosti aruanne 1931.

²⁵³ EELKKA, Viru praosti aruanne 1938.

²⁵⁴ „Iseäranis vanemad inimesed on selle üle väga pahased, mikspärast valitsus mitte teravalt nooresoo kasvatamise üle ei valva ja mikspärast sallitakse koolides niisuguseid kooliõpetajaid, kes ise Jumalat ei tunnista ja pühakirja üle laste kuuldes pilkesõnu tarvitavad. Lastevanemad on täis hirmu oma laste tuleviku pärast, keda praeguse aja koolides õpetatakse, sest nooresoo juures on kõlblise elu langemist tuntavalt juba märgata.” EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded 1921, Haljala koguduse aruanne.

courage to teach religion. To the contrary, schools were places where irreligion was promoted, as especially the campaign of the referendum had made it abundantly clear. Nurm complained that “almost” no teachers had supported publicly the campaign in support of religious instruction, while “not few” (*õige palju*) of them agitated to vote against it. So local people had the impression that the whole body of teachers were against religious education.²⁵⁵

However, after the referendum schoolteachers had arguably toned down their public opposition to religious instruction, having seen that majority of the people was in favour of it. Later Nurm complained that the quality of religious instruction at some schools was doubtful as several teachers did not consider the Bible to be the Word of God, being supporters of high criticism, and the church was dubbed an outdated institution by them. But there were also other teachers “who have a Christian worldview and place more emphasis on faith, especially considering the dark sides of life in our times, the reasons for which are mostly seen in apostasy.”²⁵⁶ In 1927, the pastor noted that he had no overview of how religion was taught at schools, but parents had told him that they were critical about it.²⁵⁷

Also, there is an account of disagreements between the pastor and the schoolteachers from the socialist daily *Rahva Sõna*. In an evidently impartial description about a lecture held by pastor Nurm at Vihula school, it is noted that local teachers with “Protestant” (i.e. theologically liberal) views questioned the claims of the pastor, winning also the support of the audience.²⁵⁸

However, there is no evidence that the anti-clerical attitudes of the teachers were common and consistent in Haljala parish. Evidently, there were also teachers in the parish who were close to the church. According to Sandberg, until the turn of the 20th century it was common that schoolteachers were expected to lead prayer meetings (*lugemistunnid*) and perform baptisms and burials. After that, this tradition began to gradually disappear. However, some teachers arguably still had performed the rites willingly “until recently” (i. e. before the completion of the text in 1959).²⁵⁹ Notably, Riho Raudla, the headmaster of Vihula primary school, was actively involved to the conflict about election of the new pastor in 1939–40. He claimed in his letter to the consistory, among other things, that those who were against Talvar were not able to appreciate the importance of national spirit in the church.²⁶⁰

Overall, it seems that religion and church was simply not paid much attention to in daily school life. For example, no explicitly religious titles²⁶¹ could be found

²⁵⁵ EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded 1922, Haljala koguduse aruanne.

²⁵⁶ “Kes kristliku ilmavaatega on ja usu peale rohkem rõhku panevad, silmas pidades iseäranis praeguse aja elu varjukülgesid, mille põhjusi ususalgamises suuremalt osalt nähakse”. EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded 1926, Haljala koguduse aruanne.

²⁵⁷ EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded 1927, Haljala koguduse aruanne.

²⁵⁸ *Rahva Sõna*, 05.03.1927, p. 7.

²⁵⁹ Sandberg 1959.

²⁶⁰ EELKKA, Konsistoriumi kirjavahetus Haljala kogudusega 1940.

²⁶¹ Perhaps „Vagajutud Kristusest” by S. Lagerlöf („Christ Legends”) and „Jõulud, jõulud!” (“Christmas, Christmas!”) by J. Parijõgi may be considered as exceptions.

in the pupils' library of Võipere school; there were some in the library of the teachers that were related to the teaching of religion.²⁶² Besides that, almost no religious and church-related topics were mentioned in a collection of essays written by the pupils in 1938 that can be found in the archives. There were three topics: "A Summer Evening", "If I won 5 million" and "Virumaa – my home county". Regarding the last topic, the standard narrative can be traced about difficult historical heritage (with anti-German traits) and rich natural resources (oil shale, forests of Alutaguse). Only once there were church-related topics even mentioned in all these essays – in case of a short note that before the arrival of crusaders, German traders and clergymen had been visiting the Eastern Baltic shores.²⁶³ In a similar vein, the only mentioning of the religion or church in the chronicle of Karula (Vihula) primary school is related to the consecration of the new school building by pastor Nurm in 1931.²⁶⁴

There are no detailed data about teaching religion in the schools of the parish. But inspector of folk schools Linso wrote in 1937 to the dean of Viru, that situation in the wider region was improving. All the teachers took part in the school prayers, while previously only teachers of religion had used to do it. The pupils' knowledge was generally satisfactory, although not as good as before the First World War. Religion was treated now equally with other subjects, and education in the Christian spirit was considered self-evident. It was not challenged anymore openly as it used to be by some individuals before. Religious services were also held in many school buildings outside of school hours, and in the program of local song festivals, religious songs were often performed at the beginning.²⁶⁵ Very few children (about 1%) opted out from classes of religion, mostly those of other nationalities or the children of "migrating individuals" who were convinced atheists.²⁶⁶ Pastor Talvar was not so positive after his arrival to Haljala; he assessed religious education to have been weak, and young people who were coming to the confirmation classes could not even recite the Lord's Prayer.²⁶⁷

Local Politics and Social Contradictions

Political tensions ran high also in communes of Haljala parish. Notably, in the case of Vihula, those amounted even to accusations of falsification of municipal elections.²⁶⁸ However, low support for religious education in the 1923 referendum can not probably be explained by means of left-wing propaganda, as their electoral support in the communes of the parish was slightly – and in the case of Aaspere commune significantly – below the national average. However, there were sympathizers of the left also in the congregation, and the sexton of the

²⁶² EAA 4636-1-5.

²⁶³ EAA 51-1-58. Possibly, the essays were written for final exams.

²⁶⁴ EAA 5361-1-14.

²⁶⁵ EELKKA 44-1-45 (materials for the annual report of Viru dean for 1937).

²⁶⁶ EELKKA 44-1-45 (materials for annual report of Viru dean for 1936).

²⁶⁷ EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded 1940, Haljala koguduse aruanne.

²⁶⁸ Juhan Saare mälestused. EKLA f. 350, M 1:249, p. 25.

congregation had even become the supporter of the communist regime established in 1940.²⁶⁹

Importantly, Nurm's involvement to the politics arouse controversies, and in particular his active collaboration with Imperial German occupation authorities in 1918. He was actively involved in the preparation of forming the Baltic Duchy, a Baltic German state which was to be closely related to Imperial Germany. Nurm served as a deputy of the joint *Landesrat* of representatives of Estland, Livland, and Kurland, which was summoned to approve the decision to separate from the Russian Empire. Immediately before the end of the occupation he was even elected an alternate member of regency council of the Duchy. Due to his activities during the German occupation, he was twice arrested in 1919 by Estonian authorities, but soon released. Later the inquiry about his alleged anti-Estonian activities did not find consistent evidence about it. However, several local people acknowledged that Nurm had been openly supportive towards German occupants and possibly also annexing Estonia with Germany.²⁷⁰ The pastor seems to have been disgraced in the eyes of his parishioners,²⁷¹ but was, according to Sandberg, soon able to overcome the bias towards him. Indeed, even though occasionally Nurm's past was referred to and his loyalty for the Republic of Estonia questioned,²⁷² there seems to be no sign of widespread opposition against him. In fact, as indicated above, Nurm was highly appreciated as an orator during public festivities. Also, in 1935, the congregation donated him a golden cross to mark the 20th anniversary of his service in Haljala.²⁷³

According to Sandberg, the reason for collaboration with Germans during the occupation was primarily pragmatic: "In turbulent times, when the fate of the country and the nation was at stake, pastor Nurm hoped for help from the big western neighbour".²⁷⁴ However, also Nurm's conservative political convictions probably played a role. Notably, his annual reports of the 1920s reveal his critical attitude towards the new political elite of independent Estonia. In the report of 1921, he seems to suggest that abolishing of compulsory religious education was related to low moral standards of the new elite: "The fact that God's Ten Commandments have been struck off in our schools is a joy to all who were fettered by God's commandments. Now you can lie and steal; now you do not have to abide by the sixth commandment so strictly, there is no need to care about the IX

²⁶⁹ According to a letter from pastor Talvar to the dean Kiivit in October 1941: EELKKA 44-1-47.

²⁷⁰ Kuldkepp 2019, 386–388 and 393–396.

²⁷¹ Waba Maa, 19.06.1919, p. 3.

²⁷² In Virulane, it was claimed that the pastor had not risen during the playing of the national anthem, was reluctant to allow laying the wreath to the church in remembrance of the fallen in the War of Independence, and claimed that Estonians had never lived in servitude (*orjuses*). On the same page, Viru-Jakobi German pastor Hoffmann's behaviour during the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the Republic of Estonia was also criticized, and his loyalty to the Estonian state questioned (Virulane, 03.03.1928, p. 4). Cf. Waba Maa, 26.11.1929, p. 6.

²⁷³ Kaja, 20.07.1935, p. 7.

²⁷⁴ „Segastel aegadel, mil oli kaalul maa ja rahva saatus, lootis õpetaja Nurm abi läänepoolselt suurnaabrilt.” Sandberg 1959, 115.

and X commandments either. Because even if the state government does not care about these last [commandments] anymore, so why a state citizen should care about abiding by and living according to them?" The reference to these particular commandments seems to contain not only a hint to the supposed relaxation of sexual morals but also a veiled critique of land reform.²⁷⁵

The pastor was not, however, hopeless as he noted that "genuine friends of the people" were striving to stop the moral decline. At the end of the 1920s, he already saw signs of improvement and approved, albeit very cautiously, the increasing church-friendly attitudes of Farmers' Assemblies: "It is interesting to note here how the leaders of our major state and political party put particular emphasis on the fact that their celebrations, harvest festivals and flag consecrations should take place in a solemn manner, namely that they would begin with the preaching of God's word and prayer. It would be too early to decide whether this is only a matter of political tricks or if there is something else behind it."²⁷⁶ According to Sandberg, Nurm was, in turn, held in high regard in the circles of Farmers' Assemblies and was frequently invited to their events, even in neighbouring parishes.²⁷⁷ Interestingly, he agreed to participate even in the memorial events organized to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the land reform, although he appears to have been previously critical of the reform.²⁷⁸ Besides that, Nurm wrote a sermon for the pre-election edition of Farmers' Assemblies newspaper in Vihula. However, in the sermon, Nurm avoided explicit endorsing of the party and, indeed, any overt political statements.²⁷⁹ In his report about 1934, Nurm expressed his favourable attitude towards newly-established authoritarian regime of Konstantin Päts: "It is a clear fact that if the State Government looks benevolently towards the church, the views of the people of the state also become benevolent towards the church, as it is now noticeable. May God grant that the government, as well as the people, will move forward in this direction".²⁸⁰

²⁷⁵ „Et Jumala kümme käsku meil koolides maha on tõmmatud, selle üle on rõõmsad kõik, kellele Jumala käsk kammitsaks oli. Nüüd võib valetada ja varastada, nüüd ei pruugi enam kuuendat käsku nii piinlikult pidada, ei ole ka tarvis IX ja X käsust hoolida. Sest neist viimistest ei hooli isegi riigivalitsus enam, mis siis maksab riigi kodanikul veel nende järele käija ja elada.” EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded 1922, Haljala koguduse aruanne. Notably, the dean of the deanery, A. F. W. Hoffmann had praised in his 1921 report those who had admittedly rejected the land that was offered to them, caring more about God's commandments than earthly benefits (EELKKA, Viru praosti aruanne 1921).

²⁷⁶ „Huvitav on siin ära märkida, kuidas meie suurema riiklise ja politika partei juhid iseäranis rõhku sellepeale panevad, et nende pidustused, lõikusepidud ja lipu õnnistamised pühalikult toimuksid, nimelt Jumala sõna kuulutamise ja palvega algaksid. Kas siin ainult poliitiliste võtetega tegemist on, või seisab selle taga midagi muud selle üle otsustada oleks veel varane.” EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded 1929, Haljala koguduse aruanne.

²⁷⁷ Sandberg 1959.

²⁷⁸ Kaja, 20.08.1931, p. 4.

²⁷⁹ Vihula Teataja, 1934, no. 1/2, p. 2.

²⁸⁰ „Selge on see asjaolu, et kui Riigivalitsus heatahtlikult kiriku peale vaatab, siis ka riigirahva vaated kiriku peale heatahtlikuks muutuvad, nagu seda nüüd märgata on. Andku Jumal,

Nurm's German connections were once again widely discussed in 1939 when he left Estonia during the organized resettlement of Baltic Germans. It was legitimate for him to leave as his wife and son-in-law were ethnic Germans (however, one of his sons remained in Estonia²⁸¹), but his departure inevitably attracted public attention, as he himself was not a German and, besides that, was among the first leavers.²⁸² The dean of Viru wrote in his annual report that Nurm's departure was not understood by the parishioners and caused even annoyance, but according to rumours he had received death threats.²⁸³ Besides that, also Nurm's former acquaintances from the earlier days were reportedly surprised. According to them, Nurm was once known for supporting the Estonian national cause and social life in Avinurme. It was presumed that perhaps his wife's impact had led to his change of mind.²⁸⁴

Nurm's legacy continued to be a bone of contention even after his departure. Some parishioners claimed that due to their sympathy towards Germans, he and his supporters had alienated local people from the church. This argument was used especially during a conflict over electing the new pastor. Initially, Bernhard Talvar (Bloom²⁸⁵) was appointed as a temporary pastor for the parish. However, the council of the congregation and also *köster* Gustav Sandberg opposed him. As a result of complaints about splitting the congregation, Talvar was dismissed on April 20, 1940. A flow of petitions to the consistory followed, some of them in support and some against Talvar. Some of their claims are outright contradictory. So, the supporters of Talvar typically claimed that due to the efforts of the young pastor people had again started to take part in the church life, while according to the opponents many people had, to the contrary, ceased to go to church. Importantly, also nationalist arguments were repeatedly used, as supporters of Talvar claimed that he was a victim of intrigues of "small number of supporters of Germans" or those who were still affiliated to the old pro-German mindset of Nurm. However, it is noteworthy that petitions supporting Talvar often came from the villages near Haljala. Thus, it seems probable that the conflict was not related so much to personal or political sympathies but rather to contradictions between different parts of the parish.²⁸⁶ Finally, Talvar was allowed to take part in the elections of the pastor (11.08.1940), which he won overwhelmingly (1038 votes in favour, 74 against, 1 invalid).²⁸⁷ He served the parish until being arrested by Soviet authorities in 1945.

et selles suunas valitsus kui ka rahvas edasi sammuks." EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded 1934, Haljala koguduse aruanne.

²⁸¹ Vaba Eesti Sõna, 30.06.1977, p. 10.

²⁸² See, for example, Päevaleht, 19.10.1939, p. 5.

²⁸³ EELKKA, Viru praosti aruanne 1939.

²⁸⁴ Uudisleht, 22.10.1939, p. 7. Johan Köpp (2010, 542), however, claims that Nurm's attitude towards associational life in Avinurme had not been favourable.

²⁸⁵ The surname was Estonianized in April 1940.

²⁸⁶ EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Haljala kogudusega 1939–41.

²⁸⁷ EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded 1940, Haljala koguduse aruanne.

Such incidents and intrigues were not uncommon elsewhere in Estonia (*cf.* chapter about Halliste parish). Evidently, it still mattered hugely to the wider public who was in charge of their parish. Pastor was still an important public figure like a commune elder or a schoolteacher, and therefore church could not avoid being engaged in local power struggles. Indeed, while the clergymen perceived their authority to be in decline, church was still not a private matter which concerned only deeply religious people.

Conclusion

Haljala was a homogenously Lutheran parish which, rather untypically for Northern Estonia, had no strong heritage of Herrnhutian piety. The pastor Martin Nurm, though an ethnic Estonian, had pro-German political orientation and family ties with ethnic Germans. On some occasions, his opponents highlighted his conservatism and German connections, which had amounted to participation in the attempted founding of Baltic German duchy in 1918. Even after his departure with Baltic Germans during the *Umsiedlung*, Nurm as an alleged archconservative was scapegoated for the ills of the congregation. But commonly, Nurm's pro-Germanness appears to be not at all seen as an obstacle to serving as a pastor by the parishioners.

For the majority of the population in Haljala, it was still natural to retain ties with the church. It was common to go to church sometimes (notably during major feasts) and observe the rites, though the share of non-baptized children was apparently somewhat higher than in neighbouring parishes. It was commonly expected that new public buildings were consecrated by the pastor and the festive events in the life of community involved a religious ceremony. Pastor Nurm was willingly ready to co-operate, even though he understood well that the focal point of these events was not religious at all.

However, the earlier regular mass attendance of the Sunday service had already ceased, and the pastor admitted that mostly older generations read the Bible and were interested in religious issues. On the other hand, it is hard to see how the church could have been able to attract young people because the activities of the congregation were largely limited to old-fashioned Sunday services in the parish church. Besides that, the pastor was also critical of a large part of the schoolteachers whom he considered to be anti-church and sometimes morally unfit for the office.

All this is closely resembling the situation in most other parishes in Estonia and Latvia. What makes Haljala exceptional, is the spread of anti-clerical views in some parts of the parish, which was not necessarily linked to support for the leftist parties. In Vihula and Varangu communes, there was unusually low support for religious instruction during the 1923 referendum. And there seems to be more accounts of individuals who consciously severed their ties with the church than was the case elsewhere. In part, this anomaly is almost certainly related to the uneasy relations of the pastors with the self-educated nationalist peasant leaders in Vihula. Besides that, there was also widespread voting against religious

instruction in Karepa and Vainupea polling stations, which may be related to the specifics of the coastal area.

In sum, while generally, the church played quite a similar role in Haljala as elsewhere in Estonia, there were some areas where notable loosening of the ties of locals with the church was taking place. However, due to paucity of the sources, it is hard to say to what extent it can be described as a part of the long-term secularization process. Interesting is the ambiguity of the commune elder Pruus who confessed that he was at his heart supporting religious instruction, despite having voted against it. Was the voting seen primarily as an opportunity to simply express his distrust towards the current pastor? Perhaps, if there had been another (an Estonian nationalist or liberal?) pastor in Haljala, also the church would have found less opposition in the “dissenting” villages of the parish.

2.2.2. HALLISTE PARISH

Introduction

Historiography

Several overviews have been written about the parish, which, however, provide mostly scanty factual data about church building and the names of the pastors.²⁸⁸

General Overview

Halliste is a part of Mulgimaa, a region consisting of southern parishes of former Pärnu and Viljandi counties, which was an economically developed early heartland of the Estonian national movement. A significant part of the Estonian political and cultural elite came from there. According to the agricultural censuses, the communes of Halliste belonged to the most prosperous communities in Estonia, Abja being in 1929 among the seven richest in the country.²⁸⁹ Farming was well-developed, and mechanization was relatively widespread.²⁹⁰ Farmers imitated the lifestyle of the lords of the manors, building magnificent dwelling houses as well as buying roadster horses and calashes.²⁹¹ The high economic development also had its flip side. Educated observers used to complain that ambitions of enriching overshadowed local educational and cultural endeavours²⁹² and that individualistic, competitive spirit was an obstacle to local social life and interpersonal relations.²⁹³ Besides that, economic inequalities led to class tensions on a scale that was unknown elsewhere in Estonia.

²⁸⁸ Tiideberg 2004, 99–103; Zwiebelberg 1942; Värav 1932.

²⁸⁹ 1929. a. põllumajandusliku... 1930, 29.

²⁹⁰ Pärnumaa maadeteaduslik, tulunduslik... 1930, 296-299.

²⁹¹ Pärdi 2008, especially p. 38.

²⁹² See, e.g. notes by Mats Laarmann, EKLA f. 169 M 275:3.

²⁹³ See, e.g., trainee teacher reports: ERA 1830-1-241, pp. 41–45 (Anastasia Hein, 1929/30); ERA 1183-2-84, p. 22 (Linda Klaassen, 1930/31), both about Kaubi primary school in Abja commune.

As for religious life, Mulgimaa was among the most secularized regions according to the ecclesiastical statistics. Results of the 1923 referendum varied significantly in the region, but the share of the supporters of religious instruction in Karksi, Helme, and especially Halliste parish were among the lowest in Estonia.

Religious background

The overwhelming majority of the population of Halliste parish was Lutheran. The Lutheran congregation, with more than 10,000 members, was among the largest in Estonia. In 1927, a congregation was established in the town of Mõisaküla. Johan Sõmer acted as the pastor there in 1936–43 and was also mayor of the town (*linnavanem*) in 1939–40. Members of the congregation were the inhabitants of the town (mostly workers), but also nearby rural dwellers. The congregation built a wooden church, which was consecrated in 1934.²⁹⁴

The orthodox minority made up 36.6% of the population of Penuja commune in 1922, and slightly over 1/10 in Kaarli, Pornuse, and Laatre. The Orthodox Church was situated in Penuja village near the Latvian border. Another Orthodox congregation was founded in Mõisaküla in 1922, and since 1933 operated in its own church.²⁹⁵

The Herrnhutian movement had been previously important in Vana-Kariste and Uue-Kariste communes.²⁹⁶ However, since the beginning of the 20th century, it had been in decline, and prayer meetings were seldom held. Membership had shrunk, and there were no lay preachers (*lugijad*) anymore. Only the pastors of Halliste held services in the meetinghouses from time to time.²⁹⁷ Free churches had only a marginal impact. In the 1932 visitation protocol, it is mentioned that Baptists, Adventists, Salvation Army, and Pentecostals had been conducting activity in Abja and Mõisaküla.²⁹⁸ Otherwise, there are little traces about them in the sources.

Pastors

Erwin von Dehn (in office from 1889–1934, lived 1862–1949) had shaped the religious life in Halliste for decades. Even more, the congregation had been previously (since 1825) served by von Dehn's uncle and grandfather. In a jubilee article, Erwin von Dehn was characterized as a cordial, helpful man, and he was, in addition, known as a good pianist.²⁹⁹ However, after Alfred Kõiv was employed as the second pastor of the parish in 1929, the relations between the clergymen proved difficult. The supporters of Kõiv in the congregation also started to exert pressure on von Dehn, and he decided finally to accept his retire-

²⁹⁴ Luhamets 2024, 234.

²⁹⁵ Luhamets 2024, 234.

²⁹⁶ Tiideberg 2004, 102; Pärnumaa maadeteaduslik, tulunduslik... 1930, 306.

²⁹⁷ EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Halliste kogudusega. Visitatsiooniprotokoll (03.12.–04.12.1932).

²⁹⁸ EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Halliste kogudusega. Visitatsiooniprotokoll (03.12.–04.12.1932).

²⁹⁹ Eesti Kirik, 12.05.1932, p. 159.

ment in February 1934. During the *Umsiedlung* of Baltic Germans in 1939, he left Estonia and died in Jena, Germany.

Alfred Kõiv (in office **1929–35**, lived in 1899—1979) had serious conflicts with some leading members of the congregation, who accused him of appropriation of congregation money. Despite that, he managed to win wide support among parishioners, exploiting internal divisions in the parish (more on that below).

Johannes Selliov (in office **1936–39**, lived 1909–1991). After the Consistory compelled Kõiv to leave Halliste in 1935, several pastors, including Arnold Võsu and Johannes Selliov, served the congregation on a temporary basis. Finally, Selliov was elected as a permanent pastor in 1936, but failed to hold out for long in the congregation marred by deep internal conflict.

After a short stint of **Hans Rebane** (1905–1983) as a substitute pastor, young **Villem Uuspuu** (1911–1944) was elected as a pastor of Halliste in March 1940. Uuspuu had excelled as a scholar of 17th-century witch trials in Estonia, but his career as a clergyman proved short. Having served less than half a year, he resigned, citing his theological doubts as the reason (more below).

Results of 1923 referendum

Table 2. Results of the Referendum on Religious Instruction in Public Primary Schools in Halliste Parish (17.02.–19.02.1923)

Commune	Polling station	Turnout (%)	Support for religious instruction (%)
Abja		66.5	64.5
	Vallamaja	66.2	62.1
	Püssi	67.4	71.7
Kaarli		59.3	58.1
Penuja		74.2	59.0
Pornuse		66.2	53.7
	Vallamaja	66.4	50
	Aadami talu	64.4	87.9
Uue-Kariste		67.9	49.4
	Kasarmu	65.5	62.1
	Vallamaja	68.3	41.4
	Reinse	71.1	64.4
Vana-Kariste		67.5	46.1
	Mõis	64.9	54.7
	Vallamaja	67.5	52.9
	Undima	71.3	22.8
	Sosi Petrovi	67.3	38.1
	Alva	76.2	28.1

Source: own calculations, based on minutes of electoral commissions (ERA 80-1-1980).

The results indicate that there were large differences in the results even within the same commune. But only in one polling station was support for religious instruction higher than the national average, while usually it was significantly lower.

Especially notable in that respect is Vana-Kariste commune, where in two polling stations relatively high turnout was combined with extremely low support for religious instruction.

Religious Life

The Lutheran congregation of Halliste belonged to Pärnu deanery. According to observations of the dean August Grünberg-Arumäe, the deanery was diverse. In the northern part, religious life had a pietist hue and was on the rise; notably, prayer meetings were becoming more popular. In the southern part, there was rather a decline; the overall mentality there was similar to Viljandi and Tartu counties, as people were not especially pious but rather expecting nice liturgy and beautiful sermons from their pastors.³⁰⁰

Individual Practice

Halliste, however was exceptional even in the southern part of the deanery for its miserable statistical indicators. A low number of baptisms, communicants, and male confirmands were frequently mentioned in the reports of the dean and even of the bishop of EELC.³⁰¹ Unusually critical were also conclusions of the visitation, which was conducted by the dean August Grünberg and other pastors of the deanery in December 1932. Eesti Kirik reported: “Religious life is dwindling: on regular Sundays, there are 30–40 people in the church; true, on major feasts, the church is full. This year, there have been a little over 800 communicants, around 1,000 membership fee payers, and all this is about a congregation of 11,000 people! The meeting houses of Uue-Kariste and Vana-Kariste, which once had been built, are empty and decaying. Many farm owners live as bachelors and have mistresses, who are called *manulised*. Nothing wrong is seen in that. In a couple of schools, there are teachers who opted for divorce in order to keep their jobs.³⁰² The religious upbringing of children at home is disappearing. Apathy towards religious life is big.” It was concluded that only large-scale religious awakening could save the congregation.³⁰³ The number of baptisms and commu-

³⁰⁰ EELKKA 1-4-457, Pärnu praosti aruanne 1933. See also report from the following year, where Grünberg also distinguished “Pietist North and Rationalist South” in his deanery (EELKKA 1-4-458, Pärnu praosti aruanne 1934).

³⁰¹ In the annual reports of EELC, Halliste was mentioned for a low share of membership fee payers (Eesti Kirik, 10.07.1930, pp. 214–215) and a large share of secular weddings (Eesti Kirik, 19.07.1934, p. 226).

³⁰² To fight unemployment among educated people, a law had been adopted that prohibited employing more than one person from the same family by the state institutions, including schools. To preserve the jobs of both spouses, some of the couples resorted to fictitious divorces.

³⁰³ „Usuelu on lonkamas: harilikel pühapäevil on kirikus 30-40 inimest, suurtel pühadel on kirik küll täis. Käesoleval aastal on armulualisi olnud vähe üle 800, maksumaksjaid 1000 ümber, ja see kõik 11.000 hingelises koguduses! Omalajal ülesehitatud Uue- ja Vana Kariste palvemajad on tühjad ja lagunevad. Paljud peremehed elavad poismeestena ja peavad armukesi, n. n. „manulisi”. Selles ei nähta midagi halba. Paaris koolis töötavad õpetajad, kes selle-

nions fell particularly low during the internal disturbances of the congregation.³⁰⁴ However, no positive turn followed, and Halliste had still one of the lowest religious practice rates in the deanery at the end of the 1930s, lagging behind also from the neighbouring parishes of Saarde and Karksi. At the end of the 1930s, attendance at church services in Halliste (only 1% of parishioners) was the lowest in the parish,³⁰⁵ and the same is true also for rites. Remarkable is also extremely low share of male communicants, but it was the case also in many other parishes of the deanery (see table 3).

The declining number of the rites in the deanery as a whole was in several times discussed by the deans of Pärnu.³⁰⁶ At the end of the interwar period, dean Grünberg marked that a significant number of young people did not show up for confirmation course when they had reached the appropriate age: “The reason is not always anti-church and anti-religious sentiment, but several other factors have contributed. Indifference, neglect of it at home in particular cases, or also economic hardship, because the confirmand would like to be properly dressed. However, if the financial situation does not allow it, then coming to confirmation is postponed, and often the young person will then never be confirmed. However, this prevents a church wedding. If you ask unmarried couples about the reason why they have not concluded their marriage in the Christian way, the reason is pretty often that one of the spouses has not been confirmed.”³⁰⁷ Dean Grünberg also noted that boys omitted confirmation much more commonly than girls, and especially so in the city of Pärnu and the parish of Halliste.³⁰⁸

In the 1920s, several grooms had not been previously confirmed as they had been in the army during wartime, and only for that reason opted sometimes also for secular marriage.³⁰⁹ In a similar vein, secularly registered married couples often referred to economic reasons. Therefore, the dean suggested to wed people free of charge, if necessary. Besides that, there had been several cases of mixed couples where the Lutheran bride had wished for a church wedding, but the Orthodox groom declined.³¹⁰

pärast end lasksid lahutada, et säilitada kohta. Laste kodune usuline kasvatus on kadumas. Leigus usuelus on suur.” Eesti Kirik, 01.01.1933, p. 8.

³⁰⁴ EELKKA 1-4-457, Pärnu praosti aruanne 1933.

³⁰⁵ EELKKA 1-4-461, Pärnu praosti aruanne 1937.

³⁰⁶ 1911–29 Otto Schultz from Pärnu-Jakobi, 1929–30 Ferdinand Hasselblatt from Pärnu, 1930–42 Grünberg-Arumäe from Pärnu. Their observations, which are referred here, concern the whole deanery, not only Halliste.

³⁰⁷ „Põhjuseks ei ole alati mitte kiriku- ja usuvastane meelsus, vaid mitmed muud tegurid on kaasa mõjunud. Ükskõiksus, hooletus selle vastu kodudes teinekord ehk ka majanduslik kitsikus, sest leeritulija tahaks olla korralikult riides. Kui aga varanduslik seisukord seda ei võimalda, siis lükatakse leeritulek edasi ja sageli jääbki noor inimene leeritamata. See aga takistab kiriklikku laulatust. Kui küsida laulatamata paaridelt põhjuse üle, miks nad oma abielu mitte ei ole sõlminud kristlikul kombel, siis on õige sageli põhjuseks, et üks abikaasast ei ole käinud leeris.” EELKKA 1-4-461, Pärnu praosti aruanne 1937.

³⁰⁸ EELKKA 1-4-459, Pärnu praosti aruanne 1935.

³⁰⁹ EELKKA 1-4-455, Pärnu praosti aruanne 1928.

³¹⁰ EELKKA 1-4-455, Pärnu praosti aruanne 1930.

Table 3. Relative Participation in the Holy Communion and Church Rites in Pärnu Deanery (EELK) in 1939

Congregation	Share of communicants per members (%)	Share of male communicants (%)	Baptisms per 1000 members	Confirmations per 1000 members	Church weddings per 1000 members	Share of payers of annual membership fees (% of those obliged)
Halliste	6.4	21.6	11.9	7.2	3.0	35%
Mõisaküla	30.1	36.8	26.8	22.6	8.5	81%
Audru	65.8	41.1	20.7	24.0	9.3	80%
Häädemeeste	16.5	35.5	19.4	7.0	6.7	53%
Pärnu-Jakobi	29.2	34.9	17.7	14	7.0	72%
Karksi	14.2	33.9	19.2	6.9	8.7	69%
Kärgu	18.7	30.4	7.5	31.3	7.5	70%
Käru	14.1	36.8	12.1	10.0	5.4	53%
Pärnu I	44.3	28.9	27.3	24.0	18.3	60%
Pärnu II	29.1	31.9	14.0	17.6	9.4	57%
Saarde	13.4	31.7	9.9	10.9	4.7	60%
Sindi	23.7	32.3	7.7	16.4	6.0	76%
Tahkuranna	33.0	33.0	28.1	12.3	7.0	89%
Tori	13.5	35.0	11.1	12.7	4.6	66%
Tõstamaa	23.0	35.5	15.9	9.5	5.6	57%
Vändra	15.6	34.9	15.6	13.9	7.5	64%

Source: own calculations, based on data of annual report of Pärnu deanery, 1939 (EELKKA I-4-463). "Members" include here all the Lutheran parishioners who had not left the congregation, including non-adults and those who did not pay their membership fees.

But even some of those who did not care about confirmation and church weddings still considered the baptism of their children important: “Among the girl confirmands, there are sometimes married women with [secularly] registered children. As [secularly] registered married couple, they have been living together for a long time. However, when a child is born, they come to be confirmed, to the church wedding, to the baptism, because in several parishes, [the principle] is observed that the children of the non-church wed couples are not baptized.”³¹¹ Even so, the dean had to admit in 1937: “It is necessary to carry out time and again explanatory work regarding the baptism of children and to call on parents not to leave their children unbaptized and to do it at the right time.”³¹²

Conspicuously low practise of religion in Halliste parish did not mean that people were entirely indifferent to the church. During the major feast days, Halliste church appears to have been as full as other churches in the deanery.³¹³ Very popular were also cemetery festivals on St. John’s Day. A report by Marta Elias, a student at the University of Tartu, who was assigned to describe the parish for scientific purposes in 1924, gives a glimpse of both the scale of the event and also differences of wealth in the parish: “Travelling by railway from Mõisaküla to Abja station. The carriage fills up with the residents of the surroundings of Mõisaküla, all rushing to the cemetery of Halliste, young and old, carrying large bouquets of flowers, mostly garden roses, white and red. Soon a lively conversation breaks out, jokes are made, *mulgi* dialect is spoken. Several school-aged children are in the carriage, their speech is already closer to written language. Approaching the Abja station, we notice a road from the carriage window and a long row of people there heading to the service. I remember what was told to us about St. John’s Day in Halliste. Near the cemetery, one could reportedly watch for hours how the caleshes drive there, with 3 horses harnessed to it. /.../ The road passing through the borough [of Abja-Paluoja] is full of worshippers going to Halliste. Here you can see simple long work carts with ladders, spring carts, dominating are long carts. No one from Mõisaküla comes with caleshes or they have passed through before. A bus and a car pass by. Horses – everybody has perfectly fit animals, there seems not to be any evident roadster horses kept in the stables.”³¹⁴

³¹¹ „Leeritüdrukute hulgas tuleb ette abielus registreeritud lastega naisi. Elatakse registree-ritult juba pikemat aega koos. Kui aga sünnib laps, siis tullakse leeri, laulatusese, ristimisele, sest mitmes koguduses peetakse sellest kinni, et lapsi ei ristita laulatamata abielupaaridel.” EELKKA 1-4-456, Pärnu praosti aruanne 1932.

³¹² Tuleb ikka uuesti teha selgitustööd laste ristimise asjus ja vanemaid üleskutsuda, et nad ei jätaks omi lapsi ristimata ja et nad seda teeksid õigel ajal.” EELKKA 1-4-461, Pärnu praosti aruanne 1937.

³¹³ In 1931, EELKKA 1-4-456, Pärnu praosti aruanne 1931. However, in the dean's report for 1939, it was noted that only 10–20% of the congregation participated in feast services (EELKKA 1-4-462, Pärnu praosti aruanne 1939).

³¹⁴ „Sõit raudteel Mõisakülalt Abja jaamani. Vagun täitub Mõisaküla ümbruskonna elanikega, kes kõik Aliste surnuaiale ruttavad, noored ja vanad, kaasas suured lillekimbud, enamasti aiaroosid, valged ja punased. Varstigi sobib elav jutt, tehakse nalja, kõneldakse mulgi keelt. Vagunis mitu kooliealist last, nende kõne juba kirjakeelelisem. Abja jaamale lähenedes silmame vaguni aknast maanteed ja sellel pikka kirikuliste rida. Tuleb meele, mis meile jutustatud

Besides that, also special events, such as service on the occasion of the conference of pastors of Pärnu deanery, still attracted large crowds.³¹⁵ Another popular event was the religious song festival of the parish in 1937, which involved sermons by two guest pastors and performances of four local choirs with 150 singers as well as local brass band. The church was overcrowded,³¹⁶ though obviously many people turned out not for religious reasons.

The dean Grünberg, writing to the consistory about the impressions of his visitation, also noted that no anti-religious attitudes were publicly voiced in the parish, although poking fun (*lõõpimine*) about religion was spreading among secondary school students. Also, formerly common delivering of religious knowledge at home was disappearing, and, in wealthier families, little attention was paid to Christian upbringing.³¹⁷

Autobiographical Sources

Only in rare cases the church or religion are paid much attention in the autobiographical writings from Halliste parish. However, according to **Meida Laarmann-Inno** (born 1928) her most vivid childhood memoirs were associated with school and church. She liked the church for its beauty and for the music performed there. Laarmann-Inno had been in the church already in her pre-school years, accompanied by her grandmother, who excelled as a singer and knew many hymns by heart – but also memorized ornaments of knitted gloves (*kindakiri*) of other worshippers. She also mentions attendance of Sunday school and describes impressions of visiting the church on festive occasions, such as a visit of bishop Rahamägi and a patriotic church service in June 1940, *i.e.*, shortly before the Soviet occupation.³¹⁸

In the memoirs of **Salme Pärn**, who lived as a child close to Latvian border and Mõisaküla town, daily farm life and colourful people of her home village are the main focuses. However, there are also very rare, but interesting references to religious beliefs. For example, she attributes recovering from a serious eye-injury to “power of God” (p. 10). On another occasion, she saw during serious illness, “perhaps due to raving in high temperature”, white angels kneeling and praying next to her bed (p. 13). Father and mother had told her that thunder was about God admonishing people for their sins. She was not afraid as she had not committed any grave sins: “Therefore I boldly looked at the thundering sky and ad-

jaanipäevast Alistes. Surnuaia lähedal võivat tundide kaupa vaadata, kuidas kokku sõidavad kalessid, 3 hobust ees. /.../ „Alevist läbiminev maantee on täis Aliste poole sõitvaid kirikulisi. Siin näeb lihtsaid redelitega õige pikki töövankreid, vedruvankreid, domineerivad pikkvankrid. Kalesse ei tule Mõisaküla poolt kandist ühtegi või on nad varem läbi sõitnud. Möödub autobuss ja üks sõiduauto. Hobused – kõigil täiesti korralikud loomad, otse tallis peetud sõiduloomi ei näi olevat.” EKLA F 360 M 18:1, p. 37. *Cf.* also short notice in Heidmets 2018, 22.

³¹⁵ EELKKA 1-4-462, Pärnu praosti aruanne 1938.

³¹⁶ Eesti Kirik, 03.06.1937, p. 6.

³¹⁷ EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Halliste kogudusega, 14.–15.12.1932.

³¹⁸ Laarmann-Inno 2013.

mired the beautiful lightning bolts, because I was confident in the protection of the Heavenly Father” (p. 19 and p. 33). Finally, her pious mother attributed accidents, such as a burning down of a sauna and an injury of a young cow, to punishment of God for working on Sundays (p. 24–26).³¹⁹

Private prayer is repeatedly mentioned in the memoirs of **Etkar Kanits** as a remedy in times of illness or life-threatening situations. His family seems to have believed in the power of prayer,³²⁰ but with some reservations. “I prayed to God, but one cannot put hope on it alone,” allegedly his mother said once, seeking a cure to an illness of her husband.³²¹ Besides that, Kanits describes how his family was invited to a private pietist gathering by a religious neighbour to listen to a famous preacher. It was a very unusual experience for a little boy, who had apparently had little religious upbringing at home: “I stared at this preacher agape. He talked about heaven and God and sin and the Garden of Eden and other things that I did not understand. Everyone listened quietly. The women occasionally wiped their eyes.”³²² Notably, however, Kanits never mentions the church in relation to these religious issues. Indeed, the pious neighbour had allegedly told her husband that he would go to hell due to his irreligion and non-participation of private prayer meetings (but not church services).³²³

In other memoirs, church-related topics are not given much coverage. Typically, social rather than religious aspects are highlighted in such cases, often in relation to Christmas and other feast days, religious education at school, and confirmation.³²⁴ In fact, Vello Arro claims that already his grandmother had not been particularly pious but used to go regularly to church in her youth just to mix with people.³²⁵

Besides of indifference, there is also evidence about conscious irreligion. For example, **Martin Polikarpus** (born in 1916 and raised in Penuja) remembers that he sometimes went to Orthodox Church with his mother, but the service was dull and incomprehensible for him, and in the winter the church was also cold: “I could not understand what those adult women and men were looking for there. When the boys grew up and began to understand life, the father made it clear that there was no sense in praying or worshiping this non-existent and imaginary god because it would not help anyway. Father had read the Bible and said it was Jewish history and that there was more fable than truth in it.” The result was that Polikarpus did not go to confirmation for lack of belief in God. The mother did not object; however, the fiercely religious and churchly aunt was upset. Indeed, Polikarpus admits that there were “yet” quite many deeply religious people in his

³¹⁹ „Seepärast ma vaatasin julgelt äikeselist taevast ja imetlesin ilusaid välgunooli, sest Taeva-isa kaitstes olin ma kindel”. Pärn 2010.

³²⁰ EKLA f. 350 M1: 485, p. 12–13, 151.

³²¹ „Palusin jumalat, kuid üksi selle peale loota ei saa.” EKLA f. 350 M1: 485, p. 49.

³²² EKLA f. 350 M1: 485, p. 43.

³²³ EKLA f. 350 M1: 485, pp. 10–11.

³²⁴ Heidmets 2018, 25, 34, 52, and 59–60 (A collection of memoirs from Penuja); EKLA f. 350 M1: 856, p. 4 and 17 (Vello Arro).

³²⁵ EKLA f. 350: M1: 856, p. 14.

home village. Also, confirmation was still popular among the youth, but not for religious reasons: it was about making photos with festive clothing, girls dreaming about the opportunity to get married, and boys having fun together, notably climbing to the church tower.³²⁶ In general, Polikarpus's autobiography deals with church issues quite extensively, but his attitude towards religion is irreverent and mocking. His family was an active supporter of socialists, which may have influenced his views on religion, though he does not link these convictions explicitly.

Milda Inno (b. 1928) has also written about religious doubts that started in childhood. To the question by Estonian National Museum about whether social norms were based on religion, she answered: "There was generally no reference to God. If then – that God sees. And if so, one should not commit too many misdeeds. I remember when the boys (my brothers) talked about God – to the devil, but what if he still exists. So there were sayings that maybe there is no god. But the doubt remained in my soul." The fatal accident at the nearby Kilingi-Nõmme primary school in 1937³²⁷ also made her think. Both Inno's grandmother and the pastor at the Sunday school confirmed that it was the punishment of God. "But there was talk at home: perhaps the death or lifelong disability of these children was too much for the sins of their parents. The doubt remained in my soul." On the other hand, she mentions praying in times of distress. Namely, when she was 14 years old, a boy touched her cheek with his lips. She had had no sexual education and therefore thought that one could get pregnant by kissing. This prompted her to pray that she would not have a child, because the unmarried mothers were in disgrace.³²⁸

Salme Vainlo, however, drawing on memoirs of **Linda Kosenkranius**, tells a story about a wealthy farm owner rejecting religion. He builds a splendid new dwelling house, and, as he heats the stove of his new home for the first time, burns the family Bible in it, boasting that he needs no Scripture as he is himself smart enough. His children are perplexed, and so is his wife, who is afraid of divine punishment for the stunt. But she does not intervene as she is even more afraid of her husband because of her financial dependency on him. The later fate of the family was indeed grim because the sons grew up pampered, arrogant, and unfit to run the farm.³²⁹ It is impossible to establish if this account is based on a true story. However, it shows at least that according to popular opinion charac-

³²⁶ His father was apparently a Lutheran, as he speaks about confirmation in Lutheran church. "Mulle jäi arusaamatuks, mida need tädid ja onud sealts otsisid. Kui poisid suuremaks kasvasid ja ilmaelust hakkasid aru saama, tegi isa asja selgeks, et seda olematut ja väljamõeldud jumalat ei ole mõtet paluda ega kummardada, sest nii kui nii sellest abi ei saa. Isa oli Piibli läbi lugenud ja ütles, et see on juudi ajalugu ning et seal on rohkem muinasjuttu kui tõde." EKLA f. 350 M 153:1, pp. 26–27.

³²⁷ On April 20, 1937, a room where more than 130 children were present caught fire in Kilingi-Nõmme elementary school during a screening of films. 18 children were killed and over 50 injured. The accident caught considerable attention of the public in the whole Estonia.

³²⁸ ERM KV 732:2, pp. 509–510.

³²⁹ Vainlo 2017, 145–148.

teristic self-confidence of newly rich farmers of the region could well amount even to abandoning the belief in God.³³⁰

Congregational Life of Lutheran Congregations

a) Halliste Congregation

Decline of church attendance was seen as a problem by the congregation already in 1920s. In a plenary assembly meeting in 1922, some argued that German orientation of the pastor was to blame, while others stressed that it was all about the spirit of the time, “which does not like the old, but is also unable to replace it with anything new.”³³¹ To rejuvenate religious life, congregation council decided in 1927 to work out a plan for arranging systematically religious services in remote villages.³³² However, during the visitation of 1932, it was noted that the congregation was still not able to proclaim the Word of God in remote parts of the parish.³³³ Probably also passivity of the pastor Dehn played a part in congregation’s problems. In his report of 1933, the dean Grünberg claimed that he had noted already some time ago that von Dehn was unable to fulfil his duties properly due to his age and health problems, and proposed him to retire. Von Dehn had declined.³³⁴

Initially, the activities of the congregation seem to have been limited to arranging religious services. Later, there were limited attempts to start children and youth work. During the visitation of 1932, 200 young people gathered to the altar for the “examination of the youth” (*noorte katsumine*). According to Eesti Kirik, many of them were deeply moved by the speech of the young pastor Harry Nuth.³³⁵ However, only very few were engaged in regular youth and children events. According to the pastor’s reports, the youth association was founded in the congregation in 1931, and had 46 members.³³⁶ Later, the membership did not rise significantly, and during the time of troubles in the life of the congregation, youth work ceased entirely. During the 1930s, also Sunday schools and children’s services were mentioned in the reports, but usually, only up to 50 children took part in these. According to the 1938 report, the youth organization had again started operating, having thirty members, and fifteen children participated in the Sunday school. These were spectacularly small numbers for a large congregation operating in the deanery where children and youth work was, after all, especially

³³⁰ Similar motives can be found in the well-known play “God of purse” (“Kauka Jumal”, 1915) by August Kitzberg (1855–1927).

³³¹ „[M]is vanat enam ei salli ja ka uut midagi asemele ei suuda säada,” EAA 1275-1-428, p. 14.

³³² EAA 1275-1-428, p. 45, cf. EAA 1275-1-431, pp. 11v–12.

³³³ EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Halliste kogudusega. 15.12.1932.

³³⁴ EELKKA 1-4-457, Pärnu praosti aruanne 1933. Von Dehn’s health problems seem to have been widely discussed in public, and he tried to debunk rumours about it also in a letter to the Consistory from March 11, 1933 (EELKKA, konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Halliste kogudusega).

³³⁵ Eesti Kirik, 01.01.1933, p. 8.

³³⁶ EELKKA 1-4-456, Pärnu praostkonna aruanded, Halliste koguduse aruanne 1931.

prioritized.³³⁷ Even more, according to the later judgment of the dean Grünberg (Arumäe), children's work was only formally reported in Halliste but possibly not executed in real life.³³⁸

b) Mõisaküla Lutheran Congregation

Significantly different was the track record of the new congregation in the town of Mõisaküla, which was established in 1926. In 1936, the borders of the congregation were officially confirmed by the Consistory, but only 1/3 of the people who lived there had become members of the new congregation. Probably, the fact that it was a small congregation, which members had joined it largely on a voluntary basis, explains also why religious life was remarkably livelier there than in the mother congregation of Halliste.

Impressively, in 1937, 70–80 children went regularly to Sunday school in Mõisaküla; it was more than in much bigger Halliste congregation – if the reports can be trusted. 10–20% of the members attended services on regular Sundays in 1938, or roughly as much as in Halliste on occasion of feast days. In Mõisaküla, however, reportedly almost all members attended on feast days.³³⁹ Dean Grünberg noted in his report for 1937: “The Mõisaküla report shows how the consistent holding of Bible studies has led people to God's word. It has been started to read the Bible also at home.”³⁴⁰ Besides that, the dean Grünberg acclaimed the economic achievements of the tiny congregation.³⁴¹

The establishment of the new congregation also led several locals to re-establish their broken ties with the church. Notably, in 1933, even 41 of the 43 confirmands were older than 20 years. According to the pastor's presentation on the day of the congregation (*koguduse päev*) in 1937, several children in the congregation had been baptized at the age of 8–10 years, and several couples that had co-habited 5–10 years, were finally wed in the church.³⁴² Pastor Sõmer ex-

³³⁷ See annual reports from Halliste in EELKKA 1-4-456.463. The dean August Grünberg-Arumäe was among the promoters of Sunday schools for children in Estonia. He spoke about the topic at the Conference of Theologians in 1933 and had written a master thesis on it (Arumäe 1934, cf. Arumäe 1931, 1933).

³³⁸ Arumäe 2005, 216.

³³⁹ EELKKA 1-4-462, Pärnu praosti aruanne 1938.

³⁴⁰ „Mõisaküla aruandes näidatakse kuidas järjekindel piiblitundide pidamine inimesi Jumala sõna juurde on viinud. Ka kodus on hakatud Piiblit lugema.” EELKKA 1-4-642, Pärnu praosti aruanne 1938.

³⁴¹ EELKKA 1-4-460, Pärnu praosti aruanne 1936.

³⁴² EELKKA, konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Mõisaküla kogudusega, kogudusepäeva protokoll (24.10.1937). Another copy: EAA 1206-1-331. Interestingly, one of those living in the civil marriage was a leading member of the congregation, Julius Kosenkranius. There were severe internal conflicts in Mõisaküla congregation in 1936, and the opponents of Kosenkranius sent complaints to the Consistory, claiming that rigging had occurred in the congregation council elections. In one of such complaints, it was mentioned that Kosenkranius had not been wed in the church. He did not deny it, claiming that before marrying in 1926, he had just graduated from school and could therefore afford only secular registration, as he had no money to settle congregation membership fee debts, which was a precondition for church weddings. No problem

plained the delayed church rites by the fact that Mõisaküla was situated far away from both Halliste and Saarde churches. But it is also possible that people of Mõisaküla had been earlier, for some reason, reluctant to turn to the pastor of Halliste.³⁴³

However, Pastor Sõmer noted in 1937 that still only 1/3 of the Lutherans who lived on the territory of the Mõisaküla congregation (as determined recently by the Consistory) had been registered as members of the congregation: “Why? Where are the others? In [the congregation of] Saarde?! In Halliste?! They hardly belong there either! According to the dean’s report from 1936, 2288 [people] of 9573 had paid the [membership] fee in Saarde, and 1864 of 11,500 in Halliste. These data and observations allow us to assume that one lives without the church. The church is arguably still fulfilling some kind of duties of good manners – out of customs. Without rising to the agenda more deeply, more seriously.”³⁴⁴

Other Confessions and Interconfessional Relations

The Penuja Orthodox congregation had contracted considerably, as many had after 1905 reconverted to the Lutheran church.³⁴⁵ Religious life was rather modest. According to the visitation protocol of 1925, about 30–40 people were attending regularly, but during the feasts the church was still full. There were arguably 600 members, but only 51 of them had paid the annual membership fee in 1924. Also, it seems that the activities of the congregation were limited only to Sunday services.³⁴⁶

The previous priest **Joann Pettai** (1894–1919) had served only a short time, before being killed by Bolsheviks in 1919,³⁴⁷ and due to economic difficulties it was hard to find a new one. In 1920s, services were held once in a month by the priest from Karksi. In 1931–35, self-appointed (but despite that later still ordained) colourful and controversial priest **Jakob Sarv** (1907–69) prompted internal conflict in the congregation, which had similar traits with the affair of Kõiv

was made on that; Kosenkranius was hastily wed also in the church and was consequently elected the chairman of the congregation council. EELKKA, konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Mõisaküla kogudusega, July–August 1936.

³⁴³ Importantly, the direct railway connection between Mõisaküla and Halliste (since 1897) facilitated going to church remarkably. The distance between the stations is only 20 kilometers.

³⁴⁴ „Miks?! Kus on teised? Saardes?! Hallistes?! Vaevalt and ka sinna kuuluvad! 1936. a. praostkonna aruande järgi on Saarde 9573 maksu maksnud 2288

Halliste 11.500 “ “ 1864

Need andmed ja tähelepanekud lasevad oletada, et elatakse ilma kirikuta. Kirik täitvat veel üksi mingit hääkombe kohustusi – kombepäras. Seesmiselt sügavamalt, tõsisemalt põhjanevat päevakorrale tõusmata.” EELKKA, konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Mõisaküla kogudusega, kogudusepäeva protokoll (24.10.1937).

³⁴⁵ „Penuja õigeusu kirik”, http://entsyklopeedia.ee/artikkel/penuja_%C3%B5igeusu_kirik1, 06.08.2022.

³⁴⁶ EAA 1205-1-132.

³⁴⁷ See the biographical database of the priests of EAOC: <https://www.eoc.ee/puhad-isad/puha-joann-pettai/?v=a57b8491d1d8>, 01.02.1924.

in Halliste. In 1938–40, **Martin Raid** (1884–1949) served the congregation, but left soon, citing internal tensions and lack of decent income.³⁴⁸

According to the Lutheran sources, the council of Penuja congregation turned in 1929 and 1931 to the Lutheran Halliste congregation, inviting Lutherans to hold services in Penuja Orthodox Church – under the precondition that money of the collection would be donated to their congregation and neither Lutheran propaganda nor demeaning remarks about Orthodox faith would be made. The then-pastor Alfred Kõiv, asking the permission of bishop Kukk for that, mentioned his experience of teaching both Lutheran and Orthodox children at school and boasted that he could persuade the local Orthodox to join Halliste Lutheran congregation within one year.³⁴⁹ The priest Vladimir Allik from Karksi, however, claimed to the Synod of EAOC that the initiative of the Lutheran services in Penuja church came from the pastor of Halliste himself, and the council of Penuja congregation had approved it. Allik however did not support the move, and therefore, the Synod forbade Lutheran services in Penuja church.³⁵⁰ This appears not to have influenced the relations between the congregations. During the visitation of Halliste Lutheran congregation in 1932, it was claimed that relations with other confessions were good. True, some parishioners objected, saying that Lutherans had not allowed the holding of Orthodox cemetery festivities (*surnuaiapäiha*) in the Lutheran cemetery.³⁵¹

In general, there are very few traces of relations between Lutherans and the representatives of free churches. Only in 1923, pastor von Dehn asked from the Consistory permission to rent the hall of the congregation (*leerisaal*) out for Adventists, who wanted to hold their prayer meetings there. The Consistory declined and expressed surprise that the pastor even had made such a proposal. In response, von Dehn claimed that this was not his initiative, but the congregation council had given him the task of writing to the Consistory about the matter, and its rejection pleased him.³⁵²

Controversy over Alfred Kõiv

However, there were not the religion-related issues, but the large-scale internal conflicts that made the congregation famous in the whole country. As these reveal much about the church's role in the local community, a detailed overview of them will follow here.

In 1929, Alfred Kõiv was invited to take the post of adjunct pastor of Halliste. The circumstances for this move are not known. At that time, the first contro-

³⁴⁸ EAA 1205-1-132.

³⁴⁹ EELKKA, konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Halliste kogudusega, 21.02.1931; see also 18.10.1929. The second pastor of Halliste, Erwin von Dehn, asked what their congregation should do if the Orthodox congregation, in turn, asked permission to hold services in Halliste Lutheran church. The Consistory suggested not to agree.

³⁵⁰ EAA 1205-1-132, 23.01.1930.

³⁵¹ EELKKA, konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Halliste kogudusega, visitatsiooniprotokoll 14.–15.12.1932.

³⁵² EELKKA, konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Halliste kogudusega, January 1923.

versies regarding the pastor had already come to light in Viljandi St. Paul (*Pauluse*) congregation, where he had served as assistant pastor.³⁵³ Besides that, a woman who had allegedly been taking care of Kõiv during his student days, had sued him successfully for alleged debts.³⁵⁴ Despite all of that, Kõiv managed to strike a chord with the people of Halliste. The position of adjunct pastor did not satisfy his ambitions, and initially he had also unwavering support from the lay leaders. So Kõiv was soon elected “second pastor” of the congregation, meaning his independence and equal status with von Dehn.³⁵⁵ The latter had previously declared that he did not object to employing another pastor,³⁵⁶ but later his cooperation with Kõiv seem not to have proceeded well.³⁵⁷ Even worse, accusations of embezzlement of the congregation’s money by Kõiv emerged. It seems indisputable that he had indeed repeatedly failed to deliver money received from people (especially as membership fees) to the congregation.³⁵⁸ Kõiv himself explained it with carelessness, which was allegedly largely a result of his huge workload.³⁵⁹

As the suspicions emerged, the congregation leaders appealed to the Consistory to dismiss the pastor,³⁶⁰ as well as started secular court proceedings against him. Kõiv, however, claiming to have been innocently persecuted by the congregation’s lay leaders, succeeded in mobilizing a significant part of the parishioners to support him. The Consistory invited the congregation leaders and pastor Kõiv to Tallinn. There Kõiv agreed, after some initial resistance, to resign, but later revoked the agreement, declining to leave Halliste and continuing pastoral activities there. Namely, he claimed to have had second thoughts after seeing the overwhelming support of parishioners for him. Indeed, in several meetings of the congregation’s plenary assembly held in 1933–34, hundreds of congregation members showed enthusiastic support for Kõiv. In some of these assemblies, people behaved aggressively against the opponents of Kõiv who were present, including members of the Consistory, and especially August Grünberg, the dean of Pärnu. Also, an attempt of von Dehn and the visiting pastor Paul Kuusik to hold prayer on occasion of public Christmas party of women’s voluntary defence organization (*Naiskodukaitse*) on December 26, 1933, was thwarted by heckling and trampling of feet. Allegedly, it had happened at the instigation of Kõiv, who later appeared in the room and held the prayer himself. Soon, Kõiv was “re-elected” as the pastor of the congregation by the plenary assembly, and previous lay leadership was replaced with supporters of Kõiv. Finally, as the Consistory,

³⁵³ Tobreluts 2017, 144–145.

³⁵⁴ Päewaleht, 06.02.1931, p. 5.

³⁵⁵ EELKKA, konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Halliste kogudusega, 10.11.1929.

³⁵⁶ EELKKA, konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Halliste kogudusega, 24.09.1929.

³⁵⁷ EELKKA, konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Halliste kogudusega, 10.11.1929. See also Visitationiprotokoll (03.-04.12.1932) in the same file.

³⁵⁸ EAA 1275-1-433. See also Pärnumaa, 28.02.1933, p. 1; Kaja, 25.02.1933, p. 6; 11.11.1933, p. 6.

³⁵⁹ See e.g. EELKKA 1-3-186, 29.05.1934 (Verdict of Mõisaküla Justice of the Peace).

³⁶⁰ EELKKA, konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Halliste kogudusega, 11.02.1933.

remaining adamant in demanding the departure of Kõiv, expelled him from the ranks of clergy, the plenary assembly of January 21, 1934, voted overwhelmingly (748 in favour, 37 against, 3 spoiled ballots, 150 did not vote) in support of leaving the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church.³⁶¹ The Consistory tried to prevent the execution of the decision, citing alleged irregularities in voting, but to no avail. After the confirmation by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Halliste congregation operated for some time formally as an independent “free congregation.”³⁶²

Meanwhile, Mõisaküla Justice of the Peace (*rahukohtunik*) had, on May 29, 1934, sentenced Kõiv to six months of imprisonment for embezzlement. The appeal court, however, overturned the verdict and acquitted Kõiv on January 7, 1935. Supreme Court of the Church, in turn, confirmed on January 12, 1935, the guilt of Kõiv in disobedience to the ecclesiastical authorities. His expulsion from the clergy was, however, changed to the ban on the execution of pastoral duties for three years.³⁶³

Kõiv himself had already begun to seek reconciliation with the Consistory, probably hoping to be forgiven and, after that being allowed to continue his service in Halliste. Therefore, he tolerated pastors whom the Consistory sent to Halliste and also told his followers to accept them as his “assistants.”³⁶⁴ His supporters put much hope on the visit of the EELC bishop Hugo Bernhard Rahamägi to Halliste, which indeed led to formal reconciliation between supporters and opponents of Kõiv,³⁶⁵ and on February 10, 1935 he convinced the plenary assembly to formally return to the EELC.³⁶⁶ The new temporary board of the congregation was appointed as the result of the visit of the bishop, with representatives from both pro- and anti-Kõiv parties, and led by chairman of the neighbouring Saarde congregation as an impartial person.³⁶⁷

However, Kõiv’s hopes were not fulfilled. His punishment was alleviated;³⁶⁸ yet, he was not allowed to continue his service in Halliste, but was sent to the remote Kaarma congregation on Saaremaa island. Namely, his superiors were convinced that tensions over Kõiv would not disappear unless he left the parish for good; he was even ordered to declare publicly that he would never again run for the pastor in Halliste and Mõisaküla as well as would not interfere in the matters of these congregations.³⁶⁹

Meanwhile, the official newspaper of the church had expressed the hope that after the reconciliation of the conflicting parties and the following departure of

³⁶¹ For comprehensive overview about the events, see EAA 1206-1-306 and EELKKA 1-3-186, 12.01.1935 (Verdict of Supreme Court of the Church (*Ülemkirikukohus*)).

³⁶² ERA 14-11-507, p. 21-33.

³⁶³ EELKKA, konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Halliste kogudusega, 12.01.1933 (Verdict of Supreme Court of the Church (*Ülemkirikukohus*)).

³⁶⁴ EELKKA, konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Halliste kogudusega, 03.09.1934.

³⁶⁵ Eesti Kirik, 22.11.1934, p. 374.

³⁶⁶ EELKKA 1-3-186, 10.02.1934. Eesti Kirik, 14.02.1935, p. 5.

³⁶⁷ Eesti Kirik, 23.05.1935, p. 5.

³⁶⁸ EELKKA 1-3-186, 04.06. and 05.06.1934.

³⁶⁹ EELKKA 1-3-286a, 24.10.1935 and 12.05.1936.

Kõiv, peace would be resumed in the congregation.³⁷⁰ Johannes Selliov, a young pastor who had been sent to serve the congregation, admitting difficult working conditions due to the legacy of the conflict, also expressed hope to win the support of the locals and improve the situation.³⁷¹ These hopes were in vain. After serving a year as a temporary pastor, Selliov was elected as the permanent pastor in 1936. However, there was significant opposition against him from the side of Kõiv's supporters, who had not given up hope of getting him back to Halliste. Pressure was inflicted upon Selliov, which included sending constantly letters of complaint about him to the bishop and the Consistory. Probably that was why Selliov, complaining about "being tired", asked in 1938 to send him temporarily to another congregation. Next year, he gave up his job in Halliste and left for the town of Valga to work as a teacher of religion in a secondary school.³⁷² Neither did Kõiv keep his promise to stay away from Halliste. It was alleged that he still guided his supporters in Halliste behind the scenes.³⁷³ In 1944 he managed indeed to return to Halliste and remained its pastor until 1960.³⁷⁴

The affair of Kõiv became a major event in local life. All of the sudden, the locals who had been so indifferent towards the church, became deeply engaged. The meetings of the plenary assembly of the congregation, which otherwise often had only a dozen or two participants,³⁷⁵ now attracted hundreds. Attitudes towards Kõiv led to fierce disagreements even between family members; there were appeals to boycott local shopkeepers for their stances on the issue.³⁷⁶ Opponents of Kõiv even sent a complaint to the Chief of Internal Defence (*Sisekaitse ülem*), asking the authorities to intervene as supporters of Kõiv allegedly terrorized his opponents, threatening them with violence. For example, young men, passing the house where Kõiv was living, had shouted: "Long live pastor Kõiv and death to his opponents!"³⁷⁷

³⁷⁰ Eesti Kirik, 09.05.1935, p. 7.

³⁷¹ EELKKA, konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Halliste kogudusega, 01.04.1936. EELKKA 1-4-459, Pärnu praostkonna aruanded, Halliste koguduse aruanne 1935.

³⁷² EELKKA 1-3-552.

³⁷³ EELKKA, konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Halliste kogudusega, 12.12.1935.

³⁷⁴ In 1942, Kõiv wrote to bishop Johan Kõpp, asking to allow him to return to Halliste. The plea was rejected. But in 1944, exploiting wartime chaos, he blatantly began to serve Halliste congregation without authorization from the church authorities. In his explanation, Kõiv claimed to have been urgently invited by the parishioners, as the operation of the congregation had ceased, and the local communist administration planned to expropriate its real estate. So Kõiv agreed to come to help to the congregation "in a difficult hour to avoid the worst". He was indeed allowed to stay there and was 1947 elected as the permanent pastor. Kõiv remained in Halliste until 1960, when the revision commission of EELC again discovered serious malpractices in the congregation. See EELKKA 1-3-186.

³⁷⁵ EAA 1275-1-428, p. 28v and 61v.

³⁷⁶ According to pastor Dehn, EELKKA, Halliste koguduse kirjavahetus konsistooriumiga 1934–1935, 15.02.1934.

³⁷⁷ „Elagu õpetaja Kõiv ja suregu tema vastased!” EELKKA, Halliste koguduse kirjavahetus konsistooriumiga 1934-1935, 21.06.1934.

Such reports may be exaggerated as they were written by biased people, hoping to benefit from the intervention of the church or state authorities. Also, it should be noted that only up to half of the people who used to pay their annual membership fees were actively engaged in the controversies by taking part in the plenary assembly meetings and elections. In turn, those paying membership fees were a minority of all the adult Lutherans living in the parish. But even so, the events clearly provoked extraordinarily strong reaction among local population, as both newspaper reports as well as secret reports of the police about the moods of the people confirm.³⁷⁸ One obvious reason for that was their link to local political tensions, which were notoriously high in the region at that time.

Public Role of the Church

Local Politics and Social Contradictions

High political tensions were cited as one of the most characteristic features of the parish by contemporary observers: “In social relations, class struggle is noticeable. Farmers, as well as labourers, are looking after their interests, and if, in calm times, this seems to subside, it appears sharply at elections. In Abja, also political passions have manifested themselves in the sharpest form.”³⁷⁹ Another commune with high political tensions was Vana-Kariste. Even two presumably political murders were committed there in 1924 and 1928.³⁸⁰

Besides, communes of Halliste parish stood out repeatedly for exceptional election results. In 1923 general elections, five of only fourteen rural communes, where the radical left Common Front of Working People (*Tööraha Ühine Väerind, TÜV*) garnered more than 30% of the votes, were situated in Halliste. In Vana-Kariste, even a majority of the voters (57%) supported it.³⁸¹ In the case of the constitutional referendum initiated by the Independence War Veterans (*vabadussõjalased, VS*) in 1933, four communes of Halliste were among only 28 rural communes in the republic which voted against it, and Mõisaküla was one of only five boroughs (*alevid*) in Estonia voting against.³⁸² There is an account about a lively campaign, with local socialists calling people to vote against the bill.³⁸³ Finally, during the 1936 referendum about convening the National Assembly

³⁷⁸ ERA 41-1-319, 252v.

³⁷⁹ „Ühiskondlikkudes vahekordades on tuntav klassivõitlus. Niihästi taluomanikud kui töölised on oma huvide eest valvel, ja kui see rahulikul ajal näib suikuvat, ilmub see valimiste puhul teravalt. Abjas on ka politilised kired kõige teravamal kujul ilmsiks tulnud.” Pärnumaa maadeteaduslik, tulunduslik... 1930, 303.

³⁸⁰ Päewaleht, 08.05.1926, p. 5; Sakala, 22.09.1928, p. 7. The murders were also mentioned in the visitation protocol in 1932, but it was added that these were still probably not committed by the locals. (EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Halliste kogudusega. Visitatsiooni-protokoll, 03.12.-04.12.1932).

³⁸¹ The other nine communes were Satserinna (60.8%), Kihnu (58%), Karksi (45%), Kohila (43.4%), Seli (36.7%), Voltveti (34.6%), Luunja (32.7%), Puiatu (31.2%), and Taagepera (30.4%). II riigikogu valimised... 1923, 48–69.

³⁸² Eesti Statistika 1936, no 7/8, p. 403.

³⁸³ EKLA f. 350 M153:1, p. 72–73.

(*Rahvuskogu*), three communes in Halliste showed somewhat smaller support for the authoritarian government of Konstantin Päts than rural communes on average. These results indicate probably successful agitation of left-wing activists, who, according to the secret reports of police, remained influential especially in boroughs and Vana-Kariste commune.³⁸⁴

Table 4. Election Results in some of the Elections and Referenda, Halliste Parish

	Support for TÜV 1923 (%)	Support for VS constitution 1933 (%)	Support for convening National Assembly 1936 (%)
Abja	35.6	44.8	69.7
Kaarli	25.1	53.4	88.2
Laatre	27.5	67.2	92.0
Penuja	37.1	44.8	82.7
Pornuse	36.0	62.6	72.1
Uue-Kariste	45	52.1	86.2
Vana-Kariste	57.3	45.4	70.7
Mõisaküla	45.1	35.5	93.9
All-Estonian result	9.8	72.7	75.4
All-Estonian result (rural communes only)	NA	73.7	83.2

Sources: *II Riigikogu valimised, 1923*; *Eesti Statistika, 1933, no 145(12)*, *Eesti Statistika, 1936, no 176(7)–177(8)*

Social contradictions and political tensions made also an impact on various spheres of public life. As a trainee teacher complained in her report: “I really love to take part in social life, but unfortunately in Kaarli commune it turned out to be dangerous for me. If one took part in the abstinence society, one was a socialist and, in the opinion of the supporters of Farmers’ Assemblies, was completely unfit for being a teacher, and when one took part in the work of the educational society, one was a supporter of Farmers’ Assemblies, and according to the socialists, such a person was no longer fit to be a teacher for their children. Therefore, I tried to withdraw from social life as much as possible and devote myself only to schoolwork.”³⁸⁵

³⁸⁴ ERA 41-1-319, p. 33, 194 and 260.

³⁸⁵ „Armastan väga seltsielust osa võtta, kuid kahjuks Kaarli vallas osutus mulle see hädahohtlikuks. Võtsid osa karskusseltsist, olid sots ja ei kõlvanud kogumeeste meelest enam kellegi õpetajaks, ja kui võtsid osa haridusseltsi tööst, olid kogumees ja sotside meelest ei kõlvanud niisugune enam nende laste õpetajaks. Püüdsin sellepärast võimalikult seltskonnast tagasi tõmbuda ja pühendada end ainult koolitööle.” Report of Aino Liiv from Araku primary school, 1929/30, ERA 1830-1-241, p. 103. Cf. a newspaper report about Vana-Kariste: Sakala, 15.04.1930, p.5.

There are also accounts of people with leftist convictions being critical or suspicious of the church. As secret reports of police about the mood among the population claimed, “leftist circles and opponents of the church from other parties” opposed a law, which enabled collecting membership fees of congregations by means of enforcement powers of the state. It was added: “Very complimentary assessments have been made from everywhere about the recently enacted law on holidays and rest days. People especially like the ban on parties and entertainment on the first days of [religious] feasts. About this law, too, one could hear from some Leftist anti-religionists the opinion that the faith is made too important, and the church is given too many rights and importance.”³⁸⁶

Political background of conflict over Alfred Kõiv

The aforementioned social contradictions made their impact also on the row over Kõiv. Importantly, their relevance is admitted both by opponents, some supporters, as well as some relatively neutral observers.

As for Kõiv’s opponents in the congregation, Christian Arro, who, answering the question of bishop Rahamägi about the causes of Kõivs popularity, “opined that the support [of Kõiv] is because the former pastor was a relatively weak preacher, which placed Kõiv in the better position. Kõiv has also created the impression that he is a pastor of the poor and thus gave the matter a political colouring.”³⁸⁷ Similarly, in a complaint of the Kõiv’s opponents to the Chief of Internal Defence (*sisekaitse ülem*), it was stated that “A. Kõiv asserts tirelessly that he is a pastor of the poor and a fighter for their interests. It is not surprising, then, that his supporters, women from the poorer strata, every Sunday in the sacristy of the church, in terrible anger, hit their fists to each other and utter threats.”³⁸⁸ Finally, the dean of Pärnu August Grünberg-Arumäe, one of the most hated representatives of the church in Halliste due to his uncompromising stance against Kõiv, argued later in his memoirs that “poorer people held the accusations against Kõiv to be a malicious slander.”³⁸⁹

On the other hand, the Consistory and bishop received a large number of letters and petitions, most of them from Kõiv’s supporters. In several of them “the

³⁸⁶ „Hiljuti antud pühade ja puhkepäevade seaduse kohta on kõikjalt avaldatud väga kiitvaid otsusi. Eriti meeldib rahvale pidustuste ja lõbustuste keeld esimestel pühadel. Ka selle seaduse kohta on mõnelt pahempoolselt usuvaenulikult kuulda arvamist, et usk tehtavat liiga tähtsaks ja kirikule antavat liig palju õigusi ja tähtsust.” ERA 41-1-319, p. 232, the reports of Commissar of Mõisaküla police department.

³⁸⁷ „[A]valdas, et poolehoid on tingitud sellest, et endine õpetaja oli võrdlemisi nõrk jutlustaja, mis asetas Kõivi paremusse. Ka on Kõiv lasknud väljapaista, et tema on vaesrahva õpetaja ja seega annud asjale poliitilise värvingu.” EELKKA, konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Halliste kogudusega, 17.11.1934.

³⁸⁸ „A. Kõiv ei väsi aga kinnitamast, et tema on kehvade õpetaja ja nende huvide eest võitleja. Ei ole siis ka midagi imestada, kui tema poolehoidjad, naised kehvemast rahvakihist igal pühapäeval kiriku käärkambris hirmsas vihas rusikaid vastamisi taovad ja ähvardusi jagavad.” EELKKA, konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Halliste kogudusega, 21.06.1934.

³⁸⁹ „Vaesemad inimesed pidasid Kõivu vastu tõstetud süüdistusi taluperemeeste alatuks laimuks.” Arumäe 2005, 230–231.

rich” and “the poor” are contrasted as well. In one of them, it is argued that the rich did not care for the local church as they could listen to the service “from the radio in their beds”. Another writer complained that accusers of Kõiv were not, in fact, regular churchgoers, but those who walked only during major feasts around the church “to show their fancy clothes” to each other. At least one writer explained the row explicitly in terms of class conflict, expressing her support to Kõiv, who was allegedly suffering innocently, being persecuted by the richer strata who could not bear that he was kind also to the poor.³⁹⁰

Finally, the pastor Arnold Võsu, essentially a bystander, whom the Consistory sent to serve the rebellious congregation in 1934, noted that the most active supporters of Kõiv tended to be marginal people: “It seems to me as though the mob of supporters of Kõiv consisted of people who have somehow degenerated, such as spinsters and unmarried mothers, etc. The more conscious strata are the opponents of Kõiv and condemn his actions. I do not know what their numerical ratio is, but it seems that supporters of Kõiv are in the majority and are more active.” He also referred to the fanatical and aggressive nature of some of Kõiv’s most ardent followers who tended to be women (“*märatsevad naised*”).³⁹¹ Similar claims about the role of fanatical women were made also by more impartial local people.³⁹² It is also noteworthy that of numerous letters and petitions sent to the Consistory or the bishop in support of Kõiv, overwhelming majority have been signed by women. Some of these letters have been written in considerably broken language, indicating poor level of education of the authors.

Shortly, relatively many observers from 1930s claim that Kõiv’s most ardent supporters were poorer people and predominantly women. The later pastor of Halliste, Villem Uuspuu, however, gives a slightly different account of the political controversies in the congregation based on his own very short experience in the parish in 1940. According to him, many Kõiv’s supporters were, in fact, linked to former Centrist Party³⁹³ and his opponents (led by Arro) to Farmers’ Assemblies. Thirdly, there was allegedly also a smaller socialist current in the

³⁹⁰ „[K]es ilma süüta kannatab, ja on kohtu aluseks saanud taga kiusamise alusel, vastas rinna kui rikama rahva klassi poolt, rikkad inimesed ei salli õpetaja Kõivi sell põhjusel et tema ka kehvema rahva klassika väga lahkeste ümber käib.” EELKKA, konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Halliste kogudusega, letters from 1934 by Leena Allik, Mall Rääbus, and Katariina Lott.

³⁹¹ „Mulle näib nagu oleks õp. Kõivu pooldajate jõuk kuidagi elus langenud inimesed, nagu vanad ja lapsega tüdrukud j.n.e. Teadlikum kiht on õp. Kõivu vastased ja mõistavad tema teguviisi hukka. Missugune on nende arvuline vahekord ei ole mul teada, kuid näib, et õp. Kõivu pooldajaid on enamuses ja on aktiivsemad.” EELKKA, konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Halliste kogudusega, 03.09.1935.

³⁹² EELKKA, konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Halliste kogudusega, 17.03.1933 (congregation council members claiming that Kõiv finds most ardent supporters among “old women”). Johannes Sellio to bishop Rahamägi 1.04.1936 (admitting that his wife had better relations with “Kõiv’s women” than he himself). See also EELKKA, konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Halliste kogudusega, 21.06.1934; Kaja, 25.02.1933, p. 6.

³⁹³ Centrist Party was formed before the elections of the 5th *Riigikogu* by the merger of three small centrist parties. Its leader was the prominent liberal nationalist Jaan Tõnisson (1868–1941).

congregation, represented by the organist Eduard Pärn.³⁹⁴ Uuspuu's claims seem to find corroboration in some appeals of Kõiv's supporters, where their camp is depicted as supporters of Estonian national ideas. According to this approach, the genuine cause of conflicts in Halliste congregation was its German spirit, represented by the German pastor Erwin von Dehn and his supporters among local *kadakad* (meaning roughly Germanized Estonians). In a comically high-flown petition to the Consistory, it is argued that the controversies in the congregation, in fact, pre-dated Kõiv, having its roots in the activities of the leader of radical wing of Estonian nationalism Carl Robert Jakobson (1841–1882) and the revolution of 1905: "The church of Halliste was more in the service of Germanness than the Word of God, and apparently the pastor treated Estonians disparagingly as a slave nation. Even the language of the slave nation was he not willing to learn well enough. It is understandable that in such a situation, no nationally conscious person expressed support for the church, but its depth and warmth remained unknown [to them]." Even after the War of Independence, German "language and spirit" allegedly prevailed in the congregation council, as lay leaders of the congregation were recruited from "the remnants of the lords of the manor and *kadakad*". But in 1925, a group of Estonian patriots, including the Independence War veterans, "who had thrown off the yoke of slavery and the violent foreign rule, and in whose breast burned the mighty spirit of national self-consciousness," were determined to bring about the change. Much hope was put on the new lay leader of the congregation, Christian Arro, but he adapted to the prevailing pro-German spirit. The turning point was the invitation of Kõiv to Halliste: "For the first time, the people of Halliste heard rousing sermons in Christian-national-patriotic spirit." That was why von Dehn and his supporters among the *kadakad* started to conspire against Kõiv, leading to the open conflict.³⁹⁵

Sure, appealing to nationalist ideas was commonly used at that time, as these were promoted by the authoritarian government. So, the petitioners were not necessarily sincere but might have exploited them simply to advance their cause. But there are indeed traces of nationalist opposition to Dehn from much earlier times. Arguably, the topic was raised during 1905 revolution, and some locals seem to have objected von Dehn's behaviour during Imperial German occupation in 1918 as well.³⁹⁶ Notably, von Dehn complained in 1920s about "chauvinism" of Estonian newspapers and fateful outcomes of the land reform which was

³⁹⁴ EELKKA 1-3-647, 10.01.1944.

³⁹⁵ „Halliste kirik oli enam saksluse kui jumalasõna teenistuses, ning vististi kohtles õpetaja härra eestlasi kui orjarahvast halvakspanevalt. Isegi orjarahva keelt ei raatsinud kuigi hästi ära õppida. Arusaadav, et niisuguses olukorras ükski rahvusliselt mõtleja ei avaldanud kirikule poolehoidu, vaid ta sügavus ja soojus jäi tundmatuks. /.../ [K]es olid endast äraheitnud orja ikke ja võera vägivalla valitsuse ja kelle rinnus hõõgus rahvusliku iseteadvuse võimas vaim /.../ Esimest korda kuulis Halliste rahvas sütitavaid jutlusi kristlik-rahvuslik-isamaalikus vaimus.” EELKKA, konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Halliste kogudusega. Undated, the end of the year 1935.

³⁹⁶ „Ajalooline traditsioon Halliste kihelkonnast”, <https://www.folklore.ee/pubte/ajaloolist/halliste/halliste.html>, 15.06.2022.

arguably becoming evident also for many Estonian parishioners.³⁹⁷ However, these remarks were made in German-language reports to the dean of Pärnu Otto Woldemar Schultz and appear not to have become publicly known. At least when in 1927 von Dehn was accused of interfering into politics, only his emphatic praise for the foregone times “when school and church worked arm in arm and school was led by pastors along with the barons”, was mentioned. Besides that, he had allegedly set the former educational system of Germany as an example.³⁹⁸ In response, the pastor argued that the newspaper had distorted his words.³⁹⁹

However, the nationalist opposition against von Dehn seems not to have been found the support of the majority of parishioners. In a 1922 plenary assembly meeting, Veisson, a leading member of the congregation, argued that few people attended the church because the pastor used to promote “German politics”. A discussion followed; some parishioners complained about Dehn’s sermons which were allegedly too long or not performed loudly enough. But neither his nationality nor political views seem to have been an issue to any other participant of the meeting. Indeed, one congregation member defended the pastor vehemently: “I have not found politics in the pastor, but he, as of German race, must be a supporter of his own race, as a true and honest member of the nation, and if he knows anything about what is good in Germany, why should not the pastor mention it. He thinks that our pastor is utmost exemplary and a person adhering to our Evangelical Lutheran faith.”⁴⁰⁰ Indeed, it seems that von Dehn had relatively good relations with his flock due to his friendly nature. According to the dean Grünberg, thousands of parishioners gathered to celebrate his 70th birthday in 1932, when also the golden cross was donated to him.⁴⁰¹

However, the nationality question was raised once again by Kõiv after the accusations against himself emerged. Finally, von Dehn was removed from office, allowing him to serve further only as “a temporary assistant pastor”. This was presented to the wider public as undoing historical national injustice – von Dehn had been put to the office by German lords of the manors, without the consent of the congregation.⁴⁰² In fact, Kõiv probably wanted to reinforce his position in the congregation with this step, and at the same time to win the support of not the necessarily very numerous group in the congregation who objected to von Dehn because of his nationality. That would explain the usage of nationalist

³⁹⁷ „Oma vitsad peksavad. Järgmisel valimisel kutsume moisnikud tagasi,” solche Äusserungen hört man nicht selten.” EAA 1206-1-105, Kirchenbericht 1924.

³⁹⁸ Sakala, 16.08.1927, p. 2.

³⁹⁹ Sakala, 01.09.1927, p. 1.

⁴⁰⁰ „Kiriku õpetajas politikat ei ole leidnud, vaid tema kui saksa sugust, peab oma suguvere poolehoidja olema, kui õige ja aus rahva liige kunagi ja kui Saksamaal midagi hääd teada on miks ei tohiks siis õpetaja nimetada. Arvab et õpetaja meil ülieeskujulik ja meie Ev. Lutheri usule vastav isik on.” EAA 1275-1-428, p. 14; Cf. Sakala, 16.08.1927, p. 6 and 1.09.1927, p. 6.

⁴⁰¹ EELKKA 1-4-456, Pärnu praosti aruanne 1932. Cf. jubilee article in Eesti Kirik, 12.05.1932, p. 159 (reprinted from Sakala).

⁴⁰² Waba Maa, 04.01.1934, p. 6; Päewaleht, 23.01.1934, p. 1; EAA 1275-1-431. As the result of the pressure, von Dehn decided to retire in February 1934: EAA 1275-1-431, 16.02.1936.

rhetoric by some supporters of Kõiv – and also why Uuspuu considered Kõiv’s supporters to be linked to the former Centrist Party.

But finally, it is important to note that class (and to lesser extent national) contradictions were not the only fuels to Kõiv’s success in Halliste. He also might have exploited rivalries between different parts of the large parish, as well as rivalries between ambitious personalities in the congregation. Notably, during the pastor’s election in 1936, Johannes Selliov (not endorsed by Kõiv) won more support in the northern than in the southern part of the parish.⁴⁰³ The outcome does not correlate with the presumed impact of socialists, based on the results of general elections and referenda, and thus casts doubt on the claims that the row over Kõiv was primarily socio-political in character. The available sources, however, do not provide any more evidence about rivalries between different parts of the parish and their probable impact on the conflicts in the congregation.⁴⁰⁴

Notably, social and political contradictions are, in fact, not the central issues in the previously mentioned petitions of Kõiv’s female admirers. Most of all, he seems to have been appreciated for his friendliness, empathy, beautiful sermons, and the like. Besides that, several petitioners also made abundant use of religious rhetoric. In sum, Kõiv seems simply to have been very skilful in mobilizing very different kind of people for his own advantage. As his opponents Reinbach and Teder remarked, his previous experiences of how to manipulate particularly women were a good benefit in that.⁴⁰⁵ Kõiv’s slimy letters to his superiors serve as good examples of how he used to toady people.⁴⁰⁶ But besides that, Kõiv exploited all kind of social cleavages – including social and political ones, which were especially characteristic to Mulgimaa.

Summer Events in 1940

The rival camps in the congregation persisted, becoming more visible during pastoral elections. But political tensions came even more explicitly in the fore after the occupation of Estonia by the Red Army, and some local workers’ activists seem to have greeted the supposed takeover of the power by “working people”. On June 23, 1940, a demonstration was held by them in Halliste, and

⁴⁰³ EELKKA, konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Halliste kogudusega, April 1936.

⁴⁰⁴ For example, there are hints in the sources about rivalry between the boroughs Mõisaküla and Abja (cf. ERA 41-1-319, p. 244). Sõmer, the pastor of Mõisaküla, was seemingly afraid that Christian Arro and other influential personalities from Abja conspired to make his congregation again dependant on Halliste (see EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Mõisaküla kogudusega, 21.12.1936). However, there is no other evidence that these and other local rivalries influenced the internal relations in Halliste congregation.

⁴⁰⁵ EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Halliste kogudusega, 17.11.1934.

⁴⁰⁶ In EELKKA 1-3-186, 14.08.1936 to bishop Rahamägi, after starting pastoral work in Kaarma: „Püüan töötada nii palju kui suudan ja sean eeskujuks Teie siinolemise aja, kuna iga koguduse liige kõneleb Teie siinolemisest suurima lugupidamise ja armastusega”. In EELKKA 1-3-186, in the year 1955 to archbishop Jaan Kiivit: „Halliste koguduse liikmeile ja õpetajale on alati armas olnud Teie heatahtlik nõuanne ja sõbralik juhtimine. Oleme rõõmsad Teie, E.L.K. Peapiiskopi, kui oma juhi ja sõbra tervenemise puhul. Olen õnnelik seda öeldes.”

they hoisted red flags to the buildings of local primary school, railway station, and pastorate. The demonstrators⁴⁰⁷ appealed to the support of local young pastor Villem Uuspuu and seem to have indeed gained it.

Uuspuu himself, seeking permission to resume working as a pastor during the Nazi German occupation in February 1944, denied his support for Communists, even though, he claimed to have empathy towards working people due to his own background. Also, Uuspuu admitted that he had initially had some illusions about the new regime and held a few speeches about the need of democratization of society. However, the newspaper reports that had depicted him as a staunch supporter of the communists, had allegedly misrepresented the events in Halliste.⁴⁰⁸ On the other hand, Richard Võlli, the pastor of Halliste during Nazi occupation years, concluded after his short inquiry that, in fact, Uuspuu had co-operated much more actively with the communist regime than he himself later admitted. However, there was also no proof that Uuspuu had played a leading role in the events of June 23.⁴⁰⁹

In any case, Uuspuu admitted that local adherents of the new regime considered him to be their supporter. They began to appear to the church services with red ribbons, elected Uuspuu to the board of local branch of the pro-regime Union of Rural Working People (*maatöörahva ühing*) and he was even put forward to the post of the chief of local administration (*vallavanem*).⁴¹⁰ Of course, central communist authorities did not allow that, and according to Uuspuu he was hereafter denied the right to live in Abja commune.⁴¹¹

At the same time, internal tensions in the congregation resurfaced. Several congregation council members (including Christian Arro) resigned, objecting to the political activities of the pastor. Soon Uuspuu himself decided to resign from the pastoral profession altogether, citing theological disagreements with the teachings of the EELC. Later he argued that also internal tensions and intrigues in the congregation contributed to his departure from Halliste, referring especially to lack of co-operation with the wilful and domineering organist Pärn.⁴¹²

In sum, the events in June and July 1940 in Halliste showed once again how political tensions reflected in the life of the parish. Local leftist activists interpreted the events probably simply as a long-awaited opportunity to seize power also in the local level, including in the congregation. At least some of them appear not have had objections to religion and church as such. They may even have been

⁴⁰⁷ Uuspuu, on the other hand, speaks only about three activists who were hoisting the flag.

⁴⁰⁸ EELKKA 1-3-647, 17.02.1944. Cf. Postimees, 26.06.1940, p. 5; Postimees, 08.08.1940, p. 9.

⁴⁰⁹ See EELKKA 1-3-647.

⁴¹⁰ Cf. Maa Hääl, 29.07.1940, p. 6.

⁴¹¹ EELKKA 1-3-647, 17.02.1944.

⁴¹² In seeking to resume his work in the church, Uuspuu claimed to have re-considered his theological views and accepting now the teachings of the church. However, he was not allowed to work as a pastor – arguably because his change of mind in theological questions was not considered to be sincere; no political reasons were cited for refusal (See EELKKA 1-3-647). Soon after that Uuspuu died in the Baltic Sea, trying to escape from advancing Soviets.

naively unaware about ideological stances of the new regime towards religion and its practical consequences.

It is worth of mentioning that there are also some reports about activists in Halliste who allegedly preached “Christian Communism”. One of them, Jaan Lossmann, was accused of subversive activities in 1929. Communist literature was found in his home, but there was no evidence about his membership in any underground organization. So Lossmann was acquitted by the court of the military district (*sõjaringkonnakohus*).⁴¹³ Arguably, in 1945 Martin Lint, another maverick preacher who tried to combine the teachings of Christianity and Communism, began to organize religious meetings in Penuja. However, he was soon disillusioned with the communist regime.⁴¹⁴

Finally, also in case of Mõisaküla, people with leftist sympathies seem not to have been necessarily lukewarm about the church. At least such claims appear in a letter from pastor Sõmer to the Consistory from 1938. He argued that the new congregation deserved financial support from the Consistory as it was not wise to tell local people to contribute more themselves: “Mõisaküla has been one of the reddest places in our country. When now, in a strange way, here in the middle of these same reds, a church was built on their own initiative, with their own money – and when these mentally dead people have started to move themselves and even go to church – can we disturb them more than this is conceivable in the limits of psychical tension [?].”⁴¹⁵

Community Life

While locals were largely indifferent towards religion and moral guidelines promoted by church, they seemed at the same time to be extraordinarily fond of religious ceremonies in different secular events.

As elsewhere, the pastor was invited to take part in different kinds of patriotic enterprises⁴¹⁶ as well as laying cornerstones of or consecrating school buildings⁴¹⁷ and village halls (*rahvamajad*).⁴¹⁸ But in Halliste, the clergy was also invited to the anniversaries of wide range of local associations (even milk societies⁴¹⁹), con-

⁴¹³ Halliste kihelkonna lood 2019, 75.

⁴¹⁴ Heidmets 2018, 57.

⁴¹⁵ The meaning of the last sentence remains obscure. “Mõisaküla on olnud punaseimaid paiku meie kodumaal. Kui nüüd imelikul viisil siia ometi nendesamade punaste keskele chitati kirik nende oma algatusel, nende oma rahaga – ja kui need vaimult surnud inimesed on hakkanud endid liigutama ja käivad isegi kirikus – kas tohime neid häirida rohkem, kui see psühhilisepinge võimaluse piires mõeldav.” EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Mõisaküla kogudusega, 18.11.1938.

⁴¹⁶ For example, consecration of national flags in Penuja (Uus Eesti Pärnu Uudised, 28.05.1936, p. 2), Victory Day service in Vana-Kariste and in the church (Sakala, 19.06.1936, p. 6), “national day” (*rahvuspäev*) in Abja (Sakala, 12.11.1937, p. 6), commemoration of uprising of St. George Night (1343–45; Sakala 06.05.1936, p. 5).

⁴¹⁷ In Kosksilla: Sakala, 22.11.1937, p. 5.

⁴¹⁸ In Uue-Kariste: Sakala, 29.07.1936, p. 6.

⁴¹⁹ Sakala, 01.02.1937, p. 5.

secrete their flags (Abja-Peraküla sports society⁴²⁰), speak at the meeting about founding secondary school in Abja,⁴²¹ and so on.

Seemingly, mainly Lutheran pastor was invited to such community celebrations; Orthodox priests accompanied him only in case the ceremony was held in the areas with considerable Orthodox population (like in the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Penuja primary school).⁴²²

Church and Schools

As for teaching religion, the picture given by sources is similar to other parishes. Before the referendum, it was taught only in some of the schools. Later, it was done in all of them, and almost all children learned it;⁴²³ according to the inspector (*koolinõunik*) Juhan Tõõts, the few who had opted out in Eastern Pärnumaa were often Orthodox.⁴²⁴ For example, there were 20 Orthodox pupils in Penuja primary school in the school year 1933/34. Of those, 16 learned religion in “interconfessional” manner and four did not get any religious instruction at school.⁴²⁵

In some of the parish reports of Erwin von Dehn from the 1920s, it is complained that teachers were not co-operating with the church and the temporary elimination of religious instruction from school had led to moral decline in the parish.⁴²⁶ After re-introduction of the religious instruction, its results were not satisfactory, as the experience with confirmands had reportedly shown.⁴²⁷ Similar assessments are also common in the annual reports of other congregations of Pärnu deanery at the beginning of the interwar era. In later reports, there is not much information about relations between the church and the schools. Only in his report for 1937, pastor Selliov remarked laconically: “The people of school make their contribution to the church life. Parents do not complain.”⁴²⁸ However, there is a letter to the bishop Rahamägi from Halliste, by a member of the congregation from the same year, with a plea to intervene to turn the schools Christian again. The writer complained that the school alienated the children from their parents, and some teachers were non-confirmed and led immoral lives.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁰ Järva Teataja, 17.08.1938, p. 2.

⁴²¹ Sakala, 08.03.1938, p. 1.

⁴²² Sakala, 25.11.1938, p. 3.

⁴²³ EELKKA 1-4-456, Pärnu praosti aruanne 1923.

⁴²⁴ ERA 1097-1-2418, 16 v (Report for the school year 1927/28).

⁴²⁵ EAA 1960-1-233.

⁴²⁶ EAA 1206-1-105, Kirchenbericht 1922.

⁴²⁷ EAA 1206-1-105, Kirchenbericht 1924.

⁴²⁸ „Koolide tegelased aitavad kirikuelule kaasa. Lapsevanemad ei nurise.” ELKKA 1-4-460, Pärnu praostkonna aruanded 1936, Halliste koguduse aruanne.

⁴²⁹ Perhaps characteristic for a *mulk* of the older generation is also the complaint that the benefits of the education do not correspond to the high costs people have to pay for it, and conviction that task of the school should be raising “faithful subjects” to the state: „Palve selles: Et lubaksida oma kaasabi koolide kristlikuteks muutmiseks. Et praegu on kristlikutel vanematel väga raske lapsi kooli saata. Sest peale kooli peavad paljud vanemad silma vees ütlema: mul ei ole enap lapsi, ja seda on meile see kallis asutus teinud, mis nõuab riigilt ja rahvalt suuri kulusi. Ning ei anna kulude vastu sugugi lootetavaid tulusi. Mis head või ristliku

Also the pastor of Mõisaküla was in his parish report for 1937 critical about co-operation with the school, noting that two local teachers were not married in the church and their children were not baptized. Also, religious knowledge of the pupils was weak.⁴³⁰

Both the Lutheran and Orthodox churches were concerned about the confessionality of the teaching. In the case of Penuja, the Orthodox Church lobbied the Ministry of Education to employ one of its priests in the local school as a teacher so that local Orthodox children could get confessional religious instruction. There was probably an ulterior motive behind that, as the congregation was too small to hire a permanent priest. As a teacher in the school, the priest could get supplementary income, enabling him to settle down in the parish. There were also several other parishes in Estonia where the Orthodox church tried to achieve it at that time.⁴³¹

August Grünberg-Arumäe, the EELC dean of Pärnu in the 1930s, paid much attention to the religious education of the youth. He published several textbooks for primary schools and tried actively to establish contacts with the teachers of religion in the deanery, hoping to overcome their distrust towards the church: "Let the time come to end at last when the school sees the church as an enemy. Once the sentiments of faith of teachers of religion deepen, they will perhaps see a friend and supporter in the church. May God grant us this soon!"⁴³²

For that purpose, he arranged the first summer days of teachers of religion in Pärnumaa (1938). His impressions were very positive: "If at the beginning of the summer days there was an unknown land in front of me, then at the end of the event hearts melted and a beautiful feeling of friendship and fellowship arose. There was no longer that scary partition wall between the pastor and the school-teacher, but we felt like joint workers on behalf of the Estonian children. The wish was expressed that such summer days would be organized also in the future." Sixty-one teachers had participated in the summer days.⁴³³

It is not known whether anyone from Halliste parish also took part. There is also no evidence about any deviations or controversies regarding the religious instruction in Halliste from the 1930s. On the contrary, the headmaster of Pornuse school Jaan Reinbach-Rannap was even among the leading lay members of the

kasvatust võib sealt tulla, kui kooli õpetaja on leerimata, ehk vaba abielu pitaja või koguni varju abielu lahutusega, selles et seatusest mööda hilida palga saamiseks, ning kui lapsed ütlevad, meie härrat pruuat elavad hoora abielu. Niisugused asjad tuleks koolist kõrvaltada. Siis saaks riik truid alamaid ja vanemad armsaid lapsi teadlikus oludes." EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Halliste kogudusega, 31.05.1936.

⁴³⁰ EELKKA 1-4-461, Pärnu praostkonna aruanded 1937, Mõisaküla koguduse aruanne.

⁴³¹ ERA 1108-3-221, p. 32–33.

⁴³² „Peaks see aeg ometi kord mööduma, kus kool kirikus vaenlast näeb. Kui süveneb kord usuõpetajate usutunne, küllap siis nähakse kirikus sõpra ja toetajat. Seda andku Jumal meile õige pea!” EELKKA 1-4-458, Pärnu praosti aruanne 1934.

⁴³³ „Kui suvipäevade avamisel otsegu tundmatu maa mu ees oli, siis päevade lõpul sulasid südamed ja tekkis kaunis sõbralikkuse ja osaduse tunne. Ei olnud enam seda hirmutavat vaheseina kirikuõpetaja ja kooliõpetaja vahel, vaid tundsime end ühiste töötajatenä eesti laste juures.” EELKKA 1-4-462, Pärnu praosti aruanne 1938.

congregation (and one of the fiercest opponents of the notorious pastor Kõiv). The children of his school used to perform with music on festive occasions in the life of the congregation.⁴³⁴ In addition, one of his pupils remembered that, in 1943, Rannap had told his pupils to pray for the people of Estonia and the end of the war.⁴³⁵

In the memoirs, it is typically confirmed that almost all students studied religion. In one case it is added that “there were no believers (*usklikud*) among us”.⁴³⁶ In another case, with the permission of his father, the writer gave up attending religious education classes when he found out in the 5th grade that in fact it was not a compulsory subject. He does not mention his own motive, but adds that, in addition to him, one Catholic (a Pole) and one Orthodox fellow pupil had also opted out.⁴³⁷ There is also a description of the evening prayers held in the boarding rooms of the school.⁴³⁸ Otherwise, memories from Halliste parish portray the school as a secular institution. For example, it is recalled that portraits of Estonian statesmen and cultural figures hung on the walls of the educational institution, but religious images or symbols are not mentioned.⁴³⁹ Also absent descriptions of religious ceremonies during the celebration of festive events of the school life or Christmas parties.⁴⁴⁰ In other autobiographical sources, religious

⁴³⁴ For example, during the introduction of pastor Selliov: EAA 1-3-11-552, 17.10.1937.

⁴³⁵ Laarmann-Inno 2013.

⁴³⁶ Irene Karpa (b. 1930, attended Pussi primary school): ERM KV 788:3, p. 43. For “believers”, Karpa apparently means deeply pious people; it does not probably mean that no one believed in God among the pupils.

⁴³⁷ Eduard Leppik (b. 1930, attended Mõisaküla town primary school): ERM KV 788:3, p. 78. In his later published memoirs Leppik claims to have come into contact with religious topics through his deeply religious grandparents who lived in Saarde parish. On Sundays, they read the Bible and sang from the hymnal, and when their grandson visited them, he had to participate. However, Leppik had developed disgust for religion in his childhood years, as a result of her grandmother’s excessive strictness: “She was completely intolerant of deviations from religious norms. /.../ The most difficult, of course, was listening to the Bible reading motionless for 20 minutes on Sunday before the breakfast. Once when I tried to escape from this deadly boring sitting and before the reading went wandering in the forest, my otherwise gentle grandmother left me without breakfast, which was completely unusual in my opinion. This is how the religious grandmother laid the foundation for the emergence of unbelief in my soul.” („Ta oli usunormidest kõrvalekaldumiste suhtes täiesti sallimatu. /.../ Kõige raskem oli muidugi pühapäeval enne pruukosti 20 minutit liikumatult piiblilugemist kuulata. Kui ma ükskord sellest surmani igavast istumisest püüdsin pääseda ja enne lugemist metsa uitama läksin, jättis minu muidu nii leebe vanaema mind hoopistükkis hommikusöögita, mis oli minu meelest täiesti tavatu. Nõnda pani usklik vanaema minu hinges aluse uskmatuse tärkamisele.” (Leppik 2004, 15–16) However, Leppik also has words of appreciation for his grandfather’s deep and sensitive religiosity, and in his own old age Leppik’s assessment of religion and the church was positive, because, according to him, it helped to promote love for one’s neighbour and homeland. In addition, he also felt a debt of gratitude to the Lutheran Church for its contribution during the dark years in Soviet era. Therefore, since the end of the 1980s, he even translated religious literature and took often part in the church events. (Leppik 2004, 121)

⁴³⁸ Hilja Sakk (b. 1926, attended Koskilla primary school ?): ERM KV 788:3, p. 291.

⁴³⁹ Leppik, ERM KV 788:3, p. 75.

⁴⁴⁰ ERM KV 788:3, p. 47 (Karpa), 101–102 (Leppik), 297 (Sakk).

instruction is mentioned just in passing as one of the subjects at primary school⁴⁴¹ and in context of mischiefs committed during school prayers.⁴⁴²

Conclusion

Religious and church life in Halliste was full of paradoxes. On the one hand, according to ecclesiastical statistics, it was probably one of the most secularized parishes in Estonia. Few people went to church on regular Sundays, and the church rites and moral guidelines of the church were neglected by a significant part of the locals. But despite some evidence about irreligion and anti-church convictions among the population, the church was still relevant for the majority of the people in some ways. For example, it remained an inseparable part of festive occasions in private and community life, notably in the case of cemetery festivities. But especially astonishing is the engagement of otherwise lukewarm parishioners in the internal controversies of the congregation, especially in the case of Alfred Kõiv.

As expected, there is also clear evidence that social and political contradictions were reflected in church life. It is, therefore, probable that socialist and, to a lesser extent, nationalist agitation also led many people in Halliste to vote against religious instruction in 1923.

Especially class tensions were relatively strong in the region, but on the other hand, some of the supporters of socialists had probably no ideological bias against religion. As their support for Kõiv and the events of 1940 seem to show, some of them simply had grievances that the congregation appeared to be led by the richer strata. On the other hand, there was also nationalist opposition to the ethnic German pastor Dehn, but for the majority of the parishioners, the nationality of the pastor was not an important issue. However, the impact of socio-political tensions regarding the peculiarities of religious life in Halliste should not be overestimated. The particular mindset of the region, which emphasized economic success and individualistic values, as well as localist and personal rivalries, may have played a significant role in it, too.

⁴⁴¹ Heidmets 2018, 63.

⁴⁴² EKLA f. 350 M 153:1.

2.2.3. JÜRI PARISH

Introduction

Historiography

No comprehensive history of the parish has been written. Julius Põldmäe, a non-professional local history researcher, has written a reliable short overview. As for the interwar period, it deals mostly with economic issues and secular voluntary associations.⁴⁴³ The only good overview of religious life has been written by Jakob Aunver, former pastor of the parish. However, in the short article published in the magazine *Eesti Kirik* and later in a collection of Aunver's writings, only a few pages are dedicated to the interwar period.⁴⁴⁴

There are also several books about the local history of communes or particular villages, and especially two of them are worth mentioning. Firstly, Julius Põldmäe has written the history of Rae commune, which is based on commune administration documents. It contains rich factual material but lacks generalization and there is almost no religious and church-related content.⁴⁴⁵ Secondly, there is an excellent overview of Nabala commune by folklorist Mari-Ann Rimmel, which is based largely on oral sources. Religious peculiarities of the commune are extensively dealt with by her.⁴⁴⁶

General Overview

As in the case of Jüri religious differences corresponded spectacularly to socio-economic and cultural ones, the latter deserve more extensive coverage here.

The parish borders the city of Tallinn in the north and was one of the cradles of Estonian associational life, Music Society of Jüri being among the first ethnic Estonian voluntary associations. Its choir was widely known for its excellence.⁴⁴⁷ But despite its location, Jüri had generally reputation of a backward parish. Otto Luberg, declining an offer from the congregation board to run in the elections of the pastor, noted that the parish was known for being suffering “under the darkness” and therefore needed an energetic and active clergyman who would see his flock not only during church services as usually was the case.⁴⁴⁸

The image of the backwardness of the parish was spread by contemporary newspaper reports.⁴⁴⁹ However, internal differences of the parish were often emphasized as well, especially contrasting the conservative lifestyle and piety of Nabala with other parts of the parish which were more open to modernity. Besides contemporary newspaper reports,⁴⁵⁰ it is true also for later reminiscences of the

⁴⁴³ Põldmäe 1991.

⁴⁴⁴ Aunver 1961, 90-99.

⁴⁴⁵ Põldmäe 2006.

⁴⁴⁶ Rimmel 2017.

⁴⁴⁷ Põldmäe 1991, 27–28.

⁴⁴⁸ „[N]agu nad kõik suurem jagu kõik on, kes ainult kirikus teiega kokku saab, siis saate veel palju aega kannatama pimeduse võimuse all” (EAA 1213-1-292).

⁴⁴⁹ Pääwaleht, 02.01.1909, p. 2.

⁴⁵⁰ Cf. e.g. Kaja, 21.07.1924, p. 3.

locals: “Kurna parish was the best of all – there were good horses, there were good farmlands. The men were more sumptuously dressed, their boots shone. The women wore hats with long bows. Nabala was backward and poor, the clothes were poor. In the church, you immediately saw who was from Nabala. There were homemade clothes without urban colours. They ran across the church to the back corner, having no courage to be among the others. They did not dare to go towards others or greet them, they were weird. They used to go to the church for a long time with carriages with wooden axles, but Kurna already had spring-carriages. People of Rae were average. Mäe farm had already a carriage with iron axles. The Vaida people were like those in Nabala. We were at the wedding of Mart from Raudsepa, people from Vaida were very shy there. Afterwards, they also became richer.”⁴⁵¹

Such subjective observations are confirmed by data of population and agricultural censuses. According to them, Nabala was considerably poorer than other communes in the parish, its dwelling houses were smaller and unhealthier. Also, the average level of education was somewhat lower there, and fewer people were born outside the commune than in Rae and Kurna (see Table 5).

“Backwardness” of Nabala was sometimes explained by the fact that it was isolated from the other communes, being surrounded by marshes. Due to poor roads, the villages of the commune were poorly accessible, especially in the spring and autumn.⁴⁵²

⁴⁵¹ „Kurna vald oli kõige ette – head hobused olid, head kuhad olid. Mehed käisid toredamini riides, soapad läikisid jalas. Naistel olid pikalehvidega mütsid peas. Nabala oli mahajäetud ja vilets, viletsad riided olid. Kirikus kohe nägid, kis on Nabalast. Kodukootud, linnavärvita riided olid. Jooksid üle kiriku taha nurka, ei julend teiste hulgas olla. Ei julend teistele vasta tulla ega teretada, imelikud olid. Käisid kaua puuassi-vankretega kirikus, aga Kurnal olid jo vedruvankred. Rae rahvas olid keskmised. Mäel oli juba raudassi-vanker. Vaida rahvas oli koa nagu Nabalas. Me olime Raudsepa Mardi pulmas, siis vaidakad olid väga tagasihoidlikud. Pärast nad kosusid koa.” Quoted in Remmel 2017, 132.

⁴⁵² EAA 2107-1-45, p. 1. Cf. Päewaleht, 11.03.1909, p. 1.

Table 5. Comparison of Communes in Jüri Parish According to Some Socio-economic and Cultural Indicators

Commune	Share of adults who could not read and/or write (1922, %)	Share of inhabitants who had had some secondary or higher education (1922, %)	Share of inhabitants who were born in the same commune where they lived during the census (1922, %)	Share of dwelling houses with straw roof (1922, %)	Average value of homesteads in <i>kroons</i> (1929)
Kurna	8.0	2.5	52.1	56.4	8661
Nabala	11.4	1.0	81.0	88.6	6063
Rac	10.0	3.4	62.7	47.3	6992

Source: own calculations, based on a) 1922 national census data; b) 1929 agricultural census data (*Talundite rahvastik ja... 1932*)

Religious Background

The parish was predominantly Lutheran. The share of Lutherans, according to the census of 1922, was 98.6% in Nabala, 92.7% in Kurna, and 90.6% in Rae. The rest were almost exclusively Orthodox. At the Eastern part of the parish, in Aruküla, was an Orthodox church. Herrnhutians had meetinghouses in Nabala, Jüri, and Vaida. Noteworthy, they were very influential in those parts of the parish that were seen as “backward” in cultural and socio-economic terms. The membership of free churches was negligible, and their activity in the parish was limited.

Pastors

Rudolf Winkler (in office **1885–1901**, lived 1855–1917), also known as a researcher of local history, had reportedly very cordial relations with his parishioners.⁴⁵³

Walter Weissberg (in office **1902–06**). His short service in the parish has not attracted much attention.

Johan Keerig (in office **1908–1919**, lived 1868–1933), the first ethnic Estonian pastor – remembered as helping to liberate local peasants from captivity during the German occupation and also as the founder of the local library.⁴⁵⁴

Eduard Tennmann (in office **1919–1923**, lived 1878–1936) was a docent and later professor of theology at the University of Tartu. His short tenure as the pastor of Jüri was marred by conflicts with the congregation. His successor, Jakob Aunver, remarked that the congregation remembered Tennmann as a talented and witty preacher, but at the same time also as selfish and intransigent.⁴⁵⁵ At the very beginning, there were complaints that due to his many other obligations, Tennmann paid little attention to his pastoral duties.⁴⁵⁶ Later, he also had conflicts on personal grounds, which resulted in the resignation of the entire congregation council. The conflicts prompted visitation of the dean of Ida-Harju, Harald Pöld, in June 1922. He managed to mediate reconciliation, and Tennmann agreed to apologize for his demeaning remarks about “dark forces” influencing council members.⁴⁵⁷ However, shortly after that Tennmann still left Jüri.

The congregation remained without a pastor for some time. Elections were held in October 1923; Johan Keerig, working at that time in Reigi (Hiiumaa island), wanted to return to Jüri, but was defeated by Arnold Wieckmann, a Baltic German pastor from Järva-Madise. However, the election results were cancelled due to procedural errors and eventually Wieckmann gave up running. Finally, on March 23, 1924, a newly graduated Estonian theologian **Jakob Albrecht (Aunver)** was elected as a pastor with 483 of 696 valid votes (69.4%). However, only

⁴⁵³ Jaan Saalverk's memoirs: Eesti Kirik, 09.05.1929, p. 147–150. See also “Ajalooline pärimus Jüri kihelkonnast”, <https://www.folklore.ee/pubte/ajaloolist/jyr/jyr.html>, 31.01.2022.

⁴⁵⁴ „Ajalooline pärimus Jüri kihelkonnast.” <https://www.folklore.ee/pubte/ajaloolist/jyr/jyr.html>, 31.01.2022.

⁴⁵⁵ Aunver 1961, 99.

⁴⁵⁶ EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Jüri kogudusega 1918–1938, documents from November and December 1919.

⁴⁵⁷ EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Jüri kogudusega 1918–1938, visitation protocol (17. and 18.06.1923).

30.7% of voters in Nabala and 42.2% in Sausti (polling station in Kurna commune close to Nabala) supported him. Surprisingly, though, voters in another Herrnhutian stronghold, Vaida, supported Aunver rather unanimously.⁴⁵⁸

According to a newspaper report, Herrnhutians had been suspicious that Aunver was a supporter of liberal theology (like his predecessor Tennmann). It prompted a vehement campaign to vote against him. The anonymous author of the article, a supporter of Aunver, depicts his adversaries not only as bigoted traditionalist representatives of older generations but also denounces their lack of national consciousness, as their favourite candidate, Wieckmann, was a German.⁴⁵⁹ However, later Aunver and his Herrnhutian parishioners seem to have had good relations and close cooperation.⁴⁶⁰

Aunver remained the pastor of Jüri until he left Estonia as a war refugee in 1944. Besides the pastoral job, he participated actively in the associational life of Jüri and taught religion in the local primary school (1924–33), but also secondary schools of nearby Tallinn. In addition, he was the managing editor (1925–31) and editor-in-chief (1934–39) of *Eesti Kirik*, the official weekly newspaper of Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church,⁴⁶¹ and a prolific publicist in ecclesiastical matters. Aunver became one of the leading figures in the church, serving as the dean of Ida-Harju (1935–44) and a member of the Consistory both in Estonia (1935–39, 1943) and later in the Estonian exile church (1959–78).⁴⁶²

Pastor Aunver wrote a short autobiography before his ordination in 1923. In it he admitted that his father had not practiced religion regularly. However, he had read the Bible from time to time. Jakob Aunver himself remembered that as a child he prayed once intensively during a thunderstorm while herding the flock. But his teacher in the village school supported the revolution of 1905, and it also radicalized young Aunver for a while. Also, religious instruction was disgusting for him in primary school because of the way it was taught.⁴⁶³ However, studying in Valga at secondary school brought a change as his teacher, Estonian nationalist pastor Johannes Kerg had so profound influence on him both religiously and nationally, that he decided to study theology.⁴⁶⁴

Aunver had strong nationalist convictions. Already in 1924, he changed his original surname Albrecht, as it sounded non-Estonian.⁴⁶⁵ As a dean and member of the consistory he appears to have avoided open conflicts with his German colleagues, but after the *umsiedlung* he argued that the departure of German

⁴⁵⁸ EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Jüri kogudusega 1918–1938, especially voting protocols (03.10.1923, 30.12.1923, 24.03.1924).

⁴⁵⁹ Pääwaleht, 09.04.1924, p. 6.

⁴⁶⁰ Aunver 1961, 97.

⁴⁶¹ Õpetaja Jakob Aunveri teenistuskiri (1935), EELKKA 1-3-11-13.

⁴⁶² „Jakob Aunver”, http://entsyklopeedia.ee/artikkel/aunver_jakob, 14.02.2022.

⁴⁶³ Aunver was born and raised in Vana-Antsla commune, Urvaste parish in Southern Estonia.

⁴⁶⁴ EELKKA 1-3-13.

⁴⁶⁵ EELKKA 1-3-13.

pastors from Juuru and Kuusalu had solved nationality-based tensions in these parishes and several people had rejoined the church there.⁴⁶⁶

Results of 1923 Referendum

The outcomes of the referendum on religious instruction varied significantly across the parish. Not surprisingly, the pious Nabala distinguishes from other communes both with extraordinarily high turnout and the share of supporters for religious instruction.

Table 6. Outcome of the Referendum on Religious Instruction (1923) in Jüri Parish

Commune	Polling station	Turnout	Share of votes given in support of religious instruction
Kurna	Kurna	66.7%	71.5%
Nabala	Nabala	89.6%	95.2%
Rae	All together	76.7%	76.0%
	Vallamaja		75.6%
	Aruküla		60.1%
	Kautjala		72.0%
	Lagedi		73.8%
	Vaida		93.9%

Source: own calculations, based on minutes of electoral commissions (ERA 80-1-1976).

On the other hand, significant internal differences in the commune of Rae stand out. High support for religious instruction in Vaida is easily explicable also by Herrnhutian piety there. As for relatively low support in Aruküla, it is worth mentioning that an Orthodox church was situated there. On the other hand, according to visitation protocols local Orthodox population seems to have been rather indifferent about congregational life.⁴⁶⁷ So it is doubtful if religious motives could significantly influence voting decisions there, though religious identification might have played a role for some people. It seems more plausible that these were leftist sentiments that motivated relatively many people in Aruküla to vote against religious instruction. Recently a large-scale peat industry had been established there, with 53 female and 108 male workers working in the summer of 1922.⁴⁶⁸ It is known that before the referendum, a campaign meeting of independent socialists was held in Aruküla.⁴⁶⁹ Also, while the official results of the elections arranged by Soviet occupiers in July 1940 are largely not trust-

⁴⁶⁶ EELKKA 1-4-113, Ida-Harju praosti aruanne 1939.

⁴⁶⁷ EAA 1655-3-480.

⁴⁶⁸ Päewaleht, 18.07.1922, p. 2.

⁴⁶⁹ Tööline, 26.01.1923, p. 3.

worthy, it is still remarkable that a much bigger percentage of people voted then for the official candidate in Aruküla than in other parts of Rae commune.⁴⁷⁰

Religious Life

Individual Practice

About 400 people took part in Sunday services according to the estimates of the pastor in 1935. It was about 9% of the congregation, and attendance was arguably in the rise.⁴⁷¹ On feast days, there were several times more worshippers; in 1929, about 1400 people attended the cemetery festivity (*surnuaiapäiha*) service.⁴⁷²

At the end of the 1920s, about 1/3 of adult members took part in Communion yearly.⁴⁷³ However, later, Aunver repeatedly noted that diminishing participation in the Holy Communion, especially among young people, was a problem in the deanery. In 1939, he explained it as follows: “Rationalistic and materialistic interpretation of life, which attacks both in the city and the countryside (although less in the latter), alienates the congregation members from those rites where rationality is less important than religious experience – the recognition of one’s sin and the unquenchable longing for atonement that the Lord of Life grants to his children.”⁴⁷⁴ According to statistical data, the numbers of participation in rites and the Holy Communion in Jüri were close to the average of the Ida-Harju deanery.

However, people’s bonds with the church remained generally strong according to Aunver. In 1925, he noted that the decline in church life, which he associated with the legacy of the war and revolutionary years, had passed, and attendance at services had even increased. People tried to apply the truths of the faith in daily lives and took church rites seriously. Several people who had alienated from the

⁴⁷⁰ Rae commune was part of the only polling district in Estonia, where one oppositional candidate was also allowed to run. According to the official results, the candidate of the occupying regime Artur Saks won 71.3% of the votes in Aruküla. In Vaida polling station, he obtained only 29.3% of the vote. See Põldmäe 2006, 384–385.

⁴⁷¹ EELKKA 1-4-110, Ida-Harju praostkonna aruanded 1935, Jüri koguduse aruanne.

⁴⁷² EELKKA 1-4-107, Ida-Harju praostkonna aruanded 1929, Jüri koguduse aruanne.

⁴⁷³ EELKKA 1-4-107, Ida-Harju praosti aruanne 1928. Participation in other congregations of the deanery was as follows: Kose over 45%, Juuru slightly below 45%, Kuusalu 30%, Harju-Jaani 21%, Jõelähtme 20%. Of those, Juuru was according to verbal reports of the pastors a significantly pious parish, with church occasionally packed with people, the strong influence of Herrnhutians and awakenings also involving young people (EELKKA 1-4-106, Ida-Harju praostkonna aruanded 1924, Juuru koguduse aruanne; EELKKA 1-4-109, Ida-Harju praostkonna aruanded 1933, Juuru koguduse aruanne). But even there both the pastor and Herrnhutian leaders complained about growing indifference about religious life (EELKKA 1-4-107, Juuru koguduse aruanne 1929).

⁴⁷⁴ „Ratsionalistlik ja materialistlik elu tõlgitsemine, mis ründab nii linnas kui maal (viimases küll vähem), võõrutab koguduseliikmeid usuelu neist talitustest, kus kaasa ei räägi mitte niipalju mõistus kui just usuline elamus – oma patu tundmine ja kustumata igatsus lepituse järele, mida jagab oma lastele elu Issand.” EELKKA 1-4-113, Ida-Harju praosti aruanne 1939. Cf. EELKKA 1-4-110, Ida-Harju praosti aruanne 1936.

church during revolutionary years, had returned.⁴⁷⁵ In 1939, Aunver reported that unbaptized children were rare, all the young people were confirmed in the parish, and some people, who had married secularly or had lived in cohabitation, had decided later for church wedding.⁴⁷⁶ In contrast, some other pastors in the deanery tended to complain about the spread of secular rites.⁴⁷⁷ In 1940, when rumours spread about abolishing confirmation ceremonies by Soviet authorities in the future, there was an extraordinarily large number of confirmands in the deanery. Aunver interpreted it as an encouraging sign that people still appreciated their bonds with the church.⁴⁷⁸

Other accounts suggest also that people of Jüri still hold church-related traditions in high regard. Answering to the questionnaire of Estonian National Museum in 1983, Eha Leek wrote that, in the 1930s, the baptism of children was almost universal, as people were still reluctant to let the children grow up as “heathens”. Notably, the rituals related to commemoration of the dead were especially closely related to religion; during the placing the dead body to the coffin, a religious speech was held and church hymns sung. Especially popular were those church feast days when loved ones who had passed away were remembered and their graves visited: *surnute mälestuspüha* (*Totensonntag*, the last Sunday of the church year), as well as Mother’s Day and New Year’s Eve. For funerals, special song sheets were usually ordered, for which only religious songs (church hymns, but sometimes also “songs of Baptists”) were selected. Later they were kept in the family Bibles; on New Year’s Eve, some songs were sung from those in memory of the loved ones. On the other hand, some couples already gave up church weddings, and the earlier wide-spread custom of singing church hymns on family feast days began to disappear, except at funerals.⁴⁷⁹ The importance of celebrating minor church feasts, such as the Day of Prayer and Palm Sunday, also began to lose its importance.⁴⁸⁰

There is not much information about following moral guidelines of the church. The annual parish reports of pastor Aunver are usually short and superficial on that. Typically, he praises the positive role of Herrnhutians in the life of the parish⁴⁸¹ and notices improvement in religious and moral life.⁴⁸² However, exces-

⁴⁷⁵ EELKKA 1-4-106, Ida-Harju praostkonna aruanded 1925, Jüri koguduse aruanne.

⁴⁷⁶ EELKKA 1-4-113, Ida-Harju praostkonna aruanded, Jüri koguduse aruanne 1939.

⁴⁷⁷ In the dean’s report for 1932, it is mentioned that “several couples” in Kose and Juuru were wed secularly, and secular burials were not rare in Kose. EELKKA 1-4-108, Ida-Harju praosti aruanne 1932. However, in 1937 it was claimed that secular rites happened in Kose only on solitary instances. EELKKA 1-4-111, Ida-Harju praosti aruanne 1937.

⁴⁷⁸ EELKKA 1-4-114, Ida-Harju praosti aruanne 1940.

⁴⁷⁹ An account by Eha Leek, ERM KV 422:1, pp. 50–53.

⁴⁸⁰ An account by Jaan Loo, cited by Eha Leek, ERM KV 422:1, p. 63.

⁴⁸¹ EELKKA 1-4-107, Ida-Harju praostkonna aruanded 1927, Jüri koguduse aruanne 1927; EELKKA 1-4-110, Ida-Harju praostkonna aruanded, Jüri koguduse aruanne 1935.

⁴⁸² In that respect, Aunver speaks repeatedly about “sobering” (*kainenemine*). EELKKA 1-4-107, Ida-Harju praostkonna aruanded, Jüri koguduse aruanne 1925, 1929, 1930. EELKKA 1-4-110, Jüri koguduse aruanne 1935.

sive alcohol consumption⁴⁸³ and divorces⁴⁸⁴ were still problems according to the pastor.

Congregational Life

Also in Jüri attempts were made to rejuvenate the congregation. But even though some remarkable one-off events were organized, no regular activities apart from church services, and in addition in some localities Herrnhutian prayer meetings, seem to have taken place. As for the special events, in 1934 and 1935, weeks of revivalist meetings (*ärkamisnädalad*) were held, with lively participation especially in Nabala. Other major events were the parochial festivals of religious music (*vaimulik laulupäev*) in 1933 and 1936; more than 150 singers and musicians took part on both occasions, both from Jüri and neighbouring parishes.⁴⁸⁵

However, attempts to organize regular youth work failed. Already pastor Tennmann tried to organize youth meetings, but according to visitation protocols, it produced no expected results.⁴⁸⁶ In his report for 1921 Tennmann complained: "I found it annoying that during conducting Bible classes for young people, couples made use of the opportunity to meet in the cemetery and naughty boys to make noise in the hall of confirmation classes. The hall becomes a smoking room during religious services, and also a place for sipping white liquid from bottle."⁴⁸⁷ In the report for the year 1931, it is mentioned that youth group was established by the congregation.⁴⁸⁸ But it appears not to have been viable, as reports fail to mention it in the following years. In 1935 Aunver complained that there was no youth work in Jüri and also in Juuru, as nobody of lay members were willing to engage with it.⁴⁸⁹

Children's work was not well established in Jüri either. Pastor Tennmann attempted to launch Sunday schools in Kurna and other nearby villages, but apparently without a lasting effect.⁴⁹⁰ Still, in the parish report of 1924, it is stated that children's services had been held in the church and once in the park of the Kurna manor, with 50–100 children usually taking part. In addition, "children's prayer meetings" were held in Kurna and Nabala with 15–20 participants.⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸³ EELKKA 1-4-107, Ida-Harju praostkonna aruanded 1927, 1929, Jüri koguduse aruanne 1927, 1929. EELKKA 1-4-110, Ida-Harju praostkonna aruanded 1935, Jüri koguduse aruanne 1935.

⁴⁸⁴ EELKKA 1-4-110, Ida-Harju praostkonna aruanded 1935, Jüri koguduse aruanne.

⁴⁸⁵ EELKKA Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Jüri kogudusega 1918–1938, 1936. a koguduse päeva protokoll.

⁴⁸⁶ EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Jüri kogudusega 1918–1938. Kirikukatsumise protokoll (17.–18.06.1922).

⁴⁸⁷ „Pahandav oli mulle nooresoo piiblitundide pidamise juures, et juhust tarvitati paarikeste kohtamiseks surnuaial ja ulakate poiste lärmitegemiseks leeritoas. Leerituba muutub jumalateenistuste puhul suitsutoaks ja ka pudelist valge vedeliku rüüppamise kohaks.” EELKKA 1-4-106, Ida-Harju koguduse aruanded 1921, Jüri koguduse aruanne.

⁴⁸⁸ EELKKA 1-4-108, Ida-Harju praostkonna aruanded 1931, Jüri koguduse aruanne.

⁴⁸⁹ EELKKA 1-4-110, Ida-Harju praosti aruanne 1935.

⁴⁹⁰ Meie Kirik, 24.01.1923, p. 30.

⁴⁹¹ EELKKA 1-4-106, Ida-Harju praostkonna aruanded 1924, Jüri koguduse aruanne.

Under Aunver, church services for children were also occasionally organized, but there was no regular Sunday school at least in mid-1930s.⁴⁹² In 1939, Aunver remarked as a dean that children and youth work was at unsatisfactory level in the whole deanery. In that year, only four youth groups operated in Ida-Harju with approximately 100 members altogether. According to Aunver, much tighter cooperation between school and church was urgently needed to improve the situation.⁴⁹³

Similarly, on the congregational day of 1936 it was regretted that there was still no permanent church choir in Jüri. Instead, the mixed choir of the local branch of ÜENÜ (All-Estonian Youth Association) performed occasionally in church services.⁴⁹⁴ Finally, it is worth of mentioning that the congregation had a library with about 400 volumes.⁴⁹⁵

Internal Differences in the Parish

While annual reports of pastors tend to treat the parish as a whole, in other sources deep internal divisions in the parish are usually emphasized. It was especially noticed that the small Nabala commune differed from the rest of the parish as its inhabitants tended to be pious and at the same time superstitious,⁴⁹⁶ old-fashioned and suspicious towards secular social life. Nabala was juxtaposed to Rae, where people tended also to be religious, but “in a different manner”. Especially younger people were there more open to secular culture, but even so local associational life still lagged behind Southern Estonia. In the third commune of the parish, Kurna, some areas were reminiscent of Nabala, while others were mentally closer to Rae.⁴⁹⁷

Noteworthy similar is the account of the pastor Jakob Aunver, who, writing later in exile, contrasted two groups in the core congregation: “pietist Herrnhutians and suburban rural intelligentsia” (“pietistlik vennastekoguduse osa ja linna-lähedane maaharitlaste pool”). The Herrnhutians were, according to him, a close-knit community, but not intolerant towards those who had different views. Their stronghold was Nabala, where there were no dance parties held at all until almost the end of the independence era. Instead, prayer meetings both in the meeting-houses and in private homes attracted both old and young people.⁴⁹⁸ It is not entirely clear how many people in Nabala were actively involved in the Herrnhutian movement. Mari-Ann Remmel argues, based on recently conducted oral

⁴⁹² EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Jüri kogudusega 1918–1938, 1936. a. koguduse päeva protokoll.

⁴⁹³ EELKKA 1-4-113, Ida-Harju praosti aruanne 1939.

⁴⁹⁴ EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Jüri kogudusega 1918–1938, 1936. a. koguduse päeva protokoll.

⁴⁹⁵ EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Jüri kogudusega 1918–1938, 1936. a. koguduse päeva protokoll.

⁴⁹⁶ Different sources mention that Herrnhutian piety was compatible in Nabala with believing in (and practising) witchcraft and magic. See, for example, Päewaleht, 15.07.1909, p. 2.

⁴⁹⁷ Kaja, 21.07.1924, p. 3.

⁴⁹⁸ Aunver 1961, 97.

interviews, that several people there did not necessarily approve Herrnhutian piety,⁴⁹⁹ but Herrnhutians were able to dictate the way of life in the whole commune: “Sunday was – and still is – a big holiday in many families in Nabala. However, those who did not go to the meetinghouse, also “suffered” from the Sunday work ban. “Sunday was a day of rest, if you worked, you got scolded, you had to do it by stealth”.”⁵⁰⁰

Herrnhutians of Jüri had good relations with the church.⁵⁰¹ Pastor Aunver appreciated their contribution to religious and moral life of the parish both in his annual reports and in an overview written later in the exile.⁵⁰² His predecessor Eduard Tennmann, however, had denounced the gatherings of the Herrnhutians as “artificially ecstatic”.⁵⁰³ There are indeed other accounts of widespread weeping in the meetings, as well.⁵⁰⁴

The group with urban influences is described by Aunver as follows: “The most prominent members of the second part of the congregation, which involved good and skilled orators, well-read people, leaders of singing and brass choirs, political figures, etc., followed closely the life of the urban people, joined youth organizations, various other societies and associations, organized drama evenings, etc. In their case, the conviction was fully evident that the congregation is also nothing else than a society that takes care of religious and moral needs. But this still did not mean that they were indifferent or even hostile to religious issues: faith was not an inner strength, an experience for them, but it was tested and weighed against the background of science and education.” Despite the sharp differences between the groups, Aunver emphasizes that, surprisingly, there were no significant discords in the congregation. Both Herrnhutians and “rural intelligentsia” influenced each other mutually and co-operated with each other, thus contributing to the stable and economically sustainable congregational life.⁵⁰⁵

⁴⁹⁹ Rimmel 2017, 152-153.

⁵⁰⁰ “Pühapäev oli Nabalas – ja on mitmes peres ka praegu – suur püha. Pühapäevase töökeelu all “kannatasid” aga needki, kes palvemajas ei käinud. *Pühapäev oli puhkepäev, kui tööd tegid, siis said sõimata, pidid salamahti tegema.*” Rimmel 2017, 158–159.

⁵⁰¹ It was not always the case, cf. pastor’s report of 1935 from the nearby Kuusalu parish (EELKKA 1-4-110, Ida-Harju praostkonna aruanded 1935, Kuusalu koguduse aruanne).

⁵⁰² Aunver 1961, 97.

⁵⁰³ EELKKA, Ida-Harju praostkonna aruanded 1921, Jüri koguduse aruanne 1921.

⁵⁰⁴ Rimmel 2017, 158.

⁵⁰⁵ „Teise osa koguduse väljapaistvamad liikmed, nende hulgas häid ja osavaid kõnemehi, paljulugenedu inimesi, laulu- ja puhkpillide kooride juhte, poliitikategelasi jt., järgisid hoolega linlaste elu, rühmitusid noorsoo organisatsioonidesse, mitmesugustesse teistesse seltsidesse ja ühingutesse, korraldasid näitemänguõhtuid jne. Nende juures ilmes selgel kujul arusaamine, et koguduski ei ole muud kui selts, kes hoolitseb usulis-kõlbeliste tarvete eest. Aga see ei tähendanud siiski seda, et usuküsimustele ükskõikne või koguni vaenulik oleks oldud, usk ei olnud neile mitte sisemiseks jõuks, elamuseks, vaid seda katsuti ja kaaluti teaduse ja hariduse valgel.” (Aunver 1961, 97–98.)

Other Confessions and Interconfessional Relations

Aruküla Orthodox congregation was the only non-Lutheran congregation that was officially operating in the parish. Arguably, local Orthodox community had been founded by Russian peasants brought to the parish by Peter the Great. However, most of their descendants were Estonianized and many adopted Lutheran faith as well. Allegedly, in order to “save the Orthodox faith”, Aruküla congregation was founded in 1872.⁵⁰⁶ It was a small congregation which had to struggle due to small membership, economic difficulties, and also indifference of the faithful. In 1929, there were complaints about mismanagement of the congregation and internal quarrels. Allegedly, in the parish the Orthodox people were buried by Lutherans, and a Lutheran even fulfilled the obligations of their *köster*. In the 1930s, church visitation found that the life of the congregation had improved both in economic and spiritual terms. Arguably, 40–50 people attended the church regularly on Sundays. According to the visitation of 1940, the congregation had 230 members, but the assessment of its future perspectives was pessimistic: “Congregation is cold about the church and faith. No creative work is done, all life is left to fate.”⁵⁰⁷

Eha Leek claims that since establishment of the republic, “when religious laws became weaker”, many local Orthodox tended to convert to Lutheran faith. However, she remembers that Lutherans, including her own family, used to visit Aruküla church on Epiphany to get consecrated water. Children were used to attend Lutheran service, and therefore the Orthodox one was strange and unintelligible for them. “Also the bottle of holy water that was brought from Aruküla, was soon forgotten in the rush of work, and by the end of the year the bottle had already been lost somewhere, so that it was not known whether the water really stayed fresh for the whole year, as promised in the church. But it was [still] believed in, and every year the children got a sleigh ride to Aruküla.”⁵⁰⁸

As for free churches, they seem to have largely failed to find supporters in the parish due to the strong impact of Herrnhutians. In 1925, Aunver claimed that there were almost no “sectarians” (*lahkusulised*) in the parish.⁵⁰⁹ However, in 1936 there were complaints that the congregation had been benevolent and patient towards the “sectarians”, who, *vice versa*, had spread unfounded criticism both about the church and Herrnhutians. However, there were still few supporters of free churches living in the parish.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁶ Usk ja Elu, 28.06.1916, p. 306-307. Cf. Põldmäe 2023, 74–75.

⁵⁰⁷ EAA 1655-3-480.

⁵⁰⁸ „Püha vee pudel, mis Arukülast kaasa võeti, unus ka varsti töötuhinas ja aasta lõpuks oli pudel juba kuhugi kadunud, nii ei saadudki teada, kas vesi tõesti terve aasta värske seisis, nagu kirikus lubati. Kuid seda usuti ja igal aastal said lapsed saanisõidu Arukülla.” ERM KV 638:3, p. 48.

⁵⁰⁹ EELKKA 1-4-106, Jüri koguduse aruanne 1925.

⁵¹⁰ EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Jüri kogudusega, 1936. a. koguduse päeva protokoll.

Autobiographical Sources

The aforementioned religious differences are reflected also in the reminiscences of the locals. On the one hand, in some memoirs religious themes are rather rarely mentioned. It is true even for **Alfred**⁵¹¹ (1908–2008) and **Julius Põldmäe** (1911–2007),⁵¹² whose father Jaan Põldmäe was among the leading lay members of the congregation.

For some people, however, religion was among the central topics in the life, as **Koidula Ameerikas** (born 1927), who was raised in Kurna commune, remembers: “Grandma believed in God in spirit and truth. I had already learned several prayers by her side when I was very young. Communication with God was part of life. Grandma had a big, hefty Bible that was pretty worn out from reading. I liked the book of Bible stories with pictures. All the faces of the evil men who bullied Jesus, I scrubbed to pieces. I knew all Ten Commandments by heart and felt fear if I somehow trespassed upon them. I especially tended to lie sometimes. Prayer meetings were held in the neighbouring Peetri farm. The people gathered in a large room, read, sang, and prayed. Grandma always went there for religious gatherings. Sometimes she also took me along, but I did not like it there, they screamed during the prayer, it was said to mean “revival”.”⁵¹³

Eha Leek (born 1903), daughter of the local social activist Jaan Saalverk, recalled: “We had to cross our arms after every meal, on Saturday evenings and Sundays we sang church hymns and father read us from the sermon book.” Father also used to write religious reflections to a notebook. Also, on her confirmation day there was a common moment of prayer in the home, and she had to ask forgiveness for any wrongdoings she had done for her family members. However, she was reluctant to ask forgiveness from her stepmother, and therefore the father argued that going to Communion would be damnation for her. However, already in the church, immediately before the sacrament, Leek still found courage to ask forgiveness also from the stepmother. On the other hand, she was happy that their male servant, who had harassed her sexually, was not at home on her confirmation day and thus she had not to ask forgiveness also from him. Her memories are exceptional among all the other autobiographical texts used in this study, because here the religious themes play a prominent role in the reminiscences of the confirmation day.⁵¹⁴

⁵¹¹ EKLA f. 350 M 1:36.

⁵¹² Põldmäe 2002.

⁵¹³ „Jumalat uskus vanaema tões ja vaimus. Olin tema kõrval juba päris väiksena mitmed palved ära õppinud. Suhtlemine Jumalaga kuulus elu hulka. Mammal oli suur paks piibel, mis oli suure lugemise tõttu päris ära kulunud. Mulle meeldis piltidega piiblliooraamat. Kõik kurjade meeste näod, kes Jeesust kiusasid, nühkisin ma puruks. Teadsin peast kõike kümnet käsku ja tundsin hirmu, kui olin kuidagi nende vastu eksinud. Eriti kippusin ma ikka vahel valetama. Naabriperes Peetril peeti palvetunde. Rahvas tuli kokku suurde kambrisse, loeti, lauldi ja paluti. Mamma käis alati seal “lugemisel”. Mind võttis ka vahel kaasa, aga seal mulle ei meeldinud, kisendati palvuse ajal, see pidi “ärkamist” tähendama.” Ameerikas 2008, 14. Cf. the memoirs of her sister Vaike Härms in ERM KV 1145:2, p. 31.

⁵¹⁴ EKLA f. 350 M 1:2, vol. II, p. 20–22.

Leek's own relationship to religion was ambiguous. On the one hand, she confesses: "But the confirmation gave me indeed food for thought, as if there were secret eyes everywhere that see and know everything".⁵¹⁵ On the other hand, one participant of the confirmation course had stolen money from the other, and the culprit was not found: "It somehow alienated from the doctrines."⁵¹⁶ Also, she notes that she had read Dmitry Merezhkovsky's novel "The Death of the Gods. Julian the Apostate" at the time of her confirmation course, motivated by her own doubts about believing in God. Some years later, she experienced a deep crisis, having also suicidal thoughts. Overcoming this, Leek wrote down her personal program for life, which included being teetotaler and working for the benefit of the Estonia, but being neutral in political and religious matters.⁵¹⁷ However, she still visited nearby prayer meetings, where some girls of her age had already "awakened". Leek "was not able to do it" and in the end, as she notes, her "religious ecstasy" disappeared gradually.⁵¹⁸

As for religious education at home, a mundane pedagogical *rationale* was important, according to Leek: "Honesty was tried to be developed together with the fear of God: if the child believed that the heavenly father sees and hears everything, even when the parents are away, he did not try to pilfer; however, the knowledge that the heavenly father always held and protected him gave courage to the child, especially when he was alone or in the dark."⁵¹⁹ Besides that, religious topics are related in her memoirs to celebrating feasts. For example, on Good Friday the parents used to go to church. No work was done, and children were not allowed to make noise nor romp.⁵²⁰

Public Role of the Church

Community Life

According to several newspaper reports from the beginning of the 20th century, which complained about the backwardness of the parish, the strong influence of Herrnhutian piety was largely to be blamed for it. For instance, when at the turn of the century temperance society was established in the parish, secular associational life was reportedly so unknown to the locals that teetotalism was referred to as a "new faith", and it provoked hostility.⁵²¹ Another local correspondent from Jüri complained: "The strong pietist current that can be found in Jüri, also has a

⁵¹⁵ „Aga mõtlema pani mind leer küll, nagu oleksid kõikjal olnud salalikud silmad, mis kõik näevad ja teavad.“ EKLA f. 350 M 1:2, vol. II, p. 21.

⁵¹⁶ „See tegi nagu õpetuse võõraks.“ EKLA f. 350 M 1:2, vol. II, p. 21.

⁵¹⁷ EKLA f. 350 M 1:2, vol. II, p. 25.

⁵¹⁸ EKLA f. 350 M 1:2, vol. II, p. 27.

⁵¹⁹ „Ausust püüti arendada koos jumalakartusega: kui laps uskus, et taevaisa kõik näeb ja kuuleb, ka siis, kui vanemad eemal on, siis ta ei püüdnud näpata, julgust aga, eriti ükski olles või pimedas, andis lapsele teadmine, et taevaisa teda alati hoiab ja kaitseb.“ ERM KV 638:3, p. 36.

⁵²⁰ ERM KV 638:3, pp. 35, 37, 48.

⁵²¹ Tallinna Teataja, 04.03.1913, p. 4.

hindering effect on the educational efforts of young men. The strange thing about these people is that they do not consider drinking, for example, a great sin, but as soon as a schoolteacher makes some secular speech, it is ferociously opposed.”⁵²²

The *rationale* behind such attitudes is explained by aforementioned Jaan Saalverk (1874–1932), a local who collected folklore in his home parish in response to the appeal of Rev. Jakob Hurt.⁵²³ In one of his letters to Hurt he wrote: “Older and pious people think also that collecting old tradition is a great sin, which has no other aim or purpose than providing the people with so-called “books of frivolous stories” that would separate them from the church, the Bible, faith and Christ. Some call you and all collectors of old tradition, myself among them, the most loyal servants of the Devil. My mother always tells me: “The Devil cannot take you to the pub with other younger people or drag you here and there but see how he catches you in his net again, you sit at home or wander around the village writing old frivolous stories and songs, you still have to be his slave.”” Saalverk himself had also had some hesitations, but as the appeal had been made by a clergyman, he concluded that collecting folklore was not something which would result in going to hell.⁵²⁴ The correspondence dates back to the turn of the centuries; notable is that already at that time contempt for secular culture was ascribed largely to older people.

Newspaper accounts of religiously motivated opposition to secular culture in the parish from the first decades of 20th century are often specifically related to Nabala. There were even vague claims about violence inflicted on those who organized meetings on non-religious topics.⁵²⁵ But also in case of Aruküla it is

⁵²² „Takistavalt noortemeeste hariduse püüete peale mõjub ka tugev palvevendade vool, mida Jürist leidub. Imelik on nende inimeste juures, et nad näiteks joomisi mitte suureks patuks ei pea, aga nii pea kui kooliõpetaja mõne ilmaliku kõne toime paneb, siis oldakse sellele ägedalt vastu.” Päewaleht, 11.03.1909, p. 1. In another report, it is claimed that Herrnhutian preachers (*lugejad*) denounced alcohol abuse, but it was not paid much attention by the faithful: Päewaleht, 15.01.1909, p. 3.

⁵²³ Jakob Hurt (1839–1907), pastor, folklorist and one of the leaders of Estonian national movement, organized a widespread collecting of Estonian folklore. Saalverk was one of his 1400 correspondents. Notably, a prominent Herrnhutian periodical, *Kristlik Perekonnaleht*, also voiced openly sceptical opinion about Hurt’s involvement with collecting folklore, see Talonen 2021, 152.

⁵²⁴ „Vanemad ja vagad inimesed arvavad jälle vana vara korjamist väga suureks patu tööks, millel muud eesmärki ega otstarbet pole kui rahvale heaste nõnda nimetud “lora jutu raamatuid” muretseda mis neid kirikust, piiblist, usust ja Kristusest peaksid lahutama. Mõned nimetavad Teid ja kõiki vana vara korjajaid ka mina nende hulgas, kõige truuvimateks kurati teendriteks. Minu ema ütleb mulle alati: “saadan ei saa sind teiste noorematega seltsis kõrtsi ega sinna tänna vedada, aga näe kudas ta jälle sind oma võrkus kinni veab, sa istud kodu ehk kolad mööda küla vana tühja jutu ja laululorasi kirjutada, ika pead teda orjama.” Quoted according to Kikas 2023, 40. Saalverk committed suicide in 1932. Her daughter Eha Leek claims that before his death he had complained that he was sinning against the Holy Spirit by involvement in both religious and secular matters (including politics). EKLA 350:1:2, vol. II, p. 36.

⁵²⁵ Päewaleht, 02.01.1909, p. 2.

once mentioned that according to local pious people, drama and secular choir rehearsals were signs of nearing of the Judgement Day.⁵²⁶

There are also some similar accounts from the 1920s, and again from Nabala. “Faith and culture are enemies of each other in Nabala. One does not know how to walk the middle path. Secular parties are frowned upon. There have been cases where the organizers of the events from other places have been chased away by throwing of stones. Maybe only music and song have more ground. Culture destroys faith, thinking is the enemy of religious feelings, believes the pious man of Nabala. Not only the older, but also the younger ones. Children follow in their parents’ footsteps here.” It was common that children asked the blessing of their parents before important life decisions. In contrast, in Rae attitudes towards modern cultural life were positive. Only some older people had religious prejudices against it; a fire in the local clubhouse had been interpreted as divine punishment for the sins by some of them.⁵²⁷ Elly Mitt, a trainee teacher who worked in Nabala in 1929–30, still complained that locals were passive regarding the secular associations, except some young people.⁵²⁸ Another trainee teacher, Hartvig Helilaid, mentioned in 1936 that locals were suspicious about Young Eagles (*Noorkotkad*), a patriotic youth organization, which was favoured by the state. Many initially forbade their children to participate. The organization became viable only after Helilaid allegedly was successful in persuading the parents to change their minds.⁵²⁹ He does not claim that the suspicious attitudes were driven by religious motives, but it seems probable. It is perhaps not a coincidence that Vaida primary school, which was situated in the stronghold of Herrnhutians of Rae commune, was allegedly one of the last schools in the entire Harju County where the branch of *Noorkotkad* was established in 1937.⁵³⁰

However, times were already changing. A wide range of voluntary associations were already operating in the parish in the interwar years, uniting youth (*ÜENÜ*), farmers (*põllumeeste seltsid*) and female village people (*maanaiste seltsid*), organizing adult education, amateur theatrical performances, public libraries, and the like.⁵³¹ The pious Nabala seems to have been no different in that regard. In an article in the agrarian daily *Kaja* from 1933, it is claimed that associational life was rather vibrant in the commune, while Herrnhutian presence is barely mentioned in the article.⁵³²

⁵²⁶ Tallinna Teataja, 13.04.1910, p. 2.

⁵²⁷ „Usk ja kultuur on Nabalas üksteise vaenlased. Keskteed käia ei osata. Ilmalikkude pidude peale vaadatakse eitavalt. On juhuseid olnud, kus mujalt tulnud pidutegelased kivide rahe all minema peletatakse. Vahest ainult muusikal ja laulul on rohkem pinda. Kultuur, see hävitab usku, mõtlemine, see on vaenlane usutunnetele, usub Nabala vend. Mitte ainult vanemad, vaid samuti ka nooremad. Lapsed käivad siin vanemate jälgedes.” *Kaja*, 21.07.1924, p. 3.

⁵²⁸ ERA 1830-1-241, pp. 149–150.

⁵²⁹ EAA 2107-1-45, p. 11

⁵³⁰ Uus Eesti, 15.04.1937, p. 5.

⁵³¹ Põldmäe 1991, 47.

⁵³² *Kaja*, 07.02.1933, p. 2.

In the interwar years, local associational life was also fostered by the pastor Jakob Aunver. He took part of the activities of secular associations and established good contacts with their leaders. For example, the choir of the local branch of the youth association ÜENÜ used to perform in festive occasions in the church services. In his annual reports of Jüri parish, the pastor Aunver appreciated the role of the associations in the improvement of moral life in the parish.⁵³³ Later, as a dean of Ida-Harju, he also emphasized good cooperation between the congregations and associations in the whole deanery, noting that reluctant attitude towards the church in some secular societies was disappearing.⁵³⁴ Importantly, the attitudes of Aunver's own colleagues towards the associational life were, in many cases, critical (see, e.g. the subchapters on Haljala and Varbla). Regarding that, Aunver's stances are spectacular, and his emphatical support to secular associations may even be considered as covertly polemical with pietist parishioners as well as his more cautious fellow pastors.

In sum, it seems that Aunver was, in fact, content with the emerging new situation where the congregation was no longer the focal point of the whole parish life but was concerned only with religious matters. Like elsewhere, it also fulfilled ceremonial purposes. Laying cornerstones or festive openings of public buildings (like new schoolhouses) involved religious ceremonies by Lutheran or sometimes both Lutheran and Orthodox clergy.⁵³⁵ The congregation was the main actor in erecting Independence War monument for the parish.⁵³⁶ But overall cultural and social life in the parish was now organized by secular actors, especially voluntary associations, which only some decades ago had attracted suspicion in some parts of the parish. The pastor was often invited not only to conduct religious ceremonies in case of festive events,⁵³⁷ but sometimes also as a speaker. For example, Aunver spoke in an evening dedicated to home culture.⁵³⁸

Presumably some Herrnhutians, especially those representing older generations, were still not happy with the secularization of public life in Jüri. But unlike in earlier decades, they were not able to resist it efficiently anymore. Thus, their grievances could easily be ignored – and therefore, there is a lack of traces about those in the sources.

Church and Schools

However, in the case of Nabala there are also several accounts of locals demanding that schools must retain their religious character. For example, in 1911

⁵³³ EELKKA 1-4-107, Ida-Harju praosti aruanne 1929.

⁵³⁴ EELKKA 1-4-110, Ida-Harju praosti aruanne 1936.

⁵³⁵ Pastor Aunver participated in the ceremony of laying the cornerstone of Rae primary school in 1932 and later in the same year, with the Orthodox dean Joann Ümarik, consecrated the building – Põldmäe 2006, 271 and 282.

⁵³⁶ Postimees, 10.06.1926, p. 5.

⁵³⁷ For example, 10th anniversary of founding of the agricultural society in Rae (Kaja, 18.12.1930, p. 9), opening of a cooperative dairy in Vaida (Kaja, 11.04.1926, p. 8), a harvest festival in Nabala (Kaja, 01.01.1932, p. 6).

⁵³⁸ Eesti Kirik, 10.11.1938, p. 2.

several parents reportedly lodged a complaint that a Christmas party at school had been too secular. A newspaper correspondent ironized: “The problem was arguably that the children and the listeners were too happy, but that happiness was, think about it, worldly happiness. Nobody feeling sad, oh dear! According to the complainants, it is quite natural to sing a verse and take a sip of vodka before eating, but they could not bear that the declamations at the Christmas party were taken only from the school textbook.”⁵³⁹ Apparently, this complaint was not a one-off case; at least, there is a vague hint from a similarly highly biased newspaper report that during German imperial occupation, locals had wanted a teacher to be arrested “because he wore spectacles and did not hold prayer meetings.”⁵⁴⁰

As for the interwar period, three separate trainee teacher reports constitute important sources about school life in Nabala. One of them, that by Elly Mitt from 1929–30, chimes well in with the newspaper report quoted above: “Almost all parents were members of the Herrnhutian organization. At Christmas time, teachers were forbidden to arrange a Christmas tree for children involving plays and other performances for children. It was only allowed to sing church hymns and read a Christmas sermon by the Christmas tree. It was said that nowhere in the Bible was a play performed at Christmas time. Of course, as a religious education teacher, it was me, who had to organize this service. People were overall against children’s parties.”

Mitt had also problems in teaching religion. She intended to follow the syllabus, but the parents wanted her to teach only the Catechism and Bible stories. Finally, allegedly a compromise was found, which satisfied most of the parents. But some were still not happy. Mitt also claims that education was not appreciated in the commune, and some were reluctant to send their children to school: “They label them [their children] as mentally handicapped, incurably sick, etc., in order to escape from compulsory school attendance.”⁵⁴¹ Indeed, there is also an account from the weekly of conservative Lutherans, *Meie Kirik*, about older people being dissatisfied that Christmas events of the schools were allegedly reminiscent of “secular parties”. In response, a local body of religious education (*Kurna usukooli korraldav komisjon*) arranged religious Christmas event for children in Kurna.⁵⁴²

Interestingly, two other trainee reports do not mention the religious peculiarities of Nabala commune at all; both refer only to widespread poverty and ill

⁵³⁹ „Viga seisnud aga selles, et lapsed ja kuulajad liiga rõemsad olnud, aga see rõem olnud, mõtelge ometi, ilmalik rõem. Ei kellelgi pea norus, oi oi! Kaebajate arvates on see täitsa loomulik kui sööma alla salm laulu ja lonks viina tehtakse, et aga jõulupeo ettelugemised ainult kooliraamatust võetud olivad, seda ei suutnud nad kannatada.” Tallinna Teataja, 24.01.1911, p. 2.

⁵⁴⁰ Sotsiaaldemokraat, 22.08.1919, p. 3.

⁵⁴¹ „Vanemad olid enamasti kõik „Vennastekoguduse” liikmed. Jõuluajal keelati õpetajatele ära korraldada lastele jõulupuu ühes näitemängu ja teiste lastekohaste paladega. Lubati ainult jõulupuu juures laulda kirikulaule ja lugeda jõulujutlust. Öeldi, et piiblis ei olevat kusagil jõuluajal näitemängu tehtud. Muidugi tuli minul, kui usuõpetuse õpetajal, seda talitust korraldada. Oldi üldse lastepidude vastu. /.../ Tembeldavad neid ise lollideks, parandamata haigeteks jne., et aga koolisundusest pääseda.” ERA 1830-1-241, pp. 149–150.

⁵⁴² *Meie Kirik*, 24.01.1923, p. 30.

health of the pupils. Elfriede Nirk, whose report covers the years 1932–34, however, writes about her problems in teaching religion. She had noticed that only a few pupils enjoyed the classes of religion and thus she tried to make those more engaging. Nirk claims to have been successful in that, largely thanks to tips from Ado Köögardal, the pastor of Keila and teacher at the pedagogical institute of Tallinn (*Tallinna Pedagoogium*). Hartvig Helilaid, who himself later became a Lutheran pastor, did not mention religious topics in his trainee report from the year 1936 at all.

How to explain the lack of references to religion in a commune which, according to other sources, was imbued with Herrnhutian spirit? Perhaps it was not deemed important or appropriate to deal these issues within the trainee reports. But it is also possible that Helilaid and Nirk were able to establish better relations with locals and were more compromising, which prevented conflicts such as those described by Mitt.

Elsewhere in the parish, there is no evidence of religiously motivated disagreements between schoolteachers and locals from the interwar period. However, it is noteworthy that despite the overwhelming support of the local population in the 1923 referendum, in the “parish congress”, held shortly before it, only about half of the deputies supported religious instruction.⁵⁴³ Apparently, the deputies – commune clerks, schoolteachers and leaders of voluntary associations – had somewhat diverging views on the church and religion than the population at large.⁵⁴⁴

From the side of the church, attitudes to the school were relatively positive in Jüri. In that regard, the pastor Aunver differed sharply from his colleagues in the deanery, who, especially in the 1920s, used to complain a lot about the low quality of religious instruction and the teachers’ attitude towards the church. For example, conservative dean Harald Pöld argued that after religious instruction was re-introduced in 1923, the level of teaching was unsatisfactory, with teachers often unwilling or unfit to teach it: “For instance, in one school in Kose, religious education was taught by a big drunkard, who in the afternoon sings profane songs in tunes of church hymns in the pub. In one school in Juuru, a schoolteacher reportedly explained that God does not exist; in another, a schoolteacher reportedly warns children against going to church, advising them to pray at home instead. Also, a schoolteacher himself spoke about his colleague, who pointed to the pig and said to the children: “This is your God”. In this way, anti-religious work is also actively carried out in schools, yet it should not have been allowed in schools since religious instruction was re-introduced.”⁵⁴⁵ Aunver’s assessment of

⁵⁴³ Päewaleht, 11.01.1925, p. 5.

⁵⁴⁴ According to the conservative Lutheran Meie Kirik, primarily deputies of the teachers as well as younger representatives of secular societies („lõbu seltside nooremad saadikud“) had been against religious instruction. Meie Kirik, 24.01.1923, p. 30.

⁵⁴⁵ „Nii õpetas Kosel ühes koolis usuõpetust suur joodik, kes pärastlõunal trahteris kiriku lauluviisisid lorasõnadega laulab. Ühes koolis Juurus seletanud kooliõpetaja, et Jumalat ei olevat olemas, teises hoiatavat kooliõpetaja lapsi kirikuskäimise eest nõu andes selle asemel kodus palvetada. Ka kõneles üks kooliõpetaja ise oma ametivennast, kes sea peale näidates

religious instruction was much more positive. In 1924, he argued: “The school headmasters have not actively stood out against the church; for the most part, they show benevolent passivity”.⁵⁴⁶ According to his 1929 report, he had never even heard any discontent from his parents about religious instruction. Allegedly, almost all the pupils in the parish were learning it.⁵⁴⁷ Later, Aunver himself began to teach religion in the local Rae primary school; *köster* Hans Mets also worked in the same school.⁵⁴⁸

In his annual reports, but also in newspaper articles, Aunver constantly expressed his conviction that school and church should co-operate closely. A similar resolution was adopted on the congregational day in 1936.⁵⁴⁹ As a dean, he argued that in general one could be satisfied with religious instruction in the deanery. In his dean’s report for 1937, he wrote that religion was taught “according to plan – seriously, religious education in schools is satisfactory, improvement is noticeable. Only one report says: based on indirect information – unsatisfactory. One reporter says that he is allowed to catechize and question pupils in a primary school within the parish. It seems that, in general, the school and the church have come closer to each other.”⁵⁵⁰

However, also Aunver did not occasionally avoid critical remarks. In the report of 1936, he claimed that some schoolteachers had “hindered” the work of Sunday schools of the congregations in the deanery, one of them also in his own parish.⁵⁵¹ He also regretted that there was still not tight enough cooperation between the church and the school, even though both institutions had, as he believed, the same educational goals.⁵⁵² To achieve it, Aunver propagated re-

lastele öelnud: See on teie Jumal. Nii tehakse koolides ka agarasti usuvastast tööd, mis lubamata peaks olema koolides sest ajast, kui usuõpetus jälle sisse toodud.” EELKKA 1-4-106, Ida-Harju praosti aruanne 1923.

⁵⁴⁶ „Koolide juhid ei ole aktiivselt kiriku vastu välja astunud, näitavad suuremalt jaolt heatahtlikku passiivsust üles.” EELKKA 1-4-106, Ida-Harju praostkonna aruanded 1924, Jüri koguduse aruanne.

⁵⁴⁷ EELKKA 1-4-107, Ida-Harju praostkonna aruanded 1929, Jüri koguduse aruanne.

⁵⁴⁸ Põldmäe 2006, 276.

⁵⁴⁹ EELKKA Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Jüri kogudusega 1918–1938, 1936. a koguduse päeva protokoll.

⁵⁵⁰ „Õpetatakse kavakohaselt – tõsiselt, usuõpetus koolides on rahuldav, on märgata paranemist. Ainult üks aruanne ütleb: kaudsete andmete põhjal – puudulik. Üks aruandja ütleb, et temale võimaldatakse ühes koguduse piires olevas algkoolis õpilasi kateheseerida ja küsida. Näib, et üldiselt on kool ja kirik teineteisele lähenenud.” EELKKA 1-4-111, Ida-Harju praosti aruanne 1937.

⁵⁵¹ EELKKA 1-4-111, Ida-Harju praosti aruanne 1936. However, besides it seems that relations with the schools were good. Schools provided their premises for religious gatherings, and Rae school teacher Johannes Ambur spoke on the parish day on the topic of cooperation between church, home and school. See EELKKA Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Jüri kogudusega 1918–1938, 1936. a koguduse päeva protokoll; EELKKA 1-4-110, Ida-Harju koguduse aruanne 1936.

⁵⁵² EELKKA 1-4-113, Ida-Harju praosti aruanne 1939.

establishment of the church control over religious instruction, including the right of pastors to inspect the teaching.⁵⁵³

Local Politics and Social Contradictions

Importantly, Nabala also stood out as one of the few electoral strongholds for the Christian People's Party in Estonia. In the general elections of 1923, as much as 30.7% voted in support of the party. This was the fourth largest support level in the municipalities of Estonia, being also sharply different from other communes of the parish (Kurna 14.8%, Rae 8.9%). However, already in 1929 the elections of "secular" parties were prevailing even in Nabala, with Farmers Assemblies garnering 35.7%, New Farmers' 27.6%, and Christian People's Party as a third one only 17.4% votes.

Both Nabala and Kurna stood out also for remarkably weak performance of Farmers' Assemblies in some elections. In 1926, only 9.7% voted for them in Kurna and 3.7% in Nabala, while their support in Rae (30.8%) was close to the average of Estonian rural municipalities (28.6%). All three communes had consistently low support for leftist parties, but it was not uncommon elsewhere in Harjumaa. However, noteworthy is relatively strong support for centrist parties, such as Labour Party, People's Party, and especially (in Kurna and Nabala) New Farmers' Party. During later elections, the preferences of people in Jüri parish were closer to the rest of Harjumaa and rural Estonia; especially noteworthy in that regard is the abrupt rise in support of Farmers' Assemblies and decline in Christian party in Nabala.

The support for the Independence War Veterans' constitution was close to average in rural Estonia, and the results of referendum of 1936 higher than that. Interestingly, people of Nabala supported the authoritarian regime of Konstantin Päts in the latter case as unanimously (participation 93.1%, votes in favour 97.4%) as religious instruction back in 1923.

Jakob Aunver himself ran in the elections of *Riigikogu* in the list of liberal nationalist People's Party (*Rahvaerakond*) in 1927,⁵⁵⁴ but there is not much evidence that the church was dragged into political conflicts in Jüri. Still, in his report for 1933, pastor Aunver remarked: "Political incitement sometimes does not have a good effect on the soul of the people – it sows hatred and contempt for each other."⁵⁵⁵ Here, one can sense a critical attitude towards the movement of Independence War Veterans, a right-wing populist mass movement which was endorsed by several of Aunver's colleagues. In his report for 1935, after the suppression of the movement and establishing an authoritarian regime by Konstantin Päts, Aunver was happy that tensions had calmed down. The political turn had, according to him, also contributed to the improvement of moral and religious life: "One does not hear backbiting and slandering behind one's neck in such a

⁵⁵³ See e.g. Eesti Kirik, 09.05.1935, p. 3–4.

⁵⁵⁴ Postimees, 14.08.1927, p. 8.

⁵⁵⁵ „Poliitiline kihutustöö ei mõju teinekord rahva hingeelule hästi – külvab vaenu ja põlgust üksteise vastu.” EELKKA 1-4-109, Ida-Harju praosti aruanne 1933.

form as it used to be common before. In this sense, the political calm has helped a lot. Sunday peace is also paid more attention than before. Hand in hand with the deepening of religious life, the spread of spiritual literature in wider circles has increased. The same is true about the Bible. One can hear more often that the Bible is a holy book that must become the basis of our lives. Derision of the Book of Books is about to cease.”⁵⁵⁶

At that time, Aunver, being the editor-in-chief of *Eesti Kirik*, used to glorify the authoritarian government as well as bishop Hugo Bernhard Rahamägi in his articles. Also, Jüri congregation was eager to send greeting telegrams to the bishop on different occasions.⁵⁵⁷ As the editor-in-chief of the weekly *Eesti Kirik*, Aunver was loyal to the authoritarian regime, and the newspaper was used to disseminate the propaganda of the regime. However, it did not rule out slight criticism on some occasions. For instance, Aunver complained in 1935, that the Lutheran Church was expected to promote the celebration of the Year of the Book, too, but the importance of religious literature was undervalued during the celebrations.⁵⁵⁸

Conclusion

Jüri was a parish with considerable internal differences. Rae commune and a part of Kurna commune were generally church-friendly as it was common in Northern Estonia. Also, their support level for religious instruction was similar to other North-Estonian communes.

However, Nabala, the poorest commune in the parish and isolated geographically by large marshes, stood out for particularly important role of religion in local way of life and, as some sources suggest, reluctance to secular associational life and education. The turnout of the 1923 referendum was also spectacularly high there, and support for re-introducing religious instruction to primary schools was almost unanimous.

Nabala was a rare but not unique case among the communes with ethnic Estonian majority. Similarly, extraordinarily high was support for religious instruction in Oru (Lääne-Nigula parish), Kiiu and Prangli (Kuusalu), Riisipere (Nissi) and some other communes in Northern Estonia, mostly known as Herrnhutian strongholds. Besides that, there are numerous accounts of religiously motivated

⁵⁵⁶ „Ei ole kuulda enam keelepeksu ja tagaselja laimamist säärasel kujul, nagu see varem oli harilikuks nähteks. Selles mõttes on poliitiline rahunemine palju kaasa aidanud. Pühapäevarahule pööratakse ühtlasi endisest suuremat tähelepanu. Käsikäes usuelu süvenemisega on tõusnud vaimuliku kirjanduse levik laiemates ringides. See maksab ka piibli kohta. Võib kuulda sagedamini, et piibel on püha raamat, mis peab saama meie elu aluseks. On ära jäämas Raamatute Raamatu mõnitamine.” EELKKA 1-4-110, Ida-Harju praostkonna aruanded 1935, Jüri koguduse aruanne.

⁵⁵⁷ EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Jüri kogudusega 1918–1938.

⁵⁵⁸ *Eesti Kirik*, 22.08.1935, p. 1–2. The Year of the Book was celebrated to mark the 500-year anniversary of printing the Catechism of Wandradt-Koell, the first partially preserved book containing text in Estonian language.

conflicts between “secularizing” teachers and Herrnhutian (or otherwise pious) parents from throughout Northern Estonia.

This diverse parish was led by a pastor with “broad church” attitude, willing to assemble both traditional Herrnhutians and people with more rational and modern religious conceptions together in the same congregation. Jakob Aunver himself was undoubtedly a clergyman willing to adapt to the nationalizing and modernizing new Estonia. Notably, he was seeking tight and friendly cooperation with schools and voluntary associations, which was not always the case for his fellow pastors at that time. However, he was adamant in trying to find a place for the church in the new society, especially as a religious educator of the youth. But he seems to have been not spectacularly successful in his attempts to rejuvenate parish life. His attempts to introduce new modes of congregational life, notably youth work, were not successful. The indicators of religious and church life seem to have been quite similar to the neighbouring parishes – and generally in decline.

2.2.4. KARUSE AND VARBLA PARISHES

Introduction

In a compact coastal area, ranging from Hiiumaa island to the western part of Pärnu county, majority of the voters rejected religious instruction during the referendum of 1923. In that belt, Paatsalu commune had overwhelmingly the smallest proportion of support for the religious instruction in the whole of Estonia (13.1%). The commune was divided between two small parishes of Varbla⁵⁵⁹ and Karuse, which were the two southernmost parishes in the county. So, to track the causes of extraordinary low support for religious instruction in Paatsalu, peculiarities of religious life and secularization in both parishes are subsequently dealt with.

Historiography

Local history in Karuse and Varbla has been researched by local non-professional historians. No comprehensive overviews about the history of the parishes have been written. Church related topics are referred very briefly only in some histories of particular communes⁵⁶⁰ and villages.⁵⁶¹

General Overview

Läänemaa county had a reputation of being poor and backward; only few areas as *e.g.* surroundings of Vigala were relatively prosperous.⁵⁶² Also the backwardness of the southern part of the county was usually highlighted by contemporary observers, and it was especially the case for Paatsalu commune. Notably, a female student who was sent there to gather data for Estonian Literary Society, shared in her diary notes utter shock she experienced there. The miserable living conditions reminded her the era of serfdom (*orjaaeg*). She even experienced occasionally hunger during the assignment as it was too disgusting for her to ask food from locals because their clothing and dwelling houses seemed extraordinarily dirty.⁵⁶³

Also, in a trainee teacher report by a headmaster of Vatla primary school, it is complained that poverty of locals was a serious obstacle in educating their children. One 8-year-old boy, who lived 11 kilometres from the school, had to walk back and forth every day as he could not afford staying overnight in the

⁵⁵⁹ Since 18th century, Hanila and Varbla parishes were served by the same pastor. After the establishing of independent Republic of Estonia, the southern part of Hanila was merged with Varbla, which since 1921 became again a fully separate parish.

⁵⁶⁰ Joala 2013, 112–113.

⁵⁶¹ Kaljuste 2002.

⁵⁶² For a comprehensive overview of human geography, culture and socio-economic conditions, see Läänemaa: maateaduslik, majanduslik... 1938.

⁵⁶³ Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, EKLA f. 360 M 9:1. The researcher Olga Kuiv herself came from relatively prosperous Põltsamaa parish in Viljandimaa, see the database of the students of University of Tartu (Album Academicum): <https://www.ra.ee/apps/andmed/index.php/site/aaut.>, 14.02.2024.

boarding rooms (*internaat*) of the school.⁵⁶⁴ Many were undernourished; some could not go to school at all due to lack of clothes and footwear. Parents tended to rely on the workforce of their children, which hampered their home learning and school attendance.⁵⁶⁵ A large part of the parents in the vicinity had been agricultural labourers (*moonakad*) in the manor, some of whom had received land during the land reform. The rest were old farmers, generally not well-off either. According to the teacher, especially the children of former manor proletariat used to be very passive and had no interest in learning whatsoever.⁵⁶⁶ Similar were the observations of Aliide Kesler from Paatsalu school. She noted that the school was very poorly equipped with furniture and means of instruction, as commune administration wanted desperately to save money.⁵⁶⁷ Also, it was complained that locals had no interest in associational life and cultural development.⁵⁶⁸ Similar pessimistic reports came also from Saastna, which was situated in the northern corner of Karuse parish: people were poor, most children came to school late in autumn as their labour was used in the farms, no voluntary associations at all operated in the vicinity.⁵⁶⁹

In some other parts of Karuse and Varbla parishes, the picture was more mixed. So, Alma Arenberg, who compiled descriptions of Paadremaa and Saulepi communes for Estonian Literary Society, noted in her fieldwork diary that in general the soil of the farms was “average or below of it”. She also noted appalling poverty in some parts of the communes, but on the other hand, there were villages and particular homesteads that were relatively well-off.⁵⁷⁰ Trainee teacher Paul Ajango from Paadremaa primary school wrote in his report, however, that many local peasants were very poor, with 34% of the children receiving aid from commune to enable them to go to school.⁵⁷¹ A smaller part of miserably poor people arguably considered education as a waste of time and money, and instigated their children to disobedience to the teachers.⁵⁷² On the other hand, Ajango admitted that despite such minor issues this corner of the parish was still surprisingly “well developed”, having vibrant associational life.⁵⁷³

Religious Background

Dominant church in both parishes was the Lutheran one, but there was a significant Orthodox minority. The latter had emerged as the result of mass conversion

⁵⁶⁴ ERA 1183-2-73, p. 73. Report by Jüri Puusepp (1930/31).

⁵⁶⁵ ERA 1183-2-36, p. 46. Report by Jüri Puusepp (1925/26).

⁵⁶⁶ ERA 1183-2-73, p. 72. Report by Jüri Puusepp (1930/31).

⁵⁶⁷ ERA 1830-1-240, p. 81–86. Report by Aliide Kesler (1927–29).

⁵⁶⁸ Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, EKLA F 360 M 9:1, p. 34–35; ERA 1183-2-73, p. 71–74. Report by Jüri Puusepp (1930/31).

⁵⁶⁹ ERA 1183-2-36, p. 50 (Report by Eduard Siegfeldt, 1925/26). Cf. somewhat more positive report by Marta Baumann from the same school (1928/29, ERA 1183-2-56, pp. 92–94).

⁵⁷⁰ EKLA f 360 M 7:1.

⁵⁷¹ ERA 1183-2-73, pp. 3–20, especially p. 9. Report by Paul Ajango (1929/30).

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

movement in 1880s, turning the Southern part of Läänemaa county into one of the very few strongholds of Orthodox faith in the governorate of Estland. Due to the conflict with the pastor of Lihula there broke out a mass conversion movement that spread quickly to neighbouring parishes.⁵⁷⁴ According to the census data from 1922, 35.5% of inhabitants of Paadremaa commune, 29.1% in Paatsalu and 15.3% in Varbla were Orthodox.

Lääne county was known for its piety. In many parishes flocks of people used to visit prayer meetings of Herrnhutians. Since the religious revival of 1880s, revivalist mood was strong in many parts of the county. Often the “awakened” people were dissatisfied with the Lutheran church, making the county the main stronghold of free church movements in Estonia. It is especially true for surroundings of Emmaste in Hiiumaa island and Ridala near the town of Haapsalu. But elsewhere in Läänemaa, too, fighting against the “sects” caused constant headache for the pastors.⁵⁷⁵

The piety of the region influenced life in Karuse and Varbla parishes as well, but in a somewhat weaker manner. Herrnhutian influence was limited to southern part of Saulepi commune. According to pastors’ annual reports, preachers and booksellers representing various “sects”, such as Adventists, Salvation Army, Watchtower Society etc. were relatively active everywhere in the parishes. But only few people left Lutheran and Orthodox Churches and no local free congregations operated there.

Pastors

Until the organized resettlement of the Baltic German national group, all the pastors in Karuse and Varbla were ethnic Germans, and theologically conservative.

The pastors of Karuse were **Kurt Kentmann (1918–23)**, lived 1893–1976) and **Ernst Lüdig (1923–41)**, lived 1892–1968). Lüdig (who was simultaneously also pastor of Hanila) was known for his interest in local history. He collected historical sources and established a museum of local history. He left Estonia in the second wave of *Umsiedlung* and continued pastoral work in Germany.

The pastors of Varbla were **Wilhelm Nerling (1909–28)**, lived 1881–1944) and **Carl Helmut Intelmann (1929–39)**, lived 1904–90). Nerling resigned after a prolonged conflict with the congregation and left for Germany. Intelmann was one of only eleven Baltic Germans, who was elected to the pastoral office of an Estonian congregation in the interwar years.⁵⁷⁶ In 1939 he left Estonia with other Baltic-Germans and continued his service as a pastor in Germany. He has co-compiled a biographical lexicon of Baltic German theologians.⁵⁷⁷

Particularly Nerling and Intelmann made considerable impact on the role of the church in local life – the former because he was not able to get along with

⁵⁷⁴ Plaat 2001, 128.

⁵⁷⁵ Plaat 2001; see also reports by pastors in EELKKA.

⁵⁷⁶ Ketola 2000, 289.

⁵⁷⁷ Amburger and Intelmann 1988.

considerable part of the parishioners, and the latter due to reluctance to conduct religious ceremonies in secular events.

Results of 1923 Referendum

Support for religious instruction was significantly lower than national average in Karuse and Varbla parishes, as was common in coastal South-Western Estonia. In both Paadrema and Saulepi communes the majority voted against religious instruction, while staggeringly low share of “yes” votes in Paatsalu is remarkable in the scale of whole Estonia. However, there were also quite significant internal differences in communes, so that share of support for religious instruction ranged in different polling stations from 5% to 79%.⁵⁷⁸

The exceptional polling station of Risti with overwhelming support for religious instruction was situated in the northern edge of Paadremaa commune. Presumably, many of only 91 people, who cast their ballots there, came from Tuhu village, which was isolated from the rest of the commune with marshes, and some possibly from nearby Kärü village, which was allegedly a relatively rich one.⁵⁷⁹ Besides that polling station, the majority voted for religious instruction only in the southern part of the Saulepi commune, where it is explainable by the impact of Herrnhutians.

The rejection of religious instruction in Karuse and Varbla parishes was explained by the dean Gustav Haller by large percentage of the Orthodox there. He mentioned that in the meetings arranged before the referendum, the Orthodox had claimed that the state church ambitions of Lutherans were behind the initiative.⁵⁸⁰ However, this explanation is not convincing as about 2/3 of the population both in Paadremaa and Paatsalu communes, and even more in Saulepi, were still Lutherans.

Wilhelm Nerling, the pastor of Varbla, however, explained the miserable result of the referendum with the impact of the left: “Sadly, our county is pretty red. /.../ No explanations on behalf of the pastor nor other benevolent persons helped against that. It was explained to the people that anyone who votes in favour will take it upon themselves to pay pastors and *kösters* high salaries.”⁵⁸¹ This

⁵⁷⁸ Such surprising differences occurred also in the neighbouring parishes. For instance, in Lihula commune, which was divided between Karuse and Lihula parishes, the supporters of religious instruction prevailed with 59.1% support on average. However, in Matsalu polling station only 22.1% voted for it. In Veltsa commune (Mihkli parish), support rates for religious instruction ranged from 76% to 97%. There was only one exception – in the polling station of Oidrema, situated at the border to Paadremaa commune, merely 28.8% votes were given in favour of it (ERA 80-1-1977).

⁵⁷⁹ EKLA f. 360 M 7:2, p. 6.

⁵⁸⁰ EELKKA 1-4-348, the report of the dean on referendum (merged to the annual report of 1922). As a unique case in the deanery, it is noted that in Karuse even a member of the board of a Lutheran congregation (Tõnis Hurt) was agitating against the religious instruction.

⁵⁸¹ “Paraku on meie maakond kaunis punane. /.../ Sellevastu ei aidanud ühedgi seletused õpetaja ega muude heatahtlikkude isikute poolt. Oli inimestele äraseletatud, et igauks, kes poolt

explanation seems more plausible, as especially Paatsalu and Saulepi excelled in the whole county by the vote share given to leftist parties in the following general elections.

Table 7. Results of the Referendum on Religious Instruction in Public Primary Schools in Karuse and Varbla Parishes (17.02.–19.02.1923)

Commune	Polling station	Turnout (%)	Support for religious instruction (%)
Paadremaa		71.7	47.2
	Risti kõrts	64.5	78.9
	Vallamaja	74.4	42.6
	Koiri küla	69.4	41.6
Paatsalu		71.6	13.1
	Paatsalu kool	72.0	5.2
	Illuste	66.6	20.7
	Nehatu	68.1	12.4
	Abruvälja talu	77.7	13.0
Saulepi		60.6	49.7
	Vallamaja	62.0	60.0
	Varbla	61.7	44.8
	Kilgi	55.3	34.5

Source: own calculations, based on minutes of electoral commissions (ERA 80-I-1977).

Religious Life

Most of contemporary witnesses noticed that people in Karuse and Varbla parishes tended to be indifferent about or even hostile towards institutionalized religion.

In 1912, travelling preacher Mürk noted that some people in Saastna (in the northernmost corner of Karuse parish) had not been to the church for several years and besides that, no religious meetings in the villages were also arranged.⁵⁸² Olga Kuiv, in her research assignment diary from the year 1926, remarked that church-going had become “old-fashioned” almost everywhere in Paatsalu commune. Only annual cemetery festivities (*surnuaiapäihad*) in St. John’s Day were still popular, but arguably younger people visited them merely to meet other people.⁵⁸³

Trainee teacher Miina Lobjakas complained even about serious difficulties in teaching religion in Varbla primary school (1928/29): “For example, when I brought the Bible to class, I heard disdainful voices about it; pupils felt ashamed when they found their arms crossed, etc. In the beginning, I had to approach to the teaching of religion pretty cautiously, relying more on morality.” According

hääletab, seega oma peale võtab õpetajatele ja köstritele suuri palkasid maksma.” EAA 1250-1-6, p. 8.

⁵⁸² Ristirahwa Pühapäevaleht, 04.10.1912, p. 315.

⁵⁸³ EKLA f. 360 M 9:1, p. 30.

to her, such a situation was an implication of prolonged conflict between locals and the pastor Nerling, which had alienated people from the church and even made religion ridiculous. Children in turn had adopted the attitudes of their parents.⁵⁸⁴ Interestingly however, two other trainee teachers who worked in the same year in Varbla, did not mention any problems associated with religious instruction in their reports, although both also taught it.⁵⁸⁵

Complaints about the attitudes towards religion, morality and the church were also rather common in the annual reports of local Lutheran pastors. So, Kurt Kentmann, pastor of Karuse, wrote in 1921 regarding the “church life” in the parish: “I do not really dare to talk about “life”, – one should talk about death, a terrible dying, which makes the members of the congregation cold, stiffens them spiritually.” According to him, church attendance in the parish was very low. Only during major feasts was the church full of people, but it was according to the pastor all about tradition and appeasing the conscience: “I have now given God what is God’s, now I can turn my back on him for one year and serve the King Mammon – walk in the ways of my heart.”⁵⁸⁶ Even people who considered themselves to be supporters of the church were according to the pastor totally numb (*tuimad*) and indifferent. In the report on 1922, it was specified that on ordinary Sundays, the participation of the services was from 25 to 90 people (2.5% of the Lutherans in the parish), during church feasts from 100 to 600.⁵⁸⁷

However, reports of Kentmann also reveal that by “serving Mammon” he meant largely resentment against membership fees and non-willingness to donate. When the financial obligations were reminded to the congregation by the pastor, people got agitated and hostile towards the church. Especially unpopular was contributing for covering the expenses of church central administration in Tallinn: “The people look at the central treasury [of the church] with the greatest mistrust. “The farmer has to work by the sweat of his brow, so that they can buy luxurious equipment for themselves in the city or send delegates abroad.” And that is how pretty reasonable people who are supposed to support the church use

⁵⁸⁴ „Näiteks piiblit klassi viies kuulsin selle kohta põlastavaid hääli; õpilasi valdas häbitunne, kui leidis käed olevat risti jne. Alguses pidin käsitama usuõpetust õige ettevaatlikult, toetudes rohkem kõlblusele.” ERA 1183-2-56, p. 74.

⁵⁸⁵ ERA 1183-2-56, p. 74, 61–70 and 83–87. However, Cäcilie Espenberg wrote: „While yet last year there was a need to fight against some prejudices among parents, for example, girls performing in gym clothes under the Christmas tree, *etc.*, this year there were no more misunderstandings in this regard.” Espenberg does not mention that the parents’ opposition was religiously motivated (like in Nabala), but it cannot be ruled out. („Kuna veel möödunud aastal tuli võidelda mõningate eelarvamustega lastevanemate juures, näiteks tütarlaste võimlemisriietes esinemine jõulupuu all jmt, polnud tänavu selles suhtes enam mingisugusi arusaamatusi märgata.” ERA 1183-2-56, 70v).

⁵⁸⁶ „Elust” ei julge väga rääkida, – peaks rääkima surmast, kohutavast suremisest, mis märksalt koguduse liikmeid külmaks teeb, vaimliselt tarretama paneb.” /.../ „Olen nüüd Jumalale annud, mis Jumala päralt on, nüüd tohin temale üheks aastaks selja pöördma ja kuningas mammonat teenida – oma südame teede peal käia.” EELKKA 1-4-348, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1921, Karuse koguduse aruanne.

⁵⁸⁷ EELKKA 1-4-348, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1922, Karuse koguduse aruanne.

to speak.” The pastor explained in vain, that the taxes enabled them to finance also such an important field of work as the internal mission; it seemed to him, that the members did not care at all about anything in the church life which happened beyond the borders of their own parish.⁵⁸⁸ People also argued openly that it was unfair that peasants had to pay for the pensions of the pastors’ and *kösters*’ widows, but if the peasant himself died, his wife would get no such pension.⁵⁸⁹ Sometimes even religious arguments were used to substantiate unwillingness to pay church taxes. In a similar vein, people were reluctant to pay the annual membership fees of the congregation. Some (especially landless people) went to partake of the Holy Communion in neighbouring parishes, in order to avoid admonishments to pay the fees by the pastor.⁵⁹⁰

The reluctance to give out money created severe economic problems for the congregations, and it affected also religious life. The dean noted in 1921 about Varbla: “Of course, everything there is foundering: the buildings are falling apart, there is no *köster* anymore and the pastor works in the fields to earn his own bread, while the spiritual field remains partially uncultivated, as in Varbla no more examination of children [*loetused*] or children’s services are held, no Bible studies – nor mission meetings. From a person who does not get paid more than 100 *poods* of grain and 5000 marks (in a year and not in a month!) you cannot ask for more spiritual work.”⁵⁹¹ As *köster* Puusep noticed, people in Karuse did not want to buy religious literature either but received it with pleasure when pastor Kentmann distributed it for free.⁵⁹²

Most people in the parishes seem to have stuck to the traditions of baptizing children, confirming the youth, and having church weddings and burials. In pastors’ reports, there are almost no complaints about resorting to secular registration and rites. In 1940, it was claimed that non-baptized children were rare in Karuse.⁵⁹³ On the other hand, in the 1930s Varbla congregation attracted attention as one of those, who used to expel the members who did not observe the mandatory rites. There were dozens of those who were expelled as they registered their marriage secularly or were not confirmed at the appropriate age.⁵⁹⁴ There is no

⁵⁸⁸ „Keskassa peale vaatab rahvas kõigesuurema umbusaldusega: „Põllumees peab palehigis tööd tegema, et nemad seal linnas omale tore sisseseade võiksid osta, ehk saadikuid väljamaale võiksid saata.” Ja nõnda rääkivad päris mõistlikud inimesed, keda kiriku toeks arvatakse”. EELKKA 1-4-348, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1922, Karuse koguduse aruanne.

⁵⁸⁹ EELKKA 1-4-348, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1922, Karuse koguduse aruanne.

⁵⁹⁰ EELKKA 1-4-349, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1923, Karuse koguduse aruanne.

⁵⁹¹ „Muidugi jäävad seal kõik asjad lonkama: hooned lagunevad ära, köstert ei ole enam olemas ja õpetaja teeb põllutööd, et omale leiba teenida, kuna vaimulik põld osalt harimata jääb, sest Varblas ei loeta enam lapsi ega peeta lastejumalateenistusi, ei piibli- ega misjoni- tundisid. Inimese käest, kes aastast rohkem palka ei saa kui 100 puuda vilja ja 5000 m. (aastas mitte kuus!) ei või ju ka suuremat vaimulikku tööd nõuda.” EELKKA 1-4-348, Lääne praosti aruanne 1922.

⁵⁹² EELKKA 1-4-349, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1923, Karuse koguduse aruanne.

⁵⁹³ EELKKA 1-4-362, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1940, Karuse koguduse aruanne.

⁵⁹⁴ In 1932, as many as 530 people were expelled because they had been either not paid annual membership fees, baptized their children or confirmed, or had opted for civil marriage (Eesti

data about why these people had ignored the requirements of the congregation and how they reacted to the decision to expel them. However, there is one known case of giving up a church wedding out of economic considerations, “although I explained to the man that no one in our church is deprived of the benefits that the church offers because of poverty,” as pastor Harry Nuudi from Pärnu wrote to his colleague in Varbla.⁵⁹⁵

Intelmann noted that political turn of 1934 had increased the number of membership fee payers, but not the number of communicants.⁵⁹⁶ Yet in 1936 he remained ambivalent about the seeming upsurge of religious life: “The life of the parish developed calmly during the reporting year. The membership fee was duly paid; several came again who had been away for years. It was especially gratifying to see that such people came to the Communion who had not walked this way for years. But unfortunately, there are still plenty of families who pay fees properly, but do not care about going to church and coming to Communion. Faith and God are secondary; however, on certain holidays it is customary to hear the Word of God. As soon as “Amen” is said, the party begins.”⁵⁹⁷

There are several other signs about indifference towards the church. In both parishes, the attendance of the plenary assemblies of the congregations were the lowest in Lääne deanery in 1921 (3% in Karuse, less than 1% in Varbla). When pastor Kentmann organized re-registration of the congregation members, 1/3 of the parishioners declined. But even many of those who had registered, proved reluctant to pay membership fees.⁵⁹⁸ Also, the council of Varbla congregation noted to the dean that the pastor adhered to the regulations that confirmation course should have lasted for at least three weeks and contain at least 60 lessons. It caused reportedly a lot of grumbling among parishioners, because in neighbouring parishes the length of the course and also requirements were much lower.⁵⁹⁹

Kirik, 14.01.1932, p. 24). In 1937, 35 young people were expelled due to avoiding confirmation („leerist eemalehoidmise tõttu”), while 38 earlier expelled people were re-admitted to the congregation: Eesti Kirik, 28.01.1937, p. 5). For more on similar cases, see EELKKA, konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Varbla kogudusega.

⁵⁹⁵ „Kuigi mehele selgitasin, et vaesuse pärast ei jää meie kirikus keegi ilma neist hüvedest, mida pakub kirik.” – The groom was from Pärnu, and the bride was formally the member of Varbla congregation. EAA 1250-1-37, 18.03.1938.

⁵⁹⁶ EELKKA 1-4-357, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1935, Varbla koguduse aruanne.

⁵⁹⁷ „Koguduse elu arenes aruandeaastal rahulikult. Korralikult tasuti liikmemakse; mitmed tulid jälle ligi, kes aastaid olid eemal olnud. Iseäranis rõõmustav oli näha, et ka lauale tuli sarnaseid, kes aastaid pole käinud seda teed. Kuid kahjuks leidub neid perekondi veel küllalt, kes küll korralikult tasuvad maksud, aga kirikuskäimisest ja laualetulemisest ei hooli. Usk ja Jumal on kõrvalasjaks; teatud tähtpäevadel aga on kombeks Jumala Sõna kuulda. Niipea kui „Aamen” öeldud, läheb pidu lahti.” EELKKA 1-4-358, Lääne koguduse aruanded 1936, Varbla koguduse aruanne.

⁵⁹⁸ EELKKA 1-4-348, Lääne praosti aruanne 1922.

⁵⁹⁹ EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Varbla kogudusega, 01.05.1938.

Congregational Life in Karuse

Kentmann, who had also complained about the hard situation regarding incomes,⁶⁰⁰ left 1923 for Kuusalu in Harjumaa. The reports of the new pastor, Ernst Lüdigi, are short and superficial, providing few useful data about the parish life. Distribution of religious literature and newspapers, as well as religious meetings in the villages and children and youth work were regularly mentioned by him.⁶⁰¹ For example in 1929, there were Sunday schools in Karuse and Hoigaste, and in summertime also in Pivarootsi and Tuudi villages. In Karuse, children's events were arranged with demonstration of pictures of magic lantern (*udupildid*). The participation was "lively", meaning 7–20 children. For youth, five religious meetings (*noortetund*) were organized that year, and there was also a youth feast service in the church (*noortepüha*).⁶⁰² In 1932, only one Sunday school with 3–4 children, six children's services, two youth services and one post-confirmation meeting were mentioned.⁶⁰³ Only few young people seem to have been engaged in the life of congregation. In 1934, youth association of the congregation was established, but it had only eight members. Ten young people had attended that year a gathering for those who had been lately confirmed.⁶⁰⁴ Major youth gatherings were held in common with neighbouring congregations.⁶⁰⁵ The congregation was several times visited by Karl Paldrok, a controversial Pietist youth activist,⁶⁰⁶ who had been in charge of the EELC youth work, but in 1935 fell out with the church leadership for severely criticizing it.⁶⁰⁷ It can thus be presumed that youth work was held in the pietist spirit, which could not be attractive to the majority of young people in the parish. In the 1920s, the pastor of Karuse tried to hold also the examination of the children (*loetused*), but often only few children turned out to those.⁶⁰⁸

Notes about church announcements reveal that a church choir operated, and occasionally some concerts of religious music occurred.⁶⁰⁹ Also, the congregation

⁶⁰⁰ EELKKA 1-4-348, Karuse koguduse aruanne 1921.

⁶⁰¹ See reports of Karuse in EELKKA (1-4-350.362).

⁶⁰² EELKKA, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1929, Karuse koguduse aruanne.

⁶⁰³ EELKKA 1-4-354, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1932, Karuse koguduse aruanne.

⁶⁰⁴ EELKKA 1-4-356, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1934, Karuse koguduse aruanne.

⁶⁰⁵ In 09.08.1931 a common youth gathering for Hanila, Karuse and Varbla congregations were held in Hanila, and in 11.11.1934 a common service for children of Hanila and Karuse congregation: EAA 1241-1-49.

⁶⁰⁶ EELKKA 1-4-356, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1934, Karuse koguduse aruanne; EAA 1241-1-49, 08.03.1936.

⁶⁰⁷ See EELKKA, Kiriklik noorsootöö 1928–35.

⁶⁰⁸ See the annual reports of the congregation in EELKKA. Similarly, few children turned out for *loetused* in some other parishes of Lääne deanery – Martna, Märjamaa, Ridala and Vigala. EELKKA 1-4-350 (Lääne praosti aruanne 1925), 1-4-351, (Lääne praosti aruanne 1928).

⁶⁰⁹ On 11.11.1934 and 27.10.1935: EAA 1241-1-49.

had a small library⁶¹⁰ and there is information about holding a meeting dedicated to the study of Lutheran Confessions (*luterlikud usutunnistuskirjad*) in 1931.⁶¹¹

Notably, pastor Lüdig never mentions the controversies with financial obligations and donating in his reports. However, the dean Jürgenson's summary of the visitation from 1937 leaves the reader with impression that not much had in fact changed since the times of pastor Kentmann: "The church building is externally in order, at the council meeting it was complained that church attendance could be livelier, even though there has been an increase rather than a decline here lately. May God grant a firm and permanent rise! The sum of charitable offerings could be even higher! And the rate of the membership fee should be taken into consideration."⁶¹²

Congregational Life in Varbla

In the neighbouring Varbla parish, both material conditions and religious life seem in the 1920s to have been similar to Karuse, but events took a more dramatic turn.

According to the report on 1926, church attendance was assessed as "satisfactory", with 90 people on average attending Sunday services (3% of the congregation). Of those, $\frac{3}{4}$ were women.⁶¹³ Varbla was the only parish in the deanery, where local Bible studies were not held in 1926.⁶¹⁴ It was claimed that the pastor was so poor that he could not afford a horse to visit remote parts of his parish.⁶¹⁵ Arguably, the conflicts with the pastor did not have an impact on the church attendance in Varbla, yet participation in Communion declined.⁶¹⁶ In 1933, Intemann had tried to start youth work, but it did not work out.⁶¹⁷ Varbla congregation day (*kogudusepäev*) decided in 1936, after having listened to the speech of Heinrich Karm, the secretary of youth work of EELK, to establish Sunday schools, youth groups and arrange events for the youth,⁶¹⁸ but nothing of this is mentioned in the reports of the following years.

⁶¹⁰ The library had been established already around 1840 but was made again available for the public in 1925 by Lüdig. It had about 450 volumes of mostly religious literature, but also 70 books for children. However, few people were using the library (Lääne Elu, 24.04.1940, p. 9). The books were borrowed for a small fee: EAA 1241-1-49, 08.09.1935.

⁶¹¹ EAA 1241-1-49, 25.10.1931.

⁶¹² "Kirik on väliselt korras, nõukogu koosolekul kurdeti, et kirikuskäimine võiks olla elavam, ehk küll siin viimasel ajal olevat märgata ennem tõusu, kui langust. Annaks Jumal kindlat ja püsivat tõusu! Ka armastusandide summa võiks olla veel suurem! Ja liikmemaksu kõrgus annab veel kaaluda." EAA 1241-1-49, 20.12.1937.

⁶¹³ EELKKA 1-4-350, Lääne praostkonna aruanded, Varbla koguduse aruanne 1926. Dean of Lääne claimed in his report on 1922 that the mean church attendance in the deanery was about 10%.

⁶¹⁴ EELKKA 1-4-350, Lääne praosti aruanne 1926.

⁶¹⁵ EELKKA 1-4-348, Lääne praosti aruanne 1922.

⁶¹⁶ EELKKA 1-4-351, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1927, Varbla koguduse aruanne.

⁶¹⁷ EELKKA 1-4-355, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1933, Varbla koguduse aruanne.

⁶¹⁸ EELKKA, konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Varbla kogudusega, 12.07.1936.

People of Varbla were also very reluctant to donate. For instance, in 1922 the pastor had reminded twice that there would be a collection in the New Year's Eve service. During the service, the church was packed with people, but the outcome of the collection was miserable, and there were many 50-penn coins, which at that time already were almost worthless.⁶¹⁹ Many people were reluctant to pay their membership fees, but especially unpopular was the central treasury tax of the church.⁶²⁰ In 1923 and 1924, the congregation council even declined to collect the latter, ignoring the demands of the pastor. Since 1925, the congregation council agreed to gather the central treasury tax, but it led to an abrupt drop in paying the membership fees. In 1925, 569 people were given a membership card of the congregation, in 1926 only 334, and in 1927 merely 106.⁶²¹

At the same time, tensions between the congregation and the pastor rose; their background is not entirely clear.⁶²² On the other hand, there are also signs of aversion to the church's central administration. These became evident especially as due to legislative changes, the adoption of new congregation bylaws was required by the state.⁶²³ A significant part of parishioners in Varbla supported registration according to the model bylaws of the so-called Free Synod. This was a conservative dissenter group inside the Lutheran church, which promoted more independence for congregations.⁶²⁴ As for the case of Varbla, it is quite possible that rather its oppositional stance towards the Consistory than conservative credentials appealed to the parishioners.

Pastor Nerling and leading lay members of the congregation opposed the bylaws modelled according to those of the Free Synod but were in 1926 outvoted by the majority of the plenary assembly. The Consistory declined to confirm the new bylaws, but after a short consideration, they were still registered by the administrative department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.⁶²⁵

⁶¹⁹ EELKKA 1-4-348, Varbla koguduse aruanne 1922.

⁶²⁰ The congregations were obliged to pay 20 marks to the central treasury for each member who had paid his/her annual membership fee of the congregation (the tax rate was reduced to 10 marks per member for poorer congregations). The incomes of the treasury were used to finance the activities of central administration of the church and other all-Estonian ecclesiastical institutions. However, several congregations declined to send the required sum of money, which led to serious finance problems for the central treasury. Eesti Kirik, 01.07. 1926, p. 207.

⁶²¹ EELKKA 1-4-351, Varbla koguduse aruanne 1927; EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Varbla kogudusega, 29.12.1927. The membership cards were usually given for those who had paid a membership fee for the previous year – or were exempt from paying it due to poverty.

⁶²² In a recent local history overview, it is claimed that Nerling had had a conflict with local „pro-Estonian” people, as he had ordered to tear down Estonian flag from the commune administration building and even threatened to slaughter supporters of Estonian independence (Joala 2013, 112). Such claims are never mentioned in any contemporary sources and can hardly be true.

⁶²³ In 1925, the new law on religious associations was adopted by the state, and re-registration of all the congregations and churches was ordered accordingly. See Rohtmets 2012, 327–363.

⁶²⁴ Rohtmets 2012, 342–352.

⁶²⁵ EELKKA 1-4-350, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1926, Varbla koguduse aruanne.

Next year, a meeting of parishioners decided to dismiss the pastor for alleged threat to slaughter (*maha nottida*) the supporters of the Free Synod, and also for alleged irregularities in giving the Holy Communion and conducting church rites. The Consistory of the church, however, denied the congregation assembly the right to dismiss the pastor. Meanwhile, the pastor Nerling himself had also fallen out with the central authorities of the church. He refused initially to co-operate with his colleagues who had been sent to carry out visitation in his parish in February 1928, but eventually gave way, and then agreed to resign from the pastoral post,⁶²⁶ leaving for Germany soon afterwards.

Consequently, the plenary assembly of the congregation decided on May 20, 1928, to leave the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, continuing its operation as a separate free congregation. The Consistory disputed the legitimacy of the decision, but the conference of pastors of Lääne deanery pleaded with the church leadership rather to seek reconciliation with the congregation. Arvid Brasche, the pastor of Kullamaa, who had visited Varbla and held service there on September 30, wrote to the Consistory that church life had considerably improved in the meanwhile. The amount of those who paid their membership fees had risen several times and the congregation council was gathering every month. The congregation was served by the clergy who were the supporters of the Free Synod. According to Brasche, parishioners had “bitter attitudes” towards the Consistory because they believed that it had been in the side of dismissed pastor Nerling. However, if a representative of the Consistory agreed to meet them personally in Varbla, there would be good chances to solve “the misunderstandings”. Apparently, the meeting took place and was successful as the congregation returned to EELK, electing Carl Helmut Intelmann as its new pastor on July 29, 1929.⁶²⁷

In the 1930s, the life of the congregation seems to have been relatively calm. True, Intelmann wrote about attempts to renew the “unrest” in the congregation, but the faithful parishioners were resisting it by praying.⁶²⁸ Possibly, these “troublemakers” were educated parishioners. In any case in 1933 Intelmann complained: “Many members of intelligentsia do not approach, they do want to have a say, that is why they pay the membership fee before the assembly meeting – and then come to criticize and make suggestions – which are often not appropriate at all. Everything is labelled as “the will of the people” – and it must be fulfilled – let God say what he wants!”⁶²⁹

⁶²⁶ EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Varbla kogudusega, 06.02.1927, 30.09.1927, 29.12.1927, 11.–12.02.1928.

⁶²⁷ EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Varbla kogudusega, 20.05.1928, 27.09.1928, 13.10.1928, 25.10.1928, 02.01.1929, 09.07.1929. Cf. ERA 14-11-674.

⁶²⁸ EELKKA 1-4-354, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1932, Varbla koguduse aruanne.

⁶²⁹ „[P]alju haritlasi ligi ei tule, nad tahavad küll kaasarääkida, seks tasuvad liikmemaksu enne peakoosolekut – ja tulevad siis kritiseerima ja ettepanekuid tegema – mis sagedasti ühtigi kohased ei ole. Kõike tembeldatakse „rahva tahtmiseks” – ja seda tuleb täita – üteltu Jumal selle kohta, mis ta tahab!” EELKKA 1-4-355, Varbla koguduse aruanne 1933.

Indeed, in characterizing religious life in the parish, Intelmann tended to contrast the majority of the parishioners and the “core congregation” (*ecclesiola in ecclesia*) throughout his years of serving the congregation. For example, in a report, he gives an interesting example about how some people tended to look for religious meaning of an extraordinary event, while others did not: “On Sunday evening, lightning set a farmhouse on fire in a farm, where threshing had just been finished. Many thought it was a punishment sent by God, but others thought only: it was good that so many participants of the communal work were still there, otherwise nothing would have been saved!”⁶³⁰

Overall, Intelmann did not complain about the spread of irreligiosity, but rather about moral decline – quite in the same manner as many of his colleagues elsewhere. People called themselves Christians but thought that the Commandments were out of date: “Many no longer care about the Decalogue: their own power and money is their obedient god; on Sunday, people are busy with working: mill blades are turning, threshing machines whirring, communal works are [held] everywhere – both in the farthest corner of the parish and in the immediate vicinity of the church; the parents of the farm-owners can be found in the poorhouse; others’ things are “taken” and not returned; marital relationships are broken or become so tangled that they cannot be resolved anymore. Generally speaking, it is good to hear about religious matters in church on Sunday, but the impact of the Word of God does not tend to extend to everyday life; there are few who deal with it during weekdays. /.../ There are few families where the Bible is free of dust.”⁶³¹ Elsewhere in his reports Intelmann mentioned also fights and alleged death threats, smuggling, co-habitation before marriage, boozing, disrespect towards parents, gossiping and divorces as wide-spread sins. In sum, also his parish was influenced by the “secularism” of the era.⁶³² However, fortunately, there was still a small circle of people who were genuinely committed to the Christian faith.⁶³³

⁶³⁰ „Pühapäeva õhtul süütas pikne talu põlema, kus just masindamine oli lõpetatud. Paljude arvates oli see küll Jumala poolt saadetud karistus, kuid teised arvasid ainult: hea oli, et veel nii palju talgulisi koos oli, muidu poleks suudetud midagi peasta!” EELKKA 1-4-157, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1935, Varbla koguduse aruanne.

⁶³¹ „Paljud ei hooli enam dekalooigist: oma jõud ja raha on sõnakuulelik jumal; pühapäeval on kibe töö käes: veskitiivad keerlevad, rehepeksumasinad vurisevad, talgud igalpool – nii kihelkonna kaugemas nurgas, kui ka kiriku lähemas ümbruses; talupererahva vanemaid on leida seegimajast; teiste asju „võetakse” ja ei anta tagasi; abielusidemed katkevad ehk lähevad nii sassi, et enam ei suudeta lahendada. Üldiselt vaadata: usuasjadest on pühapäeval kirikus hea kuulda, aga Jumala Sõna mõju ei taha ulatuda igapäevasesse ellu; vähe neid, kes sellega argipäeval teevad tegemist. /.../ Vähe neid perekondi, kus piibel vaba tolmust.” EELKKA 1-4-353, Varbla koguduse aruanne 1930.

⁶³² “God is not at the centre, man is; that is why God’s commandments also waver. /.../ After all, the whole era is distinctively secularist – and we too have learned from it”. („Jumal ei seisa keskkohal, vaid inimene; selletõttu kõiguvad ka Jumala käsud./.../ Seisab ju terve ajastu säkularismi tähe all – ja oleme meiegi sealt õpetust saanud”). EELKKA 1-4-356, Varbla koguduse aruanne 1934.

⁶³³ EELKKA 1-4-353, Varbla koguduse aruanne 1931.

Such people lived presumably mostly in the southern part of Saulepi commune, which was due to the influence of Herrnhutians perceived as the most pious locality in the region. In 1912, Mürk, the travelling preacher, noted that arrival to Saulepi was an invigorating experience after “a desert journey” where he had not met anyone who had “genuine religious feelings in his heart” within several days. He organized several prayer-meetings there and was amazed by the piety of the locals: “I have preached the word of grace for 25 years and taken part in Bible study meetings, but I have never felt such grace and blessing of God as when I was among the people of Saulepi. Since haymaking was already in full swing at that time, it goes without saying that those who have little desire or hesitate will not come to pious gatherings during such a busy working time. Whoever can abstain from working a few hours before the evening at that time must have a great hunger and thirst for God’s word. Every evening there gathered a pretty big crowd; in some places, not as many people are ever coming even if they have the largest amount of free time as they come together here [in Saulepi] in the busiest working season.”⁶³⁴

The piety and relatively supportive attitudes towards church in Saulepi were also mentioned by the pastors. According to pastor Nerling, people from this locality provided the lion share of the donations for repairing the church tower. Most of local Herrnhutians supported co-operation with the church.⁶³⁵

Somewhat different picture about the piety of Saulepi people is provided by an ironical newspaper report describing big religious gathering there, called “the wedding of the Lamb” and held annually in mid-February. People gathered to the meeting from the range of several dozen kilometres; some preachers were invited even from the cities. The meeting lasted three days and was visited by about 200 people. In prayer-meetings, very emotional preaching style and ecstatic weeping of the faithful were common, so that the atmosphere was reminiscent of a mad-house according to the writer. However, not all the participants had come to pray, but rather to spend a pleasant evening. There were many people who spent time outside the room where the meetings were held, relating to and entertaining each other.⁶³⁶

Finally, it should be noted that the congregation still complained persistently about the shortage of money. During the 1930s, it asked constantly for financial support from the church administration, arguing at one point that it was not possible to raise its remarkably low membership fee as in that case poorer people

⁶³⁴ „Ma olen 25 aastat armusõna kuulutanud ja olen piiblitundides olnud, aga niisugust Jumala armu ja õnnistust pole ma tunnud, kui Saulepi rahva seas olles. Et heinatöö sel ajal juba kõige-kiiremas hoos oli, siis on iseenesest mõista, et vähese isuga ega kaksipidise meelega inimene niisugusel kallil töö-ajal tundi ei tule. Kes sel ajal suudab ennast tööst paar tundi enne õhtut vabastada, sellel peab suur nälg ja janu Jumala sõna järele olema. Rahvast käis igal õhtul kaunis rohkeste koos; mõnes kohas ei tule kõige vabamal ajal nii palju inimesi kokku, kui seal kõige kiiremal tööajal.” Ristirahwa Pühapäewaleht, 11.10.1912, p. 322.

⁶³⁵ EELKKA 1-4-349, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1923, Varbla koguduse aruanne.

⁶³⁶ Lääne Elu, 20.02.1932, p. 2.

would have given up paying it, leaving for other nearby Lutheran congregations or even converting into Orthodox faith.⁶³⁷

Other Confessions and Interconfessional Relations

Besides Lutheran congregation, there was a sizable Orthodox congregation with a church in Paadremaa. The congregation had several permanent priests during interwar era: Karp Ustav (1917–19), Johan Tamm (1921–35), Juhan Kukk (1936–39), and Andrei Ristkok (1939–40). According to the report for 1935, 500 of about 600 adult members paid their membership fees and 14 young people were confirmed that year. There were apparently no other activities apart from religious services.⁶³⁸ As for free churches, Intelmann noted that they became more active at the time when the Lutheran congregation had no permanent pastor.⁶³⁹ According to him, even the Orthodox congregation fostered the spread of free churches by undermining the importance of confessional boundaries in the mind of the people. Adventists were notoriously persistent in distributing their literature, and besides them, Baptists, Pentecostals, and Watchtower Society were encountered in Varbla parish.⁶⁴⁰ Pastor Lüdig from Karuse parish mentioned the activity of free churches in Pivarootsi, but their influence was allegedly declining.⁶⁴¹

Confessional identities appear not to have been strong, indeed. Occasional and relatively rare conversions from Orthodox faith to Lutheranism or *vice versa* seem to have been related to mundane considerations. At least the priest Karp Noppel of the neighbouring Tõhela Orthodox congregation wrote to the pastor of Varbla in 1937, regarding a particular case of conversion: “There has not been a single case in my time [*i.e.* for 32 years – R.S.] that the faith is changed for the sake of the faith itself – be it from Ev. Lutheran congregation to Orthodoxy – or the other way around. Some kind of mundane interest has always induced it. Is Eesmaa an exception now? Miracles may happen!”⁶⁴² Notably, pastor Intelmann even used to complain that the Orthodox lured Lutherans with offering them church rites: “As one can hear, he [the priest – R. S.] conducts all the rites, regardless of to which congregation the person belongs. Some people came here to ask and talk about a rite, but afterwards it became public that the child had already been baptized, the dead had been buried, the sick had been receiving the Holy Communion, etc. – by the priest. And what was the reason? Based on the statutes, or bylaw, I had to demand people to have a church wedding, then I will

⁶³⁷ EELKKA, Konsistoriumi kirjavahetus Varbla kogudusega, especially 02.05.1937.

⁶³⁸ Paadremaa koguduse aruanne 1936.

⁶³⁹ EELKKA 1-4-353, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1930, Varbla koguduse aruanne.

⁶⁴⁰ EELKKA 1-4-354, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1932, Varbla koguduse aruanne;

EELKKA 1-4-355, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1933, Varbla koguduse aruanne.

⁶⁴¹ EELKKA 1-4-354, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1932, Karuse koguduse aruanne.

⁶⁴² „Ühtki juhtumist pole veel mitte minu ajal olnud, et usku vahetatakse usu enese pärast – olgu see ev. Lutheruse kogudusest õigeusku – või ümberpöördukt. Siin on ikka mingisugune maine huvi tõukeks olnud. Kas nüüd Eesmaa erand on? Imesid võib ju sündida!“. EAA 1250-1-37, 28.04.1937

baptize the child; or: become a member of the congregation, pay the membership fee, etc. – but the priest did not talk about these matters, did not demand that.”⁶⁴³

As a result, the sour relationship between the Orthodox and Lutheran congregations made a considerable impact on the religious life of the parish. At the end of the era, tensions became so high that in February 1939 the Lutheran Varbla congregation turned to the EELC bishop Rahamägi, asking his help in settling relations with the Orthodox Paadremaa congregation. According to pastor Intelmann, one source of hostility were Orthodox cemetery festivals, held since 1933 in the cemetery which belonged to Varbla Lutheran congregation. Despite unanimous permission by Lutherans to hold Orthodox feast services there, the priests had allegedly used the gatherings to “advertise” their religion and made demeaning remarks about the Lutheran faith. Another bone of contention was the sale of alcohol in a shop which was situated near Varbla Lutheran church. The Lutheran congregation had campaigned in vain to ban the sale because of its harm to the public order in the vicinity. But the shopkeeper (*ärijuht*) there happened to be one of the leaders of the Orthodox Paadremaa congregation, prompting a hostile reaction towards the Lutheran congregation.

Rahamägi turned to the EAOC metropolitan Aleksander to help settle the issue. In his reply, Aleksander claimed that the conflict had been provoked by Lutherans. He added to his letter the explanations of the priest Kukk, who denied any demeaning remarks or any bias towards Lutherans. *Vice versa*, he had heard that pastor Intelmann tended to be demeaning about Orthodox faith: “Expressions, coming from the mouth of the pastor about our sacrament of eucharist “children are stuffed pap with a spoon to their mouths” or that Ap. Orthodox believers can only be buried in the Varbla cemetery next to those who have committed suicide or to deniers of God, are complete insults, which I have wished to forgive to the highly educated pastor and not to submit complaints about.” He referred to his good relations with Lutheran clergy in his previous place of service in Hiiumaa island, and also boasted that usually 30% of the worshippers in his church services in Paadremaa used to be Lutherans. Indeed, the pastor’s envy of the success of Orthodox congregation was according to Kukk possibly the source of the conflict.⁶⁴⁴ This account may contain a grain of truth, as also some memoirs hint to the peculiar competition element between the congregations and their

⁶⁴³ „Nagu kuuldub toimetab ta kõik ametitalitused, hoolimata sest, mis koguduse liige inime on. Mõni tuli siia küsima ja ametitalitusest rääkima, aga pärast oli kuolda: laps juba ristitud, surnu maetud, haige lauale võetud jne. – preestri poolt. Ja mis oli põhjus? Põhikirja ehk kodukorra põhjal pidin nõudma: laske end laulatada, siis ristin last; ehk: hakake koguduseliikmeks, tasuge liikmemaksu jne – preester aga neist asjust ei rääkinud, seda ei nõudnud.” EELKKA 1-4-354, Varbla koguduse aruanne 1932. See also EELKKA 1-4-355, Varbla koguduse aruanne 1933.

⁶⁴⁴ „Väljendused õpetaja suust meie püha õhtusöömaaja sakramendi kohta „topitakse lastele lusikaga puid suhu” ehk Ap.-õigeusulisi saab Varbla kalmistul mätta vaid enesetapjate või jumalasalgajate kõrvale, on täielikud solvamised, milliseid olen soovitanud suureharidusega õpetajale andestada ja kaebtustega mitte esineda”. EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Varbla kogudusega 29.04.1939.

clergy: “The pastors of Varbla definitely had a particular sympathy with the churchgoers and confirmands from Paadremaa, because the Russian Orthodox Church operated in Paadremaa with its congregation, priest, choir and confirmation teaching. During the time of Intelmann of Varbla, the priests in Paadremaa were Tamm, later Kukk. Both were better speakers than Intelmann and had powerful basses, so that they made the church echo. It was good to listen to them, and on Christmas and Easter holidays the church was always full of people.”⁶⁴⁵

Intelmann and Nationality Question

Besides that, however, in his explanation priest Kukk also resorted to nationalistic rhetoric. Notably, he stated that good relations with Intelmann were not possible, as the pastor was a nervous person, and also a German, with a rooted bias towards poorly educated priests of “Russian faith” as he called it. However, the priest also admitted having added fuel into the fire, mentioning an incident during Victory Day service, held in Varbla Lutheran church on June 23, 1936. He was asked not to wear his priest’s robe in the Lutheran church as it would annoy pastor Intelmann. He complied but decided to hold a speech during the ceremony of laying wreaths after the service: “I was offended and spoke not as a priest, but as a person who loves his country and people. Later I heard that the pastor had been angry at my speech, which as a German he had the right to do, but the people in the church were excited.”⁶⁴⁶

Interestingly, about the same time a petition with 15 signatures allegedly representing members of Varbla congregation was sent to bishop Rahamägi, asking for substituting Intelmann with an ethnic Estonian pastor. The signatories claimed to be ashamed to have a German clergyman while many neighbouring congregations had already Estonian ones. Besides that, it was said that Intelmann was hot-tempered and arrogant which had led to conflicts with many congregation members. The relations of people with Intelmann were allegedly cool and formal. The congregation council disproved the claims. Indeed, it was questioned, if the signatories were members of the congregation in the first place; allegedly the writing of the petition was initiated in fact by a leading member of Paadremaa Orthodox congregation. Regarding the timing of the petition and sour relations between the congregations it cannot be ruled out, indeed.⁶⁴⁷ As for other sources, there is no

⁶⁴⁵ „Paadremaalt kirikulistele ja leerilastele oli Varbla pastoritel kindlasti eriline poolehoid, sest Paadremaal tegutses vene õigeusu kirik oma koguduse, preestri, laulukoori ja leeriõpetusega. Varbla Intelmanni ajal olid Paadremaal preestreiks Tamm, hiljem Kukk. Mõlemad Intelmannist paremad kõnemehed ja vägevad bassid, nii et panid kiriku kajama. Neid oli hea kuulata ja jõulu ning ülestõusmise pühadel oli kirik alati puupüsti rahvast täis.” Jõgisalu 2001, 178.

⁶⁴⁶ „Olin pahandatud ja rääkisin mitte preestrina, vaid isikuna, kes armastab oma maad ja rahvast. Hiljem kuulsin, et õpetaja oli vihastanud minu kõnele, milleks temal kui sakslasel oli ka õigust, kuid kirikurahvas oli vaimustatud.” According to the account of Lutheran congregation, Kukk had referred to submissive kissing of “the riding boot of the lord of the manor and hem of the pastor („mõisniku ratsasaapa ja kiriksanda kuuepalistuse”) in the past. EELKKA, konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Varbla kogudusega, 29.04.1939.

⁶⁴⁷ EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Varbla kogudusega, 12.09.1938–30.05.1939.

evidence about antagonism between parishioners and Intelmann. Rather, he was remembered as being respected and having good relations with simple village people; after his departure to Germany, he retained contact with Varbla until his death.⁶⁴⁸ Also, claims that the conflict with Wilhelm Nerling had had national background,⁶⁴⁹ are doubtful as nothing about it can be found in available sources from the 1920s. Indeed, the election of another German pastor after he was forced to resign, seems to indicate that the nationality of the pastor was largely irrelevant to the parishioners.

So, there is no clear evidence of widespread opposition to the pastor on ethnic grounds. But despite that, the case shows the vulnerable position of ethnic German pastors in the new nation-state, especially in the 1930s when nationalist ideology was officially promoted. They could easily be attacked simply under the pretext of their ethnic origin, even though such attacks were in fact encouraged by neither political elite nor church leadership.

Autobiographical Sources

Little can be found about the local religious peculiarities of the region in the autobiographical texts. Overall, the picture is similar to the rest of Estonia: church and faith issues are mentioned usually only in passing and are often related to festive occasions in the life of an individual. For instance, in a book of oral history stories compiled by Harri Jõgisalu, one is dedicated to the reminiscences of confirmation time. Those are mostly related to secular details – pleasant memories about time spent with other young people, the jokes and mischiefs of young boys. The importance and festivity of the confirmation day are stressed, but it is not explained in religious terms, but as the celebration of becoming an adult person: “Confirmation day was a truly memorable and joyful event in the life of a young person, at least in the village. Every family, whether on a wealthy farm or in a poor cottage, had carefully prepared for this. Everything had to be new that the child, or rather already the adult, wore. The girls had a white confirmation dress, brand-new petticoats, white stockings and for the first time shoes on their feet. There was always a problem with the shoes: they tended to pinch painfully. /.../ Even at the age of old woman, the pinching of the shoes had remained the most vivid memory from the confirmation day.” As for religious themes, it is mentioned that confirmation lessons were basically a repetition of what had been learnt previously in the lessons of religion at primary school. Also, the pastor admonished strongly to remain true to the Lutheran church, which was relevant in the region where the Orthodox church was also present: “How much the confirmands cared about or understood it, is doubtful.”⁶⁵⁰

⁶⁴⁸ Jõgisalu and Tihkan 2001, 178–179; *Scripta annalia*: EELK Lääne praostkonna aastakirjad, 2015, p. 20 (Uno Veismann).

⁶⁴⁹ Joala 2013, 112.

⁶⁵⁰ „Leeripäev oli noore inimese elus, külas vähemalt, tõeliselt meeldejääv ja rõõmus sündmus. Selleks oli hoolega ette valmistatud igas peres, olgu jõukas talus või kehviku tares. Lapsel, siis juba täiskasvanul, pidi kõik olema uus. Tüdrukutel valge leerikleit, tuliueed alusseelikud, valged sukad ja esimest korda jalas kingad. Kingadega oli alati häda: need kippusid

Manivald Müüripeal (1931–2021) remembers that he was baptized as a six-year-old boy together with his two younger brothers: “Before the baptism, there was a fair amount of fuss and discussion. Aunt Salme (father’s sister) motivated the need to baptize the boys, arguing that the boys would soon go to school and there they would be called “heathens”. The boys were baptized before school, but this did not save them from the nickname of “heathen”. In addition to the boys, their father was also called “Heathen Madis”. The father had justified baptizing three boys at the same time by saying that it would be cheaper. If you are a new farmer, you cannot afford to baptize each child individually.” Most of his short description of the baptism is dedicated to the following party, which cost 80 *kroons* for their father – and also to the petty mischiefs of young boys who were baptized.⁶⁵¹ The case of Müüripeal’s baptism chimes well in with the complaints of some pastors that establishing a party to mark the birth of the child tended often to overshadow the baptismal ceremony and its religious meaning. However, on the other hand, this case indicates that giving up baptism altogether was also hardly a viable option due to public opinion even in regions where people tended to have relatively loose ties with the church.

Another story of postponing the baptism of children concerns a mixed couple who lived in a common-law marriage. The woman was Eha Leek, known from the previous chapter about Jüri parish, who had later moved to live with her child’s father in Varbla parish: „On the Easter holiday, Karla’s mother started to talk that Karla should invite the Russian priest from Paadremaa to baptize the child (the village was in Paadremaa commune). I resisted immediately: „I am a Lutheran, the only time I saw a Russian service, it scared me with its splendour. My child, my faith.” Karla yawned – „As far as I am concerned, let him not be baptized – the expenses will be avoided, the name will be registered in Paadremaa commune.“ Later, while living in the city of Pärnu, Leek asked the local Lutheran pastor Nuudi to baptize the child, but he refused to do it because the couple had not been married in the church. However, Leek’s two children were

valusasti pigistama. /.../ Veel memmeeaski oli just kingade pigistamine õnnistamisepäevast kõige selgemini meeles. /.../ Kui palju see jutt leerilastele korda läks või sellest aru saadi, on iseküsimus.” Jõgisalu and Tihkan 2001, pp. 175–180. There is also a similar account about predominantly secular importance of confirmation ceremonies from Karuse parish: „Kirik ei olnud noortele populaarne, käidi juhuslikult. Kuid igal kevadel toimus rituaal leeriskäimise nimetusega, tähistati lapsea möödumist. 17–18. aastased noormehed ja neid, käisid kaks nädalat enamasti õhtupoolikul kohaliku kiriku õpetajalt usuõpetust omandamas. Noori huvitas, et kõik said omale ilusad riided, lõpuks toimus kirikus, pidulik, pühalik õnnistusteenistus.” (by Aleksander Nurming, ERM KV 648:10, p. 33.)

⁶⁵¹ „Sellele ristimisele eelnes ka omajagu sekeldamist ja arutamist. Tädi Salme (isa õde) põhjendas poiste ristimise vajadust sellega, et poisid lähevad varsti kooli ja seal hakatakse neid hüüdma-kutsuma „paganateks”. Poisid said küll enim kooli ristitud, kuid see ei päästnud „pagana” üldnimest. Lisaks poistele kutsuti ka isa „pagana Madiseks”. Isa põhjendas kolme poisi korraga ristimist sellega, et tuleb odavam. Asuniku asi, ega siis ei jõua igat last üksikult ristida.” Varbla Teataja, 01.12.2007, p. 3.

finally still baptized during a large child baptism campaign initiated by the Pärnu Women's Society.⁶⁵²

Besides that, religious ceremonies in case of funerals and weddings are very briefly mentioned in some memoirs, as well as participating in church service during Christmas. People, who practised religion in other ways or more often, were seen as exceptional. **Harri Jõgisalu** (1922–2014) remembers a visit to distant relatives in Tallinn from the years when he had not attended school yet: “The food was on the table, but no one started eating, they waited. I saw that the family members had their hands crossed, and my grandmother put my fingers together as well. Then uncle Priidu looked up, read a verse, and thanked the one who gives us our daily bread. Aunt Marie sighed, we were very quiet, only Heino tapped my chair leg under the table. On our way home, grandma said that Marie and Priidu were believers, they went to church on the same street near us, and prayed and sang there. Every time they sat down to eat, they said the table grace and thanked God who gave bread and other food. I asked why did we not give thanks and pray to God for our bread. Grandmother thought for a while and then said that her parents did not pray and also did not teach their children to pray. They thought that they had managed without praying, relying more on their own work than on God.”⁶⁵³ On the other hand, however, Jõgisalu mentions later that his grandmother still used to listen to church services *via* radio.⁶⁵⁴

Anni Teedearu, who would later become a teacher, expresses gratitude for her parents for having taken her to the Lutheran church in the 1930s, which gave her “foundations of ethical feelings”. The favourable attitude towards the church remained with her for her whole life even though she was afraid to attend the church during Soviet times for fear of losing her job.⁶⁵⁵

Karl Ristikivi (1912–77), considered to be one of the classics of Estonian literature, an Orthodox by faith from Varbla parish, mentions religious topics in

⁶⁵² „Lihavõtte pühal siis tegi Karla ema juttu, et Karla kutsuks Paadremaa (küla oli Paadremaa vallas) venepreestri last ristima. Hakkasin kohe vastu: olen luterlane, ainus kord veneusu teenistust näha ajas mulle hirmu peale oma toredusega. Minu laps, minu usk.” Karla haigutas – “minupoolest jäägu ristimata – kulud jäävad ära, nimi saab Paadremaa valla kirja.” EKLA 350-1-2, vol. II p. 39, 41 and 56. Orthodoxy was often colloquially called the Russian faith by the Lutherans, which significantly disturbed the Estonian Orthodox. The Paadremaa priest in question was also not in fact Russian by nationality, but Estonian.

⁶⁵³ „Toit oli laual, aga keegi sööma ei hakanud, ootasid. Nägin, et pererahval olid käed risti kokku pandud ja vanaema tõstis minu sõrmed ka kokku. Siis onu Priidu vaatas üles ja luges salmi, tänas seda, kes meile annab igapäevast leiba. Tädi Marie ohkas, olime väga vaikselt, ainult Heino tonksis laua all minu toolijalga. Teel koju ütles vanaema, et Marie ja Priidu on usklikud, käivad kirikus, samas meie lähedal tänaval ja paluvad seal jumalat ning laulavad. Iga kord kui sööma istuvad, loevad söögipalve ja tänavad jumalat, kes leiba ja muud toitu annab.

Küsisin, miks meie leiva eest ei täna ja jumalat ei palu? Vanaema mõtles natuke aega ja ütles siis, et tema isa-ema ei palunud ega õpetanud ka lapsi paluma. Arvasid, et on ilma palumata hakkama saanud, rohkem oma tööle kui jumalale lootnud.” Jõgisalu 2011, 45.

⁶⁵⁴ Jõgisalu 2011, 63.

⁶⁵⁵ ERM KV 762:1, p. 11–34.

his short childhood memoir only twice, referring to differences between Herrnhutians and other local people.⁶⁵⁶ However, as his private diary from his exile years indicates, the writer was a deeply religious person, who used to pray often to overcome problems of everyday life.⁶⁵⁷

Public Role of the Church

Community Life

In Karuse and Varbla some community leaders were also interested in co-operating with the churches. For instance, in 1935 Paadremaa Country Women's Association (*maanaiste selts*) asked in a letter to the Lutheran Varbla congregation to arrange religious service in co-operation with the Mihkli Lutheran congregation and Paadremaa Orthodox congregation "to enliven religious life" which was allegedly endangered due to long distance from the churches and popularity of the "sects".⁶⁵⁸ Notable here is their seeming unawareness of the uneasy relationship between the clergy of different confessions in the parish.

There are also some newspaper reports about religious ceremonies during secular events. In 1934, Ernst Lüdigi, pastor of Karuse, and Orthodox priest Artemi Pops from Kõmsi, consecrated together a new schoolhouse in Nehatu (Paatsalu commune).⁶⁵⁹ On October 31, 1937, Ernst Lüdigi, pastor of Karuse, and Juhan Kukk, priest of Paadremaa, provided a short religious introduction to the harvest festival and "patriotic day" in Vatla, Paatsalu commune, which was organized by Paatsalu branch of Fatherland's Alliance (*Isamaaliit*).⁶⁶⁰ Also, there is a short report about a "patriotic day" in Paadremaa from 1936, where altogether twenty national flags of farm owners were consecrated. The priest Kukk did it according to the Orthodox tradition and Carl Helmut Intelmann, the pastor of Varbla, according to Lutheran tradition.⁶⁶¹ However, next year in the harvest festival and consecration of the flag of Fatherlands' Alliance, Otto Luberg, pastor of Lihula, took part alongside the priest Kukk.⁶⁶² Besides that, there are several accounts of religious ceremonies in Varbla parish, which were carried out solely by the Orthodox priest: a harvest festival in Saulepi,⁶⁶³ remembrance ceremony of the mutiny of December 1st, 1924,⁶⁶⁴ and the Christmas party of local consumers' cooperative.⁶⁶⁵

The absence of the pastor of Varbla in these public events can be largely explained by his resentment to co-operate with secular activists. "Intelmann had

⁶⁵⁶ Ristikivi [1964] 1993, 11–20. The memoir had been written in exile.

⁶⁵⁷ Ristikivi 2008.

⁶⁵⁸ EAA 1250-1-37, letter from 18.08.1935.

⁶⁵⁹ Lääne Elu, 05.10.1934, p. 1.

⁶⁶⁰ Lääne Elu, 02.11.1937, p. 3.

⁶⁶¹ Lääne Elu, 08.09.1936, p. 3.

⁶⁶² Lääne Elu, 26.11.1937, p. 3.

⁶⁶³ Lääne Elu, 13.10.1936, p. 3.

⁶⁶⁴ Lääne Elu, 07.12.1938, p. 8.

⁶⁶⁵ Lääne Elu 29.12.1936, p. 1.

a rather cold attitude towards such local figures who tried only to promote secular social life,” remembers a woman who was confirmed by Intelmann in the 1930s.⁶⁶⁶ Several annual reports by the pastor himself confirm this assessment.⁶⁶⁷ Such an attitude was not uncommon among the Lutheran pastors at that time, who, perhaps not without reason, suspected that leaders of secular associations tended to invite clergymen to their events merely because a religious speech or ceremony would attract more people, notably from older generations, to participate.⁶⁶⁸ Most of the pastors, while feeling resentment, did usually not decline such invitations, seeing them as an occasion to reach out to the wider community. Intelmann, however, seems to have made up his mind not to take part in such secular events which, beginning with proclaiming the Word of God by him, too often ended with excessive drinking and fights. Especially, he emphasized that participation of the pastor in such gatherings annoyed pious members of congregation: “After all, the main task of a pastor is not to have the fame of a “man of the people”; but according to many the meaning is that he takes part in everything and approves everything. If we act like this, we will soon be losing the trust of the faithful members of the church. And all “admonishing and guiding to godliness, peace, upright living, love in deeds, and concord” can no longer have any effect. Nor would we be able to faithfully and properly work in the Lord’s vineyard if we ourselves were a nuisance to the core congregation, to be a friend to those outside the congregation. The fact that such a course of action is not appropriate is clear even to indifferent Christians, as evidenced by many sayings and writings.”⁶⁶⁹

Church and Schools

Before the referendum, religion was taught in none of the three schools of Karuse parish. According to pastor Kentmann, all the teachers were either indifferent or hostile towards the church. The parents were passive and there was also a lack of unity among them; thus, they were unable to put pressure on the school.⁶⁷⁰

⁶⁶⁶ „Kohalikesse tegelastesse, kes ainult ilmalikku seltsielu edendada püüdsid, suhtus Intelmann üsna jahedalt.” Jõgisalu and Tihkan 2001, 179.

⁶⁶⁷ EELKKA 1-4-356, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1934, Varbla koguduse aruanne. EELKKA 1-4-357, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1935, Varbla koguduse aruanne.

⁶⁶⁸ About discussion on that topic in the Conference of Theologians of EELK, see Eesti Kirik, 04.02.1937, p. 3.

⁶⁶⁹ „Ei ole ju õpetaja peaülesandeks omada „rahvamehe” kuulsust; s.t. aga paljude arvates: ta käib igalpool ühes ja kiidab kõik heaks. Kui nõnda tegutseda, siis kaotame pea koguduse ustavate liigete usaldust. Ja kõik „manitsemine ja juhatamine jumalakartusele, rahule, ausale elule, tegevale armastusele ja ühelemeelele” ei või enam mõju avaldada. Ega meie ei suudaks enam ustavalt ja nõuetekohaselt töötada Issanda viinamäel, kui ise oleksime pahanduseks tuumkogudusele, et aga olla sõbraks kogudusest eemalseisjale. Et sarnane teguviis pole kohane, on selge ka ükskõiksetele kristlastele, nagu tõendavad mitmed ütelled ja kirjutused.” EELKKA 1-4-357, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1934, Varbla koguduse aruanne.

⁶⁷⁰ EELKKA 1-4-347, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1921, Karuse koguduse aruanne; compare EELKKA 1-4-348, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1922, Karuse koguduse aruanne. Be-

However, according to the replies of the teachers to the questionnaire of the Ministry of Education, religion was already taught in 1924 to all or almost all pupils in most schools of Karuse and Varbla parishes (Nehatu, Paadremaa, Saastna, Varbla). Only in Vaiste primary school about half of the pupils did not take it, while in Vatla religion was not taught at all because there were reportedly not enough pupils willing to learn it.⁶⁷¹ This is highly remarkable, regarding the overwhelming rejection of religious instruction only one year before.

True, the *kõster* of Karuse complained initially, that in his parish religion was taught by the teachers who had been previously against teaching it. Thus, they did it reluctantly, and therefore the lessons of religion did not bear good fruit in some places.⁶⁷² Later, only short notices were dedicated to teaching religion in the annual reports of pastors. In 1933 and 1934, Intelmann expressed his satisfaction that teaching the Catechism and Bible stories was given more attention in schools than earlier.⁶⁷³ In 1935, he wrote that he had a poor overview of the situation of religious instruction at schools. In some schools, it seemed to have been rather good, but in one school there was reportedly almost no talk about faith in the lessons of religion. He also noted that at one school “a sectarian” was in charge of teaching religion.⁶⁷⁴ Lüdig from Karuse mentioned schools only in 1935, namely that he had visited almost all schools “regarding the religious education and holding prayers”.⁶⁷⁵

Memoirs confirm that the attitude towards religious instruction was after its reintroduction rather supportive in both Karuse and Varbla. Its abolishment by Soviet authorities was allegedly met with disapproval. Harri Jõgisalu heard from people in his home village in 1941 that teachers who had merely a year ago taught religion in Paadremaa school, claimed now that Jesus had never been born, and not he, but Lenin was a true friend of children: “It was said in the village that all the teachers had become red and it was not known what kind of people they were raising also from children, if they no longer believed in God.”⁶⁷⁶

Manivald Müüripeal in turn remembers a case from the German occupation period (1941–44): “Father once came from a meeting in the schoolhouse where the matter of religious instruction had been discussed. Father did not think anything good of this faith thing. But he considered classes of religion necessary. At the meeting, a parent said that his children would not participate in the classes of religion. His father had vehemently objected to him and was still passionate at

sides Karuse, only in Hanila parish in no schools religious instruction was taught. EELKKA 1-4-347, Lääne praosti aruanne 1921.

⁶⁷¹ ERA 1098-1-88.

⁶⁷² EELKKA 1-4-349, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1923, Karuse koguduse aruanne.

⁶⁷³ EELKKA 1-4-355, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1933, Varbla koguduse aruanne.

⁶⁷⁴ EELKKA 1-4-357, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1935, Varbla koguduse aruanne.

⁶⁷⁵ EELKKA 1-4-357, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1935, Karuse koguduse aruanne.

⁶⁷⁶ „Külas öeldi, et õpetajad on kõik punaseks läinud ja ei tea, mis inimesed nad lastestki kasvatavad, kui enam jumalat ei usu.” Jõgisalu 2011, 193–194.

home. Our father's opinion was that once a child was sent to school, he also had to attend every lesson."⁶⁷⁷

Salme Koppel (b. 1930) recalls that one of his elementary school teachers during the German occupation, Alfred Randes, had emphasized religious education: "I remember that he wanted us to believe in God. Apparently, he had somehow experienced His help and presence in his life. Thank him for that and peace to him in the soil of the distant foreign country!"⁶⁷⁸

If these short excerpts can be relied upon, they seem to indicate that there was at least no widespread opposition to religious education at the end of the interwar period. In sum, it seems safe to conclude that despite the majority voted in 1923 against religious instruction, the attitude of people in Karuse and Varbla was later essentially not much different from the general mood in Estonia.

Local Politics and Social Contradictions

In the first years of the independent republic, Paatsalu and Paadremaa communes had significant support for socialist and centre-left labour parties. Afterwards their support diminished considerably, especially in Paatsalu, where poorer peasants probably preferred the New Farmers' (*asunikud*) Party. As for bigger than average support for the Christian People's Party in 1923, it is most probably linked to the Herrnhutian impact in the southern part of Saulepi commune.

In the sources of church history, there are relatively few references to political controversies. However, there are some hints that radical views were shared also by some people who were close to the church. So, a member of the congregation council, after being admonished that upkeeping of the church and its staff is an obligation of every genuine Christian, answered reportedly: "In this day and age, the best Christian is the one who helps to reduce the number of the "lords"."⁶⁷⁹ In 1933, at the height of political tensions in Estonia, the pastor of Varbla denounced widespread disparaging of political opponents, especially during the campaign of local elections. He added: "For greater effect, verses from scriptures are resorted to; but these verses are not found in the scriptures!"⁶⁸⁰ On the other hand, however, it was reported that party identification was not as important for people of

⁶⁷⁷ „Isa tuli kunagi koolimajast koosolekult, kus oli arutatud seda usuõpetuse asja. Isa küll sellest usu asjast midagi head ei arvanud. Aga usuõpetuse tunde pidas vajalikuks. Koosolekul oli keegi lapsevanem öelnud, et tema lapsed usuõpetuse tunnis ei osale. Isa oli temale ägedalt vastu vaieldud ja oli veel koduski parasjagu äge. Meie isa arvamus oli see, et kui laps on kooli saadetud, peab ta ka igas tunnis osalema.” Müüripeal 2011, 61.

⁶⁷⁸ „Mäletan, et tema sooviks oli et me usuksime Jumalasse. Ju ta oma elus oli siis kogenud kuidagi tema abi ja kohalolekut. Aitäh talle selle eest ja rahu talle seal kaugel võõramaa mul-las!” ERM KV 1057:12, p. 231. At the same time, Müüripeal, who studied at the same school, does not write anything about Randes's religiosity, although he does mention the teacher in his memoirs.

⁶⁷⁹ „Nüüdsel ajal on kõigeparem ristiinimene see, kes aitab „isandaid” vähendada.” EELKKA 1-4-348, Karuse koguduse aruanne 1921.

⁶⁸⁰ „Et rohkem mõju avaldada, võetakse appi pühakirja salme; aga pühakirjas neid salme ei leidu!” EELKKA 1-4-355, Lääne praostkonna aruanded 1933, Varbla koguduse aruanne.

Paatsalu commune as in many other places.⁶⁸¹ There are also no indications that local political contradictions overlapped with those of church life. Indeed, resentment to pastor Nerling, at least in Varbla, seems to have united the overwhelming majority of parishioners.

Conclusion

Support for religious instruction was in Karuse and Varbla, similarly to other coastal parishes nearby, considerably below the national average. First and foremost, it seems to be associated with the deprived nature of the area. As people were poor and extraordinarily reluctant to give out money, the leftist propaganda about considerable tax hikes due to re-introducing religious instruction might well have influenced their voting decisions. Also, conflicts with pastors Kurt Kentmann (Karuse) and Wilhelm Nerling (Varbla) seem to have played a role. Importantly, those were probably also to a large extent caused by pastors' insistence to contribute financially more to the cause of the church. But besides that, hints of overall resentment towards "the lords" (*isandad*) are mentioned in the sources. It probably led to widespread voting for leftist parties in the first years of the independent republic. Church was also seen as a part of "the establishment of the rich", and the referendum was possibly treated as a protest voting against it.

Overall, Karuse and Varbla were significantly more secular than most of the other parishes of Lääne county, which was known for its exclusive piety at that time. Only in the southern part of Saulepi played religion a more important role, largely due to the influence of Herrnhutian movement. On the other hand, despite extraordinarily low support for religious instruction, the role of the church was later similar to other parishes. Expectations of the locals towards church were quite similar to the rest of Estonia (or rather Southern than Northern part of it). Generally, religion did not play an important part in everyday life, but Christian identity had not lost its importance, and churches were full during major feast days. It is especially indicative that despite the overwhelming rejection of religious instruction mainly in Paatsalu commune, very few parents declined later religious instruction to their children. On the other hand, it was common to seek church rites and clergymen were invited to perform religious ceremonies on patriotic events and important occasions in the life of the community.

True, the position of the Lutheran church was weakened due to competition from the side of the Orthodox congregation, the unwillingness of especially pastor Intelmann from Varbla to co-operate with secular community leaders, and possibly to a lesser extent German nationality of the pastors. But it seems not to have influenced the attitudes of the locals towards religion and Christian church as such. Notably, if a Lutheran pastor was unwilling to perform rites or ceremonies, at least some people had seemingly no objection to turning to Orthodox priests.

⁶⁸¹ Lääne Elu, 29.07.1933, p. 2.

2.2.5. VASTSELIINA PARISH

Introduction

The referendum results in Võru county differed spectacularly in its Western and Eastern parts. In the western parishes, notably Urvaste, support for religious instruction was in some communes among the lowest, but in the East among the highest in Estonia. Eastern Võru county was neighbouring with Orthodox Russians and Setus. Notably, the voting patterns there were similar to other parishes (in Eastern parts of Tartu and Viru counties), which were also near the ethnic frontier.

To what extent did religious life in this frontier area differ from that of other regions of Estonia, and how could contacts with non-Estonian Orthodox and Old Believers influence it? In order to find it out, Vastseliina parish from Eastern Võru county was included in this study. Importantly, pastors of Vastseliina used to serve Lutherans in Orthodox majority areas. Also, the parish had a sizable Orthodox Setu population since 1922, when Luhamaa area was merged with Misso commune. So, contacts with the Orthodox non-Estonians were presumably livelier there than in other frontier parishes.

Historiography

Overviews about the parish⁶⁸² do not pay much attention to religious topics. As for village histories, especially studies by Lui Niilo about Tsiistre deserve mentioning.⁶⁸³

General Overview

Vastseliina is situated in the ethnic-religious frontier with Orthodox Setus and Russians. In the South, there is the ethnical border with Lutheran Latvians.

Earlier, locals had had tighter contact with the outside world than peasants were used at that time. The whole parish belonged to the noble family of Lipharts, who also owned manors near Tartu and in Latvia. Peasants of Vastseliina were thus assigned different tasks also in these manors.⁶⁸⁴ Besides that, frequent encounters with strangers also happened due to living in the ethnic border area, and vicinity of Riga-Pskov road.

In the 1920s–30s, the parish was, according to some observers, relatively backward. Forested and sparsely populated, its associational life was weaker than in surrounding parishes, the lifestyle was more conservative, and farms were poorer if compared with other parishes in Võrumaa. Relatively few people went to secondary schools and universities.⁶⁸⁵ Misso in the southern part of the parish was allegedly the most backward part of it, while Vastseliina commune was

⁶⁸² Lõbu 2005, 24–25; Võrumaa: maadeteaduslik, tulunduslik... 1926, 394–418; Reimann 2004, 299–326.

⁶⁸³ Niilo 2010.

⁶⁸⁴ Lõbu 2005, 24–25.

⁶⁸⁵ Võrumaa: maadeteaduslik, tulunduslik... 1926, 66 and 90; Parmas 1923, 47.

described as more receptive to the influences from the outside.⁶⁸⁶ Usage of the local dialect was widespread in the interwar years, which occasionally hampered communication with newcomers from other parts of Estonia, including pastors.⁶⁸⁷ Also, there are accounts of confusion in Sunday services as some worshippers sang in standard Estonian, others in Võru dialect.⁶⁸⁸

Religious Background

Orthodox church was marginal among ethnic Estonians of Vastseliina. The first Orthodox church was built by settlers from Russia to Puutli in 1935.⁶⁸⁹ Previous influence of the Herrnhutians had subsided. Only two meeting houses operated in the interwar era, and religious gatherings were held only from time to time there. Earlier, there had also been a tradition of holding religious meetings in all of the schoolhouses of the parish; in the 1920s, it continued only in four of them.⁶⁹⁰

There were no congregations of free churches operating in the parish. However, in the 1920–30s some of their preachers seem to have been rather active.⁶⁹¹ In the 1938 visitation, it was noted that Misso commune in the southernmost part of the parish needed special attention because of its long distance from the parish church as well as the intense activity of “the sects”.⁶⁹² Besides that, the Herrnhutian movement also found fresh impetus there from the neighbouring Rõuge parish.⁶⁹³

Pastors

From earlier times, the activities of pastor **Gustav Masing** (in office 1860–1901, lived 1832–1901) left a lasting imprint on the life of the parish. He was remembered as a just and dedicated clergyman who was close to people, but also for his support of folk education. Besides that, he was a staunch supporter of the usage of the Võru dialect, also composing a hymn book in it.⁶⁹⁴ After him, the congregation was served by two more ethnic German pastors, **Harald Robert Hornberg (1901–1909, lived 1875–1914)** and **Eugen Wilhelm Mahr (1910–1918, lived 1882–1933)**. The latter fled in 1918 to Germany, leaving the flock for almost two years without a permanent pastor.

⁶⁸⁶ Parmas 1923, 47.

⁶⁸⁷ Plank s.a., 69–70. Cf. Salum 2005, 26.

⁶⁸⁸ EELKKA, Võru praostkonna aruanded, Vastseliina koguduse aruanne 1924.

⁶⁸⁹ Luhamets 2024, 94.

⁶⁹⁰ Võrumaa: maadeteaduslik, tulunduslik... 1926, 409–410 and 413.

⁶⁹¹ In the 1920s, Adventist preachers, who were proclaiming that the Judgement Day was imminent, allegedly found several supporters among women of Vastseliina commune. Some of them gave up eating pork and started observing Saturday instead of Sunday. Meie Kirik, 14.01.1925, p. 13–14.

⁶⁹² EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Vastseliina kogudusega, visitatsiooniprotokoll: 03.06.1938.

⁶⁹³ Koppel 2000, 4.

⁶⁹⁴ Postimees, 31.08.1901, p. 3.

In 1920–27, the congregation was served by **Johannes Nathan Aunverdt** (lived 1889–1927), an Estonian⁶⁹⁵ who proved to be an energetic and versatile clergyman. Besides rejuvenating congregational life, he studied local history, taught in courses for teachers of religion, and was keenly interested in liturgical issues but also in astronomy.⁶⁹⁶ Also he authored a prayer book for private use.⁶⁹⁷

After his sudden death, another Estonian, **Eduard Ermits** (lived 1886–1953), was elected as a pastor and served in Vastseliina in 1928–39. A vocal minority opposed him from the beginning, but later, a considerable number of congregation members turned against him. He was especially accused of excessive drinking and indecent behaviour while drunk, but also of adultery and negligence in performing his duties. In response, Ermits sued several of his critics and attacked them publicly, including from the pulpit and during confirmation lessons.⁶⁹⁸ Besides that, he had an argument with the congregation over his salary.⁶⁹⁹

Church leadership was, for a long time, hesitant to intervene decisively. In 1934, the Consistory made a public admonition to Ermits, stating that no accusations about his indecent behaviour had been proven. However, the pastor was guilty of his “excessive simple-mindedness”, which had allegedly provoked the accusations.⁷⁰⁰ Extraordinary visitation was conducted in July 1938; it was concluded that relations between the pastor and the flock were a major obstacle to the development of religious life,⁷⁰¹ but Ermits was still allowed to remain in office. New visitation resumed in June 1939, and finally he was removed from office on December 8, 1939,⁷⁰² probably as a result of personal initiative of interim church leader Jaak Varik.⁷⁰³

From the point of view of this research, it is important to note that according to his opponents, the behaviour of Ermits had alienated many congregation members from the church. Some were reluctant to receive the Holy Communion from him.⁷⁰⁴ On the other hand, Ermits had also his supporters who appreciated his friendly character. Besides that, he was also a rather skilful preacher.⁷⁰⁵ During the 1939 visitation, voting was arranged with a narrow minority of the parishio-

⁶⁹⁵ However, his widow Martha communicated with the dean of Võru in German: EAA 1205-1-284, p. 112.

⁶⁹⁶ Võru Teataja, 12.05.1921, p. 2; Võru Teataja, 03.05.1927, p. 1; Burial speech by prof. Rahamägi, EAA 1205-1-128.

⁶⁹⁷ Aunverdt 1925.

⁶⁹⁸ See sources in EELKKA: 1-3-43 and 1-3-44; Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Vastseliina kogudusega (27.03.1934, 21.01.1939).

⁶⁹⁹ EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Vastseliina kogudusega, 15.02.1938.

⁷⁰⁰ EELKKA 1-1-232, 13.06.1934.

⁷⁰¹ See visitation notes from 1938 in EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Vastseliina kogudusega.

⁷⁰² EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Vastseliina kogudusega.

⁷⁰³ Plank s.a., 162-163.

⁷⁰⁴ See visitation notes from 1938 in EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Vastseliina kogudusega.

⁷⁰⁵ Plank s.a., 18 and 31.

ners expressing their trust towards Ermits.⁷⁰⁶ Many of his supporters lived arguably in remote parts of the parish (Kahkva, Misso and Orava) and simply did not believe the stories about his indecent behaviour, as they had never witnessed it themselves.⁷⁰⁷ Ermits was given a second chance, despite having resisted violently his expulsion from Vastseliina.⁷⁰⁸ In 1940–48, he served in Elva, and in 1951–52 in Sangaste and Laatre congregations.

Meanwhile, **Uno Plank** (lived 1902–2001) had arrived in Vastseliina as an assistant clergyman in June 1939. As Ermits was often absent, the main burden of the work was on the shoulders of the assistant. After the departure of Ermits, Plank was elected as the new pastor of Vastseliina in 1940, and continued to serve there till 1944. Then he escaped to the West, continuing his pastoral work in Germany and, since 1950, in the USA. Plank was also prolific author of spiritual literature. Besides that, he published memoirs that also covered his years in Vastseliina.⁷⁰⁹

Finally, it should be noted that while all the pastors during the interwar period in Vastseliina were Estonians, the national question was still evoked on several occasions. First, it was sometimes emphasized that one of Aunverdt's virtues was that he was the first ethnic Estonian pastor in the parish. Therefore, he was also allegedly more interested in the history of the parish, while his predecessors did not care about studying it because their flock was of different nationality.⁷¹⁰ Later, the national question was exploited in the internal conflicts of the congregation. So, after the death of Aunverdt, it was argued in liberal nationalist daily *Postimees* that in order to enliven the life of the congregation, it was necessary to elect an Estonian pastor, and hinted that some of the lay leaders would prefer a German one instead.⁷¹¹ Pastor Ermits, in turn, argued later that one of his main opponents in the congregation, *köster* Matisson, was, in fact, pro-German.⁷¹²

⁷⁰⁶ Plank s.a., 18. However, among council members, only three supported Ermits, while 14 were against him. See EELKKA, Eduard Ermitsa isikutoimik, Vastseliina visitatsiooniprotokoll (25.06.1939).

⁷⁰⁷ Plank s.a., 31.

⁷⁰⁸ ERA 14-2-1228, p. 80-86. EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Vastseliina kogudusega, 11.12.1939.

⁷⁰⁹ Plank s.a.

⁷¹⁰ *Wõru Teataja*, 12.05.1921, p. 2.

⁷¹¹ *Postimees*, 02.11.1927, p. 2.

⁷¹² EELKKA 1-3-73, 15.12.1938.

Referendum Results

Table 8. Results of the Referendum on Religious Instruction in Public Primary Schools in Vastseliina Parish (17.02.–19.02.1923).

Commune	Polling station	Turnout (%)	Support for religious instruction (%)
Lasva	Vallamaja	72.8	66.1
	Tiitsmanni	84.6	73.3
	Madala	92.9	74.4
Loosi	Loosi	83.4	88.4
	Tobina	64.7	84.5
Misso	Vallamaja	87.1	91.0
	Napi	86.2	91.2
Orava	Vallamaja	73.8	89.3
	Luuska	73.7	93.8
	Hanikase	77.3	81.8
	Sepasaare	71.1	80.5
Vastseliina	Vallamaja	71.1	76.4
	Kapera	88.5	92.0
	Tsäpsi	87.7	97.7
	Tsiistre	83.8	91.0

Source: own calculations, based on minutes of electoral commissions (ERA 80-1-1984).

As seen, both the turnout and support for religious instruction were high almost everywhere in the parish. Only in Lasva commune was the latter below the national average. There were no major internal deviations across the communes. Only the surroundings of the commune house in both Lasva and Vastseliina communes showed slightly weaker support for religious instruction than elsewhere in those communes.

Religious Life

In 1938 visitation, it was claimed that “Vasteliina congregation is vigorous and is among our largest and most even congregations.”⁷¹³ On the other hand, the history of Vastseliina parish in the interwar years also provides some evidence of how the pastor’s personality made an impact on the people’s ties with the church.

Individual Practice

The general assessment of people at that time was that Vastseliina people were close to the church (*kiriklikud*)⁷¹⁴ and the southernmost commune Misso is sometimes referred to as especially pious. A local Bolshevik, Alfred Kikkas, men-

⁷¹³ „Vastseliina kogudus on elujõuline ja kuulub meie suuremate ja ühtlasemate koguduste hulka,” EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Vastseliina kogudusega, visitatsiooni protokoll 1938.

⁷¹⁴ Plank s.a., 69.

tioned in his reminiscences that due to the backwardness of Misso, religious gatherings were main social events there and religious explanations about the world widely believed. So, the outbreak of the First World War was interpreted as a punishment for sins by the locals. However, some younger people were already less influenced by religion.⁷¹⁵

In his report for 1924, the pastor claimed that in the mid-summer 500–700 people and in the winter 200–500 people attended church on regular Sundays. During feast days, the attendance was, according to him, at least 2000 and in cemetery festivities, even 10,000 people.⁷¹⁶ On the other hand, the congregation was extraordinarily big, and, in fact, regular worshippers constituted only about 5% of Lutherans in the parish; this indicator was not higher than in other parishes of Southern Estonia. However, in Vastseliina, many people lived so far away from the parish church that it was very hard for them to attend weekly. In 1924, the pastor visited eleven school buildings in the remote parts of the parish but was able to do it only twice a year.⁷¹⁷ However, at other times, local schoolteachers used to arrange religious gatherings in some of those. Alternatively, in case schoolteachers were not active enough, the locals helped themselves. According to a newspaper report from Tsiistre, the teachers held religious meetings only a couple of times in a year, which prompted dissatisfaction of locals. Herrnhutians, on the other hand, arranged several weekly prayer meetings in different homesteads.⁷¹⁸ In 1932, Misso Meeting House Society (*Misso Palvemaja Ühing*) was founded.⁷¹⁹ Thanks to the donations of locals, but also on behalf of the church and the state, a new meeting house was erected in Misso. After its consecration in 1939, religious services were regularly held there by the local school headmaster Kotleb Pärg and occasionally also by the pastor of Vastseliina.⁷²⁰

So, in the case of Vastseliina, the overall percentage of weekly worshippers was presumably much higher than those attending the church. Also, adhering to baptisms, confirmations, as well as church weddings and burials seems to have been common. The preference for civil registration over church rites was never mentioned as a worrying issue in visitation minutes or annual reports.⁷²¹

However, churchliness did not necessarily mean the high relevance of religion in daily life. A student who was collecting material heritage for Eesti Rahva Muuseum in Vastseliina in 1920, noted that a lot of people used to go to church, but it was not necessarily for religious reasons: “Old people appear to be fairly religious, but the church is rather a place to go somewhere on Sunday. /.../ Young

⁷¹⁵ Kikkas 1933, 22.

⁷¹⁶ EELKKA, Võru praostkonna aruanded, Vastseliina koguduse aruanne 1924.

⁷¹⁷ EELKKA, Võru praostkonna aruanded, Vastseliina koguduse aruanne 1924.

⁷¹⁸ Elu, 21.03.1934, p. 3.

⁷¹⁹ EAA 1205-1-284, p. 228.

⁷²⁰ <https://vastseliina.eelk.ee/ajalugu/misso-kirik/>. 13.07.2022.

⁷²¹ In 1924, pastor Aunverdt noted that there was only one unbaptized child known in the parish, whose father „had once read Marx”. EELKKA, Võru praostkonna aruanded, Vastseliina koguduse aruanne 1924.

people come to the church just to meet each other and talk.”⁷²² Schoolteacher Kristjan Seim from Tsiistre complained, in turn, in a conference dedicated to children and youth work in the deanery in 1935: “Large numbers of people visit churches and meetinghouses, but there are few serious believers.”⁷²³ Finally, also *köster* Mattisson marked in the report of the congregation in 1927 that common praying in the families had not ceased entirely in the parish, but probably only a few families held prayers daily. The Bible could be found in virtually all households, and in some of them, it was read frequently. But generally, there was no demand for other religious literature.⁷²⁴

Finally, it is important to note that the controversies over pastor Ermits seem to have also influenced participation in collective religious practices, even though competing claims were made on it both by the supporters and opponents of Ermits. For example, in 1931, the congregation council tried to refute the claims that few people had attended the Bible feast, and many were considering leaving for Rõuge or Petseri congregations. The council claimed that, to the contrary, there were relatively many people in the church even in case of unfavourable weather conditions. And during major feasts, some people had to remain outside due to lack of space.⁷²⁵

However, the remarkable decline of the number of communicants seems to indicate that the dubious reputation of Ermits had indeed a harmful effect on the people’s ties with the church in Vastseliina. According to the data of annual reports, the number of those who partook of the Holy Communion was especially low when there was no permanent pastor in Vastseliina (around 2600 people in 1919 and 1927–28). After Ermits came to serve the congregation, the number initially rose to more than 3000 people, but since 1932 declined consistently. For the year 1939, it had almost halved to 1753.⁷²⁶

Unlike in some neighbouring parishes (notably Räpina), there were only few complaints about the moral integrity of Vastseliina people in the annual reports of the pastors. Aunverdt mentions only excessive drinking as a plight⁷²⁷ and Ermits did usually not even address the issues of morality. Of course, it does not necessarily mean that parishioners were observing closely the religious and moral guidelines of the church; often, such assessments are very subjective, depending on the dispositions of particular pastors. But there are also some interesting accounts of that in some memoirs. According to some, at least at the end of the

⁷²² „Vanad inimesed on näha kaunis usklikud, aga kirik on rohkem selle jaoks, et vaja ikka pühapäeval kuhugi minna. /.../ Noored inimesed tulevad kiriku juure lihtsalt selleks, et üks-teisega kokku saada ja juttu vesta.” ERM TA 253, p. 12.

⁷²³ “Kirikuid, palvelaid külastavad suured inimhulgad aga tõsiseid usklikke neid on vähe.” EAA 1205-1-285, p. 118.

⁷²⁴ EAA 1250-1-131, p. 81.

⁷²⁵ Võru Teataja, 27.10.1931, p. 1.

⁷²⁶ For detailed data, see the appendix.

⁷²⁷ As related to the opening of an alcohol shop near the church: EELKKA, Võru praostkonna aruanded 1925, Vastseliina koguduse aruanne. Cf. Kikas 1933, 22.

Tsarist era, the observance of Sunday was common.⁷²⁸ As for sexual behaviour, there is a rare testimony from Arvo Pilt: “Even when I was a bachelor, I slept several nights with girls, but I did not dare, I was ashamed to want anything more than to hug, to cuddle and, if I liked it, also to kiss. Maybe the reason, why I was modest about it, lied in a bad habit when I was a bachelor, in case of the urge to satisfy myself with a hand, which disappeared after marriage. At that time, girls were also modest, fearing loss of honour.”⁷²⁹ Finally, however, he developed a relationship with a servant girl, who (falsely, as it later turned out) claimed to have got pregnant from him. Pilt then decided to marry her despite his family and relatives being strongly against it. The couple went to meet the pastor to arrange the wedding but chose a different path to the church than usual, to avoid being noticed by village people, which would have fuelled rumours.⁷³⁰ This account seems to indicate that in Vastseliina peasants generally shared strong denouncement of pre-marital sex as preached by the pastors. However, as there is no more evidence on that, no firm conclusions can be drawn.⁷³¹

Congregational Life

Aunverdt had also re-introduced local services in remote parts of the big parish (*kolgapühad*) and began to arrange annual services which were directed particularly to widows, unmarried young men, unmarried young women, etc. These proved popular among the parishioners.⁷³² The same was true for regular Bible study meetings in the pastorate.⁷³³

In 1925, Aunverdt initiated the foundation of Charitable Society of Vastseliina Congregation (*Vastseliina Koguduse Häätegev Selts*). According to the bylaws, its main goal was to help the needy and provide healthcare and education for the poor, as well as promoting healthcare, religious and moral values.⁷³⁴ According to the 1927 report, the congregation regularly supported 25 poor people.⁷³⁵ The society resumed its activities after the death of Aunverdt; according to annual reports of the dean, it was the only of its kind in the deanery. But as few accounts have been left about it, its activities were probably not very lively.

⁷²⁸ ERM KV 830:1/1-274, p. 155.

⁷²⁹ “Poissmehe ajalgi sai mitme tütarlapse juures ööd magatud, kuid ei julgenud, häbenesin midagi tahta rohkem kui sülelda, kaisuta ja kui meeldis siis ka suudelda. Võib-olla sellepärast olin selles tagasihoidlik, et mul oli poissmehe eas halb harjumus, kui tung oli ise end käega rahustada, mis peale abielu kadus. Ka olid tüdrukud tol ajal tagasihoidlikud, kartes au lange-mist.” EKLA f. 342 M 133: 957, p. 80.

⁷³⁰ EKLA f. 342: M 133: 957, p. 78.

⁷³¹ Besides that, there is also an account about mocking a boy for being born out of wedlock in Pugola primary school, see Salum 2005, 42.

⁷³² Meie Kirik, 07.07.1923, p. 213–214. They are mentioned also in the reports of the congregation from 1924 and 1925 (see EELKKA, Võru praostkonna aruanded).

⁷³³ EAA 1250-1-131, p. 81.

⁷³⁴ Võrumaa: maadeteaduslik, tulunduslik... 1926, 138; ERA 14-9-1005.

⁷³⁵ EAA 1250-1-131, p. 80v.

Finally, it is worth of notice that Aunverdt made also research on the history of the parish and presented its results in a lecture. Võru Teataja reported that even more people came to listen to it than sometimes attended Sunday services.⁷³⁶

As for the Ermits era, there is little evidence about activities besides regular services in annual reports, local newspapers, and other sources. However, in the conference for children and youth work of Võru deanery in 1935, Ermits claimed that children's services were held regularly during summer. He complained about a lack of people willing to do children's work, but even so, Sunday schools were allegedly operating in different parts of the parish, led by local schoolteachers. A teacher from Tsiistre, Kristjan Seim, seems to have put this account under doubt, claiming that, in fact, religious life in the parish was at a standstill (*sorgus*).⁷³⁷

In conclusion, Vastseliina was a parish where old forms of ecclesiastical life, such as Sunday services and local religious meetings, had remained relatively viable. There were also attempts to introduce new forms, such as youth work and church-related associational life.

Autobiographical Sources

The Churchly Majority. Like in Estonia overall, also in Vastseliina religious topics are rare in memoirs and autobiographical writings from that time. Most commonly, church feasts and rites are mentioned in passing. Religious practises are referred to only briefly, such as uttering of the Lord's Prayer before the anticipated death, by a soldier in 1944 (but he survived).⁷³⁸ Occasionally, God was referred to in explaining life events. So according to **Voldemar Rannaste** (1925–2000), her mother had once explained her deportation to Siberia by Soviets as a God's punishment for sticking out eyes in the portrait of Tsar Nicholas II during the revolutionary days in 1917, when she was 10–11 years old.⁷³⁹ In a similar vein, when **Arvo Pilt** (1895–1989) returned from the First World War, his uncle's wife attributed his survival to an act of mercy he gave to kittens during his childhood. Namely, his father had intended to kill those by drowning, but the son rescued them.⁷⁴⁰

Peculiar to Vastseliina is that several people who grew up in the first half of the 20th century refer positively to Christian values, upbringing and worldview, which were allegedly inherent to their families. For example: “Young people of today forget that we have been brought up in the light of Christian culture, which means that our banner is honesty, respect for other people, hard work, etc. /.../ Please excuse my poor sentence structure, I am a mathematician. Maybe someone happens to read this text (occasionally) 100 years later and learns that Estonians

⁷³⁶ Võru Teataja, 12.05.1921, p. 2.

⁷³⁷ EAA 1205-1-285, p. 118v.

⁷³⁸ Ruus 2007, 31.

⁷³⁹ EKLA f. 350 M 1:413, p. 73. Rannastes's mother was an Orthodox Setu, i.e. not originally from Vastseliina parish. Rannaste himself does not comment on the plausibility of the explanation.

⁷⁴⁰ EKLA f. 342 M 133: 957, p. 10-11. Ironically, Pilt was, in his youth, a passionate hunter. He admits having killed a lot of animals just for fun.

were hardworking, honest, respectful of other people and with a Christian culture.”⁷⁴¹

Arvo Pilt also emphasizes good interpersonal relations in his family and attributes these to the Christian spirit. His experiences from the Tsarist army during the First World War reinforced his belief that religiosity makes good persons: “The soldiers got along with each other well, thefts were rare, as they were brought up religiously, and they wore a cross around their necks and prayed, crossing themselves.”⁷⁴²

The reminiscences of **Lehte Loos** (Pant) from Jeedasküla are interesting in two respects. First, she juxtaposes those who were close to the church with those who were keen on voluntary associations: “If my home was more church bound, then Kubana farm was in the opposite direction. The farm owner was a lively cultural figure. There, on the farm, they could have hay left in the rain, or potatoes in the furrow to be caught by the cold, but if they had to go to choir practice or do some other cultural activity, they did it with peace of mind.” Secondly, the pro-church stances of her family were mixed with rather peculiar conceptions of Christianity. Her references to religion are related, on the one hand, to adhering to customs and traditions and, on the other hand, coping with difficult life situations. A christening of a child is shortly mentioned by Loos as a beautiful, solemn event; the author and her sister came into the room in dirty clothes and got scolded by their mother. Besides that, it is mentioned in passing that at Christmas time, her family used to go to church. On a New Year’s Eve, the author prayed God that her mother’s health would improve in the upcoming year and also for alleviation of poverty. However, her mother died, but “promised that at heaven she would guide my fate, and it really is so. Everything I have undertaken in my life has been successful”.⁷⁴³

Interesting is also the case of **Ida Raudsepp** (1892–1969), a modest and uneducated farmwoman as she describes herself. In her memoirs (written in Soviet times and not for publication), she describes vividly everyday life and historical events in her native Orava, referring almost never to religious topics. However, in some of her poems, there are references to God. In one of them, written in 1951, after being deported to Siberia, she calls for God as her only hope in these

⁷⁴¹ “[P]raegused noored unustavad, et meid on kasvatatud kristliku kultuuri valguses, see tähendab, et meie lipukirjaks on ausus, teisest inimesest lugupidamine, töökus jne. /.../ Palun vabandada mu kehva lauseehitust, olen matemaatik. Ehk loeb keegi 100 a. pärast (juhuslikult) seda kirjutist ja saab teada, et eestlane oli töukas, aus, teisest inimesest lugupidav ja kristliku kultuuriga.” EKLA f. 350 M 1:856 (Juta Kisand-Saral).

⁷⁴² “Soldatite läbisaamine omavahel oli hea, vargusi oli vähe, olid nad ju kasvatatud usklikult, kandsid kaelas risti ja palvetasid risti ette heites.” EKLA f. 342 M 133: 957, p. 57.

⁷⁴³ „Kui minu kodus hoiti rohkem kiriku poole, siis Kubana pool oli see vastusuunaline. Peremees oli erkas kultuuritegelane. Siin talus võis jääda hein vihma kätte, kartulid vaku külma võtta, kuid kui tuli minna laulukoori harjutusele või mõnda muud kultuuritegevust harrastama, siis mindi südamerahuga./.../ Mamma lubas mu käekäiku juhtida ka taevast ja tõesti see on nii. Kõik, mis ma oma elus olen ette võtnud, on hästi õnnestunud.” EKLA f. 350: M 1:1117.

hardships to help her in the coming year.⁷⁴⁴ And in 1963, back in the homeland, Raudsepp thanked God in the verses written on the occasion of her 50th wedding anniversary.⁷⁴⁵

Closeness to the church, based on traditions, can also be found in some memoirs of people who grew up at the beginning of Soviet period: “While talking to Uno about the church, he says that their family has always gone to church and respected the road to church. It has been part of their family’s upbringing and world view.”⁷⁴⁶ In the latter case, it is not clear how important were religion and church in his daily life. Pilt, however, while appreciating church and Christianity, admits that he was not an avid practitioner. This may be rather common for Vastseliina.

The Pious. In fact, in several cases, autobiographical sources make clear distinction between the majority of people who simply used to go to church and those who were more dedicated to religion.

What made the pious minority different from the others? Arvo Pilt, writing about his grandmother, remembers: “The people of Sokka were tall, light-skinned, good-natured, fully religious people who went to church every Sunday. Grandmother was also brought up in this spirit, and she also brought up her children in the Christian spirit. Grandfather was modest about it.”⁷⁴⁷ In fact, he once swore when being drunk, which staggered the child who had been told by the religious women that swearing was a sin.⁷⁴⁸

One member of this spectacularly pious family, Pilt’s mother’s sister Liisa, played an important role in his life, first taking care of his Christian upbringing and later remaining an understanding and comforting motherly figure for him to the end of her days. She was adamant about going to church every Sunday, even if it meant walking more than 30 kilometres forth and back. She also used to attribute religious meanings to different life events and important decisions, for example, by singing a church hymn when he had to decide about accepting a suitor.⁷⁴⁹ When young Pilt had stolen money, Liisa went to return it to the owner and afterwards read to the child a cautionary story from the Bible about stealing.⁷⁵⁰

There are other accounts of piety associated with being a good person in a book about people from Tsiistre: “His father often read the Bible, and was fair,

⁷⁴⁴ Raudsepp 2003, 141.

⁷⁴⁵ Raudsepp 2003, 160.

⁷⁴⁶ „Kui Uunoga kirikust rääkida, siis lausub ta, et nende peres on ikka kirikus käidud ja kirikuteed au sees peetud. See on kuulunud nende pere kasvatuse ja maailmakäsitluse juurde.” Ruus 2007, 43.

⁷⁴⁷ “Sokka rahvas oli pikakasuline, valge verrega, hea loomuga, täisusklikud inimesed, kes iga pühapäev olid kirikuskäijad. Ka vanaema oli selles kasvatatud ja ta kasvatatas ka omad lapsed kristlikus vaimus. Vanaisa oli selles tagasihoidlik.” EKLA f. 342 M 133: 957, p. 57, p. 6. It is important to note that Pilt was born in 1895, so his childhood reminiscences date back to the earlier time than the time frame of this study.

⁷⁴⁸ EKLA f. 342 M 133: 957, p. 4.

⁷⁴⁹ EKLA f. 342: M 133: 957 p. 9.

⁷⁵⁰ EKLA f. 342: M 133: 957, p. 13.

helpful, and kept his word. Once, when it started to rain, he even interrupted gathering his own hay and went to help a female neighbour who had asked for help in the same matter. Later, he explained that he acted according to the order of the highest Creator”.⁷⁵¹

But being pious might also mean contempt towards all things labelled secular. Oskar Parmas, a student who was doing research on local dialects, remembered in 1922 that he met a 71-year-old woman who spoke a very pure local dialect, but unfortunately was pious and therefore not willing to tell any secular stories.⁷⁵²

However, some authors of memoirs describe pious people as weird, naïve and old-fashioned. For example, **Feliks Kraani** (1927–2022), a would-be school headmaster of Misso describes his grandmother: “She was very pious. In the evenings, she often sang songs of God’s Word and read the scriptures. She also tried to raise us children in the spirit of the word of God, but it did not stick to us. While tending the flock, she showed us the clouds and said that the angels were sitting on the cloud and moved their little wings. We laughed at that because we knew very well what clouds were made of. Once tending the flock, a swarm of bees flew over our heads. Grandmother said: “Hear the children, choirs of angels sing beautifully in heaven!” She once sent me to Sunday school with my brother Ruudi. It was led by a lame old maid. She made us, the children, kneel on the floor and began to read the scriptures herself. We, naughty boys, pinched the bottoms of the girls kneeling in front, but they began to squeal. We were reprimanded and quickly got out of there. Grandmother sent us there several more times on the following Sundays. We found other activity we really liked. We went to the forest to look for bird nests and chase butterflies. So it happened that this first time of attending Sunday school remained also the last. Apart from my grandmother, there were no believers in our family.”⁷⁵³ And **Johannes Saarniit**

⁷⁵¹ „[T]ema isa luges tihti Piiblit, oli õiglane, abivalmis ja sõnapidaja. Kord vihma tulekul jätnud isegi omade heinte kokkupaneku pooleli ja läinud samas asjas abi palunud naabrinaisele appi. Hiljem seletanud, et toiminud vastavalt kõrgeima Looja käsule.” Niilo 2010, 25.

⁷⁵² Parmas 1923, 48.

⁷⁵³ „Oli väga jumalakartlik. Õhtuti laulis tihti jumalasõna laule ja luges pühakirja. Meid, lapsi, püüdis ka jumalasõna vaimus kasvatada, kuid meile ei jäänud see külge. Karjas olles näitas ta meile pilvi ja ütles, et inglised istuvad pilve peal ja liigutavad tiivakesi. Me naersime selle peale, sest teadsime väga hästi, millest pilved koosnevad. Korra karjas olles lendas mesilas-sülem üle meie peade. Vanaema ütles: „Kullõlgõ, latsõkõsõ, inglikoori’ lalva’ ilostõ taivan!” Korra saatis ta mind koos vend Ruudiga pühapäevakooli. Seda juhatas üks lonkav vanatüdruk. Tema sättis meid, lapsi, põrandale põlvili ja ise hakkas pühakirja lugema. Meie, koerad poisid, näpistasime ees põlvitavaid tüdrukuid tagumikust, aga need panid kiljuma. Meie saime noomida ja lasksime sealt kiiresti jalga. Vanaema saatis meid sinna veel mitmel järgmisel pühapäeval. Meie leidsime endale meeldiva tegevuse. Läksime metsa linnupesi otsima ja liblikaid taga ajama. Nii jäigi meile seekordne pühapäevakoolis käimine esimeseks ja viimaseks. Peale vanaema meie peres usklikke ei olnud.” Kraani 2012, 7–8. Notably, quotation of Kraani’s grandmother is in local dialect – quite possibly to highlight her backwardness. Also, remarkable is Kraani’s usage of word “believer” (*usklik*), which here seems to indicate simply a spectacularly pious person. It does not probably mean that the other family members were irreligious.

(1898–1995), later an active member and organist of the Vastseliina congregation, admits in his memoirs that he did not like his grandmother, who was obsessed with religion, constantly praying, sighing and bemoaning as well as regarding laughter and happy mood to be a sin.⁷⁵⁴

Finally, also **Voldemar Ilja** (1922–2010), speaking in an interview about the 1930s, notes that pious people were different from the rest. However, he emphasizes entirely different characteristics: “When I grew older, it was also interesting to meet the members of the Herrnhutian society who visited our farm. They were people of a different spirit and culture, and therefore interesting. /.../ All of them were very versatile and educated people. Peeter Sink, for example, was a very versatile man; he studied in “Pallas” with Viiralt and wrote poems. /.../ Eugen Tanner, for example, knew many languages and persuaded me to learn languages too.”⁷⁵⁵

To sum up, while people in Vastseliina were generally characterized as “churchly”, there were also those who stood out as being more pious than the rest. While for the majority, religion became important on special occasions and in times of hardship, for the pious, it was constantly referred to in daily matters. They spent more time practising religion but also behaved differently. The “pious” may be described both in positive terms as spectacularly kind and unselfish people, but also in negatively as weird, naïve, dull, or old-fashioned. It is noteworthy that they are so often mentioned in different kinds of autobiographical writings from Vastseliina. On the other hand, according to the pastor Aunverdt, they did not constitute a “core” of the congregation (*ecclesiola in ecclesia*) as Herrnhutian circles used to do in Northern Estonia.⁷⁵⁶

Ambiguous Anticlericalism/Irreligion. Besides “churchly” and especially pious people, there were also subscribers of theologically liberal Protestantline Ilm in the parish⁷⁵⁷ and also some very few individuals who were “radically against the faith”, as was admitted in an annual report.⁷⁵⁸ There are also some interesting accounts of such people in autobiographical sources. For example, **Karl Prants** (1865–1937) had, according to Johannes Saarniit, read extensively and had been disposed strongly against the Russian Emperor, capitalists, lords of the manor, and also the church. He had founded a private library and lent its books

⁷⁵⁴ ERM KV 830:1/1-274, p. 75.

⁷⁵⁵ Voldemar Ilja later became a pastor and scholar of the history of the Herrnhutian movement in Estonia. The persons whom Ilja mentions by name were visiting preachers who were not inhabitants of Vastseliina parish. “Pallas” was a renowned art school in Tartu, and Eduard Viiralt (1898–1954) was one of the most widely known graphic artists in Estonia. “Suuremaks sirgudes oli huvitav kokkupuude ka vennastekoguduse liikmetega, kes meie talus käisid. Nad olid teistsuguse vaimu ja kultuuriga inimesed ning seega huvitavad. /.../ Kõik nad olid väga mitmekülgsed ja haritud inimesed. Peeter Sink näiteks oli väga mitmekülgne mees, õppis “Pallases” koos Viiraltiga, kirjutas luuletusi. /.../ Eugen Tanner näiteks oskas palju keeli ja ahvatles ka mind keeli õppima.” Koppel 2000, 4.

⁷⁵⁶ EELKKA, Võru praostkonna aruanne 1924, Vastseliina koguduse aruanne.

⁷⁵⁷ Meie Kirik, 14.01.1925, p. 14.

⁷⁵⁸ EAA 1250-1-131, p. 81.

to the locals for a small fee. Karl Parts's half-brother Hindrik Prants (1858–1932), a well-known Estonian literate, was, to the contrary, a deeply religious person.⁷⁵⁹

Pastor Uno Plank wrote about another “big opponent of church and God”. That person allegedly used to use derogatory language about pastors, called upon burning the books of the Bible and hymnals, and made anti-religious propaganda among confirmands and during major feast days among those who were entering the church. The reasons are not mentioned but were probably linked to her left-wing convictions.⁷⁶⁰ But when she was dying, she asked for the pastor to come to give her Holy Communion. She also asked for forgiveness for her sins and announced that she wanted a religious burial.⁷⁶¹

Similarly, an ambiguous attitude towards the church is evident in the memoirs of **Ants Salum** (1923–2012).⁷⁶² On the one hand, he claims that their whole family are “atheists” and have nothing to do with religion (p. 32). On the other hand, he admits that during his childhood, his mother would sing him as a lullaby a well-known Estonian religious song “*Kalla, kallis isa käsi*” (p. 9). Also, after the death of his brother, their mother “felt the need for the church”, and so they attended with their whole family Christmas service in the local meeting house, which they had never done before (p. 32). And finally, Salum also found out, to his surprise, from his secondary school diaries that he himself had occasionally called upon the help of “Heavenly Father” at that time – probably influenced by his teacher of religion, the pastor Arnold Graf of Võru (p. 53–54).

Intergenerational Differences. Several sources from the parish hint at inter-generational differences in religiosity. Notably, in the memoir of **Lembit Pütsep** (born 1924) it is particularly emphasized that older generations were more religious and closer to the church. References to religion and church are there, as a rule, associated with his grandfather Jaan Pütsep, a patriarchal figure. He was a *võõrmünder*, and therefore, having the authority to baptize children he also baptized all his grandchildren, including Lembit. On Sundays, grandfather used to go to church. It was a festive occasion; he wore a hat and tie, a horse that had been spared of hard work was harnessed to the carriage, and both the horse and the carriage had to be clean. On occasion, when he did not go to church, grandfather read the Bible at home. In that case, the child had to sit on another side of the table and listen to the reading: “I often became impatient, and then Grandpa sent punishing looks at me through his wire-rimmed glasses, while he himself continued to read. I sighed and tried to be quiet. Since then, I remember well the story of the prodigal son in the Bible.”⁷⁶³ Grandfather also considered working on Sundays as a grave sin, which was permissible only in exceptional circum-

⁷⁵⁹ ERM KV 830:1/1-274, p. 76.

⁷⁶⁰ Her son Osvald Kenk was the head of the commune administration in 1940–41 during the first year of Soviet occupation. In 1941, he was killed by German occupants.

⁷⁶¹ Plank 1989, 87–88.

⁷⁶² Salum 2005.

⁷⁶³ „Muutusin sageli kärsituks ja siis saatis Papa üle traatprillide minu poole karistavaid pilke, ise samal ajal jätkates lugemist. Ohkasin ja püüdsin olla vagusi. Sellest ajast mäletan hästi kadunud poja lugu piiblis.” Pütsep 2005.

stances. But for the child, Good Friday was an especially unpleasant day because he had to be quiet all day. Therefore, this day always seemed to be very long. (p. 40–41)

However, when grandfather and grandmother went to the church, the younger generations felt released because they could now do everything that the patriarchal head of the family usually had forbidden: “Pancakes were baked, and other delicacies were prepared. All these mischiefs were accompanied by laughter, joy and being happy. When the cat is away, the mice will play! The daughters-in-law, Nete, Neti and Pauliine, had a sense of being conspirators. It was made clear to me, under threat of severe punishment, that I must keep my mouth shut. And I did. Grandpa and Granma, in my opinion, understood all this, but very tactfully did not raise any objections to the reduced level of cream in the firkins and other things. I remember that once Grandpa only warned us not to go too far! I think they knew what was being done at home in the meantime and maybe they even liked it. The young will always behave like young, and they were their daughters-in-law.”⁷⁶⁴

Also, the memoirs of Arvo Pilt contain several insights into the difficulties of religious socialization of the youth. Pilt’s pious aunt, who lived with their family, had instilled deep piety in him; in his childhood faith, fear of Satan appears to have had a prominent place. But when she married and left for her new home, “other interests prevailed”, and Pilt ceased to pray. He was also reluctant to go to church as a young man despite the permanent insistence of his father.⁷⁶⁵

Relations with the Orthodox

In a solidly Lutheran parish, almost all encounters with other faiths were related to Russians and Setus, living mostly east of the parish. Setus is an ethnic group residing in the border areas of what is now South-Western Estonia and the Pskov oblast of the Russian Federation. Their language was close to neighbouring Lutheran Estonians of Võrumaa, but they were Orthodox and culturally close to Russians.⁷⁶⁶ Yet at the beginning of the 20th century, Setus were living largely in the pre-modern world, having strong Orthodox affiliation combined with little knowledge about the teachings of the church.⁷⁶⁷

In some, though not all, newspaper reports, descriptive overviews of that time and later autobiographical writings, close communication between people of

⁷⁶⁴ „Küpsetati pannkooke ja valmistati muud suupärast. Kõige nende üleannetustega koos käis naer, lust ja rõõmus olemine. Mis siis hiirtel viga elada, kui kass kodust ära on! Miniad, Nete, Neti ja Pauliine, tundsid enid [sic!] olevat vandeseltslased. Mulle tehti suure karistuse ähvardusel selgeks, et pean oma suu kinni pidama. Ja pidasingi. Papa ja Mamma said, minu arvates, sellest kõigest aru, kuid väga taktitundeliselt ei tehtud etteheiteid vähenenud koorepüttide taseme ja muu kohta. Mäletan, et kord Papa ainult hoiatas, et ärge te siin mitte liiale minge! Arvan, et nad teadsid, mis kodus vahepeal tehakse ja võib-olla see nendele isegi meeldis. Noored jäävad alati noorteks ja nad olid ju nende miniad.” (Pütsep 2005, 43–44).

⁷⁶⁵ EKLA f. 342: M 133: 957.

⁷⁶⁶ Jääts and Kannike 1998; Remmel 2006, 35.

⁷⁶⁷ Kalkun 2015.

Vastseliina and neighbouring Setus are referred to. The attitude of Estonians was paternalistic towards Setus, who were seen as poor and non-educated but well-tempered. Relatively few communal contacts and mixed marriages occurred, but sometimes there were cordial relations on a personal level.⁷⁶⁸

Attempts had been made by Estonian activists, and since 1920 supported by state authorities, to “awaken” Setus to Estonian national consciousness and modern “civilized” life. This approach also prevailed in newspaper accounts on Luhamaa at that time.⁷⁶⁹ Reforming church life by introducing services in Estonian and adopting Gregorian calendar was seen as a key part of integrating Setus,⁷⁷⁰ while rivalries between the Estonian and Setu parts of Misso commune were also mentioned in newspapers.⁷⁷¹

In the sources of the Lutheran church, the relations with Orthodox Setus are rarely mentioned, as though they were even not living in the vicinity. Only once did pastor Aunverdt mention in his annual report that in general “there were no troubles with Setus”, but stealing was still rather widespread among them.⁷⁷² Mentioning of Setus in Lutheran sources often occurs in the context of serving Lutheran Estonian settlers who had moved to the areas of Setus. There were complaints that Estonians tended to mix with Setus, adopting also their allegedly inferior cultural and moral standards. Therefore, the need to satisfy their spiritual needs was emphasized. Vastseliina pastors were initially responsible for serving the Lutheran diaspora, going four times a year to hold service in Lazarevo.⁷⁷³

There were no persistent ambitions to convert Setus into Lutheran faith. Even so, they probably had more encounters with Lutherans in the interwar years than before. Notably, pastors participated alongside the Orthodox clergymen in some of the public ceremonies, for example, in the opening of Pankjavitsa school⁷⁷⁴ and the War of Independence monument in Pankjavitsa.⁷⁷⁵ According to one newspaper report, during the consecration of Jaaska school Setus were curious about Lutheran hymns and speech of consecration.⁷⁷⁶ According to another, Lutheran Russian-language services in Petseri proved popular among them.⁷⁷⁷

Generally, pastor Plank’s impressions of the Setus’ attitude towards Lutherans were similar. He claims that several Setu women converted to the Lutheran church because they were married to Estonian Lutheran men, but there were only rare cases of Orthodox men marrying Lutheran women. Allegedly, also the confirmation ceremony was so attractive for some Setu girls that it led to conversion

⁷⁶⁸ Remmel 2006, 152-156.

⁷⁶⁹ Võru Teataja, 19.11.1925, p. 3; Postimees, 05.05.1927, p. 5.

⁷⁷⁰ Võru Teataja, 06.06.1925, p. 1.

⁷⁷¹ Võru Teataja, 13.02.1930, p. 2.

⁷⁷² EELKKA, Võru praostkonna aruanded 1924, Vastseliina koguduse aruanne.

⁷⁷³ Ristirahwa Pühapäevaleht, 18.04.1908, p. 123; 24.04.1908, p. 131.

⁷⁷⁴ Kaja, 09.09.1931, p. 4.

⁷⁷⁵ Sakala, 07.10.1935, p. 2.

⁷⁷⁶ Lõuna-Eesti, 01.11.1924, p. 1-2.

⁷⁷⁷ Eesti Kirik, 12.04.1928, p. 119. Apparently, services in Russian were held there for only a short while.

to Lutheran faith. Most of Setus, however, were reluctant to convert, but quite a few were curious about the Lutheran faith: “There was a strange thing with Setus. When I held weekly services in some Lutheran farms located in the area of Setu villages, Setu women also came to this prayer service. /.../ Once I asked a *vöör-münder* of this part of the parish and a member of the council, why Setu women sit or stand in the back rows? His answer surprised me: “They are afraid and think that if they are near a Lutheran pastor, they will be baptized to the Lutheran faith.” In future weekly services in the Setu region, I explained that there was no “rebaptism”. To do this, they have to express their desire. If they do not, they still hold on to their faith, even though they attend Lutheran services. Over time, they began to trust me and their participation in the weekly services during Advent and Lent increased considerably. Many had said that, look, your “priest” explains the word of God so clearly and comprehensibly. Ours never does.”⁷⁷⁸

There is a vague remark by a visiting student about taking over religious customs from the Orthodox: “In the church, I saw that whenever the church bell started to ring, people raised their hats. It was said that this custom came from the Russians. The Russians cross themselves when the church bells start ringing.”⁷⁷⁹ Besides that, there are no accounts of how Orthodox faith had influenced local Lutherans. Encounters with the Orthodox church and its customs are not very common in autobiographical writings from Vastseliina. These are described only in passing as exotic, and sometimes anecdotal remarks are made.⁷⁸⁰ But, as it seems, Setus were generally treated as somewhat inferior not because of their faith, but rather because of their poor educational and cultural standards. On the other hand, the low social status of Orthodox Setus and Russians did not make their faith attractive for Lutheran Estonians.

Public Role of the Church

Notably, in the 1920s, the congregation of Vastseliina issued several public statements on political issues – possibly on the initiative of its energetic pastor, Aunverdt. So, in 1925, when adopting the new law on religious associations was on the agenda, the following resolution was adopted: “The plenary assembly of

⁷⁷⁸ „Setudega oli imelik lugu. Kui ma pidasin nädalateenistusi mõnes luteriusulise talus, mis asus setu külade piirkonnas, tulid ka setu naised sellele palveteenistusele. /.../ Kord küsisin selle kandi vöörmündrilt ja nõukogu liikmelt, miks setu naised istuvad või seisavad tagumistes ridades? Ta vastus üllatas mind: „Nad kardavad ja arvavad, et kui nad on luteri õpetaja ligidal, siis nad on ristitud luteriusulisteks.” Edaspidistel nädalateenistustel setude piirkonnas seletasin, et ei toimu mingit „ümberristimist”. Selleks nad peavad ise soovi avaldama. Kui nad seda ei tee, jäävad nad ikka edasi oma usku, kuigi käivad luteriusuliste jumalateenistustel. Aegamööda hakkasid nad mind usaldama ja nende osavõtt nädalateenistustest adventi- ja kannatamisajal kasvas tunduvalt. Paljud olid ütelnud, et näete, teie “preester” seletab nii arusaadavalt ja selgelt jumalasõna. Meie oma ei tee seda kunagi.” Plank s.a., 79–80.

⁷⁷⁹ „Kiriku juures nägin ma et alati kui kiriku kell lööma hakas, mütsi kergitasid. Teati kõnelda, et see komme on tulnud venelaste käest. Venelased löövad risti ette kui kiriku kellad helisema hakkavad.” ERM TA 253, p. 12.

⁷⁸⁰ E.g. Kraani 2012, 24.

Vastseliina parish cannot approve the separation of church and state in principle because both institutions work for the benefit of the same people and naturally need each other's support." However, if the separation of church and state is inevitable, it should take place in conditions that take the interests of the church into account. The resolution enumerated several occasions when cooperation between state and church was perceived as desirable: "Public mentioning of the state in prayer during the service, explanations in confirmation teaching and sermons, celebration of anniversaries of the republic in the church, consecrating statues and buildings, *etc.*, participating in state ceremonies, harmonizing the keeping of church records with the wishes of the state, *etc.*" However, the church should refuse cooperation if the attitude of the state towards it is not decent [*korrektne*]. Also, the plenary assembly expressed its support for the unity of the church, denouncing the proposals to register particular congregations separately by the state.⁷⁸¹ This resolution, allegedly adopted unanimously by the meeting attended by 1000 parishioners, was referred to in the parliament by the representative of the Christian People's Party (*Kristlik Rahvaerakond*) as an example of the stance of the rural people of Estonia on the issue.⁷⁸²

Separation of the church and state also posed practical problems to the congregation itself. In 1921, arose a row over Pügola schoolhouse, as a part of it had been used for religious gatherings. There were an altar and organ in the room; local schoolteachers used to hold a religious service every Sunday, and once a year, the pastor visited the meetinghouse. When it was erected at the end of the 19th century, there was obviously no issue whether the building was a school or a meetinghouse. But when school had become essentially a secular institution, disagreements appeared. So, in 1921, the number of pupils had risen, and the commune administration decided to make use of a room, which, according to the congregation, was earlier used only for religious purposes. The reaction of the pastor Aunverdt was painful. He stated that the premises of the room designated for religious gatherings were desecrated and announced that no services might there be arranged anymore. The communion ware should be removed from Pügola "meetinghouse". The pastor also threatened to "excommunicate" the commune elder, meaning removing his name from the church registries.⁷⁸³ Later, the congregation decided to contest the decision of expropriation of the house from the congregation, claiming that the building had been built for confirmation

⁷⁸¹ „Vastseliina koguduse täiskogu ei saa kiriku ja riigi lahutust põhimõtteliselt hääks kiita, sest mõlemad asutused töötavad nendesamade inimeste kasuks ja vajavad loomulikult üksteise toetust. /.../ “[R]iigi avalik nimetamine kirikupalves, seletused leeriõpetuses ja jutlustes, wabariigi aastapäevade kiriklikud pühitsemised, ausammaste ehk hoonete jm. pühitsemised, riikliku iseloomuga aktustest osavõtmised, kirikuraamatute pidamise kokkukõlastamine riigi soovidega jne.” Eesti Kirik, 22.10.1925, p. 336.

⁷⁸² Waba Maa, 11.10.1925, p. 6.

⁷⁸³ EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Vastseliina kogudusega 1921, 09.09.1921. Wõru Teataja, 17.09.1921, p. 4.

teaching and not for the primary school. This attempt seems to have been unsuccessful.⁷⁸⁴

Community Life

As elsewhere in Estonia, the representatives of the churches were invited to take part in festive occasions in the local life. First of all, religious speeches and ceremonies were almost always performed during patriotic events. The commemorations of the War of Independence were especially important in Vastseliina parish as its events had left a deep imprint on the memory of the local people. In the spring of 1919, harsh battles had taken place between the Red Army and the forces of the Republic of Estonia. Many locals suffered because of the military activities, but also from Red terror.⁷⁸⁵ So annually, the liberation of the parish was commemorated with public gatherings, which usually included religious service and sports competitions.⁷⁸⁶ For example, in 1937 a crowd of 2000 people took part in it.⁷⁸⁷ Several War of Independence memorial sites were opened in the parish during the interwar period, and it was seemingly self-evident that they were also consecrated by clergymen.⁷⁸⁸ During the authoritarian regime since 1934, religious services were also involved in the public celebration of Victory Day on June 23.⁷⁸⁹ As in some other places in Estonia, the participation of the pastor in political events, such as consecrations of “green flags” of the agrarian party Farmers’ Assemblies,⁷⁹⁰ as well as religious services during the celebration of the 10th anniversary of land reform⁷⁹¹ and harvest feasts⁷⁹² were mentioned by the contemporary newspapers.

Not untypical are also religious ceremonies held in the festive events of secular associations (*Perenaisteselts*,⁷⁹³ ÜENÜ⁷⁹⁴) of Vastseliina. However, more exceptional⁷⁹⁵ is the involvement of the church to secular children and youth events. For instance, there was a tradition of Vastseliina parish children’s festivals (*lastepidu*), where program included not only concerts and sports competitions, but always also a religious part. These big feasts drew together 500 children

⁷⁸⁴ EAA 1271-1-146. See also Postimees, 01.12.1922, p. 4

⁷⁸⁵ It was estimated that the Reds killed 37 locals aged from 18 to 70 years, and allegedly, several houses and entire villages were burnt down (Kaja, 03.06.1922, p. 7). In fact, some locals suffered also for white terror (see Kikkas 1931, 38), but that was obviously not publicly discussed at that time.

⁷⁸⁶ See e.g. Kaja, 03.06.1922, p. 7.

⁷⁸⁷ Teataja 11.08.1937, p. 6.

⁷⁸⁸ Elu, 14.10.1931, p. 1; Postimees, 12.07.1934, p. 1.

⁷⁸⁹ Maa Hääl, 12.06.1936, p. 6.

⁷⁹⁰ Kaja, 12.06.1929, p. 2.

⁷⁹¹ Wõru Teataja, 31.01.1931, p. 3.

⁷⁹² Uus Eesti, 27.09.1938, p. 9.

⁷⁹³ Wõru Teataja, 03.08.1933, p. 1.

⁷⁹⁴ Elu, 02.09.1938, p. 1.

⁷⁹⁵ It holds for Estonia, as in Latvia the involvement of the church to such children’s festivals was common. See Chapter 3.

or even more.⁷⁹⁶ It is probably due to the fact that relations between church and school were relatively good in the parish.

Church and Schools

As elsewhere, pastors of Võru deanery were often critical towards cooperation with schools and bemoaned about the religious indifference of the teachers and poor quality of teaching. Vastseliina seems to have been an exception in that regard. In 1925, Aunverdt wrote in his annual report that he had no overview of the quality of religious instruction at schools, but most of the teachers were friendly towards the church.⁷⁹⁷ It is also regularly noted in the annual reports that almost all children learned religion at school.

In 1935, the children's and youth work conference of the Võru deanery was held in Vastseliina. Several local folk school teachers took part in it. Notably, Kristjan Seim from Tsiistre primary school emphasized the need for Christian education. He was especially concerned for those who had already graduated from primary school and did not continue their studies, as they were, according to him, open to different kinds of harmful influences. Seim urged the church to cooperate with the state so that religious instruction would be included in the curriculum of continuation schools (*täienduskoolid*). Summing up the discussion about religious instruction in the conference, Valter Viks, the pastor of the neighbouring parish Rõuge, expressed his surprise at how favourably the local teachers were disposed towards religious instruction at school.⁷⁹⁸

Several local teachers were actively involved in the work of the congregation. For example, Aleksander Undritz, who was headmaster in Vastseliina primary school from 1887–1930, led the activities of the congregation in 1919–20 when the pastor had fled and also *köster* had suddenly died.⁷⁹⁹ His successor, Johannes Saarniit, served also as organist of Vastseliina congregation⁸⁰⁰ and Kotlep Pärg (Gottlieb Berg), headmaster of Pugola primary school, used to hold services in Misso. It is hard to judge about the personal religiosity of the teachers. But it seems that in the interwar period, it was still strongly presumed by the local community that schoolteachers carried out also religious functions.⁸⁰¹ The local public expressed its support for religious instruction in ways which appear to have been rare elsewhere in Estonia. In 1920, the plenary assembly of the congregation appealed for re-introducing religious instruction to public schools, as it was allegedly essential to support morality, a sense of justice and patriotism among the youth. A similar appeal was made by the parents of Kapera primary school.⁸⁰² The conservative church weekly *Meie Kirik* claimed in January 1923 that locals

⁷⁹⁶ EAA 1271-1-63, 22.05.1922; Võrumaa, 18.07.1923, p. 3; Postimees, 16.07.1929, p. 2; Võru Teataja, 3.06.1933, p. 2; Võru Muuseum, Ar 1112:33 (1940).

⁷⁹⁷ EELKKA, Võru praostkonna aruanded, Vastseliina koguduse aruanne 1925.

⁷⁹⁸ EAA 1205-1-285, pp. 117–118.

⁷⁹⁹ Saarniit 1937, 39.

⁸⁰⁰ Plank s.a., 68.

⁸⁰¹ Cf. note about Kotlep Pärg in Salum 2005, 32.

⁸⁰² EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Vastseliina kogudusega.

had collected money to pay teachers of religion and were overwhelmingly supporting the teaching of religion at school.⁸⁰³ It is rather remarkable, as no other such initiatives on behalf of parents are known from Estonia. Indeed, some pastors elsewhere in Estonia claimed that parents were, in principle, supportive of religious education but passive in fighting for that cause.⁸⁰⁴ In 1923, the Congress of Education of Vastseliina parish adopted the following resolution, which was proposed by the pastor Aunverdt: “The Congress cannot fail to emphasize the importance of educating the youth on a Christian-moral basis. However, since the religious world naturally crystallizes in the form of individual denominations and the main denominational features are in an important connection with the development of individual nations, the denial of which would lead to harmful divisions and tensions in the field of religious education, the congress considers it necessary that the future organization of religious education in the schools of the Republic of Estonia should seriously consider the nation’s confessional requirements and satisfy them in a decent manner.”⁸⁰⁵ Besides that, in the annual reports of Vastseliina congregation from 1927 and 1928, it was emphasized that parents themselves appreciated religious education and tried to give it to their children also at home.⁸⁰⁶

On the other hand, there is no evidence about putting particular emphasis on Christian upbringing in the school by the supposedly church-friendly teachers of Vastseliina. Religious topics in the autobiographical texts on school are relatively rare, and they are mostly related to the lessons of religion and associated morning prayers. Lembit Pütsep mentions only in passing that there were morning gatherings at school on Wednesdays, which involved saying of a short prayer by some older pupil and singing a church hymn. At the time of singing, boys tended to tussle.⁸⁰⁷ Pütsep had also had some religious instruction at home – after he had learnt to read from the primer, he had to read the “Ten Commandments” (*i.e.* probably to read the Catechism out loud, but not by heart). It was harder at the beginning because of Gothic letters, but he got used to it soon.⁸⁰⁸ Similar accounts are also from the Orthodox Setu corner of Vastseliina commune Luhamaa. A woman from there, who had attended local primary school in 1933–39, would remember daily morning prayers and also table graces held according to Ortho-

⁸⁰³ Meie Kirik 3.01.1923, p. 6. Before the referendum religion was a voluntary subject and also not funded by the state.

⁸⁰⁴ See, for example, the annual reports of Karuse parish for 1921 and Lääne deanery for 1922, EELKKA 1-4-348.

⁸⁰⁵ „Kongress ei või noorsoo kasvatuse tähtsust kristlik-kõlblisel alusel rõhutamata jätta. Kuna aga usuline ilm loomulikult üksikute konfessioonide näol kristalliseerub ja konfessionaalsed põhijooned üksikute rahvaste arenemiskäiguga olulises ühenduses viibivad, mille eitamine usuõpetuse alal kahjulikke lõhesid ja põnevusi tooks, peab kongress tarviliseks, et oodatav usuõpetuse korraldus Eesti vabariigi koolides rahva konfessionaalseid nõudeid tõsiselt silmas peaks ja sündsalt viisil rahuldaks.” Võrumaa, 02.06.1923, p. 2.

⁸⁰⁶ EAA 1250-1-131, 80v and 167.

⁸⁰⁷ Pütsep 2005, 85.

⁸⁰⁸ Pütsep 2005, 82.

dox traditions. In the school hall, there was also an icon, which was usually concealed but displayed during the time of the prayer.⁸⁰⁹

Remarkably, also a pupils' magazine in manuscript from Misso, Noorte Elu, had entirely secular content without any religious references.⁸¹⁰ One can presume that whatever the convictions and intentions of the teachers were, at least the content of the curriculum and textbooks, influences from media, literature, and secular associations fostered the secularization of the youth in Vastseliina as well.

Local Politics and Social Contradictions

Regarding the results of general elections and referenda, Misso commune stands out from the rest in the parish. First, it had unusually low support for left-wing parties throughout the independence period. Especially noteworthy is very low support for communist affiliated *Töörahma Ühine Väerind* in the elections in 1923. Second, the support for the draft constitution of Independence War Veterans (IWW, 95%) was among the highest in the whole of Estonia; turnout was also significant (86.7%). However, support for invoking National Assembly in 1936 (meaning broadly, support for the regime of Konstantin Päts) was lower than in the other communes in Vastseliina parish and also below national average. It is perhaps explainable by the agitation of former supporters of IWW.

The right-wing attitudes of people from Misso are probably related to their experiences with the Bolsheviks during the War of Independence. According to Arvo Pilt, initially, many locals had supposed that Bolsheviks were only against the lords of the manors. However, it turned out that they persecuted everybody who did not endorse them.⁸¹¹ Dozens of peaceful locals were killed by the Red Army. On the other hand, as Alfred Kikkas, a local Bolshevik and soldier of Red Army, acknowledges in his surprisingly frank memoirs, Bolsheviks had very few supporters there even before, as also local poor people tended to trust the community leaders. Later, the independent Estonia won the support of landless people thanks to promises to grant land. As a result, even Kikkas's own father volunteered in the Estonian army.⁸¹²

As for Lasva commune, its relatively low support for religious instruction in 1923 may be related to the influence of the Left. In the following *Riigikogu* elections, nearly half of the voters supported left-wing parties there, and 12% even casted their vote for the radical *Töörahma Ühine Väerind*. In later elections, however, the support for left-wing parties dropped, remaining close to the average in the region. Also, it is highly notable that despite former left-wing affiliation of the commune, the Independence War Veterans draft constitution enjoyed overwhelming support in Lasva in 1933.

⁸⁰⁹ EKLA f. 377 M 18:6.

⁸¹⁰ "Noorte Elu", <https://www.digar.ee/arhiiv/et/periodika/31733>, 01.03.2024.

⁸¹¹ EKLA f. 342 M 133: 957, p. 64.

⁸¹² Kikkas 1931, 24-25 and 43.

Table 9. Support for Socialists (ESDTP, ESTP) in General Elections in Vastseliina Parish (%).

Commune	1923	1926	1929	1932
Lasva	24.2	27.2	28.7	17.8
Loosi	19.3	35.3	30.8	20.6
Misso	15.1	18.1	9.2	7.9
Orava	31.5	40.7	30.5	21.2
Vastseliina	8.1	35.8	19.9	15.8
Comparison: average in communes of Võru county	19.9	34.3	26.3	19.8

Source: *II Riigikogu valimised, 1923; III Riigikogu valimised, 1926; IV Riigikogu valimised, 1929; V Riigikogu valimised, 1932.*

Table 10. Results of Referenda on Independence War Veterans' Bill of Constitution amendments (1933) and Summoning of *Rahvuskogu* (1936) in Vastseliina Parish

Commune	IWV bill 1933		Summoning of <i>Rahvuskogu</i> 1936	
	Turnout (%)	Share of support (%)	Turnout (%)	Share of support (%)
Lasva	89.3	91.3	79.5	83.3
Loosi	71.2	78	74.1	77.5
Misso	86.7	95	74.3	71.9
Orava	72.9	75.6	73.4	76.9
Vastseliina	71.8	85.5	88.1	88.8
Comparison: average in communes of Võru county	74.9	83.8	79.9	74.1

Source: *Eesti Statistika, 1933, no 145(12), Eesti Statistika, 1936, no 176(7)–177(8)*

But there are still only a few signs of the anti-clerical attitudes of local supporters of the Left.⁸¹³ In that respect, there is an interesting case of Endel Sõgel (1922–98), a famous scholar of Estonian literature, but a controversial personality due to his pro-regime reputation in the Soviet era. He wrote in his memoirs, which were published in Soviet times, that his mother had hoped that he would become a pastor.⁸¹⁴ Probably to please her, he was confirmed on June 17, 1940, in his native Vastseliina parish, while already a couple of weeks later he became a member of an atheist society and an active communist.⁸¹⁵

It also seems that local rivalries played a part in the controversies over Ermits. He himself claimed that opposition against him stemmed from a particular

⁸¹³ However, the mouthpiece of the social democratic party published on one occasion an article about the alleged avarice of the pastor of Vastseliina: Ühendus, 05.07.1924, p. 4.

⁸¹⁴ Sõgel 1982, 9.

⁸¹⁵ Plank s.a., 40.

locality (*kolk*),⁸¹⁶ which seems to have been that of Tsäpsi.⁸¹⁷ Indeed, some of the first appeals against him are signed by people living there.⁸¹⁸ Possibly the opposition to Ermits was related to the support of local people for August Pähn, then a student of theology. His candidacy was put up in the pastoral elections of 1928 but it failed; it is remarkable that people from Tsäpsi had previously asked the dean to give him as “our beloved preacher” permission to hold a service there.⁸¹⁹ Similar pleas to dispatch A. Pähn to Tsäpsi *kolk* were repeated later but were then already substantiated by references to the indecency of Ermits.⁸²⁰ However, afterwards, the opposition against Ermits seems to have also involved people from other localities than Tsäpsi, including those who had initially defended him.⁸²¹

Conclusion

Religious life was changing, and secularization was spreading in Vastseliina. It happened through the means which were common elsewhere: the spread of secular culture, associational life, schools and, in some cases, political opposition to the church. Even so, it proceeded slower than in many other parishes as traditional ties of people with the church were relatively strong. Especially noteworthy is that many schoolteachers were church-friendly, and the tradition of holding religious services in schools had been preserved in several places there. However, people who dedicated much time to practising religion were seen as exceptional by the public. People were also, as it seems, relatively apt to follow the behavioural and moral guidelines of the church. Ironically, it contributed to the expulsion of pastor Eduard Ermits himself from the parish. His case also serves as an example of how the unpopularity of a pastor could undermine practising in the parish – at least in the short term. Finally, people seem not to have understood nor approved the need to separate the church from the state and the school, as resolutions adopted by the congregation in the 1920s and also statements of schoolteachers such as Kristjan Seim indicate.

Notably was Vastseliina, in terms of Southern Estonia, economically and culturally relatively less developed. It may well have contributed to the resilience of the traditional attitudes of the locals, including religiosity and the role of the church in local life, especially in the southern Misso commune. However, it does not necessarily explain the overwhelming support for religious instruction in the 1923 referendum. Importantly, it was quite similarly high also in the neighbouring Räpina parish, which was labelled for “Mulgimaa of Võru county” for its wealthy farms and vibrant associational life.⁸²² In addition, at least the annual

⁸¹⁶ EELKKA, 1-3-73, 15.12.1938.

⁸¹⁷ EELKKA, Konsistooriumi kirjavahetus Vastseliina kogudusega, lisa visitatsiooni protokollile 18.10.1933.

⁸¹⁸ EAA 1205-1-281, EAA 1205-1-283, p. 75.

⁸¹⁹ EAA 1205-1-281, 24.04.1928.

⁸²⁰ EAA 1205-1-283, p. 75v (1934).

⁸²¹ Cf. testimony of a pious member of the congregation to the dean: EAA 1205-1-287, p. 119.

⁸²² Lõbu 2005, 23.

reports of the pastor of R pina, unlike those of Vastseliina, were also very critical of folk school teachers and the religious and moral attitudes of his parishioners.

So, it is still likely that very high support for religious instruction in most of the parishes in the Eastern frontier area of Estonia is related to the contacts with Setus and Russians. According to sources, personal contacts with them were relatively common in Vastseliina, even though strict borders still existed between ethnic-religious communities. Still, conflicts and confrontations based on religion seem to have been rare. So, "othering" of other ethnic groups did not probably contribute to the relatively strong allegiance of local Estonians to the Lutheran church. Perhaps the very visible religiosity of Setus and Russians could have somehow influenced also Estonians to retain their ties with their own church. However, it is not clear how it happened as there is very little evidence about it. Consequently, the question about the impact of interethnic relations on the religiosity of Estonians living in the frontier remains open and needs further research.

3 SECULARIZATION IN RURAL LATVIA

The four case studies have been selected to represent different parts of Lutheran-majority Latvia: Northern Vidzeme, Southern Vidzeme, Kurzeme, Zemgale. The most important criterion for selection was availability of sources and previous research.

1. Gramzda parish (Grobiņa deanery of LELC; Liepāja county; Aizviķi, Gramzda, Kalēti, Purmsāti communes).

An example of a parish in Kurzeme. Strong presence of religious minorities (free churches, Aizviķi commune as a stronghold of Baptists). Fairly little modernized, which should have been favourable for the church, while the presence of other confessions, as well as unstable congregational life, could have fostered secularization. In the 1930s, Haralds Biezais as a liberal and modern pastor acting energetically in relatively conservative surroundings. A few but thorough autobiographical and publicist sources describe religiosity in the parish from very different perspectives.

2. Parish of Jaunpiebalga (Cēsis deanery of the LELC; Cēsis county; Jaunpiebalga and Ranka communes).

On the one hand, there was a strong Herrnhutian legacy, on the other hand, it was a part of the fairly modernized Piebalga region (a remarkable part of Latvian cultural elite came from there). Relatively rich and professional research on both the church and secular history of the parish is available.

3. Rūjiena parish (Valmiera deanery of the LELC; Valmiera county; Arakste, Ipiķi, Jeri, Ķoņi, Lode, Naukšēni, Terneja, partially Idus and Mazsalaca communes, town of Rūjiena).

This parish had many features that should foster secularization: the area was modernized (among the first areas where peasants became owners of their homesteads in Latvia) and was the most outstanding stronghold of left-wing parties in the whole of Latvia.

The parish had been divided between two congregations (Northern and Southern), which in the 1930s had pastors with very different attitudes towards the role of the church in society. Neighbouring Halliste parish, with a similar historical legacy, has been dealt with in the Estonian chapter. It provides the opportunity for useful cross-border comparison.

Crucially, an exceptionally wide range of sources (as for interwar Latvia) are available for the parish: fund of the congregations in Latvian State Historical Archives, autobiographical sources, newspaper reports, and like.

4. Tukums parish (Kandava deanery of the LELC; Tukums county; Milzkalne (Šlokenbeka), Praviņi, Sēme, Smārde (Ozolnieki), Tume, Vecmokas communes, town of Tukums).

It is an example of a parish in Zemgale. Parish included a small-scale town and rural areas, so it is useful to study the interrelation of town and countryside in the life of the congregation. Also in Tukums political controversies had a considerable impact on religious life. Most crucially, there is much professional research already done about both the church and secular history of the surroundings of Tukums, which provides rich data for the analysis of secularization in the parish.

3.1. GRAMZDA PARISH

Introduction

Historiography

A history of Gramzda Lutheran congregation has been written by Haralds Biezais, the professor of history of religion at Uppsala University, who himself was the pastor in Gramzda from 1932 to 1941.⁸²³ This work is supplemented by Biezais's memoirs.⁸²⁴

General Overview

Gramzda parish was a part of Lejaskurzeme, a region which is situated east of the city of Liepāja, near the Lithuanian border. The parish encompassed the communes of Aizviķi, Gramzda, Kalēti and Purmsāti. According to Biezais, Gramzda was a “materially deprived and spiritually poor” parish, with old (*i.e.* pre-land reform) farms poorer than in his native Zemgale and many of them located far away from “the centres of culture”. The school network was underdeveloped and closest railway station was 12 kilometres away. On the other hand, there was a surprising number of people with higher education living in the parish.⁸²⁵ The closest major city was Liepāja, which had not only economic importance for the parish but was also a stronghold of both of the leftist parties and free churches.

Religious Background

Lejaskurzeme was known for the impact of several free congregations, including Baptists and non-Lutheran-affiliated Herrnhutians, and it was especially the case for Gramzda parish. The spread of Baptism in the area dates back to the 1860s. According to Kristīna Ante, its popularity may have initially stemmed from social tensions, as in Kurland there were particularly hard conditions for peasants to obtain land. So, the spread of Baptism was an expression of social protest, similar to the emigration movement, which gathered pace at the same time.⁸²⁶ According

⁸²³ Biezais 1987.

⁸²⁴ Biezais 1995.

⁸²⁵ Biezais 1995, 123.

⁸²⁶ Ante 2017, 62–63.

to Biezais, the remarkable support for Baptists in the parish was a sign of protest of “strictness and Germanness” of the long-time pastor Stegmann.⁸²⁷

Due to its location next to the Lithuanian border, Roman Catholics of mainly Lithuanian descent were also present in the parish. In 1925, they constituted 3.8% of the population in Gramzda and 7.9% in Aizviķi. According to Biezais, these Lithuanians were, in general, Latvianizing and then joined the Lutheran church.⁸²⁸ In the interwar years, agricultural workers from Latgale and Lithuania probably contributed to the rising share of Catholics in the population, which is especially visible between 1925 and 1930.

Notably, Aizviķi commune stands out in the parish by its lower and declining share of Lutherans. Also, it was the main stronghold of free churches in the parish with its share of “other protestants” being one of the highest among the municipalities in the whole of Latvia.

Table 11. National Census Data About Religious Allegiance of the Population in Gramzda Parish (%)

Commune	Lutherans			Catholics			“Other protestants”		
	1925	1930	1935	1925	1930	1935	1925	1930	1935
Aizviķi	70.5	67.2	65.3	7.9	9.4	9.0	16.9	17.4	18.8
Gramzda	88.1	81.2	84.9	3.8	8.4	4.8	6.6	7.9	7.7
Kalēti	94.5	90.3	91.9	0.9	4.4	4.4	4.0	4.4	3.7
Purmsāti	93.6	91.6	88.9	2.4	4.9	6.5	3.4	2.0	3.5

Source: *Otrā tautas skaitīšana... 1925, Trešā tautas skaitīšana... 1930, Ceturtā tautas skaitīšana... 1936.*

Pastors (Lutheran)

Friedrich Johann Eberhard Stegmann (Štēgmans, Stegmans, 1834–1914), being pastor of Gramzda **1868–1914**,⁸²⁹ had profoundly influenced the church life in the parish for a long time. According to Biezais, many people were alienated from the church for his German nationality and conservative stances.

Harry Kuegler (Kīglers) served the congregation from November 1917 until he fled to Germany in January 1919.⁸³⁰

Arturs Voitkus (1878–1962, in office **1920–22**), a pastor of local origin, had fled from Bolsheviks to his home parish in 1919 and began also to perform pastoral duties there. Next year, he was officially elected as the pastor. Despite having allegedly a good reputation among the locals, he left soon for unknown reasons, possibly because of poor economic conditions or personal relations. Later, Voitkus became director of the church gymnasium in Riga (1935–40) and

⁸²⁷ Biezais 1995, 114.

⁸²⁸ Biezais 1987, 14.

⁸²⁹ Before that, he was an adjunct by the previous pastor August Auschitzky (1864–68): Biezais 1987, 40–41.

⁸³⁰ Biezais 1987, 50–51.

the general secretary of the Central Board of LELC (since 1942). Since 1944, he was in exile in Germany.⁸³¹

Alfrēds Ernests Freibergs (1890–1966, in office **1923–25**), had been a Herrnhutian preacher, publisher and temperance movement activist. Initially a non-ordained preacher, he was ordained as assistant pastor at the request of the congregation. He left due to conflicts with the congregation leadership.⁸³²

In the following years, the congregation remained without a permanent pastor. The holding of the services and performing rites was organized by Visvaldis Sanders, the pastor of Liepāja Anna congregation. Biezais, who apparently had a sour relationship with him, claims that Sanders treated Gramzda almost as a department of his own congregation, sending students and his other protégés to perform pastoral duties there.⁸³³ In 1928, Sanders appointed non-ordained **Jānis Fricis Savickis** as a caretaker (*kopējis*) of the congregation. Initially, he was praised in the church's newspaper, *Svētdienas Rīts*, for initiating youth work and renovating the church.⁸³⁴ However, already the next year, he got into conflicts with the congregation, which led even to court proceedings. The congregation wanted to sack him, but the Central Board of the LELC did not agree.⁸³⁵ According to Biezais, Savickis was uneducated and, due to misuse of alcohol and because of his traits of character, unfit for this office. Besides that, he had conducted church rites (Holy Communion, confirmation, weddings) which he as a non-ordained person was unauthorized to do. In 1931 Savickis finally left Gramzda but in 1932 was ordained as assistant pastor (*palīgmācītājs*) and sent to serve Lipaiķi congregation.⁸³⁶

Haralds Biezais (1909–1995) himself served in Gramzda **1932–41**. Pursuing an academic career, he interrupted his pastoral service twice for studies in Zürich and Strasbourg. In 1939, Biezais defended his doctoral thesis at the University of Latvia, and in 1941, he left the congregation for Riga. Later, in exile, he became a renowned scholar of religion (since 1966, professor at Uppsala university in Sweden). Besides his academic work, Biezais is also known for his writings on the current issues of church and religion.⁸³⁷

⁸³¹ Biezais 1987, 51–53 and 174; Biezais 1995, 112.

⁸³² Biezais 1987, 53–54.

⁸³³ Biezais 1995, 113.

⁸³⁴ *Svētdienas Rīts*, 04.11.1928, p. 357.

⁸³⁵ LNVK KD 2142:2, p. 196 (12.12.1929).

⁸³⁶ Biezais 1987, 54–55 and 178–179; Biezais 1995, 112–113. According to a local newspaper, Savickis had read out publicly an anonymous slanderous letter against a member of the congregation. For this, he was sentenced to three days of arrest, but the president of the republic pardoned him (*Priekules Ziņas*, 05.04.1929, p. 3 and 5; 21.06.1929, p. 4; 04.07.1930, p. 3). He also had conflicts with the congregation over financial matters. (see, for example, *Priekules Ziņas*, 15.03.1929, p. 3; 22.01.1932, p. 4).

⁸³⁷ See e.g. essays in Biezais 1978.

Religious Life

Individual Practice

According to Biezais, church services in Gramzda were still relatively well attended even on regular Sundays, while during the feasts the church was overcrowded.⁸³⁸ Especially popular proved cemetery festivities (*kapu svētki*),⁸³⁹ which were held annually in all the four big graveyards of the parish, but increasingly also in smaller graveyards.⁸⁴⁰

The number of communicants fluctuated considerably in Gramzda, reflecting probably irregularities in serving the congregation, but did not change considerably in the long run (1925 – 664, 1937 – 760). The same is true for the number of baptisms, confirmations and church weddings.⁸⁴¹

Both the accounts of Biezais and some other sources leave the impression that one can also in Gramzda make a distinction between the churchly majority and the pious minority. As for the latter, Jānis Pāvils, the most outstanding representative of folk religiosity in the parish, is described in length by Biezais.⁸⁴² “Old Pāvils”, as he calls him, was a little man with a long white beard and short stature, and lived a highly intensive religious life. He took part in all the services at the church and “was one of those who knew the Bible much, much better than the pastor”.⁸⁴³ But besides that, he also attended Baptist, Adventist and Salvation Army gatherings and preached there. As a member of the congregation council, Pāvils used to hold long „Bible-inspired” speeches until interrupted by increasingly weary fellow members of the council. He was generally very kind-hearted but, at the same time, extremely intolerant towards those who did not follow his interpretations of the Scripture or traditions he had been raised in. So, he criticized in a long letter to the pastor vehemently parish children’s festival (*bērnusvētki*) celebrations because its opening church service was followed by entertainment events. As he looked at the procession of participants, it appeared to him in his imagination as though Satan was walking in front of it, followed by the pastor and the schoolteachers. Biezais tried to assuage him, but of no avail.⁸⁴⁴

At least twelve articles by Jānis Pāvils, which were published in the church’s weekly newspaper *Svētdienas Rīts*, seem to indicate that Biezais gave quite a credible account of his views and mentality. Some of the Pāvils’s articles were written on occasion of important or festive events in the life of the congrega-

⁸³⁸ Biezais 1995, 127.

⁸³⁹ For traditions of Latvian cemetery festivals, see *Reliģiozitāte Latvijā: vēsture...* 2012, 245–257; Uzule and Zelče 2014. The tradition had originated from Vidzeme where such feasts proved very popular already at the end of the 19th century but was for a long time relatively unknown in Kurzeme.

⁸⁴⁰ Biezais 1995, 128. Altogether, there were twelve graveyards in the parish (Biezais 1987, 177).

⁸⁴¹ See the appendix. The data for 1934 seem dubious (a typo?).

⁸⁴² See Biezais 1995, 117–118.

⁸⁴³ “Viņš piedēreja pie tiem, kas Bībeli zināja daudz, daudz labāk nekā mācītājs”.

⁸⁴⁴ Biezais 1995, 117–118.

tion.⁸⁴⁵ Some are dedicated to the appeals for a good relationship between different (Protestant) confessions.⁸⁴⁶ There is also an article criticizing the activities of the congregation council, which arguably prompted the pastor to leave Gramzda.⁸⁴⁷ But an important part of many Pāvils writings is lamenting about the decline of piety among locals as well as the whole Latvian people. Besides that, Pāvils denounced widespread alcohol consumption,⁸⁴⁸ superficial religious ceremonies without genuine piety,⁸⁴⁹ and mixing religious gatherings with secular entertainment. For instance, he describes events in Gramzda on June 28, 1925, which began with a spiritual concert in the church that was followed by a cemetery festival in Trekņi. On a beautiful sunny day, crowds, so far unseen in the parish, had gathered to take part, and speeches by pastor Sanders from Liepāja and student of theology Lūsis were cordial. “But in the afternoon, the good impression was spoiled. At 4 o’clock, an open-air party began with a dance. The same orchestra that had sung praises to God was now playing joyful polkas. Was it necessary? Although, fun as such is not a sin either. But it must be in the proper place. It is not compatible with the cemetery festivity. It caused a painful feeling in the hearts of serious people. This day would have been much more valuable if it had not been ended by the open-air party.”⁸⁵⁰

The opinion of Pāvils struck a chord with the conservative leadership of the church that edited the newspaper. On one occasion, the editor added the following comment to his article: “We are happy for this take. It is the voice of the people, from the mouth of a simple pious person, whose heart is in the right place.”⁸⁵¹ However, Pāvils enthusiasm for cooperation with Baptists did not find the approval of the newspaper, as we see below.

To conclude, “Old Pāvils” represented a type of deeply religious personality who combined very intensive practice, tolerance towards confessional differences, and a puritanical lifestyle. As for Biezais, he writes about Pāvils in a rather benign but slightly depreciating manner. Being a liberal pastor, he himself obviously did not feel comfortable with the conservative, pietist “core congregation” and made conscious efforts to make religious life in the parish more compatible with modern society. “In the last ten years, the pastor gradually but persistently led the spiritual life of the congregation in a certain direction away

⁸⁴⁵ Svētdienas Rīts, 24.08.1924, p. 5; 9.05.1926, p. 150.

⁸⁴⁶ Svētdienas Rīts, 06.07.1924, p. 7; 6.06.1926, p. 181.

⁸⁴⁷ Svētdienas Rīts, 01.02.1925, p. 39.

⁸⁴⁸ Svētdienas Rīts, 04.09.1924, pp. 1–2.

⁸⁴⁹ Svētdienas Rīts 12.06.1927, pp. 186–187.

⁸⁵⁰ “Bet pēcpusdienā labo iespaidu samaitāja. Pulksten 4 sākas zaļumu balle ar deju. Tas pats orķestris, kas skandināja slavas dziesmas Dievam par godu, spēleja tagad lustīgas polkas. Vai to vajadzēja? Lai gan arī jautrība par sevi nav grēks. Bet viņai jābūt savā vietā. Ar kapu svētkiem ta nav savienojama. Nopietnu cilvēku sirdīs ta še izsauca sāpīgu sajūtu. Šī diena būtu bijusi daudz vērtīgāka, ja ta nebūtu beigusies ar zaļumballi.” Svētdienas Rīts, 28.07.1925, p. 238.

⁸⁵¹ “Pricējamijs par šādu vārdu. Ta ir balss iz tautas vidus, no vienkārša dievticīga cilvēka mutes, kam sirds istā vietā.” Svētdienas Rīts, 12.06.1927, p. 186–187.

from the frozen letter to a free, dynamic life,⁸⁵² he emphasized later in his history of the congregation. In his such pursuits, he claims to have found supporters from among the youth, who had completed his confirmation courses. Through the young people, he was able to reach out also to their parents and many of them “became friends of mine and the congregation.”⁸⁵³ Not only Biezais, but also Alfrēds Leja confirms in his memoirs that the arrival of the young pastor had led to the rejuvenation of the congregation activities, and he was able to attach new people to the church.⁸⁵⁴

Particularly, Biezais argues to have found good contact with local educated people, who included the local forester, a pharmacist, a medical doctor, and others. They used to meet regularly, having discussions and playing cards or chess.⁸⁵⁵ The pastor developed especially close relations with the physician Jānis Liepiņš; both came from humble surroundings and liked to play chess. Many physicians treated according to Biezais religious matters as related to obscurantism and pastors were “intellectuals of second sort” for them, but Liepiņš did not have such prejudices. He even used to visit the sick together with Biezais – one to cure them and another offering the Holy Communion.⁸⁵⁶ Notably, in the autumn of 1940, even a communist newspaper complained about the pastor’s influence in Gramzda: “It should be noted that the local so-called intelligentsia is also quite responsive to the teachings of the black-coat-men. On the other hand, they did not consider it necessary to attend the founding meeting of the local Trade Union branch.”⁸⁵⁷ Besides that, Biezais also boasted that he was able to bring to the congregation those people, who had been biased against the church due to their leftist views (more on that below). In sum, Biezais seems to have been successful in building relationships with people who did not belong to the (supposedly) pietist and conservative core of the congregation.

Despite the relatively church-friendly mood in the parish, both Pāvils and Biezais perceived the decline in the church life, but, unsurprisingly, had completely different opinions about its root causes. As for Pāvils, he disputed the claims that people resigned from going to church due to long distances, non-exciting sermons, impassable roads or cold weather (especially as the churches were not heated). A couple of years ago he had noticed that while during a frosty day, Gramzda church was indeed empty, the difficult weather and road conditions did not prevent people from going to see a theatre play “with all its additions”. So, the emptiness of the church was, in fact, a sign of people turning their back to

⁸⁵² “Pēdējos desmit gados draudzes garīgo dzīvi mācītājs pamazām, bet neatlaidīgi vadīja noteiktā virzienā projām no sastingušā burta brīvā, kustīgā dzīvē”. Biezais 1987, 190.

⁸⁵³ Biezais 1995, 128.

⁸⁵⁴ Leja 2004, 47.

⁸⁵⁵ Biezais 1995, 123–125.

⁸⁵⁶ Biezais 1995, 125–126.

⁸⁵⁷ “Jāpiezīmē, ka visai atsaucīga melnsvārču mācībām ir arī vietējā tā sauktā inteliģence. Turpretī vietējās arodbiedrības nodaļas sapulces dibināšanā tā neturēja par vajadzīgu ierasties.” *Komunists* (Liepāja), 27.09.1940, p. 5.

God.⁸⁵⁸ In a similar vein, Pāvils complained that deep Christian faith, which was characteristic of his days of youth, was disappearing among the people. Once, both church and school had helped to uphold the piety of the people, but now it was not the case anymore: “The church and the school were the sanctuaries for the people, to which the people looked with reverence, where in the mornings and evenings the voice of prayer was heard and incense burnt in honour of the Lord. But now I look at that place and think about what is happening now... “Just a little moment, the fertile field has become a forest.” – Instead of faithful teachers and leaders, many atheists can now be seen; often, the sanctuaries of the people are empty. That sad prophecy is being fulfilled right in our days: churches and houses of prayer are poorly attended, the believers also begin to fall into a sleep of indifference.” Pāvils warned about the grave consequences of it, referring to the Old Testament prophets, and added that all this was happening not only in Latvia, but in the whole of Europe, while people in India were awaking to the faith.⁸⁵⁹

Pastor Biezais, in turn, claimed in a highly polemical article, published in *Ceļš* in 1938, that especially Latvian intelligentsia had been alienated from religion and was still very critical towards the church. In part, the reproaches it made to the church were unfounded – as the intellectual elite of Latvia had been formed in the pre-First World War materialistic atmosphere, it was deprived of spirituality and simply did not understand it. But on the other hand, the church also needed to improve itself, because it was still under the influence of conservative theology. Church hymns and liturgy were not aesthetic and did not touch people. Also, religious instruction at schools was old-fashioned. Professor Kārlis Kundziņš Jr., who had fought on behalf of the renewal of it, had been severely criticized by the church leadership. But his work had still borne fruit according to Biezais, as he already had many quiet supporters among teachers of religion.⁸⁶⁰

Autobiographical Sources

Alfrēds Leja (1927–2020, later sportsman, teacher of physical education and school director) has written a book about his childhood reminiscences,⁸⁶¹ and an overview of the history of Aizviķi commune,⁸⁶² which also contains many autobiographical accounts. Leja’s memoirs contain quite a lot of religion-related themes, which can be categorized as follows:

⁸⁵⁸ Svētdienas Rīts, 17.02.1924, pp. 2–3.

⁸⁵⁹ “Baznīca un skola bija tautas svētnīcas, uz kurām tauta skatījās ar godbijību, kur rītos un vakaros atskanēja lūgšanas balss kā vīraka kvēpinājums tam Kungam par godu. Bet kas es tagad aplūkoju to vietu un pārdomāju, kas viss notiek tagad... “Tikai mazs brīdis, auglīgais tīrums palicis par mežu.” - - Ticīgu skolotāju un vadonu vietā tagad redzams daudz ateistu, nereti tautas svētnīcas tukšas. Tas bēdīgais pravietojums taisni mūsu dienās piepildas: Baznīcas un lūgšanas nami tiek vāji apmeklēti, arī ticīgie sāk iemigt vienaldzības miegā.” Svētdienas Rīts, 10.08.1924, pp. 1–2.

⁸⁶⁰ Biezais 1938.

⁸⁶¹ Leja 2000.

⁸⁶² Leja 2004.

1. The important role of religious gatherings in local social life. Leja claims that as secular societies and events were not widespread yet, religious gatherings, such as burials and Sunday services in Lutheran and Baptist churches served as important occasions to meet other people. (p. 143)

2. Respectful attitude towards the pastor by the locals. “The word spoken by the Reverend was to rural women as though what God himself had said, to be taken into account, to be said forward to others and indisputable.”⁸⁶³ But, at least for the younger generation, the respect was related not to the pastor’s associations with religiosity but rather to his social position: “We were brought up to respect teachers just like the pastor, the forester, the doctor, the milk controller, the commune clerk. Only so much, it seems, there were educated people in the commune.”⁸⁶⁴

3. Frequent references to God and the Bible, which are often related to dramatic events or moral and ethical topics. For example, the author had, as a little boy, put a stone on rails to see what would happen when a train passed. When the train approached, he was looking from the bushes and, suddenly starting to fear railway disaster, began to pray. Fortunately, nothing serious happened. (p. 22) Interestingly, religious remarks are often made in a playful and joking manner, as in the case of a bicycle accident: “Had not there just been an attempt to approach to God? No, no! It is even better to live in this sinful, yet interesting world. I did not feel a particular longing for God.”⁸⁶⁵ Such joking tone is also evident in remarks that sinning was not a serious matter as one could always ask absolution from the pastor and then continue as before, or in frequent (and often rather crude) expressions made in sexual themes: “There was no need for a condom when making love. Got by with one finger of a rubber glove. Girls like masculine boys who do what they crave. Moses himself did not say a word that it was a sin to love girls.”⁸⁶⁶

4. Ambiguous is also Leja’s account of his peers’ attitude towards God and religion. Once he claims that lessons of religion were held in high regard (but to this statement follow once again tongue-in-cheek remarks), in another paragraph arguing that boys did not care much about religious prescriptions. As for Christmas, he remembers that the holiday was keenly awaited, but it had largely no religious meaning for the youth: “We did not care if Jesus was born, crucified or resurrected on this day, it was so long ago. We were more interested in the concrete life today, which related to the anticipation of this holiday, the preparation

⁸⁶³ “Lauku sievietēm mācītāja cienīgtēva sacītais vārds bija ka paša Dieva teiktais, vērā ņemams, citiem sakāms un neapstrīdams.” Leja 2000, 143.

⁸⁶⁴ “Mēs bijām audzināti cienīt skolotājus tāpat kā mācītāju, mežkungu, ārstu, piena pārraugu, pagasta skrīveri. Tikai jau arī, liekas, bija skoloti cilvēki pagastā,” Leja 2000, 110.

⁸⁶⁵ “Vai tikko te nebija noticis mēģinājums tuvoties Dievam? Nē, nē! Vēl labāk padzīvot šajā kaut grēcīgajā, tomēr interesantajā pasaulītē. Nejutu īpašas ilgas pēc Dieva.” Leja 2000, 148.

⁸⁶⁶ “Mīlēšanās reizēns kondons nemaz nebija vajadzīgs. Iztika ar gumijas cimda vienu pirkstu. Meitenēm patik vīrišķīgi zēni, kas dara to pēc kā viņas alkst. Pats Mozus nav teicis ne vārda, ka meitenes mīlēt būtu grēks.” Leja 2000, 74.

that we could see with our eyes, hear with our ears, taste with our tongue, feel on our skin with all our organs of senses.”⁸⁶⁷

5. Also, religious instruction at school is dealt with by Leja at length (more on it below).

Arvīds Dobelis (1924–2017) was another noteworthy enthusiast of local history who has also written down his own comprehensive memoirs.⁸⁶⁸ As for the place of religion in his childhood milieu, he claims: “Our parents were religious people, as it was common at that time. There were no unbelievers at all. /.../ There were parishioners who often went to church, but there were also those who did it rarely – only on feast days,”⁸⁶⁹ thus, as it seems, emphasizing the divide between the churchly majority and the pious minority. His own family belonged to the former category. Still, they used to observe Sunday at home. In the morning, father read the Bible and sang from the hymnal. The children were not allowed to do anything at that time, “even not to carve with a knife or make a willow whistle.” No household chores were done on Sundays, even the most necessary ones. The only exception was taking care of animals. Only during Soviet times, people began to give up the strict observance of Sunday because on weekdays they were busy on collective farms and had no time for working in their own households (p. 46).

Besides that, Dobelis mentions that children were expected to recite a short, rhymed evening prayer before going to bed (p. 45–46). Finally, Dobelis deals also with his participation in confirmation course in 1940–41, when the operation of the congregation was already restricted by the Soviet authorities. It was allegedly the last confirmation course to be allowed, and therefore as many as 70 young people had gathered, including those who were below the appropriate age. He also mentions his good acquaintances who took part in that course and Biezais as a young pastor who later became a well-known scholar of theology and history in exile. Finally, the confirmation gift by his uncle is mentioned – a pocket watch that was not yet fashionable in rural settings at that time. But no religious topics are invoked in relation to reminiscences of the confirmation classes and confirmation day (p. 96–97). Also otherwise, his youth memoirs contain almost no more references to the church or religion.⁸⁷⁰

⁸⁶⁷ “Mums bija vienalga vai Jēzus šajā dienā dzimis, krustā sists vai augšāmcēlies, tas bija tik sen. Mūs vairāk interesēja konkrētā dzīve šodien, kas saistījās ar šo svētku gaidīšanu, gatavošanos, ko varējām ar acīm skatīt, ausīm dzirdēt, ar mēli sagaršot, uz savas ādas izjust ar visiem jutekļiem.” Leja 2000, 153.

⁸⁶⁸ Dobelis 2012.

⁸⁶⁹ “Mūsu vecāki bija ticīgi cilvēki, kā jau tas tānī laikā bija parasts. Neticīgie jau nemaz nebija. /.../ Bija draudzes locekļi, kuri bieži gāja baznīcā, bet bija arī tādi, kuri reti – tikai pa svētkiem.” Besides that, he admits that there were also some people who did not go to church at all (p. 45).

⁸⁷⁰ There is also a short of description about a spiritist seance (p. 77).

Congregational Life of Lutheran Congregation

According to the 1924 report, besides Sunday services, which occurred three times monthly, Bible studies, Sunday school, youth meetings and other religious gatherings were held.⁸⁷¹ However, upon the arrival of Biezais, the youth group had allegedly only several dozen members, including some 70-year-old people, widows and girls with children born out of wedlock: “Its members were by no means youth, let alone the best youth of the congregation.”⁸⁷² In addition, the pastor noted that the youth work was organized “according to the pattern of sectarians”, revealing once again his prejudices towards the conservative pietist mentality. So, the existing youth organization was dismissed, and as the youth work organized by the church’s central institutions was not acceptable for the liberal pastor either, Biezais decided to use primarily the confirmation course as a “way to the heart of the youth”.⁸⁷³ During the confirmation classes, Biezais did not concentrate on teaching the hymns and doctrine of the church, as was common at that time, but rather on “free discussions on central issues of life and morality”. These discussions were very simple, as the majority of the young people had no more than an elementary school education. Biezais also initiated the tradition of “pilgrimage” of the confirmands to the graves of soldiers who had fallen in the First World War and War of Independence in the so-called Brothers’ Cemetery of Riga. The pilgrimage was held annually after the confirmation ceremony in spring. Flowers were brought to the graves, and a short religious ceremony was held. Biezais was allegedly the first pastor in Latvia, who put into practice the idea of such “patriotic pilgrimage” which was proposed by his friend Alfrēds Indriksons, pastor of Lestene. The “pilgrimages” became popular, and many parents wanted also to participate in them. For the church leadership, however, such a way of raising national consciousness seemed pagan, but they kept silent.⁸⁷⁴ Biezais also published a textbook for the confirmation course. In it, he argued that confirmation time should be a time for deep reflection in the life of young people. He denounced allegedly widespread confirmation only out of tradition, and also large-scale confirmation parties with music, dancing and alcohol. Admittedly Biezais himself had often witnessed such “mistakes”.⁸⁷⁵

The ladies’ committee worked next to the congregation since 1928, and made an important contribution to church life, especially by organizing festive events as well as raising funds for the congregation. Besides that, a congregation choir was also established, which allegedly was not common for small rural parishes at that time. However, the dedicated conductor E. Reinfelds had to step down due to discontent among the parishioners about his private life issues. Afterwards, the choir was dispersed about the year 1935 because not enough new singers had joined, and there were not many opportunities to perform (only in the church).

⁸⁷¹ Biezais 1987, 177.

⁸⁷² “Tā biedri nekādā ziņā nebija jaunatne, nepavisam nerunājot par draudzes labāko jaunatni”.

⁸⁷³ Biezais 1987, 189.

⁸⁷⁴ Biezais 1995, 128. On Indriksons’s proposal, see Misāne 2016a, 213–214.

⁸⁷⁵ Biezais 1940, 5–6.

After that, secular choirs, being usually conducted by school headmasters, used to perform on festive occasions in the church services.⁸⁷⁶

One of the main themes in interwar church history in Gramzda is frequent disagreements of pastors with lay leaders, other public figures and, in the case of Biezais, also with church leadership. Some of the conflicts had evidently merely personal and economic backgrounds. Already the departures of Voitkus and Freibergs were allegedly at least partially related to the conflicts with economic background, as the council had withdrawn the agreement on the salary of the pastor. The congregation council, on the other hand, accused Freibergs of negligence.⁸⁷⁷

Biezais writes also extensively about economic conflicts in the congregation, which apparently made negative impact on his relations with the locals as well. Namely, upon his arrival, the congregation was very poor, as only 600 people used to pay his annual membership fees. To overcome the problems, the new council member, lieutenant colonel Grīnbergs⁸⁷⁸ organized the registration of congregation members, and since then paying membership fees was persistently demanded from them. Who failed to do it two years in a row, was dismissed from the list of congregation members, and denied church rites. Initially, it raised indignation. Some went to Liepāja for the baptisms and weddings, the others told on the congregation leadership to the Central Board of the LELC, which initiated an investigation. But thanks to such strict measures, the discipline of the congregation members as well as the financial situation of the congregation improved.⁸⁷⁹

There are also several accounts of Biezais's rows about locals which indicate that he was a remarkably self-asserting person. Unfortunately, the details of these rows are often not clear. For example, according to the minutes of the Central Board of the LELC, a congregation council member had in 1936 sent a letter of complaint about the congregation leaders, but after investigation it was not upheld. Later, in the same year, the board of the congregation announced its resignation, but the Central Board refused to accept it unless exhaustive information was provided about the reasons of the move.⁸⁸⁰ Besides that, Biezais had conflicts also with the pastor of the neighbouring Priekule congregation⁸⁸¹ and the headmaster of Gramzda primary school Fricis Jauģietis.⁸⁸²

The incident with the concert of the Priekule consumer cooperative at Gramzda church is a good example of how secular matters had a profound impact

⁸⁷⁶ Biezais 1987, 188–189.

⁸⁷⁷ Articles in Svētdienas Rīts: 01.02.1925, p. 39; 15.02.1925, p. 54–55; 01.03.1925, p. 69–70.

⁸⁷⁸ According to Biezais, he had been granted land in Kalēti manor by land reform.

⁸⁷⁹ Biezais 1995, 133–134. On the other hand, the congregation itself was reluctant to pay 15% of the membership fees for the upkeep of the Central Board (LNVM KD 2142:4, p. 187, p. 211).

⁸⁸⁰ LNVM KD 2142:4, p. 169, 184 and 224. The reasons for the conflict are not clear; possibly, it was related to the dispute with Priekule co-operative (see below, also Biezais 1995, 135).

⁸⁸¹ LNVM KD 2142:4, p. 120 (29.11.1935).

⁸⁸² LVVA 6642-1-1407, p. 37–44. Biezais claims that economic issues caused the conflict, see 1995, 119–121. See also: Glābsim Dzimteni, 23.03.1934, p. 3.

on the life of the congregation. Priekule consumer cooperative had extended its activities to neighbouring Gramzda and attempted to buy land from the congregation to open its shop there. But Biezais was personally involved in the activities of the competing consumer cooperative of Gramzda and therefore was opposed to it. When Biezais was abroad for his study purposes, the congregation council still decided to sell the land. After his return, Priekule cooperative decided to begin its activities in Gramzda with a spectacular church service and concert with many invited dignitaries from Liepāja. Dispute over the content of the song sheet followed, and finally, Biezais decided not to open the church for worship at the designated time, took the key to the shrine and went fishing. There were attempts to remove Biezais from his post for the prank, but after his explanations in front of the Central Board of the LELC, he was allowed to continue as pastor of Gramzda. Biezais claims that, in fact, his behind-the-scenes efforts in Riga, involving meetings with influential people of the regime, brought him the favourable outcome. Notably, Alfrēds Frejīšs had said to Biezais that the incident was even reported to Ulmanis himself, and he had said that he liked this young man [meaning Biezais].⁸⁸³

Besides that, Biezais was also quite openly critical of the church leadership. In 1934, he criticized in *Latvija* (mouthpiece of Ādolfs Bļodnieks's New Farmers' Party) the conservative leadership for undemocratic management of the church. According to him, the episcopal form of management was to be replaced by a synodal one, which was supported by the liberals and would give more say to the congregations. He claimed that the church had become "a state in the state" and called for intervention on behalf of the authorities: "The way out of the current situation would be found only in such a way that the government would, in addition to other civil liberties, ensure also the freedom of self-determination of congregations by issuing a relevant law."⁸⁸⁴

Other Confessions and Interconfessional Relations

In the former Kurland governorate, there were two areas where Roman Catholics were in the majority – on the western coast around Alsunga and in Sēlija in the East (Ilūkste county). Elsewhere, Catholics were scattered among the Lutheran majority population. According to church historian Cardinal Julian Vaivods, there was generally no antagonism between Catholics and Lutherans. They had similar clothing, customs, and lifestyles; however, mixed marriages between

⁸⁸³ Biezais 1995, 135–140. Another perspective to the same events: LVVA 1370-1-2338; p. 197.

⁸⁸⁴ "No pašreizejā stāvokļa izeja būtu atrodamā vienīgi tāda ceļā, ka valdība līdzās pārējām pilsoņu brīvībām nodrošinātu arī draudžu pašnoteikšanās brīvību, izdodot attiecīgu likumu." *Latvija*, 23.03.1934, p. 10. In a response, pastor Maximilians Grīvans argued in the church's weekly newspaper *Svētdienas Rīts* that Biezais was not right, as all the posts in the church were elected in a democratic manner. Not too little, but too much democracy was the problem for the church, argued Grīvans, as congregation councils and pastors were not always obeying the Central Board. He also accused Biezais of undermining the unity of the church by voicing openly his disagreement. *Svētdienas Rīts*, 15.04.1934, p. 126.

them were rare. After the establishment of Latvian statehood, Catholics from Latgale began to arrive, not only as agricultural workers but also as new farmers who gained land thanks to land reform. They remained different from indigenous Kurzeme Catholics and did not mix with them.⁸⁸⁵ There was no Roman Catholic Church in the parish of Gramzda. Earlier, the nearest congregations had operated in Vecpils and Lēnas. In the interwar era, new Roman Catholic congregations in Priekule and Vaiņode were established in the vicinity. Vaivods emphasizes the helpfulness of Lutherans towards Catholics in Priekule, where Lutheran pastor Bāns had afforded to hold services in the hall of the building of Lutheran congregation.⁸⁸⁶

As for the Baptists, their stronghold was in Aizviķi, where the Baptist congregation had, according to the data of the Department of Churches and Confessions in 1937, as many as 185 members (of that 109 adults). In Gramzda, the Baptist congregation had 46 adult and 21 non-adult members; in Kalēti, respectively, 20 and 18.⁸⁸⁷ Aizviķi congregation held 96 religious services in 1939, including one cemetery festivity. Kalēti congregation had 65 services that year, and Gramzda congregation 56. All the congregations were involved in musical activities and charity (notably donating to the “Saulstari” orphans’ home of the Baptist Union in Vaiņode). Regarding youth work, there is data about the Gramzda congregation, which arranged services for children.⁸⁸⁸

Additional data about the religious life of Baptists is provided by similarly scanty newspaper reports from the congregations, which were published mostly in the Latvian Baptist magazine *Kristīgā Balss*. Usually, they described festive occasions in the life of the congregations. Besides that, there are some obituaries.⁸⁸⁹ On the occasion of celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Gramzda congregation, it was noted that it was among the oldest Baptist congregations in Latvia. However, the congregation had been recently marred by „unverified labourers” (“nepārbaudītu darbinieku dēļ”); it was probably a hint that tumultuous years of revival and following split of Latvian Baptist movement had not spared Gramzda congregation either). Also, despite conducting missionary activities in the vicinity, membership was small and faithful were scattered across different communes, which was an obstacle to religious life.⁸⁹⁰ Secular newspapers, however, paid rarely attention to the activities of Baptist congregations. In general, Baptists were known for their stringent moral requirements, notably teetotalism. Alfrēds Leja notes that some of their members were not always able to follow the requirements and pokes fun at it.⁸⁹¹

Herrnhutians built their church in Smaižu (known also as Piķelu according to the name of the farmstead where the pastor lived). Their pastor was Pēteris

⁸⁸⁵ Vaivods 1994, 106.

⁸⁸⁶ Vaivods 1994, 132.

⁸⁸⁷ LVVA 1370-1-2361. Cf. LVVA 1370-1-2675 and LVVA 1370-1-2676.

⁸⁸⁸ LVVA 1370-1-2675 and LVVA 1370-1-2676.

⁸⁸⁹ E.g. obituary of Jānis Ģibietis: *Kristīgā Balss*, no 7, 1940, p. 147.

⁸⁹⁰ *Kristīgā Balss*, no 3, 1938, p. 55.

⁸⁹¹ Leja 2004, 48–49.

Jankaitis.⁸⁹² There are some newspaper reports of his activities, mostly about his participation in religious gatherings in different parts of Kurzeme.⁸⁹³ In 1937, Jankaitis was charged, along with some other Herrnhutian preachers, for arranging religious gatherings without permission.⁸⁹⁴

According to Biezais, relations between Lutherans and members of free congregations were relatively friendly in the parish. He attributes it partially to his own tolerant attitude towards the minority faiths. Biezais remembers long discussions with Pēteris Jankaitis, who used to frequently visit him, which the Lutheran pastor enjoyed despite religious disagreements and even ferocious and arguably unfair attacks against the Lutheran church by the Herrnhutian. On the other hand, Jankaitis impressed Biezais by his deep engagement to religious and existential questions.⁸⁹⁵

As for relations with Baptists, they used to arrange joint cemetery festivities with Lutherans and are especially praised by Biezais for their musical contribution to these events.⁸⁹⁶ Biezais was invited even to preach in the nearby Baptist church but declined the offers. In the history of the congregation, Biezais mentions that the influence of Baptists had in the 1920s become so big that *kopējs* Savickis was compelled to make compromises with them, allowing them also to preach from the pulpit of the Lutheran church. Apparently, there were red lines regarding interconfessional cooperation, even for Biezais. Indeed, his attitudes towards Baptists were somewhat ambiguous. Despite the positive assessments cited above, he seems to have been convinced that the sole reason for the popularity of free churches in the parish was the German and *Herrenkirche* legacy of the Lutheran church.⁸⁹⁷ As the Lutheran church now had a Latvian pastor of simple origin (as he portrayed himself), the free churches should have become obsolete.⁸⁹⁸ Also, he notes that Baptists were in general very critical towards Lutheran church, and also some Baptist guest preachers tended to be much less tolerant towards Lutherans than local Baptists, claiming to have a monopoly on true Christianity.⁸⁹⁹

⁸⁹² Leja 2004, 50. See also Liepājas Vārds, 09.08.1991, p. 4.

⁸⁹³ In Dunika, where Jankaitis spoke in a temperance meeting, it was noted that all the speeches and the whole event had religious character because socially active people there used to be active Herrnhutians. Jaunā Balss, no 8, 1938, p. 205. In Priekule, Jankaitis took part in the meeting of local Herrnhutians: Priekules Ziņas 18.03.1932, p. 3.

⁸⁹⁴ Kurzemes Vārds, 03.11.1937, p. 6.

⁸⁹⁵ Later, already as a scholar of religious studies, he claims to have realized that Jankaitis was not an ordinary sectarian, but “one of the many revolutionaries in the church history”. Biezais 1995, 116–117.

⁸⁹⁶ Biezais 1995, 114–116.

⁸⁹⁷ Interestingly, a high official of German occupation authorities had in 1916 opined that the activities of Baptists did not correspond to interests of Germany, as they allegedly tended to present their faith as “Latvian“ one, juxtaposing it to Lutheranism (Zariņš 2022, 172).

⁸⁹⁸ Biezais 1995, 116. Notably, Savickis had also held a lecture in Gramzda Baptist church (Kristīga Balss 1931, no 2, p. 60).

⁸⁹⁹ Biezais 1995, 114–115.

In fact, there was at least one joint church service with Baptists in Lutheran church of Gramzda already before the arrival of Savickis. It prompted condemnation by the Lutheran church weekly newspaper Svētdienas Rīts. Lutherans had goodwill and tolerance towards the other faiths, claimed the newspaper, but the Baptists tended not to reciprocate. It was added: “The time has not yet come when there is one herd and one shepherd. Therefore, everyone should stick to his faith and act according to the teachings of his faith. Mixing with alien faiths creates uncertainty and vacillation, through which confusion in matters of faith can arise. And it would no longer be a blessing to the church.”⁹⁰⁰ Biezais admits that also some conservative members of his congregation did not approve even the performances of Baptist choirs in the church,⁹⁰¹ but it was certainly not true for all pietist parishioners, as the aforementioned example of “Old Pāvils” indicates.

Some other sources seem to confirm the relatively tolerant attitude of locals towards confessional differences. Arvīds Dobelis remembers that his Lutheran and apparently not very religious family occasionally used to visit Baptist chapels, even though they were farther away from their home than the Lutheran parish church: “To this day, I still do not understand why we went to a Baptist church, but not to our own Lutheran church. Later, when we were already in basic school, the children were well taken to the nearer-situated Gramzda church in autumn.”⁹⁰² Notably, Biezais claims that the lack of a permanent pastor had alienated people from the Lutheran congregation, and “the sects” exploited the situation.⁹⁰³ Possibly this could also prompt the Dobelis’s family to visit the service of Baptists. But it may also indicate a simply relaxed attitude to confessional differences, especially if there happened to be good friends or relatives in other churches.

Public Role of the Church

Community Life

According to newspaper reports, the church was also in Gramzda involved in a celebration of nationalist and patriotic events. Most important of them was the opening of a memorial plaque in the church for eighteen parishioners who had fallen in World War I and the Latvian War of Independence. The ceremony took place on June 22, 1934. According to the report in the newspaper Latvijas Kareivis, pastor Biezais and the chairman of the congregation council Ērpe had been the initiators of erecting the plaque. It was consecrated during a festive religious

⁹⁰⁰ “Vēl jau nav tas laiks pienācis, kur ir viens gans un ganamais. Tamdēl katram jāpaliek pie savas ticības un jādarbojas, kā viņš to pēc savas ticības mācījās. Sajaukšanās ar svešām ticībām rada nenoteiktību un svārstīšanos, caur ko var celties apjukums ticības lietās. Un tas nenāktu draudzei vairs par svētību.” Svētdienas Rīts, 06.06.1926, p. 181.

⁹⁰¹ Biezais 1995, 129.

⁹⁰² “Vēl šodien nesaprotu, kāpec braucām uz baptistu, bet ne paši savu – luterāņu baznīcu. Vēlāk, kad gājām jau pamatskolā, tad gan bērni rudenī tika vesti uz tuvāko Gramzdas baznīcu.” Dobelis 2012, 46.

⁹⁰³ Biezais 1987, 178.

service. In the newspaper, speeches of Biezais and also the consecrator of the plaque, pastor Edgārs Bergs, were briefly summarized alongside that of General Dankers. Biezais had reportedly “very cordially” spoken about the difficulties endured by the soldiers and the great importance of the plaque to the next generations. Bergs referred to the heroism of the fallen soldiers. No references to God or faith are mentioned in the summaries of the speeches. The church was decorated, and a local orchestra as well as a mixed choir was performing. After the service, a parade of the *aizsargi* (the Latvian national guard) took place and finally a dinner for dignitaries at Biezais’s home.⁹⁰⁴

There is also a short mentioning that the festive oathtaking ceremony of *aizsargi* of Gramzda, Aizviķi and Purmsātu had begun with religious service in the Lutheran church (and ended with a theatre performance).⁹⁰⁵ Religious ceremonies performed by pastor Biezais are mentioned in newspapers, for instance, on occasion of consecrating the school rooms⁹⁰⁶ and flag⁹⁰⁷ of Purmsāti basic school; oathtaking of new *mazpulki* members in Kalēti;⁹⁰⁸ funeral of commune clerk of Purmsāti,⁹⁰⁹ and foundation of Gramzda agricultural society.⁹¹⁰

Besides that, pastor Biezais appears personally to have actively taken part in the local cultural life and activities of voluntary associations. He was among the members of the revision commission of Gramzda agricultural society,⁹¹¹ delivering lectures in a meeting organized by *Meža un spodribas diena komiteja* (topic unknown)⁹¹² and on the occasion of Family Day (in Purmsāti) about inter-personal relations in family life.⁹¹³ He also acted as an advocate for the main protagonist Krustiņš in a literary trial on “Prodigal Son” by Rūdolfs Blaumanis.⁹¹⁴

Despite the remarkable Baptist population, especially in Aizviķi commune, their preachers seem usually not to have participated in such public religious ceremonies.⁹¹⁵ However, some Baptists were socially active and respected figures. Notably, Baptist preacher Jānis Ģībietis was the chief of the local *aizsargi* unit and served shortly also as a member of parliament from the Farmers’ Union Party.⁹¹⁶ Also, free churches were known for their musical collectives. According

⁹⁰⁴ Latvijas Kareivis, 27.06.1934, p. 2.

⁹⁰⁵ Kurzemes Vārds, 30.08.1938, p. 4.

⁹⁰⁶ Rīts, 10.9.1935, p. 2.

⁹⁰⁷ The pastor had “with cordial words” called upon to fight under this flag for the morality and ideals of the nation. Kurzemes Vārds, 24.04.1938, p. 5.

⁹⁰⁸ Kurzemes Vārds, 02.04.1938, p. 2. *Mazpulki* was a regime-favoured Latvian youth organization, following the principles of the 4H rural youth movement of the USA.

⁹⁰⁹ Kurzemes Vārds, 03.6.1937, p. 2.

⁹¹⁰ Kurzemes Vārds, 09.12.1934, p. 6.

⁹¹¹ Kurzemes Vārds, 07.10.1937, p. 3.

⁹¹² Kurzemes Vārds, 05.05.1938, p. 2.

⁹¹³ Kurzemes Vārds, 11.05.1938, p. 3.

⁹¹⁴ Kurzemes Vārds, 04.06.1940, p. 2.

⁹¹⁵ However, in a Christmas event for the needy, which had been arranged by Aizviķi commune, besides Biezais also Baptist minister Meija and Herrnhutian minister Jankaitis took part: Priekules Ziņas, 06.01.1933, p. 3.

⁹¹⁶ Kristīgā Balss, 1940, no 7, p. 147; Biezais 1994, 115.

to a newspaper account, the Herrnhutian brass band in Aizviķi commune included also players outside of the congregation. However, arguably some of them were expelled for participating in secular events, and therefore the orchestra lost its best players. On the other hand, some of the players of the string orchestra of the same congregation had also taken part in secular events, but nothing was done with them.⁹¹⁷

Church and Schools

At the beginning of 1921, the school council of Purmsāti and the meeting of parents in Kalēti supported religious instruction to be obligatory for schools, but voluntary for pupils. Similar decisions were made on behalf of most of the other schools in Liepāja county, while some of the schools supported mandatory religious instruction for all the pupils. Only in the city of Liepāja, there seems to have been significant opposition to religious instruction among teachers and a part of parents.⁹¹⁸

Little is known about the political and religious views of the teachers in the parish. In his parish history, Biezais notes his good co-operation with all four local schools and teachers and stresses that in all these schools one could find dedicated educators.⁹¹⁹ On the other hand, Biezais mentions that especially Kalēti primary school had also a reputation for being a “red” one. Notably, before the First World War, two members of the illegal social democratic party had indeed been teachers in the ministerial school of Kalēti commune. One of them was Pēteris Blūmfelds, who, after leaving in 1915 for Russia, became a well-known Latvian communist journalist and writer (pseud. Sviris). Kalēti “red school-teachers” had reportedly even organized an obstruction of the introduction service of a new ethnic German pastor in Gramzda, who had been appointed by the lords of the manor despite the opposition of the local Latvians.⁹²⁰ Biezais claims that yet in the 1930s, Kalēti had a reputation as “a red school”. However, he himself has noted nothing suspicious there and concludes that “free Latvia” has changed the attitudes of the teachers.⁹²¹ In his later memoirs, Biezais claims that Žanis Leja, the headmaster of the school from 1926, has had leftist views, indeed. But shortly after Biezais’s arrival, he engaged in close cooperation with the church, becoming even an “indispensable” member of the council of the congregation. According to Biezais himself, it was his “open liberalism” that enabled him to establish close relations with left-leaning personalities such as these school-teachers.⁹²²

⁹¹⁷ Priekules Ziņas, 13.01.1933, p. 2.

⁹¹⁸ LVVA 6642-1-126.

⁹¹⁹ Biezais 1987, 6.

⁹²⁰ Biezais 1987, 169.

⁹²¹ Biezais 1987, 247.

⁹²² Biezais 1995, 128–129. Maruta Priede has written an article about Leja, describing him as a strict but very dedicated and versatile teacher. She admits that according to some locals, Leja adapted politically to different political regimes. His attitudes towards church and religion are not mentioned by her at all. Priede 2001.

In the reports about the social activities of schoolteachers of Liepāja county, most of the schoolteachers mentioned their involvement only in secular associations. Only a small part of them was active in the church as well, usually as organists or leading members of Ladies' committees. As for teachers of Gramzda parish, almost none mentioned their church-related activities. Only Miķelis Karelis from Purmsāti noted that the (secular) choir he conducted, used to perform during the church services.⁹²³ In 1940–41, he served as the organist of the Lutheran congregation for a short while.⁹²⁴ Previously, Kārlis Būmanis, a teacher in Aizviķi, has, as her daughter remembers, often visited the church and, if necessary, played also the organ.⁹²⁵

On the other hand, the employing of schoolteachers as organists by the congregation did not necessarily mean that they were close to the church. In his report for the year 1927, bishop Kārlis Irbe argued that the congregation often hired them because there was simply no one else in the area who could play the organ. Teachers, on the other hand, were interested in additional earnings.⁹²⁶ Biezais also talks in his memoirs about the difficulties he had in finding a new organist. Unlike their older colleagues, young teachers no longer knew how to play the organ, because it was not taught in teachers' seminars anymore. But it turned out that Grīnblats, the new headmaster of Gramzda school, was willing to play the organ at church services. When Biezais asked him to play something for a trial, he played a waltz from the operetta "The Merry Widow", as he did not apparently know any church hymns. Biezais admits his hesitation and the curiousness of the situation, but seeing that Grīnblats could indeed play the instrument, he decided to hire him.⁹²⁷ This episode shows vividly how the younger generation of schoolteachers was becoming less connected with the church compared to their older colleagues.

Besides the "red" reputation of Kalēti school, and the previously mentioned claim of Pāvils about atheists among the schoolteachers (and it is not clear if he had local teachers in mind in the first place), there are no more accounts of teachers' hostility to the church in the parish. Nor is there any evidence of religion-related controversies in the files of the department of Folk Schools;⁹²⁸

⁹²³ LVVA 6642-1-346.

⁹²⁴ Biezais 1987, 59. Karelis is also mentioned by Biezais, along with Leja, as a schoolteacher who co-operated especially closely with the church (Biezais 1995, 128–129).

⁹²⁵ Leja 2004, 70.

⁹²⁶ Baznīcas kalendārs 1929, p. 50.

⁹²⁷ Biezais 1995, 122. However, Grīnblats cannot be found in the list of the organists of the congregation in Biezais 1987, 59.

⁹²⁸ However, there are some from other parishes of Liepāja county. During the purges of schoolteachers in 1934, the pastor of Priekule defended a local schoolteacher who was accused of socialist sympathies (LVVA 6642-1-1405, p. 104). Lutheran dean of Grobiņa defended another, claiming that the teacher had once been a socialist, indeed, but had sincerely repented. (LVVA 6642-1-1407, p. 39). Maiga Starosta, a schoolteacher in Grobiņa, was apparently suspected of left-wing views because her child was not baptized. But it appeared that baptism of the child was not possible as the parents had not been wed in the church; and the church wedding had been, in turn, rejected by the pastor because the groom was 19 years younger

there was only one which seemed to be related entirely to personal interests and controversies. Namely, the headmaster of Gramzda Basic School, Fricis Jauģietis, was, according to Biezais, a talented musician and used to play the organ for the congregation. However, due to arguments which, according to the pastor, were related to material interests, tensions emerged between them, and Jauģietis started to spread slander about the immoral behaviour of Biezais.⁹²⁹ In the archival documents, there are traces of discussions about sending Jauģietis to another post due to the conflicts with the pastor, but also with other public figures in the parish. In response, Jauģietis denied any wrongdoing, adding that as a religious person, he had never consciously acted against the Latvian state, nation, or teacher's ethics.⁹³⁰

The schools' choirs performed in the church⁹³¹ as well as the local annual children's festival began with the service in the church.⁹³² Besides that, Biezais himself was the teacher of religion in Gramzda basic school since 1938.⁹³³ In addition, he even initiated the establishment of a supplementary school (*papildskola*) to improve the "low level of development" in the parish. It operated there in 1938–40 and was led by Biezais himself. Other teachers included the pastor's local friends (the physician Liepiņš, a lawyer, and a forester).⁹³⁴ According to a newspaper report, "The school operates according to the principle of a folk university and is intended to increase the knowledge of rural residents in various fields of agriculture and other knowledge necessary for every conscientious citizen". It was also mentioned that lectures took place three times a week and

than the bride. The teacher promised to baptize her son, who at that time was already seven years old, but it was still decided to send her to work at another school as non-baptizing of children left "of course a bad impression" for the parents. (LVVA 6642-1-1409, p. 208–209) Kārlis Buševics from Nīgrande appealed for opting his son out of religious instruction, as the family was not religiously affiliated, and the boy had not even been baptized. The appeal was rejected on the grounds that father had not fulfilled all the formalities to leave the Lutheran church. But, notably, the headmaster Teodors Kalks also associated in his explanation the attitude towards religion with loyalty to the regime: "In addition, religion is given a place of honour in the school of the renewed Latvia, all celebrations and national holidays are introduced with religious ceremonies. It would not be desirable to try to break away from it." ("Turklāt atjaunotās Latvijas skolā reliģijai ierādīta goda vieta, visas svinības un valsts svētki tiek ievadīti ar garīgiem aktiem. Nebūtu vēlams mēģināt no ta atrauties.") Kalks also noted that during the "era of parties" the refusal to learn religion in Nīgrande had been a common occurrence and insisted that the request of Bušēvičs as a former active socialist had a political motive (LVVA 6642-1-1409, p. 19-21. Cf. LVVA 6642-1-1410, p. 178).

⁹²⁹ Biezais 1995, 119–121.

⁹³⁰ LVVA 6642-1-1407, p. 42.

⁹³¹ Biezais 1995, 129.

⁹³² Biezais 1995, 118.

⁹³³ Kurzemes Vārds, 30.10.1938, p. 2.

⁹³⁴ Kurzemes Vārds, 14.10.1938, p. 4; Biezais 1987, 234.

the supplementary school had about 43 permanent participants, but even some farm owners used to visit the lectures occasionally.⁹³⁵

As for memoirs, Arvids Dobelis does not mention religious topics in the context of school. However, for Alfrēds Leja it is an important issue. According to him, religious instruction was considered to be the most important subject at school. Notably, it was in the first place on the grade sheets and school certificates. Perhaps for this reason it was taught by the school headmaster himself. “With the care of our parents, we also began to realize that the teaching of faith is a serious matter, which would lay the foundation for our morality in everything in life,” claims Leja. “We looked at the headmaster as Jesus Christ himself, or at least as one of the apostles, who would preach the only true Gospel. We listened to what he said as believers listen to their prophets, as unquestionable truth. Good discipline and biblical peace reigned in the classes of religion, and it seemed that the Holy Spirit himself was hovering over our sinful heads and the all-seeing eye of God was watching us closely. Bible stories encouraged mercy, patience, and goodness, and called us to stand against evil, cruelty, and avarice. /.../ We tried to learn Our Father, all Ten Commandments and other divine wisdom by heart.”⁹³⁶

According to the data of the Ministry of Education, in 1934, Baptist religious instruction was taught to 21 children in Aizviķi basic school (according to other data, to 12 children).⁹³⁷ If so, apparently most of the children of Baptist parents did not opt for it and learned together with Lutherans. Alfrēds Leja also mentions religious diversity at school and argues that, in essence, “all the classes were ecumenical”, and there were no frictions based on faith differences.⁹³⁸

Local Politics and Social Contradictions

According to the assessment of the local pastor, revolutionary activities in 1905 were instigated by agitators from Liepāja in Gramzda and found later wide support among locals. The pastor was intimidated by some armed groups of revolutionaries, had to cede the church metrics, money and later his gun, and suffered from constant fear of violence. However, local leaders of the revolutionaries treated him relatively well, and parishioners did not allow the revolutionaries to hold their meetings in the church. Participation in church services and partaking

⁹³⁵ “Skola darbojas pēc tautas universitātes principa un tā domāta lauku iedzīvotāju zināšanu vairošanai dažādās lauksaimniecības nozarēs un citās katram apzinīgam pilsonim nepieciešamās zinības.” Kurzemes Vārds, 01.02.1939, p. 2.

⁹³⁶ “Ar vecāku gādību arī mēs sākām apzināties, ka ticības mācība ir nopietna lieta, kas ielika pamatus mūsu morālei visa dzīvē... “Uz pārzini skatījāmies kā uz pašu Jēsu Kristu vai vismaz kā uz vienu no apustuļiem, kas sludina vienīgi pareizo prieces mācību. Viņa sacīto uzklaustījām tā, kā ticīgie uzklausa savus praviešus, kā neapšaubāmu patiesību. Ticības mācības stundās valdīja laba disciplīna, bībelisks miers un likās, ka pats svētais gars plivinās pār mūsu grēcīgām galvām un uz mums vērīgi norauģās Dieva visu redzoša acs. Bībelstāsti mudināja uz žēlsirdību, izpalīdzību, labestību, aicināja nostāties pret ļaunumu, cietsirdību un mantrausību. /.../ Tēvreizi, visus desmit baušļus un citas dievišķās gudrības centāmies iemācīties no galvas.” Leja 2000, 88-89.

⁹³⁷ LVVA 1632-6-26, p. 115 and 118.

⁹³⁸ Leja 2000, 88.

of the Holy Communion had been high in the parish before the revolution and continued to be so shortly after its suppression.⁹³⁹

In the Constituent Assembly election results in 1920, a strong contrast between Aizviķi commune on the one hand and Kalēti and Purmsāti on the other is evident. Aizviķi was a stronghold of agrarians; leftist parties got relatively few votes there. In Kalēti and Purmsāti, on the other hand, left-wing parties played initially an important role in the political scene, with social democrats (LSDSP) garnering 2/3 of the vote in 1920. In later elections, support for the socialists was somewhat smaller. In Kalēti, many voters tended to prefer smaller left-wing (or petty bourgeois) parties while in Purmsāti the parties of „New Farmers” seem to have attracted the support of many of those who previously had supported the LSDSP. However, at the same time the support of the Farmers’ Union rose to approximately a third of the vote in both communes (and in 1928, it was even higher). Finally, in Gramzda, support for the Farmers’ Union and socialists was more evenly divided. In the Constituent Assembly elections, LSDSP had won plurality in the commune, but since 1922 The Farmers’ Union was the most popular party.

Support for Christian parties was in 1922 above the national average in the parish, especially in Aizviķi and Gramzda communes. Since the 1925 elections, the votes were scattered between the Christian National Union (later the Christian Union and Workers) and the Baptist-led Christian Labour Union.⁹⁴⁰ Unsurprisingly, the latter was much more popular in Aizviķi commune, where nearly 1/5 of the population was free church affiliated.

Table 12. Support for Selected Parties in General Elections of Latvia in Gramzda Parish (%)

Socialists (LSDSP)					
	1920	1922	1925	1928	1931
Aizviķi	19.2	3.8	12.5	11.9	6.6
Gramzda	45.4	31.5	36.5	30.6	29.5
Kalēti	64.2	48.4	24.8	24.7	26.0
Purmsāti	68.2	45.7	42.7	29.6	24.8

Leftists (pro-communists)					
	1920	1922	1925	1928	1931
Aizviķi	0	2.7
Gramzda	3.4	2.1
Kalēti	2.8	7.0
Purmsāti	2.2	0.4

⁹³⁹ Mācītāju ziņojumi par... 1930, pp. 111–116.

⁹⁴⁰ For the parties, see Tēraudkalns 2011.

Farmers' Union

	1920	1922	1925	1928	1931
Aizviķi	53.1	61.9	64.6	67.1	73.2
Gramzda	34.3	34.6	45.0	37.3	36.9
Kalēti	18.5	35.5	39.4	38.6	32.3
Purmsāti	27.9	40.9	39.8	38.5	28.5

Union of Christian Working People (Baptist-affiliated)

	1920	1922	1925	1928	1931
Aizviķi	5.8	9.2	7.3
Gramzda	2.4	4.0	4.9
Kalēti	3.3	2.4	2.3
Purmsāti	3.6	3.5	4.4

Christian Nationalist Union/Christian Union and Workers

	1920	1922	1925	1928	1931
Aizviķi	1.0	6.8	0.4	1.0	1.5
Gramzda	4.1	13.8	0.8	5.0	1.8
Kalēti	4.1	4.4	0.8	5.3	2.5
Purmsāti	1.3	2.9	0	0.7	0.4

Sources: Latwijas Satversmes Sapulzes... 1920; Skujenieks 1923, Skujenieks 1926, Skujenieks 1929, Skujenieks 1932.

According to pastor Haralds Biezais, political divisions also influenced congregational and religious life. Notably, in Kalēti, which allegedly had a reputation of a „red commune”, anti-clerical moods were more widespread. Those few people of the parish, who had no church affiliation whatsoever, lived mostly in that commune.⁹⁴¹ However, Biezais, himself of humble origin, boasts of having established good relations also with left-wingers, including even those who later became communists. Some of them even started to actively participate in the life of the congregation. However, having opted for collaboration with the Soviets, one had to flee during the war summer of 1941 to Russia and another was executed by Germans, notwithstanding Biezais’s efforts to save him.⁹⁴² He remembers that in 1940, shortly after the Soviet Union had occupied Latvia, the beginning of the cemetery festivity was suspended due to the memorial gathering of the local communists in the cemetery. When it was over, the organizers approached Biezais and his fellow pastor, simply to apologize for the delay: “We did not mean to cause the delay for you, and we will not disrupt you.”⁹⁴³ Also, it turned out that the same brass band that had played “International” for the communist event remained for the church cemetery festivity to perform religious hymns.⁹⁴⁴ Interestingly, however, Biezais does not mention that in the autumn of

⁹⁴¹ Biezais 1987, 17.

⁹⁴² Biezais 1995, 128–130.

⁹⁴³ “Mūsu nolūks nebija jūs aizkavēt, un mēs jūs netraucēsim.”

⁹⁴⁴ Biezais 1995, 130–131.

1940, „the pastor of Gramzda” was accused in a Soviet newspaper for refusing to postpone the confirmation classes despite urgent sowing work in the farms – and spreading slander about possible abolishing of confirmation teaching by the new authorities.⁹⁴⁵

As for Biezais’s stance towards the Ulmanis regime, it was ambiguous. On the one hand, he shared the nationalist worldview which was promoted by the regime. One of his sermons, which was held in Kuldīga and broadcasted on radio, would have been praised by Ulmanis himself,⁹⁴⁶ and close relations with influential people of the regime seem to have helped him in his conflicts with church leadership. However, in his memoirs, he compares this to driving out demons by Beelzebub.⁹⁴⁷ And neither in his congregation history nor memoirs, are there claims about the upswing of religious life during the Ulmanis era.

Conclusion

Gramzda is one of those parishes where few sources of church history have been preserved to our day, leaving considerable gaps in our knowledge. However, there are three different thorough but very personal accounts of the religious situation in the parish from the interwar years – memoirs of pastor Haralds Biezais, memoirs of coming of age of Alfrēds Leja, and opinion pieces by local pietist lay figure Jānis Pāvils.

The available evidence seems to suggest that the church played still an important role for the locals, as secular societies had not fully overtaken the social roles that the church used to play before. Even though a considerable part of the population voted for the left, there are only few vague hints known about anti-clerical attitudes in the parish. Apparently, those were not prevalent even among socialist sympathizers, schoolteachers, or representatives of the intelligentsia. Also, there is no information about the widespread rejection of church rites.

The authority of the dominant Lutheran church had been, however, challenged by free churches. The reasons for their unusual popularity in the parish are unclear and need further investigation. The explanation of Biezais that it was directly related to the German *Herrenkirche* legacy must be taken with a grain of salt. Importantly, the historical legacy in Gramzda (and indeed elsewhere in the region, which was the stronghold of free churches in Latvia) seems not to have been significantly different from the rest of the country in that regard. In any case, in the interwar years relations between locals who belonged to different confessions appear to have been relatively good, amounting even to co-operation on a scale that was not approved by religious authorities.

Perhaps the popularity of free churches is related to the independent mood of local lay people in religious matters, which could also explain the frequent conflicts of the Lutheran lay leaders with the pastors. Indeed, the conflicts, exchanges of pastors and long-term absence of a residing pastor hampered the religious life

⁹⁴⁵ Komunisti (Liepāja) 27.09.1940, p. 5. Cf. Jaunais Komunārs 22.10.1940, p. 6.

⁹⁴⁶ Biezais 1995, 140.

⁹⁴⁷ Biezais 1995, 136.

in the parish considerably, though it is difficult to assess its long-term influence on the secularization process.

Notables are also different conceptions of piety. A pietist minority (Pāvils) practised very intensively and had stringent moral requirements and at least a cautious attitude towards secular culture. The majority (the families of Dobelis and Leja), while having respect towards religion and the church, had no such misgivings. Also, the young pastor Biezais, despite admittedly encountering some resistance from the older generation, promoted the adaptation of the church to the modern Latvian society, taking part in the activities of secular societies, establishing secular *papildskola*, and organizing “patriotic pilgrimages”.

3.2. JAUNPIEBALGA PARISH

Introduction

Historiography

Vēsma Johansone, a teacher and researcher of local history, has written a history of the congregation, which concentrates on the pastors’ activities, and contains an annotated bibliography.⁹⁴⁸ In 2011, a hefty volume about selected topics on local history was published, edited by Johansone, with a second complemented and improved edition in 2014. From this study’s point of view, a comprehensive chapter about school history is especially valuable. In the chronology of historical events, some events of congregation life are also mentioned.⁹⁴⁹

General Overview

The region of Piebalga in mid-Vidzeme is historically known for its artisan and cultural heritage.⁹⁵⁰ Both its parishes – Vecpiebalga and Jaunpiebalga – were among the hotspots of the Latvian national movement in the 19th century. Remarkably many Latvian people of arts and science came from there.⁹⁵¹ A student of medicine, who had taken part in an anthropological expedition in the 1930s, noted that though the level of education of the locals was high, on the one hand, “truthfully, it must be said that the cultural Jaunpiebalga’s inhabitants have not yet been touched by culture in some places, regarding especially their peculiar dialect, home furnishings, and their own soul.”⁹⁵² In the interwar years, there were two communes within the borders of the parish – Jaunpiebalga and Ranka.

⁹⁴⁸ Johansone 2008.

⁹⁴⁹ Johansone 2014, 618–622.

⁹⁵⁰ Since 2023, the cultural space of Piebalga has been included in the list of Latvian non-material cultural heritage. The program website provides a thorough overview of the region: <https://nematerialakultura.lv/Elementi/elements-28/>, 10.02.2024.

⁹⁵¹ Cf. the impressive lists of famous locals found in the encyclopedia “Latvijas pagasti” 2000, 400–402.

⁹⁵² “Patiesi, jāsaka, ka kultūrālās Jaunpiebalgas iedzīvotājus vietām kultūra vēl diezgan maz ir skārusi, it sevišķi viņu īpatnējo izlokšni, mājas iekārtu un pašu dvēseli.” (J. Grebežs). Sējējs, 1938, no 3, 258 and 260.

Religious Background

At the beginning of the Latvian independence period, both communes of the parish were almost exclusively Lutheran. The region was known for its Herrnhutian heritage, with meetinghouses in Kaņepi, Ilzēni, Augstāri and Laņģi. Herrnhutianism was still occasionally referred to as an important factor shaping local mentality in the interwar years, but its importance was already in decline. The share of Catholics was on the rise in the parish, due to the influx of agricultural labourers, especially from Latgale. In 1935, already 263 Roman Catholics lived in Jaunpiebalga (5.8% of the population) and 159 in Ranka (5%) communes. In 1936, the first Catholic mass was held in the parish (reportedly about 200 people participated),⁹⁵³ and in 1939, a Catholic church was built.

Pastors

In the 19th century, father Carl Ludwig Kaehlbrandt (1803–84) and son Emil August Kaehlbrandt (1836–1907) served the congregation. The biography of Emil Kaehlbrandt, compiled by his daughter Marie Treu, is a valuable source of social and church history in the parish.⁹⁵⁴

1896–1915 Jēkabs Ozoliņš (1860–1915), the first Latvian pastor in Jaunpiebalga, took part in local associational life and was prolific publicist and researcher of local history.⁹⁵⁵ Oto Zariņš, a teacher of the parish school who came to Jaunpiebalga in 1909, remarks that it was the first time for him to encounter an ethnic Latvian pastor and also a clergyman who treated a schoolteacher as an equal. While going to introduce himself to the new pastor, he entered through the kitchen door as he was used to in other parishes but was asked by the pastor to enter through the main entrance next time. Later, Zariņš became the assistant of the ailing pastor, and related closely with his family as well, which was also *purely Latvian*, something extraordinary at that time for a family of a pastor according to Zariņš.⁹⁵⁶

1916–1944 Jānis Ozols (1876–1957). According to Johansone, he was widely respected for his kindness and humanity, for not making distinctions between rich and poor,⁹⁵⁷ but also for his good voice and meaningful sermons.⁹⁵⁸ He had connections with the political and cultural elite and served from 1933 to 1936 as the head of the Department of Spiritual Affairs (Garīgo Lietu Pārvalde) of the

⁹⁵³ Johansone 2014, 689.

⁹⁵⁴ Treija 2000.

⁹⁵⁵ Johansone 2008, 325.

⁹⁵⁶ Johansone 2008, 80–82. Cf. *Latvis*, 29.03.1930, p. 2.

⁹⁵⁷ Ozols had humble origins. Working as a schoolteacher, he taught himself to pass the final exams of secondary school at the age of 25 and was able to complete his studies at the university in 1911, reportedly thanks to the financial support of his friends (Johansone 2008, 85; *Izglītības Ministrijas Mēnešraksts* 1938, no 1, p. 64).

⁹⁵⁸ Johansone 2008, 92 and 101.

Ministry of Internal Affairs. Ozols fled from Latvia in 1944 and served Latvian congregations in exile until his death in Grand Rapids, USA, in 1957.⁹⁵⁹

Religious Life

Jaunpiebalga had a reputation as a pious, pro-church parish. One of the locals claimed in his memoirs: “It was a pure and cordial Latvian parish, where the Herrnhutian movement had left a great and deep influence. The people of Jaunpiebalga were living members of the congregation who did not change their spirit even during the times of political changes. Even then, in decisive moments, they were defenders of the church and their pastor,” saving him twice in the last moment from execution by the Bolsheviks.⁹⁶⁰ Indeed, according to Ludvigs Adamovičs, Ozols was one of only a few pastors in Vidzeme who continued his service in the congregation unhindered during the Bolshevik rule.⁹⁶¹

Individual Practice

Despite that, a newspaper article in the church’s weekly *Svētdienas Rīts* claimed in 1923 that the people of Jaunpiebalga were not particularly active churchgoers, even though a cemetery festivity (*kapu svētki*) and a Bible feast with guest pastors (respectively V. Maldonis and V. Sanders) had attracted large crowds. The writer also expressed a hope that concerts of spiritual music, which had been initiated by the pastor, would persuade more people to the church for Sunday services as well. Also, the popularity of Herrnhutian prayer meetings appears to have been declining.⁹⁶² The number of church rites fluctuated annually considerably, but there was no remarkable decline during the whole period (see appendix).

On October 20, 1927, the requirements for the Congregation Council members, which were proposed by the pastor and endorsed by the council, cast light on how being an exemplary member of the congregation was understood in Jaunpiebalga. It was decided unanimously that the Council members were obliged to live their whole lives according to the Christian spirit and fulfill “priestly tasks” in their families, arranging religious gatherings at home and encouraging reading of the Bible. Also, the leading congregation members should diligently attend church services, respect the Holy Sacrament, and follow the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12) in their daily activities as employers or employees. In secular events organized by the congregation, dancing was allowed if it was performed in a way that did not surpass the boundaries of morality and good manners. Similarly, games of chance were accepted if they were conducted in a “playful” manner,

⁹⁵⁹ Johansone 2008, 83–102; For his earlier biography, see *Izglītības Ministrijas Mēnešraksts* 1938, no 1, p. 63-66.

⁹⁶⁰ “Tā bija īsti skaidra un sirsnīga latviešu draudze, kur brāļu draudze bija atstājusi lielu un dziļu iespaidu. Jaunpiebaldzēni bija dzīvi draudzes locekļi, kuri savu garu nemainīja arī politisko maiņu laikos. Arī tad izšķirošos brīžos viņi bija baznīcas un sava mācītāja aizstāvji,” Quotation by A. Jaunais in Johansone 2008, 94, cf. p. 98.

⁹⁶¹ Adamovičs 1926, 111.

⁹⁶² *Svētdienas Rīts*, 07.10.1923, p. 5.

and awards were of tiny value. In the media, the council members were not supposed to discuss personal conflicts and overall had to take care of the good reputation of the congregation and the church. Finally, the consumption of alcohol was acceptable only in case it happened “in small amounts and seldom”, and others should not be encouraged to drink alcohol.⁹⁶³ In sum, despite the Herrnhutian heritage of the region, being a good Christian was, according to the prevailing opinion, compatible with active participation in secular social life.

Also, reminiscences of a miller’s daughter reveal an odd combination of piety with working on Sundays on pragmatic grounds. Every Sunday morning, there was a prayer in the mill: the owner played the piano in the hall, and the staff sang a hymn together. On the other hand, Sundays were also very busy working days as people on their way to church brought wool and broadcloth to the mill for processing, and after the service, they came again to take out the production.⁹⁶⁴

Autobiographical Writings

Memoirs of **Olga Lisovska** (1928–2015), a well-known poetess who came from Jaunpiebalga, are the main autobiographical source of interwar Jaunpiebalga, and contain relatively many references to religion and church.⁹⁶⁵

First, there is a longer story in the book related to the child’s encounter with death. Unta, a distant relative and the only close friend of the preschool girl Anete (so, for some reason, calls herself the author) dies due to an “evil disease”. Anete cannot cry at the funeral because Unta had once confided in her that she longed to go to Heaven; her grandmother had said that good children go there. At the funeral, however, the coffin is placed on the ground instead, which disappoints Anete, but she calms down when mother and then also the pastor confirm that the child’s soul went to Heaven anyway. Anete herself does not want to go to Heaven – she would be sorry to leave behind earthly things and other joys that life here offers, although she owned much less than the wealthy Unta. The funeral also leaves a crushing impression on Anete; she does not want to be buried in the ground nor to cause such profound sadness for her close ones. Anyway, she may not go to Heaven in the first place because she is not as good a child as Unta was – she has bullied her brothers, annoyed her grandfather, and tends to lie. However, the latter is a very serious sin according to adults. Anete also experiences that adults do not want to explain death-related issues to her. Gandmother even scolds Anete’s mother about taking the child to the funeral because she is too young to understand what has happened. (pp. 35–45)

There are also assessments of the religiosity of her close ones. The author mentioned that her nephew was going “to the Communion” the following year, and the aunt would then arrange a confirmation party (p. 21). Her mother is

⁹⁶³ Johansone 2008, 34 and 37.

⁹⁶⁴ Johansone 2014, 91–92. It is unclear whether these reminiscences are from the interwar period or earlier time.

⁹⁶⁵ Lisovska 2003.

claimed to be a quiet believer, not wanting to express her faith publicly.⁹⁶⁶ She prayed, visiting her own mother's grave, but this might have been out of habit rather than due to piety. Grandmother (mother of her father), on the other hand, sang church hymns in the evenings and also encouraged Anete to pray, assuring that God hears prayers made with firm faith. Anete herself was fond of religion classes because she liked singing spiritual songs and was praised by the teacher for excellence in performing them. Anete had also enjoyed going to church, especially at Christmas time, because of the uplifting atmosphere there. However, during the first Soviet year, Anete became a pioneer and ceased to believe in God as it was told to be inappropriate for a pioneer. (pp. 65–67) However, she recalled what her grandmother had talked about the power of prayer when, in the summer of 1941, Nazi German troops approached her home, which meant a danger to their family as they had hesitantly accepted land granted by Soviet land reform. Anete prayed fervently again (p. 67), but it did not help stop the Red Army's retreat (p. 74).

Besides that, Lisovska mentions encounters with pastor Ozols. He was also a renowned gardener,⁹⁶⁷ whose garden had flowers that could not have been seen anywhere else. A pastor was a highly respected man, and Anete was required to do a curtsy when meeting him. (p. 11–12) The latter account is somewhat at odds with claims that the pastor emphasized his own humble origins and attempted to discontinue the distance between him and common people.⁹⁶⁸

In sum, three frequent motives of autobiographical texts of interwar years appear also in the memoirs of Lisovska: the association of the deeper piety with the generation of grandparents, the naïve religiosity of children, and pleasant memories of Christmas services.

Congregational Life of the Lutheran Congregation

Besides regular Sunday services, the meetings of Herrnhutians had traditionally played an important role in the parish. The famous painter Kārlis Miesnieks (1887–1977) claims that the area was until “revolutions and times of war“ under the strong influence of the Herrnhutians, which could not be shaken even by the pastor's fierce opposition in 19th century. Miesnieks himself experienced it when as a teacher at a local school 1907–10, he was criticized for teaching Bible stories as if they were just folk tales. “There was an investigation, I was interrogated, and some students were interrogated. [The pastor] Ozoliņš, an educated and smart person, and not the kind of dogmatist that the Herrnhutian leaders wanted to see, found a compromise.”⁹⁶⁹ Importantly, the next pastor Jānis Ozols was a sympathizer of Herrnhutians himself, co-operating with them closely both in his

⁹⁶⁶ “Mammīte gan apgalvo, ka viņa esot klusā ticētāja, viņai nevajagot izrādīties uz āru”

⁹⁶⁷ Cf. Svētdienas Rīts, 26.09.1926, p. 309.

⁹⁶⁸ Johansone 2008, 101.

⁹⁶⁹ „Bija izmeklēšana, pratināja ir mani, ir skolēnus. Ozoliņš, ka izglītots un gudrs cilvēks, arī ne jau tāds dogmatīķis, kādu gribēja redzēt saiešanu tētiņi, atrada kompromisu.” Miesnieks 1959, 19–20 and 73.

parish and also outside of it, and was also a strong supporter of close ties of the movement with the Lutheran church.⁹⁷⁰

According to a letter sent to Svētdienas Rīts newspaper by a local Herrnhutian sympathizer, pastor Ozols held services in meetinghouses along with their lay preachers. In Laņģi meetinghouse, major services were held three times that year – on Good Friday, feast of maidens (May 27) and feast of children (June 22). Fifty children participated in the latter that year. Other feasts of children were held also in Augstāri in August and in Ilzēni in September, and “the feast cycle” was completed by the feast of young men in Ilzēni. In Kaņepi, religious meetings were not held anymore. Besides meetings in the meetinghouses, the Herrnhutian “brethren” were assisting the pastor by burying the dead, baptizing children, sending the bride and groom out to the church weddings with a prayer, and consoling the sick and the suffering with the Word of God.⁹⁷¹ Three years later, feasts of children in meetinghouses of Augstāri and Ilzēni were mentioned again.⁹⁷² However, besides these articles, there was little data about the religious activities of Herrnhutians; apparently, the movement was declining and did not attract much attention from the general public anymore. In 1938, it was mentioned that “even now”, locals used to gather at the Augstāri meetinghouse on Good Friday, which also seems to hint at the decline of the movement.⁹⁷³ According to Gunārs Ceipe, in the 1930s only Augstāri and Ilzēni meetinghouses still operated in the parish officially; however, some brethren elsewhere could have continued their gatherings informally.⁹⁷⁴

Also, the traditional examination of religious knowledge of children by pastors had not disappeared yet. At least the bishop Kārlis Irbe mentioned in his annual report of the LELC for 1929 that in several parishes of Cēsis deanery, including in Jaunpiebalga, *pārklaušīšanas* were still held, despite of small number of the children who appeared there.⁹⁷⁵

Some information about the activities of the congregation is provided by minutes of the Congregation Council. In 1929, the following plans were made for the next year: work with youth (congregation evenings, religious services at homes, preparation of communicants, dissemination of literature), providing “moral support” for the sick and poor, as well as for those who were in danger of falling into alcoholism or immorality. Also, arranging festive days of different kinds was discussed. Another notable feature of the congregational life was co-operation with secular organizations and institutions. In 1930, a joint meeting of the congregation council, ladies’ committees, local teachers and social activists (*sabiedri-*

⁹⁷⁰ Ceipe 2010, 106, 113 and 172.

⁹⁷¹ Svētdienas Rīts, 07.10.1923, p. 5.

⁹⁷² However, in the latter, the feast was canceled due to an inspection of cattle, which was carried out nearby on the same day. Svētdienas Rīts, 26.09.1926, p. 309.

⁹⁷³ Brīva Zeme, 21.12.1938, p. 3.

⁹⁷⁴ Ceipe 2010, 212. Both Augstāri and Ilzēni were accepted formally as branches of the Herrnhutian organization (Brāļu draudze) in 1934 (Ceipe 2010, 122).

⁹⁷⁵ Baznīcas kalendārs 1931, p. 61.

skie darbinieki) was organized to co-ordinate their activities. Pastor Alfrēds Skrodels from Mazsalaca was invited to speak at this event.⁹⁷⁶

In August, there was the tradition of celebrating the day of the youth in the congregation. In 1934, the archbishop Grīnbergs was visiting the congregation on that occasion, and the church was overcrowded with people. A local who wrote about the event to *Svētdienas Rīts*, seems to have been confident that local youth was continuing the Christian traditions of the forefathers in the parish.⁹⁷⁷

As much as is known, no free church congregations were permanently operating in the parish. However, there is an account of a public lecture on religion held by Pēteris Ķinķeris (1893–1956), a local social and cultural activist who had studied classical philology at the University of Yurjev (Tartu). In the lecture, which was allegedly popular among the youth, he interpreted religion radically differently from the church.⁹⁷⁸

Some additional information about religious life in the parish can be derived from the minutes of the annual conferences of the Ladies' committees of Cēsis deanery,⁹⁷⁹ which were published in print for the years 1932–39. According to the annual reports which were presented at the conference, the parish committee of Jaunpiebalga (with its branch in Ranka) had as many as 136 members in 1932; in 1935 there were 56 members in Jaunpiebalga and 72 in Ranka.⁹⁸⁰ The committees' activities in general were in decline in the deanery, as the overview by the dean in 1936 indicates.⁹⁸¹ The Ladies' committees in Jaunpiebalga were mainly occupied by collecting means for helping the poor and needy in the congregation,⁹⁸² and occasionally organizing events or distributing religious literature. For instance, in 1931, five lectures were held on religious topics. Thanks to it, the committee of Jaunpiebalga was one of the most active committees in the deanery by activities "in the spiritual field"; as many as eight other committees declared nothing in that respect.⁹⁸³ In 1932, three lectures (one of them with religious service), two Christmas events (*eglītes*) for the poor, and charity bazaars were

⁹⁷⁶ Johansone 2008, 41.

⁹⁷⁷ *Svētdienas Rīts*, 12.08.1934, p. 260.

⁹⁷⁸ Johansone 1996, 90.

⁹⁷⁹ Later re-named as *draudžu palīdzības komitējas*.

⁹⁸⁰ *Cēsu prāvesta iecirkņa...* 1933, 14; *Cēsu prāvesta iecirkņa...* 1936, 31.

⁹⁸¹ He also mentioned that many committees did not even send their reports, and therefore, it was difficult to get an overview of their activities in the first place. (*Cēsu prāvesta iecirkņa...* 1937, 6). Already in 1932, the dean had expressed also dissatisfaction with the passive and pessimistic attitudes of several committees and their members. Some committees also had problems with cooperation with the congregation council. (*Cēsu prāvesta iecirkņa...* 1932, 20–22).

⁹⁸² In 1938, Ls 365,74 were raised for the poor of the parish (*Cēsu prāvesta iecirkņa...* 1938, 11). As for the deanery as a whole, it was noted in the 1936 conference that funds raised by the Ladies' committees constituted ¼ of all the incomes of the congregations. (*Cēsu prāvesta iecirkņa...* 1936, 6).

⁹⁸³ *Cēsu prāvesta iecirkņa...* 1932, 19–20.

organized, and the magazine *Baznīca un Skola* was distributed among school-children.⁹⁸⁴

Public Role of the Church

Community Life

In an article, which was published in the weekly newspaper of the church in 1926, it was claimed that Jānis Ozols was, with the headmaster of the parish school Augusts Rudītis, one of the leading personalities in local social life. They had been inspired by the activities of Smiltene pastor Kārlis Kundziņš, sr., with whom they both as schoolteachers had co-operated closely at the beginning of the century. Ozols had initiated the foundation of co-operative savings and credit bank (*krāj- un aizdevu kase*) in Jaunpiebalga, he was among leaders of several voluntary associations in the parish and had initiated the building of a village hall (*biedrības nams*).⁹⁸⁵ However, the prominent role of Ozols is not mentioned elsewhere in the sources. Noteworthy, for example, is a complete absence of references to the church, the pastor, and the congregation in a lengthy overview of social and cultural life in the parish, written by Augusts Rudītis to the newspaper *Gulbenes Balss* in 1938.⁹⁸⁶

However, there was no local newspaper published in Jaunpiebalga, and therefore relatively few newspaper accounts are available about the congregation. Usually, the articles were dedicated to the festive occasions in the local life, including celebrating its Herrnhutian past. Reporting the events in Jaunpiebalga to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Herrnhutian activities in Latvia in 1929, the right-wing newspaper *Latvis* presented some facts about the history of Herrnhutians in Jaunpiebalga and named the participants of the celebrations. Among them, pastor Ozols had conducted liturgy and later in the prayer mentioned the names of former local Herrnhutian leaders. Roberts Bērziņš, the representative of Latvian Brethren Congregation, spoke according to the report about the beginnings of Herrnhutian congregation in Jaunpiebalga, its heyday, and the power of faith that the leaders and lay preachers had awakened.⁹⁸⁷ *Brāļu Draudžu Vēstnesis* added that after the crowded church service, gatherings were also arranged in *Laņģi* and *Ilzēni* meetinghouses.⁹⁸⁸ Also in 1929, the 125th anniversary of Jaunpiebalga church was celebrated. In a report about it, *Jaunais Smiltenes Vēstnesis* brought the names of dignitaries who were present, and musicians who performed in the festive concert. It is emphasized that the revenues from the concert went to decorating the church and erecting the monument for the War of Independence. Reportedly 2,000 people took part and donated a total of 1,000 Lats for this purpose.⁹⁸⁹

⁹⁸⁴ Cēsu prāvesta iecirkņa... 1933, 16.

⁹⁸⁵ *Svētdienas Rīts*, 26.09.1926, pp. 308–309.

⁹⁸⁶ *Gulbenes Balss*, 18.02.1938, p. 3.

⁹⁸⁷ *Latvis*, 06.10.1929, p. 2.

⁹⁸⁸ *Brāļu Draudžu Vēstnesis*, 1929, no 4/5, p. 72.

⁹⁸⁹ *Jaunais Smiltenes Vēstnesis*, 04.10.1929, p. 2.

Otherwise, the religious heritage of the parish was not paid much attention by the newspapers. Notably, in a lengthy article about the rich historical and cultural legacy of the parish in Brīva Zeme in 1938, the Herrnhutian movement was only briefly mentioned.⁹⁹⁰ More often, however, the congregation's involvement in patriotic initiatives and events drew the attention of the wider public.

Most importantly, erecting the monument for the fallen soldiers in the First World War and Latvian War of Independence in Jaunpiebalga was the initiative of the congregation. Pastor Ozols summoned the meeting of schools and voluntary associations in 1924 to discuss it. On August 26, 1928, the foundation stone was laid in the presence of General Jānis Balodis, and on June 29, 1930, festive consecration of the monument took place, with the participation of the president of Latvia, Alberts Kviesis. Besides that, 60 oak trees were planted nearby to commemorate the sixty fallen soldiers from Jaunpiebalga.⁹⁹¹ The news about both ceremonies was published in the army newspaper *Latvijas Kareivis*. As for 1928, it is mentioned that the celebrations began with religious service in the church conducted by Ozols and Jānis Tēriņš, the pastor of the garrison of Riga. After the service, the foundation stone of the War of Independence monument was consecrated by Tēriņš, who had, according to the newspaper, highlighted the faith and hope of the heroes in Latvia, which had prompted them to self-sacrifice for the sake of the homeland.⁹⁹² In 1930, it was mentioned that President Kviesis and other high guests had spent a night before the celebrations at the home of pastor Ozols. Again, the celebrations began with a service in the church where Ozols, Tēriņš, and Prof. Voldemārs Maldonis served. It was also mentioned that the church was full of people, and the pastor Ozols blessed the state president at the altar. After the service, the president unveiled the monument and pastor Tēriņš consecrated it, referring to willingness to give one's life for the sake of brethren as the sign of ultimate love (cf. John 15, 13).⁹⁹³ Besides that, both news stories contain summaries of the speeches of dignitaries, names of the performing musicians, and suggestions that locals appreciated the commemoration of the fallen heroes, which was shown by large participation in the celebrations and the presence of representatives from all the local organizations. In 1930, some details about the reception of the president were also provided. In sum, religious ceremonies were depicted as an integral and self-evident part of the celebrations. However, religious rhetoric was, according to the articles at least, used merely to highlight the patriotic message of the celebrations.

On another occasion, it is mentioned that a bazaar organized by the Ladies' committee raised 1000 *Lats* for the maintenance and decoration of the church and the oak grove of the war heroes.⁹⁹⁴ Also, it was mentioned only in passing that

⁹⁹⁰ Brīva Zeme, 21.12.1938, p. 3.

⁹⁹¹ Johansone 2008, 43-48.

⁹⁹² *Latvijas Kareivis*, 28.08.1928, p. 1.

⁹⁹³ *Latvijas Kareivis*, 01.07.1930, p. 1.

⁹⁹⁴ Brīva Zeme, 29.11.1938, p. 4. Ozol's merits as a long-term pastor in enlivening the life of the congregation are also praised in this short news.

pastor Ozols held “a cordial speech” on the occasion of a visit of the *Vadonis Kārlis Ulmanis*.⁹⁹⁵

Besides patriotic events, the pastor was also invited to take part in almost all major social and cultural events in the parish. As a rule, he is simply mentioned as being present and having conducted the religious ceremony (*garīgo aktu*), for example, in the events of *mazpulki*,⁹⁹⁶ assigning the name of prof. Būmanis to the former Martin basic school,⁹⁹⁷ the celebration of the centenary of the parish school building in Jaunpiebalga,⁹⁹⁸ song festival in Ranka⁹⁹⁹ and all-Piebalga song festival.¹⁰⁰⁰ Only in the case of the opening of the agricultural society in Jaunpiebalga it is mentioned that during the ceremony, the religious hymn “Dievs, sargi mūsu tēvu zemi” was sung, and Ozols had in his religious speech (*svētruna*) referred “to the importance of the day.”¹⁰⁰¹

Church and Schools

Pastor Ozols, himself a former teacher, was keenly interested in education. On the occasion of his jubilee, it was noted in the magazine *Audzinātājs*: “Ozols /.../ became convinced that the easiest way to reach the heart of the people was through school. And that is why he persistently seeks connections with the school and the teacher and considers the teachers to be the closest people to him. From time to time he has walked to the nearest school, teaching religious instruction, he is always present wherever there is an important day and event for schools and teachers.”¹⁰⁰² The congregation had the ambition to be actively involved in religious education at schools. In 1931, a joint meeting of religious co-workers of the congregation and local teachers was held. One of the teachers gave a presentation about religious instruction, and a lively discussion followed.¹⁰⁰³

There are only some short accounts of Ozols’ pedagogical views. Speaking at a local pedagogical conference on the topic “What Rural People Expect from the Schools” in 1928, he complained about the poor connection between school and society and claimed that there were too many school subjects while religious

⁹⁹⁵ Latvijas Kareivis, 19.06.1934, p. 1.

⁹⁹⁶ Gulbenes Balss, 29.04.1938, p. 5; Jaunākas Ziņas 14.04.1937, p. 4 (with Arnolds Lūsis, the official pastor of *mazpulki*).

⁹⁹⁷ Cēsu Vēstis, 18.11.1938, p. 2.

⁹⁹⁸ Izglītības Ministerijas Mēnešraksts, 1936, no 1, pp. 70–72.

⁹⁹⁹ Latvijas Kareivis, 20.08.1936, p. 2.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Rīts, 26.08.1935, p. 2.

¹⁰⁰¹ Gulbenes Balss, 25.02.1938, p. 2. Only one summary of Ozols’s speech at such events was published (on occasion of the commemoration of Brothers Kaudzītes in neighbouring Vecpiebalga parish in Izglītības Ministrijas Mēnessraksts, no 9, 1934, pp. 211–214), which is cited below.

¹⁰⁰² “Ozols /.../ pārliecina, ka tautas sirdij visvieglāki piekļūt caur skolu. Un tāpēc viņš neatlaidīgi meklē sakarus ar skolu un skolotāju un tura skolotājus par sev vistuvākiem cilvēkiem. Laiku pa laikam viņš staigājis uz tuvāko skolu, ticības mācības mācīdams, neiztrūkstoši ir klāt visur, kur vien skolām un skolotājiem kāda izcilāka diena un notikums.” *Audzinātājs*, 1938, no 1, pp. 59–61.

¹⁰⁰³ Johansone 2008, 42.

instruction was underestimated. However, religious experiences had an important role in enhancing ethical behaviour and developing character. Thus, it was allegedly a wish of the rural people that religious education remained in school and the number of its weekly lessons would not be reduced.¹⁰⁰⁴ In a similar conference in 1934, Ozols claimed that schools should not be expected too much regarding inculcating love in the work and homeland, and that parents should also do their bit. He noted that the forefathers of Latvians had no agricultural education but still achieved a lot, thanks to their candour, diligence, love, and uprightness.¹⁰⁰⁵

Several local schoolteachers also appear to be close to the church, including the most outstanding among them, Augusts Rudītis (1880–1948), who was headmaster of Jaunpiebalga parish school from 1916–40. Rudītis was an activist of the temperance movement, known widely in Latvia due to his achievements in that field,¹⁰⁰⁶ active in other local voluntary associations, and a prolific author, writing about local history and associational life, but also about pedagogical issues, including moral education. He organized pedagogical conferences in Jaunpiebalga, inviting well-known educational figures from different camps. So, in 1928, leftist anti-clerical Kārlis Dēķens was invited alongside nationalist Longīns Ausējs and the local pastor Ozols.¹⁰⁰⁷

Rudītis appears to have had good relations with the pastor. In a biographical article, published in 1926 on occasion of his 25th anniversary of working as a teacher, and authored by J. O. (probably the pastor Ozols), he is shortly characterized also as a religious person, coming from a pious family and managed to overcome the loss of his daughter in 1921 through silent prayer. Also, it is mentioned that since 1918, Rudītis had been the organist of the congregation “and served the spiritual needs of the congregation in all times of change, emphasizing the importance of religion in the moral education of the nation”. During the celebration of the anniversary, the religious ceremony was held by pastor Ozols, and several church hymns were sung.¹⁰⁰⁸

On the other hand, in his educational writings, there are almost no references to God or the necessity to nurture piety in children.¹⁰⁰⁹ True, in his eclectic book about moral education¹⁰¹⁰ Rudītis laments the moral decline of Latvians due to the spread of materialistic values, quite in a manner like the pastors used to do. But he adds that pastors were also guilty in it due to their support of German lords of the manor and inability to reach out to the soul of Latvians. In this way Rudītis

¹⁰⁰⁴ Izglītības Ministerijas Mēnešraksts, no 2 1928, pp. 180–181.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Izglītības Ministerijas Mēnešraksts, no 3 1934, pp. 251.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Allegedly, all the teachers and pupils in Jaunpiebalga parish school were members of the temperance association (*cerības pulciņš*), see Latvijas Skola 1939, no 1, p. 113. Cf. Jaunā Balss, 1938, no 3, p. 71.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Mūsu Nākotne, 1928, no 1, p. 40.

¹⁰⁰⁸ “un kalpo draudzes garīgajām vajadzībām visos pārmaiņas laikos, uzsvērdams reliģijas nozīmi tautas tikumu audzināšanā.” Izglītības Ministerijas Mēnešraksts, no 9 1926, pp. 239–242.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Kraukle 2001.

¹⁰¹⁰ Rudītis 1927.

in fact admitted the important role of the clergy in caring for the moral health of the nation (p. 53). He denies claims of religion being at odds with science (pp. 63–65), but overall, religion is put to the service of his humanist worldview. Thus, the appeal of Christ about loving of one's neighbour is cited along with similar ideas of Immanuel Kant and Aristoteles (p. 5), and the quotations from the Bible are used to substantiate humanist ideas along with references to similarly authoritative secular sources.¹⁰¹¹

There are also accounts on other pious schoolteachers. In 1931, Ozols wrote in the *Izglītības Ministerijas Mēnešraksts* about the jubilees of two outstanding schoolteachers of the parish. One of them, Olga Pilāte, was also chairwoman of the Ladies' committee of a congregation and is described as a deeply religious woman.¹⁰¹² Indeed, in the Ladies' Committees conference of Cēsis deanery in 1933, Olga Pilāts, as a delegate from the neighboring Drusti congregation, spoke about the upbringing of girls, protecting traditional gender roles, and denouncing emancipation efforts of women. Girls should have been, according to her, raised to love God, nature, and other people as well as to appreciate hard work. However, some formal education and a sense of aesthetic values are also necessary. It should not have been forgotten that the future of the nation was but in the hands of women, argued Pilāts, and referred to the Roman Empire as a cautionary example as its moral decline had arguably begun from women.¹⁰¹³

Another teacher, Jānis Priednieks, wrote in hindsight about his close relations with the church: "I feel that I was also growing in my spiritual life in Jaunpiebalga. I baptized little children and conducted funeral services of those who had fallen asleep forever. Sometimes dean Ozols invited me to lead religious services in the meetinghouses of [Herrnhutian] Brethren congregation, of which there were several in Jaunpiebalga."¹⁰¹⁴

Besides them, there are teachers whose attitude towards religion is not mentioned in their jubilee articles (Anna Būmane, Pēteris Pikurs), so presumably, their religiosity was not as exemplary or publicly recognized. On the other hand, there is virtually no information about the anticlerical stances of local teachers. Only in a letter of denunciation against the headmaster of Ranka primary school appear, among the others, also accusations that there were neither religious instruction nor morning prayers at school. The teacher debunked those accusa-

¹⁰¹¹ Curiously, Rudītis refers to the book of Proverbs (29:15 and 17) in his appeal not to punish children physically. Believing that the verses were written by the king Salomon, Rudītis claims that he might have punished in that way also his son Rehoboam, who became a harsh and cruel man as a result of this. (Rudītis 1927, 16)

¹⁰¹² *Izglītības Ministrijas Mēnešraksts* nr 2, 1931, p. 182. Pilāte was from Jaunpiebalga parish and had been teacher for the children of the pastor Ozoliņš, but since 1920 had worked as a folk school teacher in the neighbouring Drusti parish.

¹⁰¹³ *Cēsu prāvesta iecirkņa...* 1933, 26–35.

¹⁰¹⁴ "Jūtu, ka es Jaunpiebalgā augu arī savā garīgajā dzīvē. Kristīju bērniņus, izvadīju mūža miegā aizmigušos. Dažreiz prāvests Ozols mani uzaicināja vadīt dievkalpojumus brāļu draudzē saiešanas namos, kuri Jaunpiebalgā bija vairāki." Johansone 2014, 255. These reminiscences are from the years of Second World War, not the interwar period.

tions in a convincing manner, but the incident appears to show that for the opponents of the headmaster, the lack of a positive attitude towards religion and church was indeed something that might have possibly contributed to his removal.¹⁰¹⁵

Also, autobiographical writings seem to confirm the benevolent attitudes of the schoolteachers towards religion and church, even though there are, interestingly, some disagreements about the character and importance of religious education at school. For example, the ethnographer Alīse Robežniece remembers: “Rudītis did not ask us to learn Bible stories by heart, but instead tried to introduce us the heritage of our people’s spirit – proverbs, sayings, and folk songs. It was encouraged to collect these materials from grannies and parents.”¹⁰¹⁶ On the other hand, according to Olga Lisovska, Rudītis was a strict teacher to whom pupils had awe, “but I am sure I was not the only one looking forward to the classes of religion. Mr. Rudītis knew how to bring biblical legends to life persuasively, we sang a lot in his lessons.”¹⁰¹⁷

Contradictory are also the reminiscences of former pupils from other schools in the parish. So, Erna Grāvīte, in her reminiscences from Jāņa school and its headmaster Emīls Buduls, emphasizes tight relations between the church and school: “Singing at school was highly respected and honoured. We sang in singing lessons (the teacher accompanied us with the harmonium). We sang in the break time. Especially the religious songs had to be learned a lot. One had to sing two or three of them to the teacher weekly. It was also necessary to know the stories of the Bible, confessions of faith, and commandments by heart. Presumably, it was requested by pastor Jānis Ozols, who often inspected the school /.../ Pastor Jānis Ozols was also a fairly frequent guest at our place [the boarding school], his area of interest was the progress of children in the field of religious education. The day in the boarding school regularly ended with the evening prayer – the hymn „Nu es gribu gulēt iet, Tēvs slēdz manas acis ciet”.”¹⁰¹⁸ Another former pupil of the same school, Erna Kurzemniece, remembers, however, that while singing was paid much emphasis indeed, folk songs were sung rather than spiritual songs. In her memoir, religion-related issues are not paid

¹⁰¹⁵ LVVA 6642-1-613.

¹⁰¹⁶ „Rudītis mums neprasiņa iekalt Bībeles stāstus, bet tā vietā centās iepazīstināt ar musu tautas gara mantojumu – sakāmvērdiem, parunām, arī tautasdziesmām. Mudināja vākt šos materiālus no vecmāmuļām un vecākiem.” Johansone 1996, 139.

¹⁰¹⁷ “Taču esmu pārliecināta, ka nebiju vienīgā, kas ar nepacietību gaidīja ticības mācības stundas. Rudīškungis pārliecinoši prata iedzīvināt bībeles leģendas, daudz dziedājām viņa stundās.” Johansone 2014, 250.

¹⁰¹⁸ The hymn was the Latvian version of the popular German song “Müde bin ich, geh zu ruh” by Luise Hensel. „Dziedāšana skolā bija lielā cieņā un godā. Dziedājām dziedāšanas stundās (skolotājs pavādīja ar harmoniju). Dziedājām starpbrīžos. Sevišķi daudz bija jāmacās garīgās dziesmas. Tās katru nedēļu pa divām, trim bija jāatdzied skolotājam. Tāpat no galvas bija jāzina Bībeles stāsti, ticības apliecinājumi un baušļi. Jādomā, to prasīja mācītājs Jānis Ozols, kurš bieži inspicēja skolu /.../ Samērā biežs viesis pie mums bija arī mācītājs Jānis Ozols, viņa interešu sfērā bija bērnu sekmes garīgās audzināšanas jomā. Diena skolas internātā regulāri noslēdzās ar Vakarjundu – korāli „Nu es gribu gulēt iet, Tēvs slēdz manas acis ciet.” Johansone 2014, 261–262.

attention, except a mentioning in passing that every school day started with a morning prayer.¹⁰¹⁹

There are also other sources confirming close ties between the church and schools in Jaunpiebalga. The inspector of folk schools of Cēsis noted that in 1931, two children's festivals were arranged in his district. That of Jaunpiebalga began with church service, while the other festival, which was held in Priekuli for the schools of the city of Cēsis and its vicinity, apparently did not.¹⁰²⁰ Besides that, Cēsu Vēstis wrote in 1934 about the day [diena] of schoolteachers and parents in Jaunpiebalga. It was only briefly mentioned that the conference began with religious service, which was conducted by Ozols, and that he also gave a presentation about secular and spiritual culture. However, the content of the presentation is not introduced to the readers, unlike that of other presentations which dealt with school gardens, *mazpulki* organizations and need to promote country life and agriculture among the youth.¹⁰²¹ Such involvement of the church in the events of teachers was not common in other parishes.

Local Politics and Social Contradictions

Revolutionary events of 1905 took also place in Jaunpiebalga, including the disruption of the cemetery festivity. However, the revolutionary activist Eduārdš Celmiņš admitted later that the incident was instigated by the activists coming from outside of the parish, while only few locals supported the revolution or indeed realized what was going on.¹⁰²²

Table 13. General Election Results in the Communes of Jaunpiebalga Parish (Selected Parties)

Commune	Elections	Socialists (LSDSP)	Farmers' Union	Bļodnieks's New Farmers	Christian National Union/Christian Union and Workers
Jaunpiebalga	1920	38.2	34.5	...	5.1
	1922	33.7	45.4	...	7.7
	1925	35.4	42.2	...	2.2
	1928	32.7	41.6	6.7	4.9
	1931	18.2	31.1	28.1	3.3
Ranka	1920	56.3	24.4	...	2.1
	1922	46.5	23.5	...	4.9
	1925	33.7	34.8	...	1.3
	1928	27.5	30.5	12.5	4.1
	1931	25.0	34.3	14.9	3.1

Sources: *Latvijas Satversmes Sapulzes... 1920; Skujenieks 1923, Skujenieks 1926, Skujenieks 1929, Skujenieks 1932.*

¹⁰¹⁹ Johansone 2014, 264–268.

¹⁰²⁰ LVVA 6642-1-179, p. 6.

¹⁰²¹ Cēsu Vēstis, 16.02.1934, p. 2. Similarly, the role of Ozols was only briefly mentioned in an article about the same conference in *Audzinātājs*, 1934, no 2, p. 104–105.

¹⁰²² Valsts Darbinieks 1928, no 10, p. 347–349.

As for the elections of independent Latvia, the trends were typical for rural Latvia as a whole. The Farmers' Union and Social Democratic Workers' Party were the most influential parties in both communes of the parish, and their support was generally declining during the years of parliamentary rule. Poorer peasants who resigned from voting for the LSDSP seem to have opted for Ādolfs Bļodnieks's New Farmers' Party (especially in Jaunpiebalga commune), while support for pro-Communists remained meagre. As for Christian nationalists, their support was stronger than the national average during the first two elections but declined later.

Importantly, the church was clearly not an apolitical institution in the parish. Judging by the texts written by pastor Ozols, he had strong nationalist and anti-socialist convictions. For instance, in a presentation in the Ladies' Committee conference in 1936, the pastor claimed that while the socialist movement had been suppressed in May 1934, the mentality insidiously instilled by the socialists had still been adopted even by many of those who considered themselves to be opponents of socialism. It was characterized, according to Ozols, by the pursuit of unlimited freedom, which could lead to immorality and arbitrariness. The pastor also defended traditional gender roles, which had been allegedly undermined by socialist propaganda, and denounced the attempts of modern women to engage in formerly men-dominated spheres of life, especially politics. Instead, drawing on an essay by the writer Zenta Mauriņa, Ozols suggested women concentrate on taking care of their home, being promoters of peace in the family, and striving to be good mothers.¹⁰²³

Similarly, in his sermon published in 1933 in the magazine *Baznīca un Skola*, Ozols complained about moral decline and again linked it directly with the pernicious influence of the socialists. As an example, he referred to an allegedly true story about a son belonging to "Marxist-atheist" intelligentsia, who had said to his mother that it would be better if she died as she was not able to work anymore due to her poor health.¹⁰²⁴ In an Easter sermon, Ozols gave a national and secular meaning to the holidays: to find the spiritual strength to cope with difficulties of life both at the level of the individual and the nation.¹⁰²⁵ A short summary of Ozols' another sermon, delivered on the occasion of commemorating brothers Kaudzītes¹⁰²⁶ in 1934 in Vecpiebalga, enables to get a glimpse of how Ozols saw relations between Christian religion and nationalism: "Every nation tries to preserve its peculiarities, cultivate its culture, create its own era, while remaining nationally distinct and independent. Nationalism is the greatest internal power of a nation because it is based on the power of God, the religious faith of the people, and their uprightness; where these two forces work in full harmony, there the people experiences true times of happiness. In ancient times, the divine fire was

¹⁰²³ Cēsu prāvesta iecirkņa... 1934, 46–50.

¹⁰²⁴ *Baznīca un Skola*, 15.10.1933, pp. 1–2.

¹⁰²⁵ *Rūjienas Vēstnesis*, 18.04.1933, p. 1.

¹⁰²⁶ Reinis Kaudzīte (1839–1920) and Matīss Kaudzīte (1848–1926) were known particularly for their jointly written novel „Mērnīeku laiki” (1879).

brought to people by the gods themselves (Prometheus); in our time, it is blown up by great writers and poets of the nation, people enlightened by God. This fire was also brought to us by the Kaudzīte brothers, lauding and teaching by their works of art and by their lives the love of the people, their uprightness, and the true, clear faith.”¹⁰²⁷ Also, in a report sent to the Department of the Churches and Confessions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1940, Ozols emphasized strong nationalist overtones of the church life in Jaunpiebalga: “Here, religiosity and nationalism fuse together into a single force in the hearts of the parishioners.”¹⁰²⁸

However, not in all Ozols’s speeches and texts were religious motives mixed with secular ideologies and identities. For example, in a sermon, held on the occasion of Herrnhutian conference in Augstāri meetinghouse, Ozols did not evoke social or political issues almost at all (except the short mention of the importance of Herrnhutians in the history of Latvia) but spoke about the love of God, which can lead people to love their neighbours as well.¹⁰²⁹

Finally, it should be noted that so far there has been found no evidence of left-wing anti-clerical attitudes from the parish during the interwar years. According to Olga Lisovska, being herself a daughter of a landless agricultural labourer, there were significant inequalities in her childhood milieu, and after the land reform initiated by the Soviets, tensions between those who lost and who gained land led to the threats of violence. But class-based conflicts, according to her, appear not to have been directly related to the attitudes towards the church.¹⁰³⁰

Conclusion

Jaunpiebalga was, on the one hand, a parish known for its Herrnhutian legacy, but on the other, among the most developed parishes in Latvia. Even though Herrnhutian piety, as well as church attendance, were evidently in decline, there is evidence of the prevalence of pro-church attitudes both in the revolutionary years and the interwar period. There are virtually no traces of religion-related political controversies. Schools had a good cooperation with the church, and there were significantly pious people among schoolteachers. Similarly, the pastor

¹⁰²⁷ “Ikviens tauta cenšas saglabāt savas īpatnības, izkopt savu kultūru, radīt savu laikmetu, paliekot nacionāli īpatnēja un neatkarīga. Nacionālisms lielākais tautas iekšējais spēks, jo tas atbalstās uz Dieva spēku, tautas reliģisko ticību un sirdsskaidrību, kur šie divi spēki darbojas pilnā saskaņā, tur tauta piedzīvo patiesus laimes laikus. Senlaikos dievišķo uguni cilvēkiem nesa paši dievi (Prometejs), mūsu laikos to uzpūš lieli tautas rakstnieki un dzejnieki, Dieva apgaismoti cilvēki. Šo uguni mums nesuši arī brāļi Kaudzītes, cildinādami un mācīdami savos dzejdarbos un savā dzīvē tautas mīlestību, sirdsskaidrību, patiesu, skaidru ticību.” The words of Ozols were mediated by A. R. (probably Augusts Rudītis) in *Izglītības Ministrijas Mēnešraksts* no 9, 1934, pp. 211–212.

¹⁰²⁸ „Še reliģiskais ar nacionālo sakūst kopa par vienotu spēku draudzes locekļu sirdīs.” Johansone 2008, 89.

¹⁰²⁹ Brāļu Draudzes Vēstnesis, no 9, 1933, pp. 122–124.

¹⁰³⁰ Lisovska 2003.

appreciated cooperation with secular societies, and the church had an especially prominent role in celebrating patriotic events.

According to the memoirs of the well-known writer Olga Lisovska, who was born and raised in Jaunpiebalga, the church was held in high regard in her childhood milieu. However, personal piety was rather characteristic of older generations.

Indeed, secular topics were often prevalent even in the church life. Pastor Ozols appreciated Herrnhutian legacy and cooperated closely with the “brethren”, but on the other hand, in his speeches he used to mix religion with nationalist and right-wing ideas.

In sum, piety has been held in high regard in the past, and respect for the church still mattered in Jaunpiebalga. However, the importance of religion in daily life appears to have declined despite the efforts of the energetic pastor to integrate “the religion of the forefathers” with the modernizing and nationalizing society.

3.3. RŪJIENA PARISH

Introduction

Historiography

Several general overviews of the history of Rūjiena parish have been written,¹⁰³¹ which usually contain also parts about the congregation and religious life. More can be found on those topics in the articles by Ludis Alberdings and the diploma paper of Elmārs Kide, both of which concentrate on the biographies of local pastors.¹⁰³² A rich collection of autobiographical writings, as well as other materials, can be found on the website <https://www.saknesrujiena.lv>.

General Overview

Rūjiena parish was among the most developed in Latvia. The selling of farms to the peasants began there in the 1850s, earlier than elsewhere in Latvia, and local peasants were later among the wealthiest in Latvia.¹⁰³³ Also associational life was lively. The region benefitted from the proximity of the port of Pernau (Pärnu). The parish centre Rūjiena started to develop from the end of the 19th century and was granted town privileges in 1919. In the interwar years, more than 4000 inhabitants lived there.¹⁰³⁴

¹⁰³¹ Alberings 1978; Melnalksnis 1928; Ziema 1999. Of recent works by the students of the University of Latvia, Ķibere 2011 provides information about education, cultural and associational life in Rūjiena town and nearby, while Lūse 2022 has investigated activities of Rūjiena town government.

¹⁰³² Alberings 1978; Kide 1981 (available in the library of University of Latvia).

¹⁰³³ Hamilkar von Fölkersahm, the main instigator of agrarian reforms in Livland, was until 1851 the owner of Rūjiena manor. See Alberings 1978, 32 (in an article by the historian Edgars Dunsdorfs) and 67-68 (Alfrēds Ozols).

¹⁰³⁴ According to the national census data: 4830 (1925), 4582 (1930), 4337 (1935).

As the population of the parish had risen fast (in 1818, there were 4304 people living there, in 1887, already 17,567, and in the 1920s reportedly about 19,000¹⁰³⁵), the congregation was divided into two parts in 1882, called Ziemeļ-Rūjienas (North Rūjiena) and Dienvid-Rūjienas (South Rūjiena), which had different pastors but used the same church and administered economic issues in common. Also, both congregations had joint Sunday services, with pastors of the two congregations preaching in turn. However, for church rites, the members of the respective congregations had to turn to their own pastor.¹⁰³⁶ After Latvia became independent, a separate German congregation was established in Rūjiena, which also used the same church. Besides that, the pastor of the Southern congregation held services in Pīksāri filial church, which had been erected in 1905.¹⁰³⁷

Administration of the common church building and other property in the town of Rūjiena was not easy, leading to conflicts between the congregations. In independent Latvia, a common congregation council for Northern and Southern Rūjiena congregations was initially elected, but since 1923, both congregations elected their councils separately due to bitter conflicts between their representatives.¹⁰³⁸ In the following years, conflicts continued, especially on issues of sharing land and other property between the congregations. Even the Central Board of the church had to intervene, trying to avoid the resolution of the issue by means of court proceedings.¹⁰³⁹ Later, the issue of how to use the former dwelling house of *ķesteris* became the bone of contention. The Southern congregation seems to have strongly disagreed with the intention of pastor Slokenbergs and his congregation to give it to the usage of the school run by Slokenbergs himself.¹⁰⁴⁰

Religious Background

Rūjiena was a homogeneously Lutheran parish. In all communes, Lutherans made up at least 95% of the population according to the censuses, and in the town of Rūjiena, their share was 91–92%. The most important religious minority was that of Orthodox, with around 200 followers in the town and several dozen in some of the communes. The number of Catholics was on the rise due to the influx of agricultural workers from Latgale, but their share amounted in 1935 only to 1.8% of the population in Ipiķi commune, 1.2% in Naukšēni, and less than 1% in the other communes.

Herrnhutian movement had not been strong in the region historically, and sources about interwar years do not mention their activity in the parish. However, several small free churches (Pentecostalists, Baptists, Adventists) operated in the town, but there were only about sixty people registered as “other Protestants”

¹⁰³⁵ Melnalksnis 1928, 7. According to the interwar census data, the population of the parish was likely smaller (about 14,000–15,000).

¹⁰³⁶ Alberings 1978, 45.

¹⁰³⁷ Alberings 1978, 55.

¹⁰³⁸ LVVA 3681-1-272, pp. 1–2.

¹⁰³⁹ LVVA 3681-1-275, pp. 66, 112, 120.

¹⁰⁴⁰ LVVA 3681-1-272, p. 67v-68, Ne ikkatrs, ka... 2018, 200.

during censuses in the town, and their share was negligible in all of the communes. Besides it, also a tiny Jewish community lived in the town.

Pastors

1. Southern Congregation

1895–1919 Karl Baer (Kārlis Bērs), an ethnic German clergyman, has been characterized as a very strict pastor, who did not mingle with Latvians and, at least at the beginning, spoke poor Latvian. During the 1905 revolution, he was severely criticized by local radicals, and it was put forward to him to leave Rūjiena. But Baer had rejected all the accusations, referring to his oath to the emperor. He allegedly cooperated actively with punitive expeditions in 1905 and declined the pleas to intercede on behalf of jailed revolutionaries, saying that they fully deserved their punishment. However, during the First World War, Baer was jailed for alleged non-loyalty towards Russia.¹⁰⁴¹

1921–41 Hermanis Ba(c)hs was of local origin from a family of Germanized Latvians. Both his grandfather (originally Krastiņš) and father had been primary school teachers. According to Alberings, Bahs had pro-German sympathies but still managed to find a common language with the locals. He was also widely known for his research on the history of the congregation.¹⁰⁴² However, some other accounts of him are rather unfavourable. According to Biezais, he was deeply conservative, had no talent for speaking and fulfilled his obligations formally.¹⁰⁴³ According to Jānis Brože, Bahs was a typical *kārkluvācietis* who even spoke poor Latvian and was not respected by people who liked to poke fun at him.¹⁰⁴⁴ Also Alfrēds Indriksons¹⁰⁴⁵ claims that Bahs was a conservative and old-fashioned pastor who always protected the interests of German barons. Being Indriksons's teacher of religion in Rūjiena gymnasium, he was not liked by the students and never offered his pupils anything more than dull rote learning of catechism and Bible stories in his classes. Indriksons never forgot Bahs's critical remarks on agrarian reform while consecrating new school premises in Eriņi manor house: "Latvians do not like to sit in someone else's nest, but you, children, are not to be blamed because you are put here."¹⁰⁴⁶ After that speech, Bahs was

¹⁰⁴¹ Alberings 1978, 46–47.

¹⁰⁴² Alberings 1978, 47–48.

¹⁰⁴³ Biezais 2018, 21.

¹⁰⁴⁴ https://novadpetnieciba.saknesrujiena.lv/atminu_stasti/1-j-brozēs-berņibas-atminas.html 02.12.2023.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Alfrēds Indriksons was a pastor who came from Rūjiena parish. He issued two booklets in the 1930s, proposing church reform in a liberal and nationalist spirit. His proposals were rejected by the Central Board of the church, and almost all copies of the booklets were annihilated. Possibly because of such a reaction, he gave up his pastoral post in the first Soviet year. He became an atheist, working as a schoolteacher during the Soviet era. Cf. Misāne 2016a, 210–215. Indriksons's memoirs, which were published at the end of the Soviet time, are imbued with the ideological rhetoric of the era.

¹⁰⁴⁶ "Latvieši nemīl sēsties svešā līgzdā, bet jūs, bērni, neesat vainīgi, jo jūs esat te iesedināti". Indriksons 1986, 10. These words were attributed to Bahs also in a denunciatory letter in 1936, see LVVA 1370-1-2338, p. 109. In a parliamentary speech of the socialist deputy Kārlis

dismissed, and Alfrēds Skrodēlis, the popular pastor from nearby Mazsalaca parish, became the new teacher of religion. The latter was completely different from his predecessor, inspiring also Indriksons to go to study theology.¹⁰⁴⁷

Bahs was 1931–34 also a member of the Central Board of the church.¹⁰⁴⁸ Interestingly, also a leading lay member of the Southern congregation, Gustavs Bergsons, happened to be a Germanized Latvian. He had even run to *Saeima* in the list of the Baltic German Party but was still respected by local Latvians.¹⁰⁴⁹

2. Northern Congregation

Unlike Baer of the twin congregation, **Mārtiņš Grossbergs**, the pastor of Northern Rūjiena congregation in **1888–1912** was, according to Alberings, highly respected as he was an ethnic Latvian who spoke good Latvian. He had good relations with the locals and was buried with great honours by them.¹⁰⁵⁰ Other sources, however, do not assess him so well, as his sermons were allegedly dry and full of platitudes, and his home language was still German.¹⁰⁵¹

1912–1916 Jānis Ozols, reportedly a pastor with strong Latvian national consciousness, developed good relations with locals but left soon for a larger Jaunpiebalga congregation.¹⁰⁵² According to one account, his departure was related to certain problems related to his subordination to the Southern Congregation.¹⁰⁵³

1916–1926 Heinrichs Ozolings, another Germanized Latvian, has been characterized as a quiet man who was fond of music,¹⁰⁵⁴ but also as a weak preacher who attracted very few people to the Sunday services.¹⁰⁵⁵

1929–1942 Roberts Slokenbergs. His arrival to the congregation led to considerable changes due to his ambitions to increase the role of the church in local life, adapting it, among other things, to the modernizing society and Latvian nationalist spirit. Slokenbergs's role in local history was stressed by his contemporaries; it has inspired writers (the novel "Mākoņu stūmēji" by Nikolajs Kalniņš, 1990) and is still widely celebrated. On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of his birth, Slokenbergs's monument was unveiled in Rūjiena,¹⁰⁵⁶ he is being glorified as one of the most outstanding personalities from Rūjiena of all times¹⁰⁵⁷ and

Dēķens (Dēķens 1929, 10), as well as in some anti-clerical writings, e.g. in Mūsu Nākotne no 19, 1923, p. 530, the words are presented as an ultimate example of reactionary mood of Lutheran clergymen, but the name of the pastor and the parish are not mentioned.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Indriksons 1985, 10.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Kide 1981, 28–29.

¹⁰⁴⁹ See Bergsons's obituary in Rūjienas Domas, 15.09.1931, p. 1. Besides that, he was also chairman of the local German congregation, see Alberings 1978, 52.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Alberings 1978, 48.

¹⁰⁵¹ Biezais 2018, 155 (the account of Pēteris Švalbe).

¹⁰⁵² Alberings 1978, 48–49. See also the subchapter on Jaunpiebalga parish.

¹⁰⁵³ Rūjienas Vēstnesis, 05.08.1932, p. 1.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Alberings 1978, 49.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Biezais 2018, 155 (the account of Pēteris Švalbe).

¹⁰⁵⁶ <https://www.saknesrujiena.lv/places/1239-pieminekli-macitajam-r-slokenbergam.html>, 01.02.2024.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Būmane-Grasmane et al. 2014, 120–121.

his public activities, as well as colourful details of his private life, are still discussed in the media.¹⁰⁵⁸

In memoirs, an idealized picture of his personality and achievements is often presented. It is usually noted that Slokenbergs excelled by his organizational capabilities and oratory skills. Also, as a clergyman, Slokenbergs emphasized his difference from the previous German pastors, especially by downplaying the social distance between him and the parishioners, mingling with common people and being kind and sympathetic towards them.¹⁰⁵⁹ On the other hand, Slokenbergs was known also for his Bohemian lifestyle (he was compared with Selma Lagerlöf's Gösta Berling) and rumours about his love affairs.¹⁰⁶⁰

Religious Life

Individual Practice

In his annual reports, pastor Bahs noted that the parish church was relatively crowded on Sundays, but it was not surprising as it served two big congregations. On the other hand, there were still many people in the parish who rarely attended the church.¹⁰⁶¹ As for the church attendance after the arrival of Slokenbergs, there are conflicting accounts. In some memoirs, it is claimed that during his services, the church was packed with people, as he was a good orator, always offering something new and attractive.¹⁰⁶² On the other hand, there are claims that people of Rūjiena had not much interest in the church.¹⁰⁶³

¹⁰⁵⁸ See, for example, Ievas Stāsti, 2013, no 16, pp. 8–13.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Biezais 2018, 112 (Kārlis Ieviņš).

¹⁰⁶⁰ In 1936, a denunciatory letter was sent to the minister of education, where it was claimed that “there is no other womanizer in all the surroundings of Rūjiena like Slokenbergs is” (“Tādu meitas gājēju visa Rūjienas apkārtnē otra nav ka Slokenbergs”). He had even kissed a female teacher at his school in the sight of pupils, as witnesses could arguably confirm. Commenting on the issue to the Folk School Directorate, the inspector of Valmiera County confirmed that rumours about the immoral behaviour of Slokenbergs had been indeed circulating in Rūjiena for several years already. Arguably, it was difficult to say to what extent these rumours were founded. (LVVA 6642-1-1559, pp. 118–121) The Ministry of Education also informed the Central Board of LELC about the accusations, and Slokenbergs was invited to interrogation by the church leadership (LNVM KD 2142:5, 21.08.1936). In another complaint from the year 1938, it is claimed that parish school was managed by drunkards, and Slokenbergs himself had occasionally appeared drunken both to school, graveyard and baptismal ceremonies (LVVA 6642-1-1561, pp. 133–134). Haralds Biezais remembers that Slokenbergs's friends, including Arnolds Krēsliņš, the mayor of Rūjiena, drank heavily in a social gathering in the pastorate. Biezais, who had been asked by Slokenbergs to preach in Rūjiena in his absence, himself a teetotalist at that time, was shocked to witness it. (Biezais 2018, 137)

¹⁰⁶¹ In his report for the year 1927, it is noted that 300 people usually attended the joint services, while the number of Lutherans in the parish (i.e. membership of Northern and Southern congregations combined) was 14,000–15,000 people (LVVA 3681-1-148).

¹⁰⁶² Reminiscences of Zenta Zariņš: https://novadpetnieciba.saknesrujiena.lv/atminu_stasti/3-atminas-par-rujienas-draudzes-skolu.html, 02.03.2024.

¹⁰⁶³ Biezais 2018, 235; cf. p. 175.

Pastor Slokenbergs's own assessments of the religiosity of the people of his parish varied. On one occasion, he emphasized that God, the church and the sacraments were sacred to the people of Rūjiena, and therefore the performance of Aspazija's play "The Builder of Tower" was offensive to them.¹⁰⁶⁴ On another occasion, he published an article in which he was critical of the religious indifference of particularly the more educated and wealthier parishioners: "There are also very many representatives of bourgeoisie in our congregation who speak about the church with the highest respect in conversations, in private conversations. But that is all. It seems to them that the church is a necessary institution that protects the treasures of the soul of our people, that makes the state strong. And in such a safe state, the bourgeois feels well. He can increase his wealth by doing his daily work. But they do not come closer to the church. During feast days, he goes to church, sometimes he also takes communion. That is all they do to fulfil their citizen's duties." According to Slokenbergs, educated Latvians had distanced themselves from the church largely because their pastors had been of German or Germanized Latvian origin. Therefore, the Latvians still had no idea how valuable it was that the church was offering them. It was understandable that the socialists stayed away from the church; but regrettably, the churchliness of the bourgeois part of the society was also limited only to donating, sending their children to religious instruction classes and participating in church ceremonies. Only when death was near, some people began allegedly to search for God. Slokenbergs, however, urged people also to go to church on regular Sundays, to pray at home and raise children in a religious spirit: "May a new Latvian intelligentsia grow stronger in spirit and body than the previous one. Let the next generation understand that without the light of the church and God's blessing, the Latvian nation and state will perish, the state of Latvia gained in ferocious fighting."¹⁰⁶⁵

Regarding the church statistics,¹⁰⁶⁶ it is noteworthy that while the numbers of registered congregation members were comparable in Northern and Southern congregations, the number of communicants was higher in the North both in times of Ozolings and Slokenbergs. However, the numbers of baptisms, confirmations and church weddings were comparable in both congregations. True, their number had temporarily decreased as for some time there was no permanent pastor in the Northern congregation after Ozolings's death. According to Slokenbergs's nephew, many children had been left unbaptized in the meanwhile. Thus,

¹⁰⁶⁴ Rūjienas Balss, 31.10.1930, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶⁵ "Arī mūsu draudzē ir ļoti daudz pilsoņu, kuri sarunās, privatās sarunās ar lielāko atzinību izsakas par baznīcu. Bet tas tad arī ir viss. Viņiem šķiet, ka baznīca ir vajadzīgs iestādījums, kas sargā mūsu tautas dvēseles bagātības, kas vairo un valsti dara stipru. Un šādā drošā valstī pilsonis jūtas labi. Viņš var savas bagātības vairo, strādājot savu ikdienišķo darbu. Bet tuvāki baznīcai viņi nepieiet. Svētiku laikos aiziet baznīcā, arī dažreiz pie dievgalda iet. Tas viss, pildot savus pilsoņu pienākumus. /.../ Lai aug jauna latvju intelīģence garā un miesā spēcīgāka nekā līdzšinēja. Lai nākošā audze saprot, ka bez baznīcas gaismas un Dieva svētības bojā ies latvju tauta un valsts, nīknās ciņās izcīnītā Latvijas valsts." Rūjienas Vēstnesis, 17.02.1933, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶⁶ See Appendix.

after the arrival of the new pastor, mass baptism ceremonies were arranged so that the church was full of parents and godparents.¹⁰⁶⁷

Pastor Bahs used to claim in his annual reports that the number of unbaptized children, as well as secularly registered marriages, was negligible in his parish.¹⁰⁶⁸ However, according to a newspaper report, of 80 children born in the town of Rūjiena in 1931, 35 were registered by the pastor of the Northern congregation, 21 by the Southern congregation, and 18 were registered directly by the (secular) registry office. So, almost one-fourth of the children in the town seem not to have been baptized at least immediately after the birth, as the church expected. However, several of them might have been baptized later. Indeed, of 76 young couples, only five were not wed in the church that year.¹⁰⁶⁹

Bahs mentions in his 1935 report that some parents who had initially registered secularly the birth of their children, decided to baptize them later, adding that it was not clear whether behind that decision were religious motives or current fashion. Some non-baptized children wanted themselves to be baptized in order not to be different from their peers.¹⁰⁷⁰

On the other hand, there were also cases of unauthorised christenings. Pastor Slokenbergs noted in 1931 that “many” parents who came to the pastor to register the birth of their children claimed that the child had already been baptized. However, their baptizers had sometimes been persons who did not attend church or partake of the Holy Communion, or even were not members of the LELC altogether. Therefore, Slokenbergs announced that he would no longer register children who were baptized by persons not authorized by him.¹⁰⁷¹ In 1934, Slokenbergs noted again that many baptisms were performed by *pērminderi* and schoolteachers, as had been the custom from generation to generation. However, this should not be done without the approval of the pastor, admonished he. The parents of the baptized child must be members of the congregation, the child must be entered into the church register in advance, and the names of the godparents must be noted down.¹⁰⁷²

Both existing local cemeteries belonged to the congregation, which raised the question of how secular burials should be organized. The councils of the congregations decided in 04.07.1929 that burials to the cemeteries should be carried out with Christian ceremony and “without red flags and secular songs”.¹⁰⁷³ There is also an account of a controversy about whether the burial was to be religious or secular. In 1931, Vilhelms Lenšs, a Rūjiena socialist, had committed suicide, allegedly due to material difficulties and problems in his family life. The all-Latvian socialist daily *Socialdemokrāts* complained that bourgeois circles had tried to exploit his plight and win him over to their camp but without success.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Biezais 2018, 105.

¹⁰⁶⁸ LVVA 3681-1-148.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Rūjienas Vēstnesis, 31.01.1936, p. 1.

¹⁰⁷⁰ LVVA 3681-1-148.

¹⁰⁷¹ Rūjienas Balss, 31.07.1931, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷² Rūjienas Vēstnesis, 28.09.1934, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷³ LVVA 3681-1-272, p. 55.

After his death, however, the widow had agreed with Christian burial, though Lenšs had reportedly not been a believer. The representatives of the Socialist Party (LSDSP) were not allowed to carry a red flag in the burial procession. In addition, there had been an agreement that there should be no talk about politics in the graveyard, but Slokenbergs had broken that, making demeaning remarks about workers' organizations and their leaders in his speech.¹⁰⁷⁴ In addition, controversial was also the unwillingness of the Northern congregation to allow burying of people, who had not paid membership fees, to its cemetery.¹⁰⁷⁵

Congregational Life of Lutheran Congregation

An important source for the activities of Southern congregations are annual reports by the pastor Bahs.¹⁰⁷⁶ Besides the regular Sunday services, Bible studies¹⁰⁷⁷ and activities of the two Ladies' Committees (in Rūjiena and Pīksāri) are mentioned in these reports, but otherwise, the life of the Southern congregation was not very active. Sunday school is mentioned in the reports of 1924 and 1927, and it operated under the auspices of a branch of the Internal Mission Society. But in 1927, its operation ceased due to lack of teachers. There were neither children's services, youth gatherings, nor church choirs. The attitude of commune administrations towards the church was assessed as good by Bahs, but he noted in 1929 that while secular associations were not hostile towards the church (except some leftist ones), indifference towards it was widespread, as scheduling of secular meetings and events at the time of church service indicated. 15–17 *pērminderi* took care of religious life in different parts of the parish. A couple of times in the year, the pastor held services with the Holy Communion for the poor and sick in poorhouses, and some volunteers arranged prayer meetings there.

No annual reports have been preserved for the Northern congregation. However, the arrival of Slokenbergs brought considerable changes. Notably, church music was paid considerable attention. The congregation choir was established¹⁰⁷⁸ and concerts of religious music were organized. Also, Slokenbergs used to invite guest preachers and arrange public lectures on different topics, both religious and secular.¹⁰⁷⁹ A children's choir was established in the parish school; a smaller part of it that consisted of more talented children as well as teachers, had professional ambitions and performed also in Tallinn and Riga.¹⁰⁸⁰

Ladies' Committees operated in both congregations, raising funds for the congregation, decorating the church and its surroundings, organizing events (bazaars, concerts, social gatherings and lectures on both religious and secular

¹⁰⁷⁴ Sociāldemokrāts, 21.06.1931, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Rūjienas Vēstnesis, 28.09.1934, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷⁶ LVVA 3681-1-148.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Cf. Svētdienas Rīts, 26.02.1922, p. 5.

¹⁰⁷⁸ LVVA 3681-1-272, p. 60.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Biezais 2018, 159 (Pēteris Švalbe).

¹⁰⁸⁰ Biezais 2018, 211–212; Rūjienas Vēstnesis, 12.05.1933, p. 1. Cf. a memoir: https://novadpetnieciba.saknesrujiena.lv/atminu_stasti/5-juliju-skujinu-atceroties.html, 11.03.2023.

topics), and caring for the needy.¹⁰⁸¹ At one point, the Ladies' Committee of the Northern congregation even organized systematic visits to the sick congregation members.¹⁰⁸² Besides that, the Committee of the Northern congregation established scholarships for the students of Rūjiena secondary school. Thanking for it in a newspaper article, the gymnasium noted that the Committee was engaged not only in religious but also in "hygienic and aesthetic education".¹⁰⁸³

Other Confessions and Interconfessional Relations

Not much is known about the activities of the Roman Catholics and the Orthodox in the parish. Bahs remarked only shortly in his reports that relations with other congregations were good. On one occasion, he added that "for the first time after the reformation", a Catholic priest appeared in the parish in 1929 and celebrated a mass in the building of the local Farmers' Society.¹⁰⁸⁴ Indeed, Bahs appears to have had some prejudices towards Catholics; in the conference of Ladies' Committees, he appealed not to celebrate Mother's Day, as it had allegedly Catholic origin. He suggested to celebrate "Parents' Day" instead.¹⁰⁸⁵

As for smaller denominations, according to Bahs's reports, both of the Baptist unions, Adventists, Salvation Army, and God's Congregation (*Dievas Draudze*) were present in the parish. „The sects” were active, and their religious meetings were relatively well attended but, according to the pastor, very few locals joined their congregations.

According to Jānis Tervits, almost all the Baptists of Rūjiena had left Latvia during the mass emigration movement of Latvian Baptists to Brazil in the 1920s.¹⁰⁸⁶ Later, two tiny Baptist congregations operated in the city for a short time, reflecting the split in the Latvian Baptist movement.¹⁰⁸⁷ In 1938, the Baptist congregation of Rūjiena had only 36 members; of those, 29 were entitled to vote. Besides 87 religious services, the activities of the congregation included home visits, including to the sick and the poor, distribution of religious literature and organizing "literary-musical events".¹⁰⁸⁸

¹⁰⁸¹ Rūjienas Balss, 14.03.1930, p. 5; 31.10.1930, p. 1; 06.02.1931, p. 1; 29.05.1931, p. 1; Rūjienas Doms, 20.09.1932, p. 4; Rūjienas Vēstnesis, 10.06.1932, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸² Rūjienas Vēstnesis, 10.06.1932, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸³ Rūjienas Balss, 22.08.1930, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸⁴ If not to take into account the presence of German military priests during the First World War in Rūjiena, added Bahs: LVVA 3681-1-148. Cf. Rūjienas Balss, 11.04.1930, pp. 5–6.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Valmieras prāvesta iecirkņa... 1934, 18. Bahs was mistaken – Mothers' Day was (and is still) celebrated in Latvia on the second Sunday of May, according to the tradition which originated in the USA.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Tervits 1999, 103. See also p. 589.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Rūjienas Revival (*Atmodas*) Baptist congregation, which belonged to the Second Baptist Union of Latvia, was established on October 31, 1928 but was dissolved already on August 10, 1930. At that time, it had only 11 members (LVVA 1370-1-1338). According to Jānis Tervits, the reasons for the split in the Latvian Baptist movement in 1926 were diverging opinions on the revivalist movement of the 1920s, as well as the personal ambitions of the leaders. The two national Baptist unions were merged again in 1934 (Tervits 1999, 117–125).

¹⁰⁸⁸ LVVA 1370-1-2675, pp. 100–101.

The Adventist congregation of Rūjiena was established in 1916. In 1928, it had 58 members. After nearby Valka and Mazsalaca congregations were closed off, its members formally joined the Rūjiena congregation, and so in 1939, the membership had risen to 86 people. Till that year, altogether 133 people had been baptized in Rūjiena by the Adventists.¹⁰⁸⁹ Similarly modest was the membership of Pentecostalist God's Congregation (*Dieva draudze*) in the town.¹⁰⁹⁰

Some light on the activities of the free churches can be cast also thanks to the fund of Department of Churches and Confessions in Latvian State Historical Archives. According to the minutes of the congregation assemblies, the Adventists and adherents of God's Congregation organized services and other religious meetings, distributed religious literature, and visited the sick and needy. Interesting are also police reports about the leadership of the congregations (members of the board and revision commission). According to those, leading members came from diverse social backgrounds, including relatively wealthy farmers and house owners, artisans, as well as casual labourers. Without exception, it was found that nothing politically, criminally, or morally compromising was known about them, and so they were fit for the office. However, on several occasions, it was added that the persons were "strongly religious" or even fanatical, leading a very quiet life and being not engaged in anything at all except religious matters.¹⁰⁹¹

Similar prejudices towards free churches appear in the case of student Alma Dreimanis's expulsion from Rūjiena 2nd Basic School. Despite the requirement in school rules not to participate in any extracurricular activities, she had attended church services of the Baptist Revival congregation, performing with singing and declamation, and often staying late in the evening for rehearsals. As a result, she allegedly did not perform well in classes and was sleepy. It was decided to expel Dreimanis from school because she had already exceeded the compulsory school age. Later, however, an agreement was reached with the parents, and she could continue attending the school.¹⁰⁹² Other similar accounts show that conflicts between teachers and their free-church-related pupils were not uncommon.¹⁰⁹³ Apparently, the pupils challenged the authority of the teachers with their non-conformist stances and behaviour, prompting attempts to punish them.

Newspaper reports about the activities of free churches are relatively rare. Importantly, allocating the town's land for the Congregation of God to erect their church proved controversial, as socialists were against it. The latter argued that there were more such congregations in the town, and it would not be possible to

¹⁰⁸⁹ Pešelis 2013, 271–273.

¹⁰⁹⁰ For the data on Rūjiena congregation, see LVVA 3170-1-1600.

¹⁰⁹¹ LVVA 3170-1-2600, LVVA 3170-1-2635.

¹⁰⁹² LVVA 6642-1-1549.

¹⁰⁹³ Rūjienas Balss, 30.04.1929, p. 2; Rūjienas Balss, 21.03.1930, p. 1.

give land for each of them.¹⁰⁹⁴ Importantly, information on services and events of the free churches can not be found in the newspapers.¹⁰⁹⁵

Autobiographical Writings

Religious themes find considerable coverage in the memoirs of **Vilis Timze** (1928–1994),¹⁰⁹⁶ who was raised in a poor family living in the town of Rūjiena. His father was irreligious and never attended church, remaining home even on Christmas Eve when the rest of the family used to go to church. According to father's mother, he had not been like that before, but the Reds had corrupted him during his stay in Russia during the wartime. Father used to make demeaning remarks about all the churches and the clergy and declined to go to church even after his wife had asked him to take Communion together with her just to dispel doubts that he was a communist (Timze claims that he was not; however, the pastor Slokenbergs had already explicitly asked about it from his wife; pp. 33–34).

Mother, on the other hand, was very religious, attending both Lutheran and Baptist services, as well as private prayer meetings. According to Timze, she used to partake Communion every month (p. 22) – extraordinarily often regarding that time. As the family could not afford a doctor, she used to pray in case of serious illnesses of her child (pp. 15–16). Once she asked to call the pastor when she herself thought she was dying of a serious illness (however, fortunately she recovered; p.19). Also, she played the Red Cross lottery, hoping to win a major prize as she had promised to God to share the money in that case with the church (but she never won it; p. 33).

Prejudices towards free churches are evident also in Vilis Timze's memoirs. His mother was initially close to Baptists and even considered converting. Her mother-in-law admonished her not to do so, as it was disgraceful to abandon "the faith of her fathers and mothers" and join a sect. Timze's own stance on Baptists is demeaning as well. According to him, they were able to persuade simple-minded women and girls thanks to their simplicity and kindness towards common people. As a child, Timze had himself visited the gatherings of Baptists with his mother and noted that everything was very different from the Lutheran services. In a private prayer meeting, he was so frightened about ecstatic praying that he began to cry, believing that the praying women, including his mother, had lost their minds. (pp. 20–22) Besides accompanying his mother to the prayer meetings, Timze used to go to Lutheran church with his grandmother (p. 21). He claims that Christmas has been always the most beautiful holiday in his life, and during his childhood years, Christmas service at church have been a memorable part of it (p. 34).

¹⁰⁹⁴ Rūjienas Balss, 10.09.1929, p. 1; see also Rūjienas Balss, 25.11.1929, pp. 3–4.

¹⁰⁹⁵ However, there are exceptions in case of major events, for example, of a youth spring event with guests from Mazsalaca: Rūjienas Domas, 03.04.1932, p. 4.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Timze 1992.

As a child, Timze attended Slokenbergs's school, and his account of the pastor is generally benevolent: he was energetic and ingenious in achieving his ends, including in pushing aside his arch-rival teacher Baunis, and arranged exciting events and excursions for the children of his school: „Slokenbergs gave his pupils such fun that they have something to remember for the rest of their lives!”¹⁰⁹⁷ Timze also notes that the arrival of Slokenbergs to the parish helped to surge church attendance. Implicitly, he seems to suggest that it was rather due to the personal attractiveness of the new pastor than the rise of interest in religion (and he attracted rather women than men): “Already after Slokenbergs's first church service, word spread quickly about the eloquence of the new pastor from Rūjiena and the beautifully held church service. This message soon reached the farthest corners of the parish, and the wives of farm owners in the countryside who had not attended the church for years now ordered horses to be yoked in cabs to drive to Rūjiena church and look at the face of the young, handsome pastor, listen to his service and sign up for next Sunday's Communion. In the past, less than one table of communicants from old women gathered, but now so many signed up that there were three or four tables. Handsome gentlemen and ladies, wives of farm owners and young adult women, all wanted to receive the holy bread from the hands of the stately pastor and a sip of wine from the cup he gave them.”¹⁰⁹⁸ Besides eloquence, Slokenbergs also paid attention to visual effects. Timze mentions torch processions that accompanied the solemn patriotic services (p. 37) and also that during Christmas services, people dressed as angels stood next to the altar in white garments, having palm leaves in their hands (p. 34).

Slokenbergs happened to be Timze's godfather, too. Namely, his mother, being afraid of dying due to pneumonia, asked to baptize also her unbaptized children when Slokenbergs had come to give her Communion.¹⁰⁹⁹ As there were no other people around, Slokenbergs himself decided to become Timze's godfather. As the pastor perhaps half-jokingly insisted it, Timze promised to become a pastor (pp. 19–20). He did not keep his promise; in fact, judging according to the memoirs, despite close contact with different congregations during his childhood years, he appears not to have become a particularly religious person.

¹⁰⁹⁷ “Slokenbergs rīkoja saviem skolēniem tādas izpriecas, ka viņiem ir ko atcerēties visu mūžu!” p. 10

¹⁰⁹⁸ „Jau pēc Slokenberga pirmā dievkalpojuma ātri izplatījās vēsts par jaunā Rūjienas mācītāja daiļrunību un skaisti noturēto dievkalpojumu. Šī vēsts drīz vien sasniedza vistālākos pagasta nostūrus, un lauku saimnieces, kas gadiem nebija apmeklējušas baznīcu, tagad lika jūgt zirgu pedervāģos, lai brauktu uz Rūjienas baznīcu un ieskatītos jaunā, skaistā mācītāja sejā, noklausītos viņa dievkalpojumu un pierakstītos uz nākošo svētdienu pie dievgalda. Agrāk sanāca nepilns galds dievgaldnieku no vecām tantiņām, bet tagad pierakstījās tik daudzi, ka sanāca trīs vai četri galdi. Glauni kungi un dāmas, lauku saimnieces un pilngadīgas jaunavas, visi nu gribēja saņemt dievmaizīti no staltā mācītāja rokas un viņa malku no viņa pasniegtā biķera.” (p. 22).

¹⁰⁹⁹ It is not mentioned what had prevented the baptism of the children immediately after their birth, as the church expected. Perhaps it was related to the father's irreligious and anti-clerical stances.

Miervaldis Birze (1921–2000), a physician, writer and the son of Rūjiena socialist mayor Jānis Bērziņš, almost does not mention religious topics in his childhood memoirs.¹¹⁰⁰

Memoirs of **Viktors Štraubs** (1918–2016),¹¹⁰¹ the son of a German physician whose mother was a Latvian, reflect his childhood in an affluent family. Much is spoken about the personalities of the pastors, as his family socialized with their families. Štraubs notes that both Bahs and Ozolings were Germanized Latvians themselves, their wives were Germans, and their children attended German school along with Štraubs. Bahs is described as an odd person due to his behaviour and clothing, but also as a good scholar of local history.

Štraubs himself could not speak German at all in his early childhood, but was decided to put into local German basic school because the teachers of Latvian basic schools were considered to be too leftist. Štraubs had heard that they promoted anti-state views and instigated class hatred, were atheists and made demeaning remarks about the church.

When the church is referred to in the memoirs of Štraube, it is usually related to church rites. Specifically, the baptism of his brother, burials of one of his friends and his father, consecration of their new dwelling house, and confirmation of Štraubs himself are described. Essentially, they are described as social rather than religious events, with the participation of the pastor mentioned in passing. Regarding the confirmation, it is only mentioned that Reinholds Meijers, the pastor of Burtnieki, who substituted Slokenbergs at that time as a confirmation teacher, was a notably wise man who was able to explain religious questions (but also the issue of persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany) very well. Also, during the confirmation service, Meijers spoke very cordially, while the sermon of the pastor Bahs was irrelevant and weird. Other memories of confirmation day are, as usual, purely secular: making joint photos, receiving flowers and gifts, celebrations at home with close ones, and becoming an adult as the main meaning of the day.

The church is mentioned twice in connection with the death of loved ones. As for the funeral of a friend, Štraubs mentions that it involved a ceremony in the church and was a depressing experience for him as a child. His father, however, committed suicide when Štraubs studied already in Riga; Pastor Slokenbergs was very kind in conducting the ceremony,¹¹⁰² even though he and father had not been “friends in any sense”. He said, among other things, that even though Štraubs’s father seldom attended the church, he demonstrated through his work and life that he still was a Christian. Also, Slokenbergs had ordered to ring the church bell to

¹¹⁰⁰ Liesma, 1989, no 11, pp. 1–2. It is only once mentioned in passing that one of the school subjects was religion. Some more outstanding topics in his memoir include the patriotic and, at the same time, the multiethnic character of his childhood milieu as well as the persecution of his father and other left-wingers during the years of Ulmanis regime and Nazi occupation.

¹¹⁰¹ https://novadpetnieciba.saknesrujiena.lv/atminu_stasti/9-viktors-schtraubs-sava-laikmeta-liecini.html, 09.11.2023

¹¹⁰² In fact, it was a farewell ceremony in Rūjiena, as Štraubs’s father was buried in his home parish.

his memory, even though it was not, at least as much as Štraubs had heard, usually done in case of those who had committed suicide.

Besides that, Štraubs mentions private lessons in Bible stories by an old German woman, which, importantly, helped also to improve his German language skills, and pleasant, solemn atmosphere in Christmas services. In sum, his memoirs gave the impression that Štraubs grew up in a milieu where religion was not important, but church was self-evidently related to different festive occasions – and similar social status of the family led to personal relations with pastors and their families.

Velta Grimma's (1926–2003) reminiscences¹¹⁰³ about her childhood years in the town of Rūjiena contain rather few references to Christianity and the church. Primarily, these are related to her religious grandmother and her studies at school. For example, the girls were puzzled by a religious verse which they had to learn, which mentioned “God’s eye”. Did God have only one eye? As their grandmother declined to explain the matters related to the Heavenly Kingdom as it was a sin according to her, they decided to ask the teacher. But even she admonished them not to denigrate God’s Word. Another verse of the hymn, namely about committing sin, was arguably much better understandable. (p. 64) Holy Communion is referred to twice in the book – it is mentioned that grandmother partook in it in the church (p. 71), but also that the authors’ naughty brothers compared taking cod liver oil in the evenings disrespectfully with the sacrament (p. 41). Finally, pastor Slokenbergs is repeatedly mentioned by Grimma as the headmaster of the school where she studied and once also as the only “elegant” (*smalks*) person in the provincial town. But even he was elegant only during Sunday services when he wore gorgeous vestments, while on ordinary days, he was definitely not (p. 71).

In the reminiscences of the actor **Harijs Liepiņš** (1927–98), it is mentioned that since he was five years old, he used to visit Sunday services with his grandmother, and both sang with clear and loud voices, as grandmother had instructed. Especially beautiful were Christmas services: “It was beautiful in Rūjiena church. At Christmas, the organ played so powerfully, I had a lump in my throat, and I was glad that I knew all the words and melodies of the Christmas hymns, and also those of the other church hymns.”¹¹⁰⁴

Alfrēds Indriksons (1903–1998), a former Lutheran pastor and later pro-Soviet atheist schoolteacher, published his memoirs in the late Soviet era.¹¹⁰⁵ His family had been relatively poor, and particularly his mother sought the help of God in difficult life situations. His father also believed in God – which did not prevent him from hating the lords of the manor as well as other lords (*kungi*), and even taking part in the revolution of 1905. The adults used to go to the church

¹¹⁰³ Grimma 1996.

¹¹⁰⁴ “Skaisti bija Rūjiēnas baznīcā. Ziemassvētkos tik vareni spēlēja ērģeles, sirds kāpa kaklā, un es biju priecīgs, ka zināju visas Ziemassvētku, kā arī pārējo baznīcas dziesmu vārdus un melnīgas”. *Māksla* 1989, no 6, p. 48. Republished: https://novadpetnieciba.saknesrujiena.lv/atminu_stasti/17-manas-bernibas-diapozitivi.html, 10.10.2023

¹¹⁰⁵ Indriksons 1985.

sometimes but never took the child with them because it was a long journey there, and therefore he never met the pastor as a child. When the parents did not go to Sunday service, a religious family gathering was held at home. (pp. 5–6) Besides that, Indriksons used to pray often during his childhood years and believed that he experienced the help of God in difficult situations, such as being bullied by his co-pupils (pp. 7–8) or surviving after he had, out of curiosity, drunk an unknown liquid (p. 6). Indriksons also refers to the importance of religious festivals, such as Christmas and Easter, for their family. But for a child, much more important than the religious content of the festival was the fact that they were different from grim everyday life; notably, there was no need to work, and one could eat tasteful food (p. 6). Besides that, Indriksons emphasizes the role of the primary and secondary schools of Rūjiena in the formation of his liberal religious worldview (pp. 7–11).

Public Role of the Church

Community Life

An excellent source for assessing the role of religion and church in local life is the local press. Despite the tiny size of the town, sometimes two and occasionally even three weekly local newspapers were published simultaneously in Rūjiena.¹¹⁰⁶ All of those also published news from the surrounding rural areas, and in the case of Rūjienas Vēstnesis, from Mazsalaca. As the newspapers were published by bitter political rivals, their accounts gave an interesting glimpse of the main events of the parish from opposing perspectives.

In March 1929 local schoolteachers Pēteris Meisters and Kārlis Mālmeisters launched the newspaper Rūjienas Balss, which was taken over the next year in January by the new editor Arnolds Krēsliņš, a leading bourgeois politician of the town, and a friend of Slokenbergs. Since then, it took clearly pro-church stance.¹¹⁰⁷ However, in December 1931 Krēsliņš and his whole team were dismissed for unknown reasons by the publisher, the director of Rūjiena gymnasium Liepiņš,¹¹⁰⁸ and a new paper Rūjienas Vēstnesis was established by them. The latter was published by the pastor Slokenbergs himself.¹¹⁰⁹

On the other hand, Pēteris Meisters began to publish his own newspaper again in 1931 under the title Rūjienas Domas. Meisters and another teacher Jānis Bauņis ran in the municipal elections in the “united list of New Farmers and Small-

¹¹⁰⁶ Rūjienas Balss, 1929–1932; Jaunās Rūjienas Ziņas, three issues at the turn of the year 1929/30, Rūjienas Domas 1931–1934, Rūjienas Vēstnesis, 1931–1940; Rūjienas Ziņas, 1928–1930. For more about local newspapers in Rūjiena, see Alberings 1978, 123–124.

¹¹⁰⁷ Cf. Rūjienas Balss, 17.01.1930, p. 4.

¹¹⁰⁸ Possibly disagreements related to upcoming elections were to be blamed: Alberings 1978, 124.

¹¹⁰⁹ The writings signed by Slokenbergs himself are pretty rare in the newspaper. Possibly it was due to his busy schedule and his personality traits. It can also be questioned to what extent Slokenbergs had the desire and opportunity to direct the editorial work. In any case, he seems to have had no ambitions to turn the newspaper into a church’s mouthpiece.

holders and Progressive Citizens of Rūjiena”,¹¹¹⁰ and were leading members of Rūjiena Teachers’ Union, which was among the most vocal adversaries of Slokenbergs in the town.

Slokenbergs accused the rival newspaper of being hostile towards church, which was vehemently denied by its editors. They claimed to be critical specifically towards Slokenbergs only, having had good relations with all of the former pastors of Rūjiena and also Hermanis Bahs, the then pastor of Southern congregation.¹¹¹¹ Indeed, Rūjienas Domas published regularly church announcements of the Southern congregation (meaning information of church services and other events as well as names of the baptized, married and buried congregation members). Importantly, several articles about the events of the church life were indeed written in benevolent manner.¹¹¹²

However, as for the activities of Slokenbergs, Rūjienas Domas tended to be scathingly critical. He was typically characterized as a „false Christian“ with dubious moral integrity. It was claimed that Slokenbergs used ethically questionable means for promoting his school and persuading voters during elections, he was power hungry, pursuing personal interest instead of the common good, treated his employees in a heartless manner, demanded unusually high membership fees from his congregation members and misused the funds raised by the congregation. Besides that, it was emphasized that Slokenbergs slandered his political adversaries, made demeaning remarks about them, and had appeared drunken to the public.¹¹¹³

On the other hand, unlike Slokenbergs’s paper, Rūjienas Domas used not to publish sermons of pastors on occasion of major feasts such as Christmas or Easter. Instead, anonymous reflections of the editorial board were usually published. In those, mainly the secular meaning of the feast was highlighted, but also religious themes were invoked to some extent. In the case of the Christmas of 1932, it was done in an explicitly anti-clerical manner. Namely, Christmas was depicted as the feast of peace, and invoking the painful memories from the First World War, it was claimed that the threat of war had not disappeared because still too little had been done to preserve the peace: “Can we not ask for more from those who were supposed to be the ones who showed the way and encouraged to fulfil Christ’s teaching? Very often they have forgotten and are forgetting due to self-interest, material and political interests, the teachings of the Peace feast. Let us just remember the behaviour of different denominations during the World War. Even now, the factories of deadly weapons work for the most part with their

¹¹¹⁰ “Latvijas Jaunsaimnieku-sīkgruntnieku partijas un Rūjienas progresīvo pilsoņu apvienotais saraksts.” Rūjienas Domas, 10.03.1931, p. 5.

¹¹¹¹ Rūjienas Domas, 27.09.1932, p. 1.

¹¹¹² Rūjienas Domas, 27.10.1931, p. 4 about consecration of the new altar painting in Pīksāri church, and Rūjienas Domas 05.01.1932, p. 2 about a lecture arranged by the Southern congregation.

¹¹¹³ See Rūjienas Domas 11.10.1932, p. 1; Cf. 24.03.1931, p. 4; 31.03.1931, p. 2; 15.09.1931, p. 4; 22.11.1931, p. 4; 05.01.1932, p. 1; 12.04.1932, p. 1; 19.04.1932, p.1.

blessing and compliance. Hereafter, it should not be like that.”¹¹¹⁴ On another occasion, in polemicizing with Slokenbergs, it was emphasized that the church had not necessarily played a positive role in Latvian history, referring to the subjugation of Latvians under the pretext of their Christianization, to harsh repressions against those who did not follow the religious requirements of the church, to collaboration between the clergy and the Baltic German nobility, and especially to the events of 1905. However, at the same time, it was emphasized that the original teachings of Jesus were all about loving God and the neighbour, and that he had suggested that one could pray to God everywhere, not only in the church buildings. In short, the institution of the church was and had indeed always been unable to follow the true Christian spirit.¹¹¹⁵ In sum, the content of Rūjienas Domas was occasionally (though not often) anti-clerical, indeed, and not barely critical towards particular pastors such as Slokenbergs. But on the other hand, the expression of anti-religious or anti-Christian statements was consistently avoided.

Both newspapers published news about the public performances of the pastors. It appears that in that regard the parish was not different from the rest of the country – pastors were routinely invited to perform religious ceremonies first of all at the beginning of patriotic events and the events of the *aizsargi* (the national guard), but also other festive events in the life of the community, such as the inauguration of new voluntary associations and consecrating the flags of both Farmers’ Union and New Farmers’ Parties.¹¹¹⁶ The religious part was also integral to the public celebration of Christmas. During the traditional Christmas gatherings at schools, religious speech and prayer were held by a pastor or by a school-teacher (often the headmaster). Performances of children followed, which included singing and sometimes acting.¹¹¹⁷ As for the basic schools of Rūjiena, which were headed by staunch adversaries of Slokenbergs, there appears to have been no religious speech at least in 1929, but children still sang Christian hymns among other songs.¹¹¹⁸ At the Christmas gathering in Pīksāri school in 1930, the parents had been reportedly deeply disappointed that the children had not been taught any songs for the holiday, neither religious nor secular. The writer of the

¹¹¹⁴ “Vai no tiem, kam šajā lietā vajadzēja būt par ceļa rādītājiem un uzmodinātājiem, lai piepildītu Kristus mācību, nevaram vairāk prasīt? Ļoti bieži viņi ir aizmirsuši un aizmirst pašlabuma, materialu un politisku introšu dēļ, Miera svētku mācību. Lai tikai atceramies dažādu konfesiju izturešanas pasaules kara laikā. Arī tagad nāvejošo ieroču fabrikas pa lielakai daļai strādā ar viņu svētību un atbilstu. Uz priekšu tas tā nedrīkstu būt.” Rūjienas Domas, 20.12.1932, p. 1.

¹¹¹⁵ Rūjienas Domas, 17.03.1931, p. 3.

¹¹¹⁶ Some examples: annual *aizsargi* event in Naukšēni: Rūjienas Balss (RB) 25.07.1930, p. 1; Branch of “Latvju Jaunātnē” launched in Ide: RB 30.04.1929, p. 3; 10th anniversary of the police in Rūjiena: RB 01.10.1929, p. 2; Ipiķi choir 50th anniversary celebrations: 31.07.1931, p. 4; anniversary of Rūjiena firefighting association: RB 25.07.1930, p. 1; consecration of the flag of Jeri New Farmers’ association: RB 23.05.1930, p. 5; anniversary of the local branch of Farmers’ Union: RB 12.12.1930, p. 3.

¹¹¹⁷ For example, see report about Ipiķi: Rūjienas Domas, 05.01.1932, p. 3.

¹¹¹⁸ Rūjienas Balss, 31.12.1929, p. 3.

letter to the Rūjiena Balss assumed that this was due to the teacher's indifferent attitude towards religion, but the newspaper did not hold that credible.¹¹¹⁹

Besides the schools, some voluntary associations also invited pastors to perform religious ceremonies during their Christmas events. But possibly the most religiously accented were the Christmas events for the needy. In Rūjiena, these were organized by the municipality in cooperation with the Ladies' Committees. In these events, the pastor usually held a speech and religious songs were sung together. In the newspaper accounts, the Christian love of the neighbour is emphasized on that occasion, exemplified by the mercy of the community, which had not forgotten the old and helpless, providing them also with "Christmas gifts" (probably food aid). The needy were reportedly deeply thankful but also aware of their vulnerable position, referring to their reliance on God.¹¹²⁰ Such Christmas events for the needy were held also by rural municipalities and had probably religious overtones there as well. On one occasion, Rūjienas Domas noted that in Ipiķi the event was unusual in that year as both the pastor and the local schoolteacher had fallen ill and could not participate.¹¹²¹ Thus, apparently, the religious part of the gathering was seen as an important part of such events.

As for other Christian holidays, these were rarely celebrated publicly outside the church. However, sometimes arranging secular entertainment events in these days raised controversy. For instance, in 1931, Slokenbergs's Rūjienas Vēstnesis reported disapprovingly that a local village school arranged a dance party in the first Easter holiday: "And it is organized by the school, in whose hands we have entrusted the formation of so many children's souls? Are they able to distinguish between these two directions? In the morning, the pupil goes to church with his beloved parents; in the evening, the school organizes an event with a dance party. Does the large majority of parents also see this relationship? Have you thought about it? We have a neighbouring country that plays dance music on the radio every first holiday [of religious feasts] – when the radios of other countries broadcast the melodies of faith to the world. There are also some schools in our cities that hold dance parties every first holiday. And now, on the first Easter holiday, our school also hosts a party. Is faith put in the first place here?"¹¹²²

However, children's festivals proved to be an especially notable bone of discontent between the church and secular schoolteachers. Rūjiena Teachers' As-

¹¹¹⁹ Rūjienas Balss, 09.01.1931, p. 3.

¹¹²⁰ Rūjienas Vēstnesis, 01.01.1932, p. 2. Cf. Rūjienas Balss, 31.12.1929, p. 3.

¹¹²¹ Rūjienas Domas, 05.01.1932, p. 3.

¹¹²² "Un to rīko skola, kuras rokās esam atdevuši veidot tik daudz bērnu dvēselīšu? Vaj viņas spēj atšķirt šos divejados virzienus? No rīta skolēns iet ar saviem mīļiem vecākiem baznīcā, vakarā skola rīko izrīkojumu ar balli. Vai lielākais vairums bērnu vecāku šo attiecību arī redz? Vai par to esat padomājuši? Mums kaimiņos ir valsts, kura katros pirmos svētkos noraida pa radio šiberu muziku – kad citu valstu radio raida pasaulē ticības skaņas. Arī mūsu pilsētas ir dažās skolās, kuras katros pirmos svētkos rīko balles. Un tagad – pirmos Lieldienas svētkos balli rīko arī mūsu skola. Vai šē ticība ir nostādīta pirmā vietā?". Rūjienas Balss, 10.04.1931, p. 4. Already next year Slokenbergs's own school arranged a similar event in the First Easter holiday, and Rūjienas Domas made obviously use of the opportunity to remember the denouncing article from a year ago (03.05.1932, p. 3).

sociation had arranged these since 1923, which involved performances of children (singing, gymnastics, etc.) and entertainment.¹¹²³ The Teachers' Union also sent an invitation to the Slokenbergs's school, but it was rejected.¹¹²⁴ However, beginning in 1931, Slokenbergs started to arrange his own "parish children's festivals", which, unlike the teachers' festivals, also included a religious part in the church. The secular and ecclesiastical children's festivals were seen as competing enterprises. In 1931, some rural teachers tried to hinder bringing their children to Slokenbergs's festival.¹¹²⁵ Especially tense was the situation in Ipiķi, where supporters of Slokenbergs brought local children to the festival without the consent of the headmaster of the school.¹¹²⁶ There are no similar reports from the following years, but the number of participants in the teachers' festival decreased somewhat, partially also because some schools had preferred the event arranged by the church.¹¹²⁷

Slokenbergs's supporters claimed that the reluctance of the teachers to hold a religious ceremony during their festival was proof of their lukewarm or hostile attitudes towards the church, and therefore, there was a need for an alternative festival. It was denied by Rūjienas Domas; according to the paper, the church ceremony was simply inappropriate in the case of this particular festival: "The teachers' union organizes a children's festival so that the pupils can spend one day together, be glad and have fun after a year's effort. All the children's attention is focused on the performances, entertainment and competitions that await them at the festival venue, and on such days, they are unable to delve into the content of the religious ceremony, no matter how well it is intended. Taking children to church on such a day would be an empty formality that would not give them anything lasting; rather, it would accustom them to the idea that they should go to church out of obligation or courtesy. Another meaning would be in the case of a children's festival, where the focus is on the service itself. This could be followed by catering of the children without any secular entertainment. In the past, Herrnhutian fellowships organized such events, and the pastors of Rūjiena have also done it several times with good results."¹¹²⁸

¹¹²³ For the programs and details of the organization of these festivals, see the minutes of the Rūjiena Teachers' Union (LNB A 134: N33).

¹¹²⁴ LNB A 134: N33, letter to Rūjiena Teachers' Union from 12.05.1930.

¹¹²⁵ Children from a part of Idus commune were not able to participate as a car was denied to bring them to the town: Rūjienas Balss, 28.08.1931, p. 4.

¹¹²⁶ Rūjienas Balss, 04.09.1931, p. 6; Rūjienas Domas, 22.09.1931, p. 4. Cf. LVVA 6642-1-759, p. 11.

¹¹²⁷ According to memoirs of P. Meisters: LNB A 134: N33, pp. 22–23.

¹¹²⁸ "Skolotāju biedrība rīko bērnu svētkus, lai skolēni pēc mācības gada pūlem vienu dienu pabūtu kopā, papriecatos, izklaidētos. Visa bērnu uzmanība saistīta pie priekšnesumiem, izpriecam un sacīkstem, kas viņus gaida svētku vietās un viņi šādās dienās nespēj iejusties garīgā akta saturā, cik labi tas arī nebūtu domats. Vest tādā dienā bērnus uz baznīcu būtu tukša formalitāte, kas viņiem neka paliekošu nedotu, drīzāk gan pieradinātu pie domam, ka baznīcā jāiet parāduma vai pieklājības dēļ. Cita nozīme būtu bērnu svētkiem, kur galvenais ir pats dievkalpojums. Tam varētu sekot bērnu pacienāšana bez kādam laicīgām izpriecam. Tādus

Slokenbergs had appealed to arrange joint festival¹¹²⁹ with the Teacher's Union, and in 1934, discussions were held on that question between Slokenbergs's school, Rūjiena gymnasium and the Teachers' Union. However, these were not successful; the teachers claimed that Slokenbergs wanted to impose his will on other schools, demanding, in addition to holding church service, also arranging the event in his own school. So, also in 1934, two separate children's festivals were to be held,¹¹³⁰ but the coup of Ulmanis changed profoundly the power relations also in Rūjiena. Rūjienas Domas was closed, and the children's festival was arranged only by the Slokenbergs's school.¹¹³¹ The pupils of Rūjiena Town Basic School, whose teachers were the main adversaries of Slokenbergs, also took part in it. But already a week later, the school was closed off, with all the teachers, including Baunis and Meisters, dismissed.¹¹³² In following years, the remaining teachers of the parish seemed to have tamely accepted that the children's festivals were arranged according to conditions set by the pastor and his school.¹¹³³

On the other hand, starting the festival with church service did not necessarily mean that the festivals arranged by Slokenbergs were of an inherently religious character. For instance, they are described at length by Vilis Timze as a major gathering of local people, which attracted huge crowds from both the town and surrounding rural areas. According to him, it was a major opportunity for socializing and entertainment for both children and adults, but he does not mention either the church service or other religious content of the event at all.¹¹³⁴

In any case, the lukewarm attitude towards religious ceremonies indicates that the local teachers' union (as well as its mouthpiece, Rūjienas Domas) had indeed a distanced stance towards the church. Telling is, however, that they avoided public acknowledgement of irreligious views.

Besides the children's festival, cemetery festivities were major events in local community life. These were arranged only by the church, and there appears to be virtually no resistance to the idea that public commemoration of the dead was the task of the church. However, there were also some controversies related to that field. In 1931, relatively few people attended the opening service of the Skudrīte cemetery festival in the church, while a large crowd ("thousands") passed the church and headed directly to the graveyard. Annoyed, Slokenbergs had expressed surprise that on such a day, people could ignore the shrine. Saying that he prefers to be among genuine worshippers and not the "curious people and

agrāk rīkoja brāļu draudzes un arī Rūjienas mācītāji vairākkārt to ar labiem panākumiem darijuši". Rūjienas Domas, 11.10.1932, p. 1

¹¹²⁹ LNB A 134: N33, letter to Rūjiena Teachers' Union from 17.05.1933. However, he had previously in a defiant newspaper article demanded teachers to confess their faith and be compliant (*piekāpību baznīcai*). Rūjienas Vēstnesis, 17.02.1933, p. 3.

¹¹³⁰ See Rūjienas Domas, 10.04.1934, p. 3; 24.04.1934, p. 1.

¹¹³¹ Rūjienas Vēstnesis, 06.07.1934, p. 1; 20.07.1934, p. 1.

¹¹³² Rūjienas Vēstnesis, 27.07.1934, p. 2.

¹¹³³ Rūjienas Vēstnesis, 03.04.1936, pp. 1–2.

¹¹³⁴ Timze 1992, 29–30.

spectators”, he threatened not to go to hold the ceremony in the graveyard but changed his mind, arguably to show respect towards visiting pastor Jānis Ozols.¹¹³⁵

Besides cemetery festivities, Slokenbergs organized the annual commemoration of Latvian riflemen on January 6 (on the occasion of the anniversary of the Christmas battles of the First World War). He introduced these celebrations already in his previous congregation in Džūkste, which had then raised suspicions of conservative parishioners, as well as his church superiors, who saw the influence of pagan rites in those. Notably, at the altar, “holy fire” was consecrated by the pastor, and everybody could take it home with candles or torches.¹¹³⁶

In newspaper reports from the Ulmanis era, involvement by Slokenbergs (and, noteworthy, much less by Bahs) is usually mentioned in all major community events, such as patriotic feast days and frequent visits by government ministers and other prominent politicians from Riga.¹¹³⁷ As previously, Slokenbergs took part in festive gatherings of patriotic and other associations, consecrated their flags, and the like. He also performed lectures on Dostoyevsky,¹¹³⁸ on occasion of the Cleanness Week,¹¹³⁹ and the like. Besides spiritual music concerts, Slokenbergs also organized secular concerts and lectures in the venues of parish school or the clubhouse.¹¹⁴⁰

Noteworthy are also Slokenbergs’s interventions to the cultural and social life of Rūjiena, made in the name of protecting the morality.¹¹⁴¹ For instance, he criticized publicly “The Builder of the Tower”, a play by Aspazija, performed by Northern Vidzeme theatre also in Rūjiena, for its allegedly rude language and anti-religious content. According to the pastor, such a play would be fit for performing in the atheist Soviet Russia but not in Latvia, where people were still close to the church.¹¹⁴²

During the Lent in 1934, Slokenbergs asked not to organize an operetta performance and overall to limit himself to performances with serious content at that time (in addition, he referred to the anniversary of the death of Latvian war hero

¹¹³⁵ Rūjienas Balss, 14.08.1931, p. 1.

¹¹³⁶ Biezais 2018, 126–127 (Džūkste, Biezais), 185–186 (Rūjiena, Jānis Māliņis).

¹¹³⁷ See, for example: Brīva Zeme, 21.10.1935, p. 3; Rīts, 27.09.1936, p. 14.

¹¹³⁸ Rūjienas Vēstnesis, 25.01.1936, p. 5.

¹¹³⁹ Rūjienas Vēstnesis, 01.05.1936, p. 1.

¹¹⁴⁰ Biezais 2018, 159 (Pēteris Švalbe).

¹¹⁴¹ It is interesting that he decided to announce his dissent through a newspaper on these occasions; after all, it was a small town, and the organizers of the events represented his own political camp. This shows that he did not have enough authority to carry out his will through private communication. Thus, he apparently decided to appeal to ordinary readers, among whom he hoped to find more support.

¹¹⁴² Rūjienas Balss, 31.10.1931, p. 1. Aspazija (true name Elza Pliekšāne, 1865–1943) is among the classic authors of Latvian literature. In fact, her play “The Builder of the Tower” can hardly be labelled as critical towards religion. For the content and interpretation of the play, see <https://runa.lnb.lv/objects/729053/>, 13.06.2024

Oskars Kalpaks).¹¹⁴³ Regarding the beauty pageant, held in the town in 1932, an anonymous opinion was published in the paper, claiming organising it was not suitable for a “serious and esteemed” firefighting association.¹¹⁴⁴ In yet another article, Slokenbergs linked the suicide of two students at Rūjiena Secondary School to the fact that, unlike in earlier times, little attention was paid to religious education in schools. He claimed that faith in Christian God (but, importantly, not in other gods) gave people comfort in difficult situations and, therefore, also helped to prevent suicides.¹¹⁴⁵

The range of topics that Slokenbergs dealt with in his newspaper articles was thus not very wide. Unlike his Tukums colleague Virbulis, he was not interested in, for example, the relationship between employers and employees. Slokenbergs seems to have accepted that religion was not anymore referred to or the opinion of the church sought while dealing with most of the everyday matters of economic, cultural and social life. However, he believed that it was still crucial from the point of view of nation’s future that the majority of the people practiced religion, and also listened to the church on certain specific issues which were related to traditions and morality. In addition, it may be argued that in Slokenbergs’s approach, faith has an instrumental meaning in achieving this-worldly (notably nationalist) ends, but it is not important “in and of itself”.¹¹⁴⁶ Typically, he did not refer to the necessity of obedience to God’s will or about God’s direct supernatural intervention in history. Rather, he emphasized merely the importance of religious sentiments and practice (which he juxtaposed to merely external churchliness) for the well-being of individuals and society.¹¹⁴⁷

Also, otherwise, the references to religion or God were not frequent even in Slokenbergs’s own newspaper when economic, cultural or social issues were discussed. There is, however, relatively much content dedicated to individual

¹¹⁴³ Rūjienas Vēstnesis, 16.02.1934, p. 2. Colonel Oskars Kalpaks (1882–1919) was the hero of Latvian War of Independence.

¹¹⁴⁴ Rūjienas Vēstnesis, 09.09.1932, p. 2. According to Rūjienas Doms, the newspaper’s publisher Slokenbergs had also agitated against the contest from the pulpit. However, his friend and editor of the newspaper Arnolds Krēslīņš supported the contest, and his daughter was unanimously elected the beauty queen of Rūjiena. Even several teachers of Slokenbergs’s school had reportedly taken part in the event: 27.09.1932, p. 4.

¹¹⁴⁵ Rūjienas Vēstnesis, 17.02.1933, p. 2.

¹¹⁴⁶ Such a distinction is made by Ida Olenius, who deals with the connections of Swedish patriotism and nationalism with the Lutheran state church during the Second World War. In her opinion, politicians emphasized the importance of faith and the church only from the point of view of promoting Swedish national identity, democracy and humanist values. For church leaders, however, the spread of the Gospel and strengthening of Christianity was a goal in and of itself, and not only for Sweden but for the whole world. (Olenius 2022)

¹¹⁴⁷ However, Slokenbergs did express at least once his belief that the survival of the Latvian state depended on God’s blessing. Namely, in an article in which he complained about the religious indifference of particularly the more educated and wealthier parishioners, he appealed: “[M]ay a new Latvian intelligentsia grow stronger in spirit and body than the previous one. Let the next generation understand that without the light of the church and God’s blessing, the Latvian nation and state will perish, the state of Latvia gained in ferocious fighting.” (Rūjienas Vēstnesis, 17.02.1933, p. 2.)

piety. Besides major religious feasts, spiritual reflections were irregularly published at other times. Often, they were written by Alfrēds Skrodels, the popular pastor of the neighbouring Mazsalaca parish, who used to write for other papers as well, such as Svētdienas Rīts and Latvis.

Finally, it must be noted that the Orthodox congregation was mentioned in the media as the organizer of concerts¹¹⁴⁸ and art exhibitions.¹¹⁴⁹ The representatives of the Orthodox congregation were treated as figures of public life, and the important events of their lives were paid attention to by the local community and newspapers. For example, in 1931, Emilian Fyodorov celebrated his 60th year of acting as a psalm singer in the congregation. It was noted by Rūjienas Domas that Fyodorov acted despite his age of 78 still both as a schoolteacher and psalm singer and that the choir of the local Social Association (*Saviesīga biedrība*) performed some songs in honour of him.¹¹⁵⁰ In 1940, an obituary for the priest Mārtiņš Kārklīš was published by Rūjienas Vēstnesis. There he was celebrated as a freedom fighter for his activities in the year 1905, as well as a talented painter and singer, and a figure of local associational life.¹¹⁵¹

Church and School

The links between the church and education had been tight in the parish, but not without controversies. Notably, Baer had been one of the several Baltic German pastors who had discouraged the local peasants from seeking secondary education for their children in Tsarist times, alarming about Russification and other harmful impacts of the schools.¹¹⁵² But as for folk school teachers, they often performed tasks in the church as well, and to some extent, this tradition continued in the interwar years. So, Teniss Kampus, the headmaster of the 2nd grade basic school of Rūjiena, resigned in 1926, having fulfilled the duties of *ķesteris* and organist of both congregations. After that, it was spoken about the need to arrange a joint meeting of the councils of both congregations to discuss the conditions of hiring a new *ķesteris*, presuming that the offices of the school headmaster and *ķesteris* should also be united in the future.¹¹⁵³

In the annual reports of the Southern congregation,¹¹⁵⁴ Bahs usually mentioned that religion was taught in all the schools of the parish, except in the commercial school. In most cases, he did not answer the question in the questionnaire of the reports whether the instruction was conducted in the spirit of the church. In 1924, however, Bahs admitted that he did not know how religion was taught, but according to complaints of some parents it was not paid enough attention; sometimes the lessons were allegedly used for other purposes. In 1935, Bahs noted that the knowledge of those coming to confirmation was poor.

¹¹⁴⁸ Rūjienas Ziņas, 21.09.1928, p. 3.

¹¹⁴⁹ Rūjienas Domas, 24.05.1932, p. 3.

¹¹⁵⁰ Rūjienas Domas, 6. okt.1931, p. 1.

¹¹⁵¹ Rūjienas Vēstnesis, 14.06.1940, p. 1.

¹¹⁵² Alberings 1978, 47.

¹¹⁵³ LVVA 3681-1-275, p. 243.

¹¹⁵⁴ LVVA 3681-1-149.

Discontentment with the stances of schools towards religion and the church can also be found in the files of the Northern congregation. The council of the congregation unanimously demanded in 1925 that religious education should be taught for at least two classes a week and should again be supervised by pastors.¹¹⁵⁵ Next year, the council returned to the topic, complaining that religion was not taught by such teachers who were entitled to do it by the church and was done in a manner which alienated the youth from the church. It was decided to send a petition on the issue to the president, prime minister, and minister of education.¹¹⁵⁶

Besides that, accusations about openly anticlerical or antireligious stances of some local teachers can be found in letters of complaint, which had been sent to the Ministry of Education. The sources are obviously very biased, and therefore, their accounts should be treated with caution. Notably, in 1930, in the town of Rūjiena, complaints were raised against the teacher Jānis Sprincis for being careless and sharp towards children, but also for living a scandalous family life, openly mocking church and religion, and promoting socialism, thus causing discord between parents and children.¹¹⁵⁷ Sprincis and his supporters tried to debunk the accusations, claiming, among other things, that he was not against religion as such, but merely against “confessional religious instruction”. As a result, Sprincis was dismissed by the town school administration despite the support expressed to him by many parents.¹¹⁵⁸

There is an account about the refusal of teachers to teach religion. In 1929, the chairman of Valmiera county school administration informed the Folk School Directorate that parents from Ipiķi had turned to him with a request to ensure that the new teacher who would replace the outgoing headmaster of the school, J. Alberings, should be elected from among the candidates, who were willing to teach religion. Allegedly, there were no such teachers currently working in Ipiķi Basic School.¹¹⁵⁹

In 1930, there was a conflict in Pendīga school of Terneja commune, which seems to have been caused by economic reasons and personal disagreements between the teachers. However, the teacher Paeglītis was, among other things, accused of expressing contempt towards religion. It was claimed that she had left the room for the time of religious ceremony during the national day celebrations last year. Also, during a Christmas event, she had allegedly mocked the religious ceremony, wondering according to multiple witnesses why such “Jewish worship” was still held at school.¹¹⁶⁰

Especially in 1934, after the Ulmanis’s coup, politically motivated accusations against teachers became frequent as systematic efforts were made to purge the

¹¹⁵⁵ LVVA 3681-1-272, p. 12v.

¹¹⁵⁶ LVVA 3681-1-272, p. 24.

¹¹⁵⁷ LVVA 6642-1-1551, pp. 6–7.

¹¹⁵⁸ LVVA 6642-1-1551, pp. 16, 19–20.

¹¹⁵⁹ LVVA 6642-1-1550, p. 108.

¹¹⁶⁰ “Vai tad reiz tiem žīda pātariem nebūšot galā,” LVVA 6642-1-732, p. 19.

schools of teachers who were either socialists or their sympathizers.¹¹⁶¹ It was common that negative attitudes towards religion and church were cited as signs of support for the left. On some occasions, incriminated teachers turned to the local pastors to get confirmation letters that, in fact, they had been friendly towards the church and decent members of the congregation, in some cases even having contributed to its activities, notably by baptizing children.¹¹⁶²

As for the schools of Rūjiena parish, Ipiķi teacher Leontine Tilts was charged by the school administration of Valmiera county for founding and leading a local Trade Union of agricultural workers where some members had allegedly been sympathizers of communists. Tilts was allegedly “hostile to the church and the *Aizsargi* organization [Latvian national guard. R. S.]. She was the organizer and inspirer of all left-wing elements in Ipiķi commune. With the people who are like-minded with her (communists), she has constantly disrupted the activity of both the commune self-government and local public organizations, energetically working against every national and cultural initiative. In her schoolwork, teacher Tilts has shown a complete lack of tact. Due to the quarrelsome nature of teacher Tilts, as well as her anti-religious attitudes, all matters of school life have been dealt with in a very bitter tone. It has left a completely demoralizing impression on the pupils as well”.¹¹⁶³ As a result, Tilts was sacked. She protested against the decision, arguing in a letter sent to the minister of education that all the accusations were false. Among others, she stressed that she was a member of Lutheran Academic congregation of Riga and had occasionally contributed to the religious ceremonies held at school with performing music. Also, she had allegedly never said anything against religion but only on a few occasions expressed her support for the views of the liberal professor of theology, Kārlis Kundziņš, Jr.¹¹⁶⁴

However, there were also some occasions when teachers who were under scrutiny for their alleged left-wing allegiance were not directly accused of being atheist or hostile towards the church, for example, in the case of Naukšēni commune administration’s appeal to dismiss Antons Ore and Marta Mūzikants. Ore was only blamed for his alleged sympathy towards the “Adventist sect”.¹¹⁶⁵

¹¹⁶¹ See LVVA 6642-1-1557.

¹¹⁶² See, for example, the confirmation letter written by Gustavs Šaurums, pastor of Umurga, in support of Pāles 2nd grade basic school teacher Voldemārs Ālers, LVVA 6642-1-1557, p. 202.

¹¹⁶³ “...naidīgi noskaņota pret baznīcu un aizsargu organizāciju. Ipiķu pagastā viņa bijusi visu kreiso element organizētāja un iedvesmotāja. Ar saviem domu biedriem (komunistiem) viņa pastāvīgi traucējusi gan pagasta pašvaldības, gan arī vietējo sabiedrisko organizāciju darbību, enerģiski strādāma pretim katram nacionāli kulturālam nodomam. Skolas darbā skolotāja Tilts pie tam ierādījusi pilnīgi takta trūkumu. Pateicoties skolotājs Tilts ķildīgai dabai, kā arī pretreligiozajam noskaņojumam, visu skolas dzīves jautājumu kārtošana norisinājusies ļoti skarbā tonī. Tas pilnīgi demoralizējošu iespaidu atstājis arī uz skolēniem.”

¹¹⁶⁴ LVVA 6642-1-1557, pp. 250–252.

¹¹⁶⁵ LVVA 6642-1-1557, pp. 137–139. Besides that, Ore was a co-author of a textbook of religious education (Mālmeisters and Ore 1926). He also held a lecture on “Religion and school” during the week of education in Pīksāri in 1932, where he claimed that while religion was the only way to live a happy life, the churches had deviated from genuine Christianity as they

Data about the social activities of teachers of the county, collected already after the purge, indicate that only very few of them were actively involved in the church or religious activities. As for Rūjiena parish, out of 17 teachers, only three did: teacher Ģerda Meisters from Idus was a member of Ladies' Committee of Mazsalaca Lutheran congregation. Roberts Pēlekais from Jeri and the headmaster of Ipiķi basic school Augusts Rikmanis noted that they used to baptize children, bury the dead and conduct religious ceremonies in festive occasions of the lives of locals (such as jubilees).¹¹⁶⁶

In 1937–38, however, a campaign against Rikmanis was launched. In the complaints his alleged former sins were evoked, too, including those related to his attitudes towards the church. It was claimed that Rikmanis had not allowed his pupils to take part in the children's festival organized by the pastor Slokenbergs, that he had contributed to the "left-affiliated newspaper" Rūjienas Domas and, among other things, had ridiculed the church in his writings there. Also, it was noted that he had been an active member of Ādolfs Bļodnieks's New Farmers' Party and had incited hatred against the Ulmanis's Farmers' Union supporters before the coup. However, supporters of Rikmanis emphasized that he was not only a good teacher but also active in the wider community. Importantly, he used to conduct religious ceremonies, baptize the children and bury the dead in Ipiķi as well as for the Latvian community of Mōisakūla over the border in Estonia. Accusations concerning faith and the church were not central; Rikmanis was mainly accused of intrigues and bad relations with other teachers and local figures, as well as his alleged drinking and private life problems.¹¹⁶⁷ Indeed, the investigators concluded that while Rikmanis was a "conflictual person", he was also a skilful teacher and many accusations against him were not well founded. Finally, the head of the local *Aizsargi* (national guard) unit was found guilty in a row with Rikmanis, which apparently had caused the smear campaign against him.¹¹⁶⁸

Irreligious spirit was especially attributed to the basic schools of the town of Rūjiena, and such assessments pre-dated the arrival of Slokenbergs. For example, in a newspaper report from 1928, it was noted that "in ungodly spirit" nurtured pupils of the town's basic schools had misbehaved in the church during the solemn service dedicated to the 10th anniversary of Republic of Latvia. Unsurprisingly, there was no one to discipline the children because their teachers rarely attended church services: "As is already known for everyone – in our basic schools the name of God is not used very willingly."¹¹⁶⁹

However, it was Slokenbergs who used to criticize the teachers especially fiercely for their alleged irreligiosity and anticlerical stances. According to him,

were interested mostly in power and money, practised baptism of children, and supported wars. See Rūjienas Domas, 19.04.1932, p. 3.

¹¹⁶⁶ LVVA 6642-1-374.

¹¹⁶⁷ LVVA 6642-1-759.

¹¹⁶⁸ LVVA 6642-1-1560, p. 118.

¹¹⁶⁹ "Ka visiem jau zināms – mūsu pamatskolās Dieva vārdu ne visai labprāt lieto." Rūjienas Ziņas, 07.12.1928, p. 4.

these were the fruits of the “Russian spirit” in the schools, while for genuine Latvians, faith and church had always been close to the heart. Therefore, also the parents of the children were allegedly not satisfied with the schools, which were able to teach the children merely to read, write and calculate but failed to shape them into persons with solid character. He even resorted to the vague claims that conspiracy against Latvian nation was behind the creeping promotion of irreligiosity via schools: “It is an old truth that if you want to destroy a country, or a nation, or an individual person, then it is enough to take away his faith – his religion. And man is made an animal”. Besides that, he claimed that church-hostile schoolteachers tended to be with weak, superficial educational backgrounds.¹¹⁷⁰ On another occasion, Slokenbergs claimed that besides some teachers who were close to the church, there were many who did not believe in God themselves. The latter were either indifferent or even hostile towards religion. There were also some who considered themselves to be religious but, at the same time, were enemies of the church. Every teacher taught religion in a way he or she pleased, and the results were reflected in a very different level of knowledge among those who appeared in confirmation classes. Therefore, Slokenbergs threatened to prolong the confirmation course ten times for the pupils whose teachers were not church-friendly.¹¹⁷¹ In 1933, he published an advertisement in the newspaper, in which he announced that Sunday schools would be opened first in the city and then also in the countryside, which were mandatory for those who wanted to be confirmed in the future.¹¹⁷² However, this plan was apparently not implemented.

It should be added, however, that not only the personal religious views of the teachers mattered but also the political context. Overall, political tensions between left-wing and bourgeois parties were high, and it made a considerable impact on educational life in Valmiera county. Notably even the inspector of folk schools complained in his annual report in 1931: “The operation of the county school board was very stormy, even scandalous. Often, it was not anymore about working with practical issues, but about the pursuit of political demagoguery.”¹¹⁷³ The overwhelming victory of the list of „progressive schoolteachers” in the elections of teachers’ representatives in Valmiera county appears to show a strong impact of (broadly) left-wing views among the teachers of the region as a whole.¹¹⁷⁴ As church-related issues were heavily politicized as well, it also had inevitably impact on relations between congregations and schools at the local level.

On the other hand, there is no evidence of widespread irreligious or atheist attitudes among the teachers. Some of the adversaries of Slokenbergs appear to

¹¹⁷⁰ “Ir veca patiesība tā, ja valsti, jeb tautu, vai arī atsevišķu cilvēku grib iznīcināt, tad pietiek ja viņam atņem viņa ticību, - viņa reliģiju. Un cilvēks ir pataisīts par dzīvnieku”. Rūjienas Balss, 6.02.1931, p. 2. Cf. Rūjienas Vēstnesis, 07.10.1932, p. 1; 17.02.1933, p. 3.

¹¹⁷¹ Rūjienas Balss, 24.07.1931, p. 1.

¹¹⁷² Rūjienas Vēstnesis, 26.01.1933, p. 2.

¹¹⁷³ „Apriņķa skolu valdes darbība bija ļoti vētraina, pat skandalioza. Bieži vien šie vairs nebija lietišķa darba strādāšana, bet politiskas demagoģijas dzīšana”, LVVA 6642-1-228, p. 32.

¹¹⁷⁴ LVVA 6642-1-228, pp. 30–31.

have taught religion willingly at school, and Kārlis Mālmeisters and Antons Ore even published a series of textbooks about it. The Teachers' Union of Rūjiena arranged several lectures about religion and its teaching at school in 1924. For example, a lecture by a local teacher about seekers of God in newer Latvian literature attracted 123 listeners.¹¹⁷⁵ At least two times, a well-known socialist politician, teacher, and educational publicist Kārlis Dēķens was invited to Rūjiena. In 1924, he was asked to speak about religion, but as he was known for his strong anticlerical views, it was decided to invite Alfrēds Skroders, the celebrated pastor and publicist from the neighbouring Mazsalaca parish, as a fellow speaker to avoid the one-sided treatment of the issue.¹¹⁷⁶ In the same year, it was discussed about inviting professor of theology Kārlis Kundziņš Jr. to speak in Rūjiena.¹¹⁷⁷ These decisions indicate that a balanced and objective approach was sought in religious questions by the union.

The attitudes towards religion and the church may have varied among the teachers themselves, but they were united in a clear opposition to the interference of pastors in the matters of the school. In 1920, the union decided to reject the plea of a local pastor to inform him about teaching religion in local schools, referring to the People's Council's¹¹⁷⁸ decision not to allow the interference of pastors in the matters of the school.¹¹⁷⁹ In 1925, the proposal of granting of the pastors the right to inspect the lessons of religion was denounced,¹¹⁸⁰ and on several occasions, the teachers expressed their support for non-confessional teaching of religion.¹¹⁸¹ Regarding the new curriculum, it was proposed that the extent of the Old Testament stories should be decreased and ethics-related stories from the literature should be added to the syllabus of religion.¹¹⁸² Evidently, the quest for autonomy from the church, which is characteristic of the Teachers' Union minutes, contributed largely to the confrontation of the teachers with the ambitious new pastor Slokenbergs.

Also, the memoirs of Pēteris Meisters, which were written during the Soviet period, seem to confirm that the claims about the spread of both left-wing and anticlerical views among the teachers of Rūjiena were exaggerated. Even though Meisters was, after his return to Rūjiena as a headmaster of the basic school in the first Soviet year, apparently seen as a supporter of the new regime by the public and some of his colleagues, his memoirs are relatively free from ideological clichés of the time of writing. Importantly, in general, he avoids both disparaging remarks on independent Latvia and glorifying the Soviet regime.

¹¹⁷⁵ LNB A134: N29, 05.03.1924.

¹¹⁷⁶ LNB A134: N29, 20.02.1924.

¹¹⁷⁷ LNB A134: N29, 02.04.1924.

¹¹⁷⁸ *Tautas Padome*, temporary quasi-parliamentary body of newly independent Latvia, consisting of representatives of most of political organizations.

¹¹⁷⁹ LNB A134: N29, 02.05.1920.

¹¹⁸⁰ LNB A134: N29, 13.05.1925.

¹¹⁸¹ LNB A134: N29, 06.02.1927; 20.09.1928.

¹¹⁸² LNB A134: N29, 06.02.1927.

At the time of writing, he himself had obviously no motivation to deny having left-wing nor anticlerical sympathies anymore, but despite that, his account of the events is similar to that of his earlier writings in Rūjiena Domas in the 1930s: Slokenbergs as a person with dubious moral integrity is criticized, but not religion as a such or, in general, neither the institution of the church. Overall, Slokenbergs is expectedly treated as a major villain by Meisters, but religion is paid very little attention in his memoirs.¹¹⁸³ Religious instruction is mentioned only as a subject that was obligatory for schools, but not for pupils. The liberal attitude in that question is attributed to the progressive mood, which was still widespread in the 1920s as allegedly a legacy of Bolshevik rule. Reportedly only few parents wanted their children to learn religion in Rūjiena. Organizing morning prayers was up to the school council; his own school never opted for that.¹¹⁸⁴

“Slokenbergs’s School”

The lack of cooperation with public schools in the parish was probably the main reason why pastor Slokenbergs decided, shortly after his arrival, to establish the basic school of his own.¹¹⁸⁵ The school was established on the premises of a former parish school (which had been recently closed) by the council of the Northern congregation on 23 August 1929. The school was seen as linked to the congregation, and an additional fee was imposed on the congregation members to establish the school.¹¹⁸⁶ Formally, however, the school was initially called “Private 6-Class Basic School of Roberts Slokenbergs”. Already, on 30.09.1929, the statutes of the new school had been confirmed by the state authorities.¹¹⁸⁷

In parallel, there was an initiative to appoint Slokenbergs as a teacher of religion to the Rūjiena 2nd Basic School, but he was on 02.09.1929 bluntly rejected by the school council. Some of the parents protested, and on 21.09.1929, the town government installed Slokenbergs in the office, notwithstanding the objections of the school. However, Slokenbergs resigned himself, referring to the hostility of his fellow teachers who had, among other things, made indecent accusations at his address at one of the parents’ meetings.¹¹⁸⁸

The Slokenbergs’s school was known in its first years (and later popularly) as “Slokenbergs’s private basic school”, but since 1931 as 6-class Rūjiena Parish

¹¹⁸³ LNB A134: N8.

¹¹⁸⁴ LNB A134: N8, p. 3.

¹¹⁸⁵ Biezais 2018, 195. The idea of establishing schools by the congregations as an antidote to allegedly anticlerical mood of the teachers of regular schools was expressed already at the beginning of 1920s. Umurga congregation was reportedly unable to open its school due to the resistance of “red” school administration of Valmiera county in 1921 (Svētdienas Rīts, 01.01.1922, p. 3). Also, in Valmiera, a congregation-related private school had been established (Svētdienas Rīts, 24.05.1925, pp. 163–164; 16.08.1925, p. 264).

¹¹⁸⁶ LVVA 3681-1-272, pp. 56–57.

¹¹⁸⁷ LVVA 6642-1-1550, pp. 124 and 127.

¹¹⁸⁸ LVVA 6642-1-1550, pp. 128–150.

School of Terneja commune¹¹⁸⁹ and since August 1934¹¹⁹⁰ 6-Class Basic School of parish of Rūjiēna (Rūjiēnas draudzes 6-klasīgā pamatskola). However, in the Slokenbergs's own newspaper, the school was usually called "parish school" ("draudzes skola"), notwithstanding its official name.

Opened in the autumn 1929, it initially had 110 pupils.¹¹⁹¹ The sources which are sympathetic to Slokenbergs, claim that as the pastor did not spare money to develop the school, it became very popular among the locals, so that in the 1930s all public primary schools in the town of Rūjiēna had to be closed down.¹¹⁹² In memoirs, the school is usually appreciated for its good conditions and high standard of teaching, making it one of the best schools in the whole region. Instead of local teachers, who were suspected of leftist sympathies, young and idealistic teachers were hired who had just graduated the seminary. The school building was thoroughly renovated, with a newly erected water tower and even a swimming pool. To finance the school, Slokenbergs reportedly pawned his father's farm. Besides that, donations were collected, and importantly, Slokenbergs managed to establish good relations with leading politicians.¹¹⁹³ Notably, when then-minister of education, writer Atis Ķeniņš visited Rūjiēna in 1932, he was allegedly so impressed by the school (and also the preceding sermon of Slokenbergs in Mazsalaca church where he had cited the minister's poetry) that he decided to cover the debts of the school from the state budget.¹¹⁹⁴ Besides that, Slokenbergs was skilful in mobilizing the support of the locals. Allegedly, 3000 signatures were collected on behalf of allocating state subsidies to the school.¹¹⁹⁵ He organized fund-raising among locals, too; the entrances in the so-called "Golden Book" of the donors indicate that besides big donations of some dignitaries, many common people (including pupils of the school themselves) contributed to the cause.¹¹⁹⁶

However, other sources indicate that the success of the Slokenbergs's school was not by far related only to skills and willingness of sacrifices by the pastor and his supporters. Importantly, the support of the right-wing-dominated Rūjiēna

¹¹⁸⁹ Slokenbergs decided to subordinate the school formally to Terneja commune, as he hoped that it would facilitate the funding of the school: LVVA 3681-1-272, p. 56v. Terneja commune agreed to take responsibility for the school as it allegedly was obliged to open its own basic school but lacked funds to build a school building, see LVVA 5280-1-1. However, in the school year 1931/32, only 72 pupils of 343 in the school came from Terneja commune: LVVA 5280-1-9.

¹¹⁹⁰ Rūjiēna parish school was established with an agreement between the Northern Rūjiēna congregation, the town of Rūjiēna, and the communes of Terneja and Lode. According to the agreement, all children who lived in the territory of Northern and Southern Rūjiēna parishes were eligible to be accepted as pupils in that school. LVVA 6642-1-1557, pp. 127 and 223.

¹¹⁹¹ LVVA 3681-1-272, p. 58.

¹¹⁹² Alberings 1978, 164; Biezais 2018, 158.

¹¹⁹³ Biezais 2018, 156–158.

¹¹⁹⁴ Biezais 2018, 206–207; Cf. Rūjiēnas Vēstnesis, 13.05.1932, p. 1.

¹¹⁹⁵ Rūjiēnas Balss, 27.06.1930, p. 1.

¹¹⁹⁶ The names of donators were initially regularly published also in Rūjiēnas Vēstnesis (see, for example, 18.12.1931, p. 5).

town council and Valmiera county school administration played a major role. Slokenbergs's opponents, mostly local schoolteachers, complained that several local schools were closed down in order to get more pupils to Slokenbergs's school. Also, his school was allocated money at the expense of other local schools.

Already at the very beginning, local teachers claimed in identical petitions to the Directorate of Folk Schools, to the Latvian Teachers' Union and the Education Committee of the *Saeima*¹¹⁹⁷ that the school founded by Slokenbergs was financially supported not only by the church (one *Lats* was added to the membership fee of the congregation), but also by the municipality. The petitioners suggested that any state support for this school should not be allowed as it would be unfair from the point of view of public schools. Also, it was claimed that the pastor had launched a smear campaign against the existing schools and their teachers: "Attracting students to R. Slokenbergs's school takes place with the help of demagoguery, which is spread among the children's parents under the label of the religious education and the Christian spirit. Compulsory [*i.e.* public] schools are labelled as schools of pagans and evil of all sorts, from which the only salvation allegedly lies with Slokenbergs's school, even though teachers work there even without pedagogical education and approval [of school authorities]."¹¹⁹⁸

The Inspector of public schools in Valmiera county admitted that the private school of Slokenbergs was indeed problematic because it pulled children away from municipal schools.¹¹⁹⁹ Notably, richer parents sent their children to Slokenbergs's school even from very far away. Therefore, the upkeep of the village schools became difficult, and poorer parents suffered as they were not able to educate their children in Rūjiena. However, the inspector also criticized the preceding educational policy of social democrats, who, while in power, had previously managed to replace bourgeois-minded teachers with their "comrades" through similar means, including the reorganization of schools. In addition, "confessional religious education" had really been disparaged by left-wing teachers at meetings of parents as well as in political rallies.¹²⁰⁰

Similar accusations against Slokenbergs's school were made by the teacher Miķelis Volkovs in his petition to the Directorate of Folk Schools. Volkovs had been made redundant due to the closing of Jurata Basic School and argued that

¹¹⁹⁷ LVVA 6642-1-1550, pp. 134–138.

¹¹⁹⁸ „Skolēnu pievilksana R. Slokenberga skolai notiek ar demagogijas palīdzību, kuŗa tiek izplatīta bērnu vecākos uz ticības mācību un kristīgā garā rēķina. Obligatīskās skolas izprovocē par pagānu un visada ļaunumu skolā, no kuŗa vienīgais glābiņš esot pie Slokenberga, kaut gan tajā strādā skolotāji pat bez pīdagogiskās izglītības un apstiprināšanas”. LVVA 6642-1-1550, p. 134v.

¹¹⁹⁹ Indeed, according to the data of the school from 1931/32, only 72 pupils of 343 came from Terneja commune, which was officially taking care of the school. 151 pupils were from the town of Rūjiena, 44 from Naukšēni, 16 from Rūjiena, 15 from Ipiķi, 12 from Jeri communes, and the rest from 8 other communes. LVVA 5280-1-9.

¹²⁰⁰ LVVA 6642-1-1550, p. 140.

ongoing rearrangements of the school network in the Northern part of Valmiera county were related to Slokenbergs's propaganda against the local schools. He was allegedly trusted by many villagers who were used to holding pastors in high regard.¹²⁰¹ Inspector Breikšs confirmed that the closure of schools was indeed related to establishing the school of Slokenbergs.¹²⁰² In the following years, similar teachers' complaints about unfair support for Slokenbergs's school by the state and resulting damage to the other schools in the parish continued. The controversy was extensively covered by the media, including the newspaper of the Latvian Teachers' Union *Mūsu Nākotne*.¹²⁰³ Tensions also grew between the county school administration and inspector Breikšs. The Teachers' Union argued that the latter was persecuted by the Valmiera school administration for his „non-partisan” stance and called upon the release of the head of school administration for that.¹²⁰⁴ However, it was Breikšs, instead, who was forced to leave his post, and the adversaries of Slokenbergs claimed that the influential friends of the pastor were behind his removal.¹²⁰⁵

However, the adversaries of Slokenbergs claimed that soon many parents became disappointed and took their children again away from his school. Arguably the school had not met their expectations, mostly because of ignorance, negligence, and immoral behaviour of its headmaster. The scholastic progress of the pupils was not impressive either – partly because Slokenbergs was kindly receiving pupils of all kinds, including those who had difficulties in their previous schools.¹²⁰⁶

Sources also shed light on how Slokenbergs carried out his famous saying, “If the goal is good, money can also be knocked out of stone”. He had written to both Prime Minister Mārgers Skujenieks and Minister of Education Atis Ķeniņš, asking for funds for his school, noting that Terneja commune was not able to fund it properly, and proposing the status of state school or at least covering teachers' salaries from the state budget.¹²⁰⁷ In fact, already in 1930, Slokenbergs had attained subsidies in sum of 4000 *Lats* for his school from the state.¹²⁰⁸

As for Rūjiena town administration, it covered, for example, in 1931 the bill of electricity used during the Christmas party of the school and the costs for meals of needy pupils.¹²⁰⁹ But in 1934, the town council allocated in yearly budget of the town 3000 *Lats* to Slokenbergs's school and only 2000 *Lats* to the town's own basic school, notwithstanding the protests of the left-wing deputies.¹²¹⁰

¹²⁰¹ LVVA 6642-1-1552, pp. 4–5.

¹²⁰² LVVA 6642-1-1552, p. 21.

¹²⁰³ *Mūsu Nākotne*, 27.01.1932, p. 3.

¹²⁰⁴ LVVA 6642-1-1553, pp. 8–9; cf. *Izglītības Ministrijas Mēnešraksts*, no 2, 1931, p. 187.

¹²⁰⁵ *Rūjienas Doms*, 20.09.1932, p. 1 (The article titled “Kādas autoritātes revidējušas Slokenberga skolu un ko tas atrādušas”).

¹²⁰⁶ LNB A134: N 9, p. 35.

¹²⁰⁷ LVVA 6642-1-1555, pp. 21–22, cf. pp. 23–31.

¹²⁰⁸ *Rūjienas Vēstnesis*, 27.06.1930, p. 1

¹²⁰⁹ LVVA 5280-1-2, pp. 47–48.

¹²¹⁰ *Mūsu Nākotne*, 22.02.1934, p. 4.

Slokenbergs obtained some financial support also from the church. In 1929, the Central Board of the LELC had approved the establishment of Rūjiena parish school “provided that it is managed in the evangelical Lutheran spirit and the immovable property will always remain the property of the church”.¹²¹¹ On 14.01.1932, Slokenbergs was invited to the Central Board to report about “the state of the Rūjiena parish school, which is now officially called the 6-class basic school of Terneja commune”. It was decided to allocate 500 Lats to the school to promote education in the spirit of the Church.¹²¹² In February the Central Board declined to support the school with further 2500 Lats, referring to the lack of funds, but then agreed in April, 7 to give it a loan in the sum of 1500 Lats for three years with the interest rate of 8%.¹²¹³ In addition, the Central Board had granted a loan personally to Slokenbergs in March – also in the sum of 1500 Lats and rate of 8%, but only for one year.¹²¹⁴

Crucially, Slokenbergs had also solid political backing. He hosted frequently prominent politicians and statesmen in his school.¹²¹⁵ The fact that many of them happened to come from Rūjiena parish, undoubtedly facilitated Slokenbergs’s efforts to obtain preferential treatment for his school. In fact, in a newspaper article, he explicitly acknowledged that minister A. Alberings and chairman of school directorate J. Lejins-Leja had advanced the case of the parish school in front of state institutions.¹²¹⁶

Similarly, the town council provided money for a kindergarten, which had been launched by the Slokenbergs’s school. The municipal basic school was also applying for the support of the town to open the kindergarten but was denied funding – under the pretext that Slokenbergs’s kindergarten was able to operate cheaper.¹²¹⁷

In short, the establishment of an arguably exemplary basic school in Rūjiena was not achieved merely by the efforts and personal sacrifices of pastor Slokenbergs and his local supporters but was largely a result of lobbying and establishing good relations with politicians and church leaders. Besides that, while accounts of Slokenbergs’s opponents are, of course, biased, it seems that preferential treatment of “Slokenbergs’s school” had probably indeed negative side effects on the other schools in the parish, as they suffered from the declining number of pupils and lack of resources.

The tug-of-war between Slokenbergs and the Teachers’ Union should, however, not be seen primarily as a battle about the role of religion in the public

¹²¹¹ “Ar noteikumu, ka tā tiek vadīta ev. lut. Baznīcas garā un nekustāmais īpašums paliek arvien baznīcas īpašumā”, LNVM KD 2142:2, pp. 177–178.

¹²¹² “Rūjienas draudzes skolas stāvokli, kuŗa tagad oficieli saucas par Ternejas pagasta 6 klasīgo pamatskolu”. LNVM KD 2142:3, p. 169.

¹²¹³ LNVM KD 2142:3, p. 217.

¹²¹⁴ LNVM KD 2142:3, p. 207.

¹²¹⁵ See, for example, Rūjienas Balss, 12.12.1930, p. 1; Rūjienas Vēstnesis, 13.05.1932, p. 1; 22.07.1932, p. 1.

¹²¹⁶ Rūjienas Balss, 02.10.1931, p. 1.

¹²¹⁷ Rūjienas Balss, 19.06.1931, p. 3; 03.07.1931, p. 1 and 6.

sphere, as Slokenbergs tried to present it. Rather, the conflict had rather mundane roots. Importantly, the disputes about school network in the parish pre-dated the arrival of the pastor. Previously the teachers at the basic schools of the town of Rūjiena had been complaining about another competitor to their schools, namely Rūjiena gymnasium, which had opened preparatory classes. Besides the ordinary subjects of basic school, also French and Latin languages were taught there, which attracted those who were planning to continue their studies in the gymnasium.¹²¹⁸ Presumably, in a similar manner, the teachers were not necessarily concerned about the religious character of Slokenbergs's school but simply stood against a perceived attempt to undermine the future of their own schools and, thus, their own livelihoods. Besides that, both the pastor and some of the teachers were competing for leading positions in local social life, which prompted bitter rivalry in arranging children's festivals and other events,¹²¹⁹ organizing social assistance to the poor, and publishing rival weekly newspapers.

Importantly, the Christian character of Slokenbergs's school is in the autobiographical writings often mentioned only in passing, referring to the morning prayers, lessons of religion, the sculpture of Christ in the school etc.¹²²⁰ For example, in case of Velta Grimma, religious topics play no prominent role in her school reminiscences. She mentions only briefly that religion was one of the subjects at school and that their much-respected teacher "prayed to God together with us, the sinners".¹²²¹ True, Viktors Irbe mentions that Slokenbergs tried to enhance the modest interest of the children in religion by arranging a „competition" of church service attendance between classes, but it did not work. Only relatively few of the pupils often took part in the services, some even twice daily during major church feasts, but at least half of the pupils were not interested in this competition at all.¹²²²

The papers of pupils (probably from the Latvian language final exams) from the years 1932–35 and 1937–38, found in the archive fund of the Slokenbergs's school, also allow us to draw some conclusions about the place of faith and the church in the pupils' lives.

Only one of the themes of the papers was directly related to the faith – namely "People and religion in "Mērnīeku laiki" by Brothers Kaudzītes". In these papers, pupils usually presented the classification of people according to their piety on the one hand and good deeds on the other, taken from the novel itself, and categorized the protagonists according to it.¹²²³ Besides that, references to the piety

¹²¹⁸ LNB A 134 N 8, pp. 20–21.

¹²¹⁹ Similarly, Rūjienas Vēstnesis also campaigned against a local song festival organized by the teachers' association (03.03.1933, p. 1), and expressed *schadenfreude* when the turnout was low (17.03.1933, p. 1). Cf. Rūjienas Vēstnesis, 03.02.1933, p. 2.

¹²²⁰ https://novadpetnieciba.saknesrujiena.lv/atminu_stasti, 17.11.2023.

¹²²¹ Grimma 1996, 62.

¹²²² Biezais 2018, 235.

¹²²³ Worried mother asked in a deathbed from her son Kaspars if it was true that he was not going to church often. Kaspars replied with the parable about four different kinds of trees, confirming that he himself was like a tree which did not blossom but bore fruit, *i.e.* he was not

of the protagonists were made by pupils who wrote in the theme “People with pure heart in the works of Latvian literature”, which is also understandable regarding the character of the literary works by Jānis Poruks and Apsīšu Jēkabs which were usually dealt with in these papers.

As for other topics, religious motives appear in five papers on the topic “A person whom I respect”. In these papers, children characterized an exemplary person (usually one of their parents, relatives, schoolteachers, or friends), and on four occasions out of sixteen it is mentioned that the person (respectively mother, father, a teacher and grandmother) was also religious or used to go to church.¹²²⁴

However, in writings about other themes¹²²⁵ there can be found almost no references to the topics of religion and church at all; churches visited during school excursions (Burtņieki church and Riga Dome Cathedral) are simply mentioned as interesting or beautiful sights.

Local Politics and Social Contradictions

The parishes of the North-Western Vidzeme were known as strongholds of socialists at that time, and Latvian sources in exile emphasize that Rūjiena had the reputation of a “red town”. Slokenbergs arguably challenged it *via* his activities.¹²²⁶ However, as shown above, the adversaries of Slokenbergs themselves tended to downplay their ideological bias towards the church, emphasizing rather the personal aspect of the conflict. On the other hand, it is undeniable that the strong presence of socialist supporters had a major and manifold impact on the church in the parish.

Their influence dates back to the revolutionary year 1905. The daughter of the pastor Baer noted in her memoir that before the revolution the old social order seemed to be self-evident, including the sincere respect towards lords of the manor and pastors. The revolution was the water-shed moment according to her,

showing off his piety but was believing in God in his heart and doing good to other people. The worst kind of people were, according to Kaspars, those who blossomed but did not bear fruit, *i.e.*, those who were pious but at the same time evil in character. (Kaudzīte and Kaudzīte [1879] 1998, 82–89). “Mērnīeku laiki”, considered to be the first novel in Latvian language, is one of the most popular literary works in Latvia.

¹²²⁴ While in most other papers, religiosity is linked to kindness of heart, one child argued that his deeply religious father was kind to his children only on Sundays, while on ordinary days, he was strict towards them so that children were afraid of him. Even so, he arguably loved them and so was worthy of respect. – The fifth case religious issues were mentioned in writing on that topic, was also about Kaspars from the novel “Mērnīeku laiki” (see the previous comment).

¹²²⁵ On school excursions, “Aspazijas sievietes” and „Vecāki un bērni” (1932), “Mana māja” (1934), “No zemes šīs mēs izauguši esam, mums šajā zemē galva noliek” (1937), „Mamuliņa latviešu tautas dziesmās” and „Kā es piepildīšu Dr. Ulmaņa vārdus: “Manas domas, mans darbs, viss manis spēks un viss es pats piederešu manai dzimteni un tēvijai, mūsu valstij Latvijai” (1938).

¹²²⁶ Biezais 2018, 156–157.

which prompted changes of perceptions on society.¹²²⁷ In 1905, revolutionaries operated openly in the town and its vicinity for months. True, it was rather due to the weakness of authorities than the result of active mass support of the population. Revolutionary activities, which included mass meetings and some raids against the local manors, were led by incomers from Riga, some of them being of local origin. Besides them, local schoolteachers, secondary school students and commune clerks were active. On the other hand, at least wealthy farm-owners seem not to have been supporting the activities of the radicals. According to later reports, the Orthodox priest Mārtiņš Kārklīņš had been actively participating in the revolutionary meetings, even giving a speech. Later, he arguably served a short jail term for that.¹²²⁸ In one of the revolutionary meetings, it was demanded that Latvians should be given the right to decide the matters of the church and congregation, and to free the religious instruction at schools and examination of reading skills of the children from the supervision of the pastors.¹²²⁹

The radical mood resurfaced once more after the outbreak of the 1917 revolution. In the elections of county councils, 80% voted for social democrats (dominated by Bolsheviks at that time) in the town of Rūjiena¹²³⁰ and yet in the elections of Latvian Constituent Assembly in 1920, about 2/3 of the voters in most of the communes and even 3/4 in the town supported the socialist LSDSP. In later elections, support for the Left waned somewhat but still remained much higher than in most other parts of Latvia.

Table 14. Election Results in Rūjiena Parish (Average Share of Votes in Communes and the Town of Rūjiena, %)

	1920	1922	1925	1928	1931
Farmers' Union	26.4	31.4	34.4	29.3	31.3
Christian Nationalist Union/Christian Union and Workers	2.1	3.6	2.1	5.3	6.0
Socialists (LSDSP)	64.1	54.0	41.4	27.4	22.0
Leftists (Pro-communists)	...	...	...	19.6	10.2
Other	7.4	11.0	22.1	18.4	30.5

Source: Latwijas Satversmes Sapulzes... 1920; Skujenieks 1923, Skujenieks 1926, Skujenieks 1929, Skujenieks 1932.

Another popular party, like elsewhere in Latvia, was the Farmers' Union. Since the elections to the 2nd Saeima, the party had at least a comparable level of sup-

¹²²⁷ https://novadpetnieciba.saknesrujiena.lv/atminu_stasti/22-macitaja-carl-baer-meitas-atminas-par-rujienu-no-vacu-valodas-tulkojis-evalds-silinsch.html, 11.03.2023.

¹²²⁸ Alberings 1978, 81–95; Krīgers 2006.

¹²²⁹ Alberings 1978, 81.

¹²³⁰ Šiliņš 2013, 34.

porters to socialists in most of the communes. It was especially popular in Lode and Idus communes, where it garnered the majority of the votes.

In the elections to the 3rd Saeima, the support for the LSDSP declined even further, but this time largely due to the debut of the radical left in general elections. In three communes, the latter proved even more successful than socialists, with 1/4 of the votes in Arakste and almost 1/3 in both Ipiķi and Sēļi. Besides that, local communists also developed underground activities, hoisting red flags, distributing their leaflets and literature, and keeping contact with “propagandists of Moscow”. They also tried to make use of legal agricultural workers’ Trade Unions to promote their cause.¹²³¹ In local newspapers, the surroundings of the town were called a stronghold of communists in the whole of Latvia, and news about their agitation, as well as their arrests and court processes, were published from time to time.¹²³² As in the whole of Latvia, the support for the left declined in the last interwar Saeima elections in 1931, but it still was at least around 30% in most of the communes. In Ipiķi and Sēļi, it was around 40%, and in the town of Rūjiena as much as 48%. Less leftist were once again the communes of Koņi and Lodi, where less than quarter of the voters opted for them.

The decreasing popularity of the left-wing views can be explained by the fact that the independent Republic had satisfied the demands of large groups of people, leading to their de-radicalization. It concerned, first of all, the people who had acquired land due to land reform, but also many others for whom new opportunities of social advancement became available. According to Pēteris Meisters, Jānis Miķelsons, the well-known publisher and bookseller in Rūjiena, was a good example of that. He had been almost a communist in the past, agitating, among other things, against religious instruction at schools. However, after the arrival of Slokenbergs, Miķelson let his already quite old children to be baptized by the new pastor, and supported Slokenbergs’s ambition to become a teacher of religion in the 2nd basic school of the town.¹²³³

Besides agrarians, socialists and pro-communists, no other party was able to gain the support of more than 1/10 of the voters in the parish. However, it is significant that Christian National Union (since 1926, “Christian Union and Workers”) was able to improve its election results in the town and many communes in the two last elections. Notably, Slokenbergs himself ran in the elections of Rūjiena town council and Saeima (both held in 1931). Especially in the municipal elections of the town of Rūjiena, the church-related issues were therefore high on the agenda. Slokenbergs’s list of „the Friends of the Church” appealed largely to the workers and other poorer people, claiming that they (and not the rich) were the most active church-goers. The self-proclaimed leaders of the

¹²³¹ Rūjienas Balss, 21.11.1930, p. 3.

¹²³² See, for example, Rūjienas Balss, 16.10.1931, p. 2.

¹²³³ LNB A 134, N8, p. 33. According to some other sources, Miķelsons was later a supporter of Latvian neo-pagan Dievturība movement: <http://lgdb.lnb.lv/index/person/2585/>, 02.12.2023.

workers, social democrats, however, had become rich themselves and were also against religion.¹²³⁴

The pastor conducted fierce campaigns; his adversaries accused him of smearing his opponents and using unfair methods, such as covert buying of votes.¹²³⁵ However, the inquiry did not confirm any wrongdoings. The election results showed the remarkable personal popularity of Slokenbergs. He was elected to the town council and, as newspaper reports indicate, became a very active speaker in the proceedings. On the other hand, the electoral result of his list of “Friends of the Church” was probably below the expectations of Slokenbergs. It got only 18.7% of the votes, attaining third place after social democrats (43.0%) and the list of house owners (*namsaimnieku saraksts*, 21.1%). Voter turnout was surprisingly high – even 94%.¹²³⁶

Also, in the elections of Saeima, Slokenbergs got a remarkable number of votes of approval, including from those who had preferred socialist or communist parties.¹²³⁷ However, it was not enough to get to Saeima. Also, in the Saeima elections, the arch adversaries of Slokenbergs, the social democrats, still won the plurality in the town of Rūjiena. Slokenberg’s appeal for the workers was thus largely of no avail as his list seems to have obtained the support of mostly those people who had been previously voted for other bourgeois lists.¹²³⁸ In the communes, socialists also lost ground in the 1931 Saeima elections. But the main winner of their decline was, as elsewhere in Latvia, the Ādolfs Bļodnieks’s New Farmers’ Party, which was also endorsed by some Slokenbergs’s opponents among teachers, such as Baunis and Rikmanis.

In sum, Slokenbergs’s undeniable personal popularity did not translate into electoral support of his party. Nor did it prompt a large part of the local population to give up left-wing political preferences, which at that time were widely seen as incompatible with the stances of the church. Indeed, some ordinary people could well be pro-church and, at the same time, vote for socialists and communists. Vilis Timze remembered that he was punished at school for wearing a red scarf, as it was deemed to be a show of political stance. Confused, he asked at home who were “the Reds” and why they were not tolerated. His deeply religious mother explained that “the Reds” were good people, all of them were Communists, and their aim was to make better the lives of people like them. In hindsight, Timze supposed that his mother had obtained her views from her fellow working-class women in the town and noted that it was easy for the communists to deceive people like she, who had seen nothing good in their lives.¹²³⁹ Besides that, there is also a newspaper account that in Arakste even some widely known supporters

¹²³⁴ Rūjienas Balss, 27.03.1931, p. 5.

¹²³⁵ Rūjienas Balss, 22.05.1931, p. 3.

¹²³⁶ Rūjienas Domas, 31.03.1931, p. 1

¹²³⁷ In the Saeima election, besides giving a vote for a party, one could also express its support or rejection of individual candidates of any of the parties.

¹²³⁸ Rūjienas Domas, 31.03.1931, p. 1

¹²³⁹ Timze 1992, 38-39.

of the Left had allegedly taken part in the crowded religious service held by Slokenbergs there.¹²⁴⁰

Besides participation in the elections, Slokenbergs used also other ways to intervene directly in politics. In 1931, he endorsed voting for expropriating the Dome church by the state in the referendum.¹²⁴¹ In 1934, shortly before the end of the democratic era in Latvia, he was accused of denigration of *Saeima*, as he had said in a sermon in the Riga Dome Cathedral that the Parliament did not care about war invalids while treating the property of the people as it were some kind of goods in the market.¹²⁴² Later, Slokenbergs turned into a fervent supporter of the Ulmanis regime. He claimed that on the morning of May 16, 1934, when many in Latvia were still hesitant towards the new regime, a hymn of thanksgiving was sung during the morning prayer at his school. He also boasted that his school was the first in Latvia to send a congratulatory telegram to “geniuses of Latvia”, the authoritarian leader Kārlis Ulmanis and his ally General Jānis Balodis, on the occasion of the coup.¹²⁴³ Vilis Timze, in turn, claims that during the festivities of the 20th anniversary of Latvian independence, Slokenbergs had held a church service that, in fact, was more reminiscent of a political and nationalist meeting because he had mentioned and glorified Ulmanis more than God.¹²⁴⁴

According to a memoir of a local communist activist, Slokenbergs pleaded his loyalty to the new authorities in the first Soviet year, providing his religious views were tolerated. It had allegedly caused considerable confusion among local wealthy farmers. However, Biezais claimed that his position remained precarious and possibly only the respect of local communist sympathizers saved him from repressions.¹²⁴⁵ And finally, in 1942 he was dismissed from office due to conflict with Nazi German occupation authorities. The details of the incident are not clear.¹²⁴⁶

But pastor Bahs also had troubles with authorities regarding his political stances. In 1936, the administrative department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs informed the Board of Spiritual Affairs that Bahs, even though he was himself ethnically a Latvian and the pastor of a large Latvian congregation, was against imposing on a small German Lutheran congregation of Rūjiena a fee for using the church for christenings and burials, arguing that Germans should have been entitled to use the church free of charge as they were those who had built it in the past. Besides that, Bahs had held a religious service during the Aviation Day

¹²⁴⁰ Rūjienas Balss, 23.12.1930

¹²⁴¹ Rūjienas Vēstnesis, 19.06.1931, p. 5.

¹²⁴² LVVA 1370-1-2335, p. 151.

¹²⁴³ Brīva Zeme, 13.07.1935, p. 10.

¹²⁴⁴ Timze 1992, 37.

¹²⁴⁵ Biezais 2018, 24–25.

¹²⁴⁶ Biezais 2018, 27–30, *cf.* pp., 188–189. A local claims that he had declared from the pulpit that Latvians may greet Germans as liberators from the Soviets, but they should not forget that Germans had oppressed them for 700 years: https://novadpetnieciba.saknesrujiena.lv/atminu_stasti/1-j-brozes-bernibas-atminas.html, 02.03.2023.

celebrations, which were arranged by the local branch of the Aviation Club, but declined to consecrate a glider, which the Club had recently obtained, “thus openly demonstrating his opposition to an event to which the state leadership, as we know, pay great attention”. Finally, it was reminded that Bahs had also earlier shown unloyalty towards the Latvian State, openly criticizing the land reform and declining pleas to consecrate the dwelling houses of new farmers. It is not known how the Board reacted to the letter; however, Bahs remained in office.¹²⁴⁷

Finally, it should be mentioned that the Baptist preacher Ivanovs had established a cell of Christian Labour Party in Rūjiena, which caused conflicts in the congregation during the election campaigns.¹²⁴⁸

Conclusion

Rūjiena is a case of a modern, wealthy and culturally developed parish. It was almost homogeneously Lutheran. In the case of the town of Rūjiena, the operation of several free congregations attracted public attention, but their membership remained small, and the attitude of the wider public towards them was prejudiced.

Despite being a stronghold of left-wing parties, the Lutheran church played an integral part in the lives of the majority of the locals. Only a few people opted out from church rites. Christmas services and cemetery festivities were popular, and local organizations used to invite pastors to perform religious ceremonies in their festive events. On the other hand, regular church attendance was not common and religious topics were not paid much attention in the local newspapers.

The people living in Rūjiena in the interwar years have had experiences with very different pastors. It has been often argued in the literature of local history that Latvian nationalist pastors Jānis Ozols and Roberts Slokenbergs were popular among the people and contributed to the tightening of relations of the locals with the church. The legacy of German pastors (Baer) and Latvian pastors with German orientation (Bahs, Osolings), has, however, been assessed rather critically. It is hard to judge to what extent these assessments are well founded.

An especially important role in the public life of the parish played Roberts Slokenbergs, the charismatic pastor of Northern congregation in 1928–42, who excelled as a good orator and also published a local newspaper, established a congregation-related primary school, and played a prominent role in local politics. The aim of his energetic public activities seems to have been not as much promoting individual piety as securing to the church (and thus also to himself) a respectful role in the society. It is hardly ever claimed even by his supporters that the popularity of the pastor has prompted locals also to value religion or church more than they did before. Indeed, Slokenberg's school was only vaguely clerical and at least according to his opponents, he himself failed to stick to the moral standards that were expected from a pastor at that time.

¹²⁴⁷ “...tādā kartā atklāti demonstrojot savu opozīciju pasākumam, kuŗam valsts vadība, ka zināms, piegrež izcīlu vērību”. LVVA 1370-1-2338, p. 109.

¹²⁴⁸ Rūjienas Domas, 16.02.1932, p. 3.

Establishing connections with political circles was an important part of Slokenbergs's success. Besides his ability to persuade influential people, ideological considerations also played a role in it. As socialists had a reputation for being anticlerical, the allegiance to the church served as a sign of loyalty to the bourgeois parties and later to the regime of Ulmanis at that time. Therefore, the church could easily appeal to the support of right-wing politicians, and perhaps especially so in the left-leaning Northern Vidzeme. On the other hand, at least for some locals, supporting the Left and being close to the church were not incompatible. Notably, during the 1931 municipal and general election campaigns, Slokenbergs tried hard to win over the leftist voters, but largely to no avail.

Also, Slokenbergs's sour relations with the local branch of Teachers' Union were presented in political terms. However, his claims about the wide spread of leftist, anti-religious and anticlerical views among teachers seem to be exaggerated. While the personal religious and political convictions of the teachers probably varied widely, most of them were simply keen to defend the independence of the school from the church. Besides that, there was a bitter rivalry between the pastor and some leaders of the teachers over the leading role in the local community. A vivid example of this is organizing competing children's festivals.

In sum, what at first glance looks like Slokenbergs's bold challenge to the spread of societal secularization in Rūjiena might have rather been a colourful part of the local power struggle. It is not possible to measure the sincerity of Slokenbergs's faith, but both his political and religious activities may have served sometimes simply as tools for achieving his own extraordinary personal ambitions.

3.4. TUKUMS PARISH

Introduction

Historiography

There is a rich literature about the history of the parish, largely due to the contribution of the Tukums Museum and some non-professional researchers. An excellent and comprehensive history of Lutheran congregations has been written by Inta Dišlere.¹²⁴⁹ Other best and most professionally researched topics are related to the history of the town¹²⁵⁰ and the manors. Besides that, several collections of articles are dedicated to the history of communes.¹²⁵¹ However, the quality of the articles in the latter is uneven, and they contain relatively little information about church and religion. In 1996–2012, the museum published twelve volumes of collections of articles on local cultural history.¹²⁵² Some of those contain valuable information also about the public role of the churches.

Tukums Museum also has a long tradition of collecting and conducting professional research in oral history. The collection consists of thousands of interviews, and therefore, analysing its content was unfortunately beyond the reach of the current study.¹²⁵³

Religious Background

Six major confessions were represented in the town: Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Jews, Baptists, and Adventists.¹²⁵⁴ The communes of the parish were predominantly Lutheran. However, during the interwar years, the number of Catholics increased considerably due to the influx of agricultural labourers from Latgale and Lithuania. In fact, in the summer period, their share might have been even higher as many of them did not stay permanently but arrived around St. George's Day and left home around St. Martin's Day.¹²⁵⁵

¹²⁴⁹ Dišlere 2017.

¹²⁵⁰ Ozola 2014.

¹²⁵¹ Šablovskis, 2006; Dišlere et al. 1998 (Smārdes pagasts); Šablovskis and Aizpuriete 2007; Akmens 2021.

¹²⁵² Tukuma novada kultūrvēsture I–XII.

¹²⁵³ Ozola *et al.* 2007. According to Tukums Museum, there is little church-related material in the collections. During the Soviet times, people felt uneasy about sharing their faith-related reminiscences with the researchers. Only on some occasions did people mention baptisms or church weddings in the context of showing researchers family photo albums. (E-mail from Agrita Ozola to Rain Soosaar, 07.06.2023).

¹²⁵⁴ Ozola 2014, 21.

¹²⁵⁵ Dišlere 2017, 312.

Table 15. Share of Lutherans of Population in Communes (%) of Tukums Parish According to National Census Data

	1925	1930	1935
Tukums town	80.6	80.3	79.4
Milzkalnes (Šlokenbekas)	95.5	92.5	91.1
Praviņu	96.9	92.5	88.9
Sēmes	94.7	91.2	89.8
Smārdes (Ozolnieku)	95.5	94.7	89.3
Tumes	94.4	89.0	87.6
Vecmoku	92.7	90.8	84.5

Sources: Own calculations, based on: Otrā tautas skaitīšana... 1925, Trešā tautas skaitīšana... 1930, Ceturtā tautas skaitīšana... 1936.

Table 16. Share of Roman Catholics of Population (%) in Communes of Tukums Parish According to National Census Data

	1925	1930	1935
Tukums town	1.5	2.2	4.5
Milzkalnes (Šlokenbekas)	0.8	3.2	4.1
Praviņu	1.8	5.6	8.3
Sēmes	1.9	2.9	4.2
Smārdes (Ozolnieku)	2.1	3.6	8.1
Tumes	2.5	7.5	8.7
Vecmoku	4.2	7.0	12.0

Sources: Own calculations, based on: Otrā tautas skaitīšana... 1925, Trešā tautas skaitīšana... 1930, Ceturtā tautas skaitīšana... 1936.

Many of the local Orthodox were ethnic Russians. In the late 1880s and early 1890s, also some Latvians had converted to Orthodoxy. According to the Lutheran pastor, there were criminals among them who hoped to escape punishment this way.¹²⁵⁶ In the interwar years, the Orthodox community remained small but was rapidly growing, presumably also due to the influx of agricultural workers. In 1925, there were 304, and in 1935, 404 Orthodox living in the parish. In the town of Tukums, there also lived a considerable, though slowly declining, Jewish population. Arguably, a quarter of industrial enterprises and half of trade enterprises in the town were owned by Jews.¹²⁵⁷ Harald Biezais argues that antisemitic moods were relatively rife in the parish, both among town dwellers and village people. The latter encountered Jews mostly as petty traders who were trying to buy off their agricultural production when they were on the way to the town market.¹²⁵⁸ Yakov Karazin, a Jewish resident of interwar Tukums, who later became an economist in Israel, remembers that the antisemitic mood was not

¹²⁵⁶ Dišlere 2017, 273.

¹²⁵⁷ Karasin 2002, 12–13.

¹²⁵⁸ Biezais 1995, 67–68.

common in earlier times but emerged both among Germans and Latvians during the 1930s, while the attitude of authorities towards Jews remained tolerant and benevolent.¹²⁵⁹

Other faiths had very few followers but sometimes attracted attention due to their energetic proselytizing.

*Pastors*¹²⁶⁰

1871–1911 Peter Anton Thomas Jürgensohn (Pēteris Antons Tomass Jirgensoņs, lived 1833–1918), raised in Tartu, ordained in 1863. After Tukums congregation was divided according to national principle, he became the first pastor of the local Latvian congregation.¹²⁶¹

1911–1919 Karl Gustav Mattisson (Kārlis Gustavs Matisons, lived 1867–1919). Ordained in 1893. He established a church choir, introduced children's services and also children's festivals, disseminated spiritual literature, and was an enthusiastic supporter of the temperance movement. From 1915 to 1918, he lived in Pskov as a war refugee.¹²⁶²

1920–1946 Alberts Virbulis (lived 1890–1946). Ordained in 1914, served in Nīca, Liepāja and Jelgava. During German occupation, he was arrested, as he reportedly declined to ring the church bell in Jelgava in honour of the visit of *Kaiser* Wilhelm II. Elected and introduced in Latvian congregation of Tukums in 1920, since 1932 Virbulis was the acting dean of Kandava (since 1933, the dean). As one of only two members of the Central Board of LELC, who had remained in Latvia after the Second World War, he was to become the acting archbishop of Latvia at the beginning of 1946 but declined the office due to ill health, and indeed died already in March.¹²⁶³

Of several adjunct pastors, Pēteris Kleperis (1904–1968) is worth of mentioning. He engaged in children's work in Tukums and later led the youth work of the whole LELC. In 1968, Kleperis was elected archbishop of Latvia but died shortly after that.¹²⁶⁴ Another noteworthy pastor's assistant, Augusts Briedis (1904–1950), spent five years (1935–40) in Tukums, first as a student of theology in 1935 and since 1938 as ordained adjunct pastor. He was engaged in children's work and social work (including holding religious services in hospitals and social care homes).¹²⁶⁵

Magnus Fleischer, was from 1885 to 1930 the pastor of the German congregation, but during World War I he served also the Latvian congregation (1915–

¹²⁵⁹ Karasin 2002, 14–15.

¹²⁶⁰ The main pastors of the congregations are mentioned here. There were several adjunct pastors; for information about them, see Dišlere 2017.

¹²⁶¹ Dišlere 2017, 428–429.

¹²⁶² Dišlere 2017, 435, 437.

¹²⁶³ Dišlere, 2017, 437–440.

¹²⁶⁴ Dišlere 2017, 441–442.

¹²⁶⁵ Dišlere 2017, 443–444.

18).¹²⁶⁶ The last pastor of the German congregation of Tukums was **Hans Karl von Tiesenhausen** (served 1930–39).¹²⁶⁷

Religious Life

A short overview of the events in the late Tsarist era and the First World War, as well as their impact on the church, is due here, as it had a profound impact on congregational life in Tukums during the interwar period. As Inta Dišlere emphasizes, yet at the turn of the century, there were few signs of the profound change in the life of the church that was to come.¹²⁶⁸ However, the revolution of 1905 proved to be the breaking point. Tukums was one of the hotspots of revolution in Latvia. An armed struggle broke out, and the revolutionaries took control over the town; there were dozens of victims due to fighting and following activities of punishment squads sent in by the authorities.¹²⁶⁹ Church was not at the epicentre of the events, but the revolution left a lasting imprint on religious life, including the abrupt drop in attending communion.¹²⁷⁰

As in Latvia as a whole, the years of 1914–20 were an ordeal also for the people of Tukums. A large part of parishioners left before the German army arrived in 1915, following the order of Russian authorities. Violence and terror were used consequently by German imperial occupation authorities, Red Latvians, and the Whites (including Baltic-German and Bermondts forces). From the point of view of the congregation, Bolshevik rule was especially harsh, involving requisitions and repressions of congregation employees, while also the church was occasionally used for Bolshevik rallies.¹²⁷¹

Individual Practice

In the mid-19th century, it was noted that 1/10 and sometimes even half of the Latvian congregation attended the parish church on Sundays. German upper class, however, tended to be rather lukewarm towards the church.¹²⁷² But in the wake of the revolution in 1905, church attendance decreased, and partaking of the Holy Communion plummeted.¹²⁷³ There were several signs of the declining importance of the church in the life of locals already at the end of the Tsarist era. Notably, young people and intelligentsia were increasingly absent from the church. There were cases of forsaking or postponing church rites, which were at

¹²⁶⁶ Dišlere, 2017, 429–431.

¹²⁶⁷ Dišlere 2017, 442–443.

¹²⁶⁸ Dišlere 2017, 282.

¹²⁶⁹ Dzenis 2006, 5–30.

¹²⁷⁰ A stink bomb was once put into the church before the Sunday service; a service was cancelled because the dead bodies of the victims of violence were deposited in the church; some people were afraid of attending Sunday services because of rumours about plans to blow the church up. However, no “church demonstrations” happened in the town. (Dišlere 2017, 282–286)

¹²⁷¹ Dišlere 2017, 292–295.

¹²⁷² Dišlere 2017, 258.

¹²⁷³ Dišlere 2017, 284–287.

first rare but still noted in the reports of pastor Gustavs Matisons, apparently as warning signs. Namely, at least three people were confirmed in their 20s, a woman had not taken communion for 17 years, and two children were baptized at an age older than half a year. Only few children used now to appear to the traditional examinations of reading skills and religious knowledge of children (*pārklaušīnāšanas*), which were carried out by the pastor. The reading skills of those present were good, but many did not know prayers or church hymns, which, according to the pastor, indicated that the prayer life of their parents was weak.¹²⁷⁴ In general, Gustavs Matisons classified the parishioners as follows: 1) “the living” (active churchgoers), 2) “the dead” (people with “naturalist and atheist” convictions) and the 3) “weak or sick” (those who showed interest in church only on festive occasions). He emphasized the need for the activation of lay members, as the pastor was unable to “awaken the dead and treat the sick” alone.¹²⁷⁵ Shortly, the decline of the churchliness of the locals appears as a serious challenge in ecclesiastical sources already in the final decade of the Tsarist era.

After the establishment of independent Latvia, the new pastor Virbulis was initially remarkably pessimistic about religious life in the parish. In his annual report for the year 1920, he claimed church attendance to be average. However, only few people came from rural municipalities, excusing themselves with the lack of horses and the means of transport, or claiming that they wanted to spare horses who were tired from the workweek. A large part of the congregation did not take the Holy Communion, especially the representatives of intelligentsia, some of whom had not taken it for several years. Confirmands did not often even know the Ten Commandments; some could not read or write. According to the pastor, a rapid decline in morale was evident in the Lutheran part of Latvia as a whole and also in other Protestant countries. Moreover, as church weddings were going to be made optional, also the number of divorces would go up. Lutheran church was arguably done; on the other hand, the Catholic Church (including in Latgale) had retained its vitality.¹²⁷⁶

Later reports are slightly more positive, however. In the twenties and thirties, the church was still satisfactorily attended. The seats were usually occupied, and some people were standing. Only in case of unfavourable weather conditions was the church empty, but during Easter and Christmas, it was usually packed to the brim. However, the church was, in fact, too small for the large parish. Thus, many parishioners were still indifferent. Reasons were, according to the pastor, the impact of the 1905 revolution, lack of horses, the fact that farm owners no longer went to church with the whole family, but also „paganism” and irreligion.¹²⁷⁷ On another occasion, Virbulis supposed that declining participation in the Sunday service was related to listening services at home *via* radio.¹²⁷⁸

¹²⁷⁴ Virbulis 1937, 74–77.

¹²⁷⁵ Dišlere 2017, 289.

¹²⁷⁶ Dišlere 2017, 298.

¹²⁷⁷ Dišlere 2017, 302–303.

¹²⁷⁸ Dišlere 2017, 310–311.

Taking part in the Holy Communion was also slowly declining within the period. However, also the number of registered members fluctuated considerably in the case of the Latvian congregation. So, according to reports, the proportion of communicants was lowest in 1931 (47%) and highest in 1936 (64%).¹²⁷⁹

The church expected the infants to be baptized soon after the birth, but this was not the case anymore. According to the pastor, some delays happened “due to circumstances” and others due to negligence. However, sooner or later, almost every child was still baptized, as there were very few parents who rejected the rite out of principle.¹²⁸⁰ In 1936, Virbulis baptized 32 children during a single service.¹²⁸¹

The pastor mentioned cohabitation without marriage and children born out of wedlock as the main moral drawbacks in the lives of local people. He added, however, that the number of the latter was not sensible indicator anymore, as the children who “were not allowed to be born” should have been also taken into account.¹²⁸² As for the number of couples living without a church wedding, there were about sixty of them in 1922–26, seventy in 1927,¹²⁸³ and in 1937 the pastor noted only that their number was “quite large”.¹²⁸⁴ Presumably this number was higher in the town than in the countryside, but apparently also in the town large majority of the people still appreciated church marriage. According to a newspaper report on new marriages in the town only, in July 1925 twenty couples were wed in the church, and only three opted for civil registration.¹²⁸⁵

Noteworthy change had happened in terms of holding religious gatherings at home on Sundays. According to the visitation report of 1897, the tradition was, in general, strong in the parish, even though there were also homes where no such gatherings had been held throughout the whole year.¹²⁸⁶ However, pastor Virbulis noted in the 1930s that home services were already generally “out of fashion” at that time. True, he was asked for sermon and prayer books occasionally, indicating that some parishioners still held these. According to the pastor, changing family relations as well as language and faith differences were obstacles for common home prayer gatherings (referring to the widespread hiring of Catholic agricultural workers).¹²⁸⁷

One of the pastor’s concerns was family relations and growing number of divorces. The number of marriages in the 1920s was arguably 30% higher than

¹²⁷⁹ Dišlere 2017, 309.

¹²⁸⁰ Virbulis 1937, 84.

¹²⁸¹ “Dāži kavējas ar kristību apstākļu dēļ, citi aiz nolaidības.” Dišlere 2017, 310.

¹²⁸² Virbulis 1937, 84. It is unclear if Virbulis is denouncing only abortions here or also other methods of birth control.

¹²⁸³ According to the annual report of bishop Irbe, it was the highest number among small towns of Latvia. Another outlier was Bauska, where allegedly 56 pairs lived outside of Christian marriages. Overall, however, in both small towns and rural areas non-church marriages were rare. See *Baznīcas kalendārs* 1929, p. 61-62.

¹²⁸⁴ Dišlere 2017, 309–310.

¹²⁸⁵ *Tukuma Ziņas*, 08.10.1925, p. 3.

¹²⁸⁶ Dišlere 2017, 274.

¹²⁸⁷ Dišlere 2017, 310–311.

before the war, but their “quality” was worse. However, there were probably still more satisfying marriages than unhappy ones. Crucially, parents generally had little influence over their children after they had left home for studies or work. Youth tended to be influenced by the irreligious “spirit of the times”, by lack of authority figures, and the pernicious effect of immoral literature, cinema, and fashion. However, there were still several families where the authority of the parents had remained strong.¹²⁸⁸ In later reports from the 1930s, Virbulis found family relations to be generally good, but it was important to find means against imprudent marriages.¹²⁸⁹ Also, excessively liberal divorce laws and immoral literature were to blame for the high number of divorces.¹²⁹⁰

In his annual reports, pastor Virbulis also paid attention to class relations. According to him, the tensions were the result of the materialist spirit of the time, which undermined the formerly friendly, cooperative attitude between employers and employees. Virbulis presumed that social democratic propaganda, as well as too high salaries of the workers, were to blame for it: “Material gain is the most important thing for both sides; participation in each other’s joys and sorrows is lost.”¹²⁹¹ Also, as agricultural workers were now often hired only for one summer, no human connections with farm-owners could develop. Even worse, the workers often came from Lithuania and Latgale, spoke a different language and were of a different faith. Virbulis complained that even those farm-owners who formerly had consciously hired only “Latvians” (meaning Lutherans), had changed their mind due to economic calculations. On the other hand, Virbulis also drew some positive examples of cordial relations between employers and employees, notably about an employer who had been crying at the funerals of his gardener. Also, local peasants had confirmed to him that relations in the parish between farm owners and workers were better than was common in the wealthy farms of the plain of Zemgale at that time. In the surroundings of Tukums, employers and employees arguably still had good relations and ate around the same table during meals. Virbulis, however, seems to have been somewhat sceptical about whether it would also hold for the future.¹²⁹²

Besides that, pastors complained about the non-observance of Sundays. According to the 1920 report of Virbulis, fish mongering took place during the service in the nearby market square. In an event on the occasion of the harvest festival in 1932, the adjunct pastor Klēpers noted as well that since the end of the war, busy trading had taken place in the town market, and shops were also open on Sundays, even at the time of the church service. He admonished people to pay more attention to God’s commandments.¹²⁹³

¹²⁸⁸ Dišlere 2017, 310–311.

¹²⁸⁹ Dišlere 2017, 310–311.

¹²⁹⁰ Virbulis 1937, 86–87.

¹²⁹¹ “Materiālais ieguvums kā vienā, tā otrā pusē ir to svarīgākā lieta; zūd līdzdalība vienam otra priekos un bēdās.” Dišlere 2017, 311–312.

¹²⁹² Dišlere 2017, 312.

¹²⁹³ Svētdienas Rīts, 16.10.1932, p. 333.

After the political turn in 1934, the tone of reports of Virbulis changed to more optimistic. More people had arguably begun to pay membership fees and some asked for membership fee debt cancellation. In 1939, the pastor marked a growing interest in church life.¹²⁹⁴

Lutheran Congregational Life

Everyday religious life was relatively vibrant in the Latvian congregations. Theology students were employed to conduct services for children and the youth and they served in poorhouses. Among the congregation's events, the following were mentioned in the reports: cemetery festivities (*kapu svētki*), evangelization services, services for youth, liturgical services, and thirteen to eighteen Bible studies in a year. There were frequent visits by visiting pastors, who, among other events, conducted evangelization services. For instance, in 1930, prof. Kārlis Kundziņš, Jr. was allowed to hold a religious service for the studying youth of the Talsi-Tukums region on the condition that "politics" would not be dealt with in the services.¹²⁹⁵ Besides that, the congregation of Tukums was mentioned in the annual report of the bishop of Kārlis Irbe for the year 1927 as among the very few in the LELC, where besides pastors also laypeople were involved in religious work.¹²⁹⁶

The pastors visited hospitals, prisons and poorhouses, distributed religious literature and the Holy Communion there. Much attention was paid to children. There was no Sunday school in the parish, but the revived¹²⁹⁷ children's festivals (*bērnu svētki*) always started with a church service. Since 1926, usually more than 20 services for children were held annually. In 1937, for example, an average of 70 children attended, but sometimes even as many as 200. Hundreds of copies of the Christian children's magazine *Bitīte* were distributed in the parish in the 1930s. Pictures of Bible stories were ordered from Germany, and arranging Christmas parties (*eglītes*) for children with books and sweets as gifts became a tradition. There are also reports about lectures on religious topics specifically for children, as well as showing films about the life of Jesus.¹²⁹⁸

An important part of the life of the congregation was played by the Ladies' Committee, which raised funds for the renovation of the church, made Christmas gifts for the needy, and arranged various events. The latter included children's festivals, "religious-ethical lectures", both religious and secular concerts, and evenings "for bringing members of the congregation closer together". Usually about 30–40 women were engaged in the activities of the Committee.¹²⁹⁹ Besides the Committee, branches of the YMCA, YWCA and Christian Workers' Union

¹²⁹⁴ Dišlere, 2017, 303.

¹²⁹⁵ Dišlere, 2017, 303.

¹²⁹⁶ These were a student of theology, H. Ulmanis, and an unnamed retired secondary school teacher. *Baznīcas kalendārs* 1929, p. 50–51.

¹²⁹⁷ First children festival had been held in 1914, see Dišlere 2017, 385.

¹²⁹⁸ Dišlere, 2017, 302 and 306–307.

¹²⁹⁹ According to an overview of its activities on the occasion of its 10th anniversary, *Tukuma Ziņas* 16.02.1933, p. 3. See also Dišlere 2017, 387–393.

operated in the parish, all of them seeming to have been closely cooperating with the Latvian Lutheran congregation.¹³⁰⁰

In sum, at least according to the reports, the congregation excelled in adopting new modes of work, often following the example of secular associational life. Youth work and providing pastoral care was paid much attention, and remarkably also other people besides the pastor contributed to religious life in the parish. However, the vibrant congregational life seems to have been concentrated in the town. There appear to be no accounts of active congregational life in remote parts of the parish, neither in the annual reports nor in newspapers. True, besides parish church, a local filial church operated in Sēme, but church attendance was weaker there than in the main congregation. There were also attempts to separate Sēme congregation from that of Tukums, but these did not realise.¹³⁰¹

There is also some evidence of disagreements over the modernization of the church life. On one occasion, pastor Virbulis had recommended parishioners to buy the calendar of the church's weekly newspaper *Svētdienas Rīts*, but afterwards, it turned out that it contained an article which criticized unscientific thinking, dogmatism, "old" songs and "unnecessary ceremonies" in the church. Members of the congregation came to ask if Virbulis agreed with it. Writing this in his annual report, the pastor concluded that this text should not have been printed in a publication intended for "the lovers of the church",¹³⁰² because they were the ones who appreciated traditional churchliness. According to the pastor, such questions should have been discussed only in Synods behind closed doors.¹³⁰³

As for the small German Lutheran congregation, it was closely involved in the promotion of German-language education and cultural life in the town of Tukums. There were conflicts with the Latvian congregation over the ownership of the church and the movable property located there. In general, however, the relations between the German and Latvian congregations were formally correct. When pastor Fleischer of the German congregation retired in 1930, the Latvian congregation presented him a walking stick with a silver handle. Also, the 250th

¹³⁰⁰ Dišlere 2017, 307.

¹³⁰¹ Dišlere 2017, 301–302.

¹³⁰² He meant probably those who were already actively engaged in the life of the congregation.

¹³⁰³ Dišlere 2017, 309. The referenced text was an article written by the docent Kārlis Kundziņš, Jr., on August 1, 1920, in which he confirmed that, despite the pessimistic moods, the Latvian Lutheran Church was not without vitality. However, in order to ensure a dignified place for the church in the life of the people, innovations were needed in order to be able to better satisfy the religious needs of people, including the younger generation. However, if the church failed to do this, sticking on old traditions and dogmas instead, people would look to other providers of answers to their questions, especially politicians (including Bolsheviks) and sects. ("*Svētdienas Rīta*" kalendārs 1921. gadam, literariskais pielikums, pp. 9–14).

anniversary of the consecration of the church was celebrated together on September 12, 1937, and bilingual song sheets were printed for this purpose.¹³⁰⁴

Other Congregations and Interconfessional Relations

In 1896, a modest Catholic church was also built to the town of Tukums.¹³⁰⁵ There was no Catholic congregation in the rural municipalities of the parish. However, the neighbouring Pūre parish had a Catholic church in Lamiņi.¹³⁰⁶

As for the free churches, Virbulis's reports reflect the activities of Adventists, Baptists and the Salvation Army. Those, and especially Baptists, were according to him very active, but still made few converts. In the annual report for 1938, Tukums Baptist congregation claimed to have had 190 members at the end of the year, of those 81 had voting rights. 208 religious services were held during 1938, besides that Sunday school was organized for children as well as religious and musical gatherings for the youth.¹³⁰⁷

Generally, the Lutheran majority paid little attention to other confessions, but the attitude of pastor Virbulis tended to be rather critical towards them. Importantly, on May 4, 1924, the altar and pulpit of the Lutheran parish church were covered with a black covering on the occasion of the "Day of Humility and Prayer" as St. James Church of Riga was handed over to Catholics on that day.¹³⁰⁸ It is also worth remembering that, as mentioned above, Virbulis was critical about hiring Catholic agricultural workers.

The pastor's attitude towards free churches tended to be biased, too. According to Virbulis, "sectarians" had noticed the weakness of the church after the war and wanted to take advantage of it, slandering the church and extolling their sect. The distributors of Adventist literature were active in the market square, and even by the Lutheran church and in Lutheran cemetery festivities.¹³⁰⁹ In addition,

¹³⁰⁴ Dišlere 2017, 322–323.

¹³⁰⁵ Dišlere 2017, 264. Tukuma Dzīve, 05.10.1933, p. 3.

¹³⁰⁶ In the 18th century, the lord of the manor in Sēme converted to the Roman Catholic faith, the peasants had to do the same, and the Lutheran churches in Sēme and Lamiņi were turned Catholic. In 1806, there were still about a hundred people who belonged to the Catholic Church compared to the 243 Lutherans in Sēme manor. (Dišlere 2017, 264) At the beginning of the 20th century, the congregation was floundering in Lamiņi according to the prominent Catholic clerical historian Julijans Vaivods, as there were no farm owners among the remaining Catholics there. The situation arguably improved in the interwar years, as many newcomers (including new farmers) from Latgale joined Lamiņi congregation (Vaivods 1994, 215–230, especially p. 220). In 1927, bishop Jāzeps Rancāns visited the congregation and found that most of them were Latgallians. The bishop called local Catholics to "stick to your faith, customs and, living here among the strangers, not to forget neither God, nor the church, nor your beautiful holy songs." ("[T]uretis pi sovas ticibas, irodumim un lai šeit storp svešim dzeivojut naaizmerst ni Diva, ni baznicas, ni sovu skaistu sv. Dzismu." Katoļu Dzeive, no 7, 1927, p. 128.)

¹³⁰⁷ LVVA 1370-1-2675, pp. 93–94.

¹³⁰⁸ Dišlere 2017, 313.

¹³⁰⁹ Pešelis 2013, 329. On the other hand, when Adventists had in 1941 no venue for their services, the Lutheran congregation got approval from the Central Board of the LELC to

Adventists received material support from abroad and lured people with gifts and diapositives, complained the pastor.¹³¹⁰ Besides that, the pastor argued that some members of the [Lutheran] congregation had joined with the “home congregation” (“mājas draudzei”) and were hostile towards the church.¹³¹¹ In turn, in the report for 1927, the pastor was critical of the members of his own congregation, who, according to him, were more eager to donate to “sectarians” than for the good of their own congregation. Also, it was condemnable that Lutherans preferred to buy religious literature from “sectarians” and not from their own pastor. Virbulis disapproved also of the “excessively benevolent attitude” of some council members towards the Baptists (some had co-operated with them in the town elections of 1931).¹³¹²

Autobiographical Sources

Relatively few memoirs of the parishioners have been published. References to religion or church are relatively rare in these, and concern mostly information about confirmation, lessons of religion at school, and difficult life situations. As an example of the latter, **Ģirts Lagzdīņš**, a son of a folk school teacher, shares his father’s First World War reminiscences: “Later, he was drafted into the army. My father remembered all his life that the two brothers who went to war were blessed by grandfather at the Bible, and both of them returned home after six years with only minor injuries.”¹³¹³

There are some reminiscences from the perspective of the Baltic German minority. In an interview, made by local history researchers with the son of the last owner of Jaunmokas manor, religiosity was associated with following certain strict moral guidelines, notably avoidance of excessive drinking and being compassionate and trustful towards other people, sometimes too much so. Therefore, it is arguably not good to be “too pious (*ticīgs*)”: “Was faith important in your family?” “Mother only said: “What the Lord says above must be done.” She did not say anything more. But she still was a person of faith. She also disliked drinking alcohol very much. It was a common thing among the foresters, almost all of them drank. We have a relative who had not paid his rent for 30 years, he had debt of 50,000 marks to our father. He cheated. He went to [my] mother and told her how terrible the conditions were and that he wanted to live no longer. [My] mother was terribly sorry, and ran to the father to ask him not to expel him.

enable them to hold their gatherings in the house of the Lutheran congregation. See LNVM KD 2142:7, p. 43 (17.02.1941).

¹³¹⁰ Dišlere 2017, 314. First Adventists were baptized in Tukums before the First World War, and the congregation was established in 1927 (Pešelis 2013, 327–328).

¹³¹¹ Dišlere 2017, 314.

¹³¹² Dišlere 2017, 313.

¹³¹³ “Vēlāk sekoja iesaukums armijā. Tēvs visu mūžu atcerējās, ka abus brāļus, kas izgāja kara gaitās, vecaistēvs pie bībeles svētīja un abi viņi tomēr atgriežas majas pēc sešiem gadiem tikai ar sīkiem ievainojumiem.” Šablovskis 2006, 40.

He never paid using this blackmail. This is the negative thing that can happen when one is too religious. But everything mother did was well-intentioned.”¹³¹⁴

An “autobiographical novel” by the Baltic German writer **Gertrud von der Brinken** (1892–1982) depicts life in the town of Tukums from the perspective of local Germans. Religious motives are referred to especially regarding the persecution of the local Germans by the Bolsheviks¹³¹⁵ and praying in material hardships.¹³¹⁶ Also, working as a private English teacher, she taught both Jews and Latvians, and claimed to have liked all of her students. Sometimes she felt closer with Latvians, as common faith creates strong ties between people. As for Jews, religion was separating them, but they had German language in common, and it, in turn, made them closer than Latvians.¹³¹⁷

Two Latvian writers – **Harijs Gulbis** (1926–2019) and **Kārlis Ķezbers** (1914–2006) spent a part of their childhood in the interwar Tukums parish, but in their memoirs neither of them has paid attention to the church or religion.¹³¹⁸ As for Gulbis, in his collections of autobiographical essays, published in the Soviet era, there are no references to religion.¹³¹⁹ Nevertheless, in his novel “Doņuleja” (1983), which has some recognizable autobiographic features, religious experiences and convictions play crucial role in determining the fate of the main protagonist, a simple woman living in rural Kurzeme.¹³²⁰ In an interview, made after the restoration of Latvian independence, Gulbis revealed that he was a religious person, and his experiences during studying in the secondary school of Tukums played an important role in it.¹³²¹

¹³¹⁴ “- Vai jūsu ģimenē kāda nozīme bija ticībā? – Māte tikai teica: “Ko Kungs augšā saka, tas jādara.” Vairāk neko viņa neteica. Taču viņa bija ticīgs cilvēks. Alkohola dzeršana arī viņai ļoti nepatika. Starp mežziņiem gan tā bija izplatīta lieta, pa lielākai daļai viņi visi dzēra. Mums ir kāds radnieks, kas savu īri nav maksājis 30 gadus, viņš no tēva bija aizņēmis 50 000 marku. Krāpās. Gāja pie mātes un stāstīja, cik briesmīgi esot apstākļi, ka vairs negribot dzīvot. Mātei bija briesmīgi žēl un viņa skrēja pie tēva lūgt, lai viņu nemet ārā. Ar to savu *black male* (ar šantāžu – A.Š.) viņš nekad nemaksāja. Tas ir tas negatīvais, kas var notikt, ja viens ir parāk ticīgs. Bet viss, ko māte darīja, bija labi domāts.” Šablovskis and Aizpuriete 2007, 121–122.

¹³¹⁵ Von den Brinkena 2015, 81, 86, 155.

¹³¹⁶ Von den Brinkena 2015, 198.

¹³¹⁷ Von den Brinkena 2015, 210.

¹³¹⁸ Gulbis 1986; Ķezbers 2017.

¹³¹⁹ Gulbis 1986.

¹³²⁰ Religion and church are mentioned in the novel relatively rarely, but often in crucial moments which are set in the interwar Latvia. The main protagonist, Alise, a young girl at that time, carried away by the solemn atmosphere in the Christmas service at church, decides to accept the marriage proposal of a young man whom she does not love nor like. Later, a religious dream prompts her to return to her rude and non-sensitive husband. Notably, religious practice is almost always ascribed to women in the novel. The author seems to suggest that attending Sunday services was not uncommon for village women at that time, and there are also references to the Ladies’ Committee of the congregation. Irreligious people are also featured in the novel; Alise is surprised that one of them seems to be, contrary to her prejudices, a good and moral person. (Gulbis 1983)

¹³²¹ Šablovskis 2006, 64.

Public Role of the Church

Community Life

As elsewhere, church ceremonies were especially appreciated in case of “patriotic” events. Ina Dišlere mentions 28 special services which were held in 1928–39. Of those, only three were dedicated to the religious anniversaries: in 1932, the 300th death anniversary of Gustav II Adolf, and in 1933, 450th birth anniversary of Martin Luther were celebrated, while in 1939, a Bible feast was held to commemorate 250th anniversary of the first edition of the Bible in Latvian. Five festive church services were dedicated to important occasions in the life of the congregation and the LELC, two were part of synods of Kandava deanery, and there were also two family day services in 1938. The rest (14 out of 28) were, as it seems, related to largely secular events, such as anniversaries of voluntary associations (Red Cross, Boy Scouts), a temperance event (*pretalkohola kristības* in 1928) and patriotic celebrations, or later, propaganda events of the regime of Ulmanis. Besides that, it was common to organize religious ceremonies (*garīgi akti*) on the occasion of festive events of various voluntary associations.¹³²² Since 1935, also the anniversary of the coup of Ulmanis was annually celebrated with religious services in the market square.¹³²³ For example, the festivities in 1940 included church service, music from the church tower and ringing of the church bells.¹³²⁴ Noteworthy was the role of the congregation and its Ladies’ Committee in organizing annual children’s festivals, which traditionally began with religious service in the church, followed by a procession to nearby Durbe manor.¹³²⁵ More untypical was the fact that in addition to the events of spiritual character, the congregation used to arrange also social and cultural events, such as musical and theatre performances, lectures on various scientific and social topics, and even charitable dance parties.¹³²⁶

Finally, the congregation was engaged also in social work. In 1886, local Germans founded a deaconess hospital, which operated until 1937 (when it was taken over by the town administration). For instance, between 01.10.1921, and 01.10.1922, 141 patients were taken care of, most of them local Latvians.¹³²⁷ In the interwar years, the Latvian congregation collected donations for the poor, and pastors held religious services in poorhouses and enacted rites there. Special attention was paid to helping the needy during the years of the economic crisis.¹³²⁸

In particular, there was a tradition to hold Christmas gatherings for the needy, which included a religious part. A newspaper article about one of those, held in

¹³²² Including commemorations of Latvian Riflemen, the fallen in the War of Independence, colonel Briedis, 10th anniversary of Latvian independence, the events of *aizsargi* (the national guard).

¹³²³ Dišlere 2017, 304–305.

¹³²⁴ Rumba 2009, 32.

¹³²⁵ Zērvēna 2002-2003, 103.

¹³²⁶ Zērvēna 2002-2003; Dišlere 2017, 305.

¹³²⁷ Dišlere, 2017, 378–380.

¹³²⁸ Dišlere, 2017, 307–308.

1925, highlights the sublime mood of the gathering, and it is claimed that 162 needy persons were distributed aid in food and clothing. Pastor Virbulis confirmed in his “cordial” sermon that God loves the givers and the receivers equally. Also, it was emphasized that the Christmas gifts distributed to the poor were signs of Christian love towards neighbour.¹³²⁹

Church and Schools

According to sources, there were diverging attitudes towards church and religious instruction among the schoolteachers.

In 1905, all the folk school teachers from the parish had allegedly taken part in the revolutionary congress of teachers in Riga, but none of them had supported abolishing religious instruction at schools. The teaching of it continued without interruption during the revolutionary events.¹³³⁰

In 1920, the members of the Council of the Latvian Lutheran congregation of Tukums expressed their unanimous wish that religious education should be compulsory in schools.¹³³¹ Similar were the attitudes of the parents, as show the minutes of their meetings from the beginning of 1921.¹³³² For instance, the meetings of parents in both Cērkste and Šlokenbeka communes voted for religious instruction to be obligatory for both schools and all children. In the first case, there was a disagreement between participants, and voting made it clear that 16 parents supported the resolution and four were against it. In Šlokenbeka, the decision was unanimous. In Mežkungā commune, the parents’ meeting found that religious instruction should be compulsory for schools, but children should have the opportunity to opt out from it if their parents agree. Similar was the opinion of the council of Vecmokas basic school, arguably taking also into account the parents’ opinion.¹³³³

As for relations between schools and the Lutheran congregation, there seem to be some tensions at least in the 1920s. According to Virbulis, some parishioners had complained in 1921 about schoolteachers who bragged openly about their atheism: “One can imagine what they teach in the lessons of religion”. Even the inspector of the folk schools had arguably tried to ban the teaching of church hymns in music lessons.¹³³⁴ Yet in his 1926 report, pastor Virbulis was very critical about the teaching of religion. While officially it was taught in all of the

¹³²⁹ Tukuma Ziņas, 31.12.1925, p. 3.

¹³³⁰ Dišlere 2017, 370.

¹³³¹ Dišlere 2017, 371.

¹³³² The Ministry of Education had asked the opinion of local teachers and parents in several questions regarding the life of folk schools. The responses from different regions of Latvia enable to gauge the attitude of the locals towards religious instruction. Overall, the attitude of the parents is almost always supportive, and in many cases, it is also stated that it should be mandatory even for those children whose parents would like to opt out of it. The support of school councils to religious instruction was usually more qualified, and in some cases, they rejected religious instruction altogether.

¹³³³ LVVA 6642-1-127, pp. 140, 149, 154, 175.

¹³³⁴ “Var iedomāties, ka tie pasniedz ticības mācības”. Virbulis 1937, 79.

twelve schools of the parish, only God knew *how* it was taught, but most probably it did not occur “in the spirit of the church”. Virbulis complained that there were no qualified teachers and common principles in teaching religion: in one of the schools the Catechism was not taught, and in another Old Testament stories were omitted. In general, things were so bad that religious education in this form hardly had any sense at all. Besides that, the congregation had no overview of how many children of its members learned religion at school in the first place.¹³³⁵ Later, pastor Virbulis claimed that the coup of May 15th had brought significant improvement also in the field of teaching religion at school, but added that changes in the curriculum and textbooks were still necessary.¹³³⁶ Also, there was still no data about whether all the Lutheran pupils learned religion, and also information about how well it was taught was not accessible to the pastor.¹³³⁷

In the reports of inspector of Tukuma-Talsi district,¹³³⁸ only few remarks can be found about teaching religion, usually containing complaints that teaching of this subject tended to be “dry”. In 1930, the inspector maintained that religious instruction was not yet taught decently but admitted that the situation was improving: “In general, teachers have little delved into the religion as a subject, so the students do not know this subject very well either. For the most part, teachers try to teach religion as ethics. However, it is noticeable that the attitude of teachers towards this subject is developing, and religion has already gained a visible place among the subjects in many schools.”¹³³⁹

On the other hand, there are no accounts of serious controversies about religion and church in the sources of school history. According to the inspector, in 1930, as many as 80% of schools in his district arranged morning prayers for pupils. In some schools, it was done in a solemn manner (*svinīgi*), and, thus, the prayer was a good start to the school day. In 1931, the prayers were reportedly held already everywhere except in some town schools.¹³⁴⁰ The accounts of prayers can be found also in memoirs. So, Ilze Sommere remembers that in Tume school, a schoolday began with morning prayer and there was also a prayer prior to the lunch.¹³⁴¹

However, the attitudes of teachers towards religion were divergent. On the one hand, among them, there were some self-proclaimed atheists, indeed, such as Vera Ansone, a teacher at Ozolnieki school.¹³⁴² Besides her, a prominent leftist

¹³³⁵ Dišlere 2017, 371.

¹³³⁶ Virbulis 1937, 88.

¹³³⁷ Dišlere 2017, 371.

¹³³⁸ His district covered the area of Tukums and Talsi counties, so the following assessment is not about Tukums parish only but about the wider region.

¹³³⁹ “Ticības mācībās kā priekšmetā skolotāji visumā maz iedziļinājušies, tapēc arī skolēni visai labi šo priekšmetu nepārzin. Pa lielākai daļai skolotāji ticības mācības cenšas pasniegt kā etiku. Tomēr ir nomanāms, ka skolotāju attiecība uz so priekšmetu veidojas un ticības mācības daudz skolās ieguvušas jau redzamu vietu priekšmetu starpā.” See LVVA 6642-1-226, the quotation is from the page 40.

¹³⁴⁰ LVVA 6642-1-226, p. 40 and 45.

¹³⁴¹ Šablovskis, 2006, 51.

¹³⁴² Dišlere et al. 1998, 131.

politician and a member of Saeima from the LSDSP, Ernests Gulbis, was the headmaster of Vecmoku primary school until 1925,¹³⁴³ and the socialist mayor of Tukums (in 1925–34), Jānis Cers, had also been a teacher by profession.¹³⁴⁴ There are some accounts of critical attitudes towards the church from the side of teachers. Notably, in 1924, a letter from Tukums was published in “Mūsu Nākotne”, the newspaper of the left-leaning Latvian Teachers’ Union, where the church representatives were accused of arranging a competing children’s festival (*bērnu svētki*) to the one which the Teacher Trade Union had organized. Apparently, the teachers had been arranging such an annual festival for several years already, but in 1924 it was scheduled for June, 22. However, the council of the Latvian Lutheran congregation decided to arrange their own event before it, on the 1st of June, and in the advertisement, it was claimed misleadingly that an allegedly non-existing “Tukums branch of the Latvian Teachers’ Union” was among the organizers. As the author of the letter to Mūsu Nākotne scornfully remarked, the event was neither well organized nor meaningful. One of its main attractions was a politically biased speech by the Professor of Theology Volde-mārs Maldonis, but nothing exciting for the children. Then, also the festival arranged by the teachers took place on 22nd June as planned, with about a thousand children from twelve schools participating.¹³⁴⁵ In subsequent years, the Teachers’ Union held its children’s festival at the end of May, while the congregation held its own a few weeks later. The children’s festivals organized by the teachers included performances by pupils, while those of the congregation started with a church service. Both ended with an entertaining part — games and other amusements were organized for the children, such as a car ride, *etc.*¹³⁴⁶ The arranging of competing children’s festivals had undeniably political hue. Bourgeois organizations of the city took part in the congregation’s children’s festival procession, while the local socialist newspaper made disparaging remarks about the event.¹³⁴⁷ On the other hand, however, there is no evidence of deep tensions between the organizers of competing children’s festivals like those in Rūjiena.

There are also accounts of particularly pious and church-friendly teachers. For instance, an old teacher of Tume basic school, Fricis Simsons, a deeply pious man, was appreciated as an orator, especially in the case of religious burials.¹³⁴⁸ In some cases, religious teachers could make a lasting impact on their students. Writer Harijs Gulbis remembers from his studies in Tukums secondary school during Nazi German occupation: “At secondary school of Tukums, there was a

¹³⁴³ Rumba 2009, 42.

¹³⁴⁴ Ozola et al. 2007, 72.

¹³⁴⁵ Mūsu Nākotne, 1924, no 13/14, p. 399.

¹³⁴⁶ About the festivals, organized by the teachers, see, for example: Tukuma un Apkārtnes Balss, 03.02.1927, p. 3; 21.06.1928, p. 3. Tukuma Ziņas, 04.06.1931, p. 5. In 1933, the festival was organized in common by the Teacher Trade Union and Nationalist Teachers’ Association: Tukuma Dzīve, 30.05.1933, p. 2. About the festivals organized by the congregation, see, for example: Tukuma Avīze, 19.06.1931, pp. 1–2; Tukuma Dzīve, 30.05.1933, p. 1.

¹³⁴⁷ Tukuma un Apkārtnes Balss, 21.06.1928, p. 3.

¹³⁴⁸ Šablovskis 2006, 219–220.

very likeable teacher of religion, a genuine Christian – a fragile, sensitive, meek and, as it seemed, spiritually strong person. She gave us the Gospels, each printed in a separate, small booklet. Holding, browsing, and reading these books, I felt the presence of holiness. For a short time, I even wanted to become a pastor.”¹³⁴⁹

Probably also attitudes towards religious instruction among teachers overlapped with their political preferences, as was the case elsewhere. It was noted that there were considerable political tensions among teachers in Tukums county, and it led to the split in the Teacher Trade Union, as bourgeois-minded teachers of Tukums and Talsi counties left it and founded their own “nationalist teachers” associations. According to the inspector of folk schools, at least in the town of Tukums, the influence of socialists was in decline.¹³⁵⁰ Also, inspector Miķelis Štāls was accused by Socialdemokrāts in 1927 of his political bias, especially because he had, in a course for schoolteachers, allegedly shown disrespect to the heritage of the revolution of 1905.¹³⁵¹ But contrary to the report of Sociāldemokrāts, most of the teachers who participated in the course appear to have supported the inspector.¹³⁵²

*Local Politics and Social Contradictions*¹³⁵³

Table 17. Voting Share of Latvian Social Democratic Workers' Party (LSDSP) in the General Elections in Tukums parish (%)

Commune	1920	1922	1925	1928	1931
Tukums town	36.9	31.3	45.2	35.8	29.0
Cērkstes	10.3	24.1	...	...	...
Mežkunga	21.8	26.7	...	...	...
Milzkalns	17.7	17.1	21.5	24.4	18.1
Praviņu	41.6	39.1	38.7	38.9	17.1
Sēmes	34.8	37.0	35.6	37.1	23.5
Smārdes	32.1	25.0	33.7	26.6	19.6
Tumes	39.1	38.9	43.9	25.8	21.3
Vecmoku	9.0	32.1	24.9	38.4	14.5

Sources: Latwijas Satversmes Sapulzes... 1920; Skujenieks 1923, Skujenieks 1926, Skujenieks 1929, Skujenieks 1932.

¹³⁴⁹ „Tukuma vidusskolā bija ļoti simpātiska ticības mācības skolotāja, īsta kristiete – trausla, iejūtīga, lēnprātīga un, ka šķita, garīgi stiprs cilvēks. Viņa mums dāvināja evaņģēlijus, katru iespiestu atsevišķā, mazā brošūrā. Turot rokā, šķirstot un lasot šīs grāmatīņas, izjutu svētuma klātbūtni. Neilgu laiku pat vēlejos kļūt par mācītāju.” Šablovskis 2006, 64.

¹³⁵⁰ LVVA 6642-1-226, p. 42 and 46.

¹³⁵¹ Socialdemokrāts, 10.08.1927, p. 3

¹³⁵² LVVA 6642-1-1498, pp. 52 and 62–64.

¹³⁵³ Changes in the commune borders (and re-naming of the communes) were accomplished in the parish in 1920s (see Dišlere *et al.* 1998, 27–33), making comparison of the voting results somewhat complicated.

Like elsewhere in Latvia, the LSDSP and the Farmers' Union were the most popular political parties in the parish. Unusually strong was the popularity of agrarians in the election of the Constituent Assembly. Stronghold of the Social Democrats was the town of Tukums; as for rural areas, support for it fluctuated considerably across the communes. The decline of their support during the last pre-war elections in 1931 is explainable by the rise of Bļodnieks's New Farmers' and Smallholders' Party. Pro-communist forces played a significant role only in the town (8.4% of the votes in 1928)¹³⁵⁴ and surprisingly also in Tume¹³⁵⁵ where they garnered as much as 1/5 of the votes during the 1928 elections.

Another remarkable fact is the popularity of Christian nationalists, especially in the town of Tukums,¹³⁵⁶ but their support was during the 1st Saeima elections high also in Šlokenbeka (later called Milzkalnes, 15.0%), Vecmoku (10.5%) and Ozolnieku (later called Smārdes, 9.7%) communes. In the elections of 1925,¹³⁵⁷ 1928,¹³⁵⁸ and 1931,¹³⁵⁹ pastor Virbulis himself ran in the Christian list, but the party proved not so successful anymore. Also, according to a newspaper report, the dean of Latgale, Kārlis Irbe,¹³⁶⁰ arranged a political meeting of the Christian party in Tukums in 1925 which took place just after Sunday service.¹³⁶¹

Political differences were also evident regarding the coverage of church and congregational life in socialist and bourgeois newspapers. Socialist Tukuma Balss (later Tukuma un Apkārtnes Balss) reported rarely about events in the church. If the church was mentioned by the newspaper, it usually happened in a negative context. However, in many cases, the socialist newspapers avoided direct atheist or anti-religious tones. Instead, it was rather argued that the church and its representatives fell short of genuine Christianity, being hypocritical, greedy, and indifferent towards the difficult situation of workers and the poor. For instance, it was claimed that a well-known "Christian" butcher in the city exploited his workers and did not give them rest even during Sundays and religious feasts.¹³⁶²

However, sometimes the writings in the local socialist newspaper even went so far as to jeer at religion, calling religious ceremonies "raving" (*murgojums*).¹³⁶³

¹³⁵⁴ About communist activities in interwar town of Tukums, see Ozola 2014, 27–29.

¹³⁵⁵ Ivars Lagzdīņš writes about his deskmate in Tume primary school: "He came from a certain more distant corner of Tume parish. There were several new farms with people known to be Bolshevik sympathizers. Already in those times, they were openly bragging. But no one touched them." („Viņš nāca no kāda attālāka Tumes pagasta kakta. Tur bija vairākas jaunsaimecības ar cilvēkiem, kuri bija pazīstami kā boļševiku simpatizētāji. Jau tajos laikos tie vēl atklāti plātījās. Gan nieviens viņus neaiztika", Šablovskis 2006, 19).

¹³⁵⁶ 19.7% (1922), 7.5% (1925), 12.9% (1928), 10.5% (1931).

¹³⁵⁷ Tukuma Ziņas, 24.09.1925, p. 4.

¹³⁵⁸ Valdības Vēstnesis, 21.08.1928, p. 1.

¹³⁵⁹ Tukuma Ziņas, 01.10.1931, p. 1.

¹³⁶⁰ Not the bishop, but his relative and namesake.

¹³⁶¹ Tukuma Ziņas, 17.09.1925, p. 3.

¹³⁶² Tukuma Balss, 06.02.1930, p. 3.

¹³⁶³ In the context of commenting on the hot debates in the city council if the new schoolhouse was to be consecrated or not. Tukuma un Apkārtnes Balss, 08.11.1928, p. 3.

Another example of an anti-religious article was the one about the Tukums Secondary School graduation ceremony. Speaking there, teacher Kochs had made a speech that cursed corruption and politicians, called to appreciate nationalism and prepare for inevitable war in the future, but also expressed the idea that faith in God should be the basis of life. The newspaper commented upon it as if a war-disabled teacher could not be blamed if he sought solace in his life's difficulties from faith in God, but that instilling this kind of faith in young people was to be objected. Kochs's suitability to work at the school was questioned, taking into account that the students' knowledge of the subjects taught by him was allegedly also weak.¹³⁶⁴

Most anti-clerical articles, however, do not refer to local context almost at all, making simply negative generalizations about pastors and Christians or slamming Andrievs Niedra and other "reactionaries".¹³⁶⁵ However, the critical articles were mostly political by character and were often related to election campaigns; the readers were not encouraged to break away from church or religion but rather to avoid voting for "the Christian hypocrites". As some of these articles are signed by „A Rural Worker" (*Laukstrādnieks*,¹³⁶⁶ *Laukstrādniece*¹³⁶⁷), these propaganda articles seem to be directed implicitly at villagers.

As for bourgeois newspapers, topics like renovation of the church, religious ceremonies held by the pastor, and involvement of the congregation in the celebration of patriotic events were often covered. Also, annual overviews about the activities of the congregation were occasionally published, which tended to concentrate on details of economic character,¹³⁶⁸ but might also include church statistics (including demographical features).¹³⁶⁹ Traditionally, ceremonies held in case of patriotic events were covered. Usually, the participation of the pastor and conducting of religious ceremony would be mentioned only in passing. However, in the case of a memorial event in Smārde Brothers' cemetery, it was mentioned that pastor Roberts Bērziņš had highlighted in his speech the concord and selflessness of Latvian riflemen.¹³⁷⁰

In general, bourgeois newspapers dedicated little space to the issues of the church. However, the topic became more relevant before the elections. For example, during the campaign of municipal elections in the town of Tukums in 1925, the Christian Nationalist Party called for the election of those who were known as believers and good people because both this-worldly and spiritual well-being was at stake: "Let us not forget those recent times, when people gathered in our churches for rallies, desecrated God and defamed the Christian faith and Christian people. They promised great things but managed in such a way that many had to suffer hunger. If we do not want these times to be repeated, then we

¹³⁶⁴ Tukuma un Apkārtnes Balss, 21.06.1928, p. 3.

¹³⁶⁵ Tukuma Balss, 01.11.1925, p. 3.

¹³⁶⁶ Tukuma Balss, 25.02.1926, p. 2.

¹³⁶⁷ Tukuma Balss, 22.04.1926, p. 2.

¹³⁶⁸ Tukuma Ziņas, 20.05.1926, p. 3; Tukuma Dzīve, 08.03.1934, p. 2.

¹³⁶⁹ Tukuma Ziņas, 31.01.1930, p. 5 (Tukumu Ziņu pielikums nr. 4).

¹³⁷⁰ Tukuma Ziņas, 18.01.1934, p. 2.

must not vote for the same proclaimers of paradise, social democrats, who tempt us, the working people, with huge promises, but – they have not given and are not going to give us anything.”¹³⁷¹ In other words, “Christian politics” is presented as the only viable antidote to the demonized left (social democrats being equalized with communists), and the appeal is directed towards their usual voters, *i.e.* “working people”.

In turn, the mouthpiece of the Social Democrats, the weekly newspaper *Tukuma Balss*, urged genuine Christians not to vote for the Christian Nationalists, referring to Jesus’s words on Pharisees (Matthew 23) and arguing that, contrary to the spirit of Christianity, the party had not supported the bills which would have made life of poorer people easier. Also, their claims about protecting the interests of Latvians were hypocritical (here, the socialist newspaper even went so far as to make antisemitic remarks). Besides that, it was remembered that, unlike the Social Democrats, the Christian Nationalists had not supported the fight against excessive drinking.¹³⁷² In sum, these accounts show that nationalist and religious sentiments were still so strong in the town that they became important issues during the election campaigns and could not be underestimated by the left, either.

Thus, in Tukums as well, the public role of the church became a politicized issue. Perhaps most of all, it found its expression in 1928, when the socialist-dominated Tukums town council decided to open the town’s elementary school without a religious ceremony, and the bourgeois organizations declined their participation as a sign of protest.¹³⁷³

According to Virbulis, Marxism was the biggest enemy of the church as it wanted to substitute Christianity with the religion “of this world”. However, he did not deny that some of those who voted for the socialists still had a rather benevolent attitude towards the church. Virbulis also complained about the mocking articles about the church in the local socialist newspaper. In connection with the referendum of 1923, the pastor sharply criticized also the bourgeoisie political forces, who had supported turning the Lutheran church of St. James into the Catholic cathedral. However, later the relations between the right-wing political parties and the church seem to have been good.¹³⁷⁴

After the coup of Ulmanis, Virbulis noted that more people had begun to appear to the church, baptize their children, come to Communion and pay their membership fee debts. He concluded that earlier people perhaps had not been alienated from the faith, as it seemed at that time, but rather been afraid of

¹³⁷¹ “Neaizmirsīsim tos nesenos laikus, kad mūsu baznīcās sapulcējās uz mītiņiem, zaimoja Dievu un ķengāja kristīgo ticību un ļaudis. Viņi solīja lielas lietas, bet saimniekoja tā, kā daudziem bij jācieš bads. Ja mēs negribam, lai šie laiki atkārtojas, tad nedrīkstam balsot par tādiem pašiem paradīzes sludinātājiem, socialdemokrātiem, kuri vilina mūs, darba ļaudis, ar milzīgiem solījumiem, bet – neka nav devuši un nedod.” *Tukuma Ziņas*, 05.03.1925, p. 2.

¹³⁷² *Tukuma Balss*, 26.02.1925, pp. 1–2. *Cf.* the reply in *Tukuma Ziņas*, 05.03.1925, p. 4.

¹³⁷³ *Dišlere* 2017, 310.

¹³⁷⁴ *Dišlere* 2017, 310.

expressing their faith publicly due to the influence of the socialists.¹³⁷⁵ However, the statistical data does not indicate a significant surge in church life.¹³⁷⁶ True, as elsewhere, some persons were probably motivated to show their loyalty to the new regime by demonstrating their benevolent attitude towards the church by hastily reestablishing their ties with the congregation and also baptizing their unbaptized children.¹³⁷⁷

Not only pastor's own political involvement and later his sincere approval of the Ulmanis regime testify that right-wing moods were prevalent in the congregation. For instance, in 1932, the Council of Latvian Lutheran Congregation of Tukums appealed to the Central Board of the Latvian Lutheran Church to help pardon the controversial writer and politician Andrievs Niedra so that he could return to Latvia for treatment.¹³⁷⁸

Finally, it is worth mentioning that, as elsewhere in Latvia, pastors were also expected to confirm the trustworthiness and loyalty of certain persons. In the case of Tukums, the authorities had turned to the Central Board of the LELC on October 6, 1922, noting that pastors Virbulis and Fleišers had given someone called Voldemārs Tannenbergs a certificate of political loyalty, but the latter had not justified the trust. The Central Board decided to admonish pastors to be more attentive when issuing such certificates.¹³⁷⁹

Conclusion

The history of Tukums Lutheran congregations has been thoroughly studied by Inta Dišlere. According to her research, since the beginning of the 20th century, profound changes in religiosity in the parish happened. On the one hand, the tradition of religious family meetings vanished. But an important watershed was also the 1905 revolution, which was followed by a significant decline in church attendance and participation in the Holy Communion.

During the interwar years, the life of the congregation was remarkably vibrant. Bible studies, children's services and youth work were implemented, but the Ladies' Committee organized secular events such as theatre performances to raise money. Especially noteworthy is the arrangement of children's festivals in the parish, which began with church service, but most of the events were secular. Also, as elsewhere, church involvement was expected on the occasion of patriotic events.

As in Rūjiena, church issues became politicized in Tukums, too. Presumably, it was truer for the town of Tukums than for rural parts of the parish. Notably, the

¹³⁷⁵ Dišlere 2017, 315.

¹³⁷⁶ See appendix.

¹³⁷⁷ As was done e.g. by schoolteachers elsewhere in Latvia, cf. chapters about Gramzda and Rūjiena.

¹³⁷⁸ Dišlere 2017, 295. Andrievs Niedra (1871–1942), a popular pastor and writer, was widely condemned for agreement to lead Baltic-German-led Latvian puppet government in 1919. After re-installing of Latvian nationalist government, he had to go into exile.

¹³⁷⁹ LNV M KD 2142:1, 12.10.1922.

issue of whether religious ceremonies should be included in the opening celebrations of a new schoolhouse in the city in 1928 became a highly symbolic question in the rivalry between the left- and right-wing parties. Alberts Virbulis, the pastor of the Latvian Lutheran Congregation of Tukums, was himself actively engaged in politics, running in the list of the Christian Nationalists to the parliament. Later, he greeted the coup of Ulmanis, hoping that it would also bring positive changes to the church.

In sum, vibrant congregational life in Tukums could theoretically slow down the secularization process, while the very direct mingling of the representatives of the congregation to the politics could have fostered it. However, these factors did not have an immediate sizable effect on religious life and connections of people to the church. Only considering the long-term perspective, changes are detectable, and those are rather related to the profound political and social changes which concern the whole of Latvia.

4 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

In the final part of the thesis, generalizations are made based on the findings from the ten parishes, and possible interpretations of the findings are discussed. Comparable evidence from the other parishes is provided to make presuppositions about generalizability of the findings to the whole of Estonia and Latvia, and the opportunities for further research are discussed.

General Background

At the beginning of their statehood, Latvia and Estonia were diverse countries. Especially complex were discrepancies between the territories of former Lutheran-majority Baltic Governorates and the non-Lutheran Eastern areas. However, even inside Lutheran-majority areas, there were significant differences in socio-economic development and cultural background. One of the tasks of this study has been to find out how these differences influenced the secularization process.

Links between modernization and secularization have been so far studied in neighbouring Finland. Notably, Paavo Kortekangas has argued that secularization was in rural parts of the Häme region closely related to economic development: “Here too, it is noticeable once more that the development of the economic life has had a clear effect on the survival of the custom or its destruction. The political positioning did not have much effect. The church was attended the most there, where the other old customs were preserved, but the least there, where also in other areas the new ways of life had been introduced.”¹³⁸⁰

Especially in the case of Estonia, one can also speak about such “dynamic” and “static” regions or parishes, following the word usage of Kortekangas. Northern and Western Estonia were economically and culturally less developed than Southern Estonia, and were indeed perceived as more pious, having higher rates of church attendance and observance of church rites. People were there also less exposed to secular cultural influences, and secular voluntary associations were in some parishes not strong enough yet to challenge the central position of the weekly church services in local social life. Especially strong was the position of the church in localities with strong Herrnhutian heritage.

However, the relationship between the “level of development” and “level of secularization” was not straightforward. For instance, both Nabala (in Jüri parish) and Paatsalu (Karuse and Varbla parishes) communes were poor and “underdeveloped” in terms of low educational aspirations of the locals, low intensity of secular social life and slow adoption of modern lifestyle. However, the former stood out for its piety and closeness to the church, while in the latter religious

¹³⁸⁰ „Tässäkin on jälleen havaittavissa, että taloudellisen elämän kehitys oli vaikuttanut selvästi joko tavan säilymiseen tai häviämiseen. Poliittisella asennoitumisella ei ollut paljонkaan vaikutusta. Kirkossa käytiin eniten siellä, missä muutkin vanhat tavat säilyivät, vähiten taas siellä, missä muutenkin oli siirrytty uusiin elämänmuotoihin.” Kortekangas 1987, 185.

indifference as well as critical attitudes towards the institutional church were widespread. Similarly, according to the results of the referendum of 1923, religious instruction in public primary schools had almost consensual support in Nabala but was overwhelmingly rejected in Paatsalu. In a similar vein, attitudes towards religion and church varied significantly also along the parishes and communes of highly modernized and prosperous regions, such as Mulgimaa in Southern Estonia.

In general, Latvia was more developed in socio-economic terms in the late Tsarist era than Estonia, largely due to the fact that Riga was one of the industrial and commercial centres of the whole Russian empire. However, there appear to have been no major differences in the religious life of rural Latvia and at least Southern Estonia. On the other hand, there is some evidence of differences in religiosity between the former Livland and Kurland governorates,¹³⁸¹ and observance of church rites was also higher in the latter (although only slightly).¹³⁸² However, due to the lack of previous research and paucity of sources, it is not possible to make any firmer conclusions about the socio-economic and cultural background of these differences.

In sum, both in the case of Estonia and especially Latvia, more research would be needed to find out how and to what extent social and cultural change at the beginning of the 20th century contributed to the secularization process. This study has shown that the relationship was complex and not straightforward. One aspect which is worth paying attention to is the one of possible links between land ownership and people's ties with the church. It has been found elsewhere in Europe that in regions with concentrated land ownership and a lot of landless people, anti-clerical stances tend to be widespread.¹³⁸³

Personality of the Pastor

There were several ways how the personality of a local Lutheran pastor could make a significant impact on the public importance of the church, and perhaps also on individual practice.

First, the clergy in Latvia and Estonia was heterogeneous. Especially relevant appears to have been the generational divide, which partially overlapped with differences in theological views, cultural orientation and national identity. Older pastors had almost all studied in the faculty of theology of the University of Dorpat (Yurjev, now Tartu). The theological orientation of the faculty (so-called "Old Dorpat") has been characterized as confessional and rather conservative.¹³⁸⁴ A large share of the older generation of pastors were Germans, and also some pastors of Estonian or Latvian roots had pro-German orientation or fluid national identity. The younger generation of pastors had been studying theology in the

¹³⁸¹ Cf. Feldmanis 2017, 34–40.

¹³⁸² Cf. Ceļš 1940, no 2, p. 131.

¹³⁸³ E.g. Gibson 1989, 238–239 on France, and Blackbourne 1998, 295 on Germany.

¹³⁸⁴ Talonen and Rohtmets 2014, 348.

newly independent nation states, and among their teachers were scholars with nationalist and more liberal views.¹³⁸⁵ And, importantly, the youngest of them had been socialized in a radically different educational environment from the very beginning.

Besides different theological, social and political views, also the reactions to the changing status of the clergy mattered. Secularization in both societal and individual level meant also diminishing prestige and authority of the clergy, and presumably the older pastors were less ready to come to terms with it. The younger pastors may have had lesser expectations from the beginning, but, importantly, they were also more able to use new ways to enhance their status. Indeed, awe towards the supernatural among the people as well as support of secular authorities may have declined, but pastors could still earn the respect of the parishioners as public figures due to their university education and contribution to the life of the community. Apparently, such pastors as Jakob Aunver and Haralds Biezais were trying to do exactly that.

But, crucially, the expectations of the parishioners towards the pastor were remarkably different, too. The older people were obviously more conservative and distrustful towards any innovations in church life. But on the other hand, they were probably less likely to cut their ties with the church entirely if they were disappointed with the pastor. Therefore, it was more important for the pastor to meet the expectations of younger people during their formative years. Younger pastors realized it probably better and were also better able to find a common language with the local youth. The efforts of Haralds Biezais and Roberts Slokenbergs are examples of it, but in both cases, it remains doubtful how successful they were in the long run.

But the generational divide of the parishioners was not the only important one. For pietists, for instance, theological views and the moral integrity of the pastor were relevant, while for some others, oratory and social skills were more important. Some pastors gained popularity as they downplayed their status difference with common people and acted as “men of the people”, while some parishioners, on the contrary, were still accustomed to showing reverence for the pastor.

In sum, expectations towards the pastors and their ability to meet them deserve further investigation, as it may have played an important role in the secularization process.¹³⁸⁶ Followingly, the question of how the nationality of the pastor (and also the German legacy in the Lutheran church) could have influenced the attitudes towards the church is dealt with, as it has been widely discussed both in historiography and popular debates about the role of church in the society.

¹³⁸⁵ For a comprehensive overview, see Talonen and Rohtmetts 2014.

¹³⁸⁶ For example, memoirs, oral history sources as well as newspaper articles can be systematically studied to find out which were the conceptions of „good” and „bad” pastors among parishioners, and how the role expectations of pastors changed in time.

*National Question*¹³⁸⁷

The nationality of the clergy became an important question due to tensions between Estonian/Latvian national movement and German upper-class.¹³⁸⁸ Especially liberal and nationalist Estonian or Latvian pastors, such as Aunver and Biezais, tended to claim that the legacy of Baltic German *Herrenkirche* was to blame in indifferent or hostile attitudes of the people towards the Lutheran church. Indeed, at the end of the Tsarist era a considerable part of pastors in Estonian and Latvian congregations were ethnic Germans, especially in Estland and Kurland.

However, it is not easy to draw a clear line between the pastors of Estonian, Latvian and German nationality, even though such efforts have been made.¹³⁸⁹ Several of the older pastors of Estonian or Latvian peasant descent had an ambiguous national identity¹³⁹⁰ or were often at least culturally and mentally close to Germans. It was common for Estonian or Latvian pastors to communicate with each other in German; only a few of them spoke their native language even with their own family members. Some corresponded in German with their co-national pastors.¹³⁹¹ Therefore, it seems more sensible to speak about pastors of (more or less) pro-German orientation, who included besides “full-scale” ethnic Germans also such pastors as Bahs, Ozolings, and Nurm.

On the other hand, there was a minority of Estonian and Latvian pastors with strong nationalist convictions already in the late Tsarist era; in the Estonian case,

¹³⁸⁷ The topic has been thoroughly researched in case of Estonia (Ketola 2000, Saard 2020), and therefore most of the following examples are derived from there. However, it is assumed that the findings can to large extent be generalized also to Latvia.

¹³⁸⁸ In Catholic Latgale (as well as in Ilūkste county), there were no national-based tensions between Latgalian-speaking peasants and Polish-speaking clergy (who had often Lithuanian descent) (Strods 1990, 217 and 225). As national consciousness was not yet developed among rural population, the authorities of independent Latvia were concerned that the considerable authority that clergy enjoyed there could lead to the Polonization of Catholic Latvians. Indeed, yet in the interwar years some of the latter wished to educate their children in Polish-language schools. (See, for example, reports of the inspector of folk schools of Ilūkste county in LVVA 6642-1-210, especially pp. 26–27.)

¹³⁸⁹ The most up-to-date and authoritative list of pastors of Estonian descent, who served in Estonian congregations in 1870–1919, can be found in Saard 2020, 318–331.

¹³⁹⁰ Saard 2020, 82–85. Latvian pastor of the older generation, Kārlis Beldavs (1868–1936) remembers from the days of his youth: “The Baltic Germans simply were not able to understand how a person who had a German education – how such a person could still remain a Latvian. /.../ A whole row of Latvian students appeared, who echoed these views and characterized their paths of life with the following words: “I am Latvian by birth, German by education and also German by nationality.” Because nationality, according to them, is determined by upbringing and sympathies.” (“Baltijas vācieši nevarēja un nevarēja izprast, kā gan cilvēks, kas baudījis vācu izglītību, – kā gan tāds cilvēks var vēl palikt latvietis. /.../ Radās vesela rinda studentu latviešu, kas šiem uzskatiem piebalsodami raksturoja savad dzīves gaitas sekošiem vārdiem: “Pēc dzimuma esmu latvietis, pēc izglītības vācietis un pēc tautības arī vācietis.” Jo tautību, pēc viņu domām, noteic audzināšana un simpatijas.” Jaunātnes Ceļš 1934, no 8, p. 242).

¹³⁹¹ Saard 2020, 176. Most ethnic Estonian pastors were married with Germans: Saard 2020, 82.

they were often members of the Estonian Students' Society (EÜS). Their relationship with the dominant Baltic-German clergy was often uneasy. However, most of the Estonian and Latvian pastors did not consistently express public support for the national(ist) cause – either because it was genuinely unimportant for them¹³⁹² or on pragmatical grounds (*i.e.*, mostly to facilitate the career in the church, which was dominated by Germans),¹³⁹³ and were therefore blamed for indifference by the nationalist clergy who were trying to rally the co-nationals.¹³⁹⁴

Even this classification – involving ethnic Germans, more or less pro-German native pastors, nationalist Estonians and Latvians, and, finally, nationally indifferent people – is disputable. Personal attitudes of people may change over time or be ambiguous, and some cases are obviously hard to classify in the first place. However, it was not uncommon that alienation of people from the church was attributed to the (allegedly old-fashioned and nationally biased) German and pro-German pastors, while nationally conscious native pastors were depicted in a positive light. Riho Saard has shown that such grievances were often made already in the Estonian-language newspapers of the late Tsarist era. The hostility of German clergy towards the Estonian national movement and insufficient knowledge of the Estonian language were often mentioned, and some of the pastors had allegedly made even demeaning remarks about Estonian peasants.¹³⁹⁵

But did also rank-and-file parishioners care about the nationality of their pastor? The spread of national consciousness and nationalist ideas among the peasants is a question that needs thorough research in the first place.¹³⁹⁶ At first glance, for example, violent protests against imposing a German pastor against

¹³⁹² According to Johan Kõpp, one of them was Leopold Raudkepp, later one of the leaders of the Estonian Christian People's Party (Kõpp 2010, 547). Interesting are in that respect excerpts of the minutes of meetings of Estonian students of theology from the year 1912. The participants of these meetings seem to have shared national consciousness, but several of them were hesitant about establishing a separate Estonian Theological Society, arguing that instead of emphasizing national particularism, personal piety or the study of theological questions should be concentrated on. See "Ado Kõögardali päevaraamat", 12.10.1925: <https://harjumaamuuseum.ee/1925-aasta-paevaraamat/>, 29.01.2024.

¹³⁹³ Saard 2020, 49.

¹³⁹⁴ Saard 2020, 230–231.

¹³⁹⁵ Saard 2020, 89–93.

¹³⁹⁶ In the Estonian case, it has been concluded on the basis of readers' letters to the prominent nationalist newspaper *Sakala* that at least some peasants felt already in the 1880s as members of the nation. However, it is doubtful how widespread the national identity was among the peasantry as a whole. (Jansen 1977, 95–96) On the other hand, ethnologist Gustav Ränk (b. 1902) seems to argue in his memoirs that national identity was not relevant for the people in his native Saaremaa island (known, to be exact, for its "backwardness") in his childhood years; see Ränk 2010, 26). Sigrid Põld notes in her study about Hageri parish in Northern Estonia that in the late Tsarist era, it was common for the Estonian peasants to give their children German (and occasionally Russian) first names. However, Estonian names, such as Leida, Linda, Helmi, and Lembit, began to emerge at the end of the period (Põld 2016, 45–46). Indeed, analysing the spread of Estonian first names (and also, if possible, the social background of the parents who gave them), would be one of the tools to gauge the spread of Estonian national consciousness and nationalist ideas in different parishes.

the will of the parishioners seem to hint at the importance of the national question.¹³⁹⁷ But possibly the main problem here was not the nationality of the pastor *per se*, but the indignation about the will of increasingly self-confident local peasantry being ignored. Indeed, if Estonian peasants *did* have a say about the new pastor, they sometimes preferred German pastors for Estonians, defying the agitation of Estonian nationalists.¹³⁹⁸ For example, members of the Maarja-Magdaleena congregation stated that “they do not look at all whether the new pastor is Estonian, German or Latvian. The main thing is that he is a nice and kind man and knows the Estonian language.”¹³⁹⁹ Neither is true that pastors of Estonian origin had generally closer and better relations with their flock than the Germans. On the contrary, some of the co-nationals were notably unpopular among the locals, while several German pastors were often shown much affection.¹⁴⁰⁰ Systematic analysis of sources from throughout Latvia and Estonia is needed to settle the issue; however, the evidence from oral history collected in the interwar years in Estonia seems to suggest that while national- or class-based grievances were occasionally indeed made about pastors, much more often people assessed them merely according to their personality traits, professional commitment, moral integrity and friendliness to the people.¹⁴⁰¹

The nationality of the pastor could possibly become more important after the establishment of independent Estonia, as nationalist ideology became more prominent, promoted by the state and absorbed increasingly by the population at large. However, Baltic Germans were still elected pastors in independent Estonia. According to Mikko Ketola, it occurred eleven times, all of them in the parishes of North Estonia.¹⁴⁰² Of the parishes studied here, it was the case of Varbla. But besides that, in Jüri, as shown, a Baltic German would have become the pastor if the elections had not been cancelled due to procedural errors. As for the latter case, his popularity may be related to the significant influence of Herrnhutians in the parish. Namely, for pietists, German pastors seem to have been even preferable to Estonians, as they had the reputation of being “true believers”,¹⁴⁰³ while Estonians might have well been adherents of highly condemnable liberal theology as Eduard Tennmann in Jüri had indeed turned out to be.

¹³⁹⁷ One such case was briefly referred to in the chapter about Gramzda. Such incidents occurred on several occasions also in Southern Estonia at the turn of the century; see Saard 2020, 138–162.

¹³⁹⁸ See Saard 2020, 66–67 and 77–78.

¹³⁹⁹ Cited in Saard 2020, 80.

¹⁴⁰⁰ Saard 2020, 77–80.

¹⁴⁰¹ The collection “Ajalooline pärimus Eesti Kultuuriloolise Arhiivi kogudest” contains oral history accounts on various topics, including reminiscences on pastors. It is preserved in the Literary Museum of Estonia in Tartu (EKLA f. 199 and f. 200) and is largely available online: <http://www.folklore.ee/pubte/ajaloolist/>, 26.01.2024.

¹⁴⁰² Ketola 2000, 289.

¹⁴⁰³ Also Ado Kõögardal suggests it in his novel “Rahula kirikla”, which is based on his own experiences as a pastor of Keila, another stronghold of Herrnhutians in Northern Estonia: Kaskemäe 1938, 5–7.

As for the nationality-based controversies, they did sometimes occur in those parishes where pastors were Germans in the interwar era. But at least in the cases of Intelmann of Varbla and von Dehn of Halliste, the agitation of nationalists failed to find the support of the majority of parishioners. So far, there is no clear evidence of it from any other parish either. Even more, it is highly remarkable that despite close collaboration with Baltic Germans during the occupation of imperial Germany, Martin Nurm could continue his service in Haljala without significant public opposition from the side of the locals. Similarly, also other active collaborators continued their service in their congregations without facing mass indignation from the side of parishioners.¹⁴⁰⁴ Still, it cannot be ruled out that Nurm's pro-German political engagement contributed to relatively small support for religious instruction in the referendum of 1923 in some parts of the parish. However, as Mark Gortfelder has demonstrated, in general, there is no relationship between voting results and the nationality of the pastor.¹⁴⁰⁵

In sum, while Estonian and Latvian nationalists (including nationalist pastors) tended to be critical towards the German legacy of the Lutheran church, there is no evidence of widespread national bias against German pastors. Even so, the fact that Lutheran church had been historically dominated by Baltic Germans, could in many indirect ways still contribute to the secularization in societal level:

1. It made the Lutheran church vulnerable to public attacks.

In the nationalizing state, the German nationality or German cultural/political orientation of a pastor was an argument that could easily be used as a pretext for a wide range of internal conflicts in the congregation. Scapegoating of Germans for the decline of religious and ecclesiastical life was certainly more credible when the pastor was indeed (pro-)German, for instance, in Varbla and Halliste, but not in Vastseliina. In Latvia, the loyalty of (pro-)German pastors to the state (or Ulmanis's regime) was questioned as well. In addition to Bahs of Rūjiena, complaints were made also against Limbaži,¹⁴⁰⁶ Trikāta¹⁴⁰⁷ and Talsi¹⁴⁰⁸ ethnic German pastors. In Kuldīga, local Latvian nationalists were dissatisfied with local pastor Ernests Freibergs, who as a result of that was dismissed from his office in 1936.¹⁴⁰⁹

2. „German pastors” were presumably less responsive to the expectations of the rapidly changing society. True, the clergy tended to be socially conservative also elsewhere in Europe in that time. But in the Baltic states, precisely the pastors of German descent or cultural orientation had more to lose due to the revolutionary changes than their Estonian and Latvian colleagues. Indeed, critical remarks about educational and agrarian reforms made by Dehn, Nurm and several other

¹⁴⁰⁴ Cf. Põld 2016, 72 on Konstantin Thomson, the pastor of Hageri.

¹⁴⁰⁵ Gortfelder 2021a, 79.

¹⁴⁰⁶ Regarding Henzel, the pastor of local German congregation (LVVA 1370-1-2338, p. 47).

¹⁴⁰⁷ LVVA 1370-1-2336.

¹⁴⁰⁸ LVVA 1370-1-2336, p. 185.

¹⁴⁰⁹ Asne 2004, 40–45 and 48–52.

pastors in their reports, indicate their reactionary political views. Much fuss was made over remarks on land reform made by Bahs in Rūjiena. But even when the “German” pastors were reluctant to voice their controversial views publicly, they were obviously not eager to participate actively in the building of democratic national states either, and it weakened the social role of the church.

Importantly, local elite sought the cooperation with the church especially in the case of patriotic celebrations. Understandably, German pastors could readily subscribe to anti-communism of these events, but not – explicit or implicit – Estonian/Latvian nationalist tones.¹⁴¹⁰ In any case, they must have felt themselves uncomfortable in the changed social environment, where the tone was set by new Estonian and Latvian elites; and the latter were obviously reserved towards German pastors, too. Perhaps it was exactly one of the hidden reasons why some pastors, such as Intelmann, were reluctant to take part in any secular events. Of course, it was also important that German pastors tended, at least in Estonia, to be supporters of Pietism and thus cared, at least in words, more about saving the souls than participating in social and political life. In any case, German pastors tended probably more likely than their Estonian colleagues to resort to social and political quietism, thus undermining the efforts of the church leadership to keep the church as an important factor in public life. In addition, some pietist German pastors strived for a church whose membership was made up only of “true believers”. In some of their congregations, they started to expel the members who had not fulfilled their formal obligations – to pay the fees, to baptize their children, and to have church marriages.¹⁴¹¹ This was, in effect, not only a step undermining the social relevancy of the church but could also foster secularization at the individual level.

3. The national question led to divisions also among the clergy. Critical remarks made by deans Arumäe and Aunver about their German colleagues after *Umsiedlung* reveal deep bias towards them. In Halliste, Alfred Kõiv exploited national

¹⁴¹⁰ Remarkably, in 1934, the Consistory declined the plea to organize religious services on the occasion of Victory Day celebrations on June 23 under the pretext that it was not a religious holiday. Victory Day had recently been installed as a state holiday to commemorate the victory of the Estonian army in a relatively minor clash against the Baltic German *Landeswehr* during the War of Independence in 1919. One can well understand that for Baltic German pastors, a service on the occasion of such a holiday would have been a rather embarrassing experience. An Estonian patriot was indignant about the decision, arguing in *Kaja* (10.06.1934, p. 2) that the Consistory failed to listen to the heartbeats of the nation („rahva südame tuksumist”). However, interestingly he did not explicitly refer to the Baltic German clergy in his article. – Later, the contribution of the Lutheran church to the Victory Day celebrations was common, and as indicated in the chapter about Haljala parish, relatively pro-German Estonian pastor Martin Nurm also took part in them.

¹⁴¹¹ Besides Varbla, also Martna congregation was the case. In 1927, it was reported that three members were expelled because they had not paid membership fees for more than three years, had not taken part in Communion, and two of them had not sent their son to the confirmation course “in appropriate time”. *Eesti Kirik*, 20.01.1927, p. 20. See also Jakob Aunver’s critique about the practice in *Eesti Kirik*, 03.02.1927, p. 34.

arguments in his rivalry with Erwin von Dehn, and other pastors referred to their “appropriate” nationality to enhance their appeal to the parishioners or authorities.¹⁴¹² In Latvia, the first bishop, Kārlis Irbe, stood out for his lenient and tolerant stance towards Germans. But some young nationalist pastors such as Slokenbergs did not heed the bishop’s stance, expressing publicly their support for the expropriation of the Dome Cathedral of Riga, and anti-German sentiments are frequently evident also in the writings of Haralds Biezais. As a result, the national question further weakened the Lutheran church in a situation when unity was urgently needed due to the vulnerable position of the church in the changing society.

4. The German legacy complicated efforts to make use of the church in constructing the national identity of Estonians and Latvians. It proved to be fatal in the era when the public role of the churches in Europe depended largely on their relationship with nationalism. David Martin is among the scholars who have especially emphasized this aspect: “A positive overlap with the national myth is a necessary condition for a lively and widespread attachment to religion: the majority of people cannot bear too sharp a contradiction between their universalistic faith and their group identity. Of course, other factors may affect that liveliness and that attachment in very large measure, but if national myth and religious faith are contradictory, the social power of religion is restricted.”¹⁴¹³

However, in the case of Estonian and Latvian nationalism, the main adversary, the German upper class, had historically had the upper hand in the Lutheran church. As the church’s stance towards Estonian and Latvian national movements was negative,¹⁴¹⁴ it was inevitable that nationally conscious Estonians/Latvians, whatever their personal religious views, were alienated from the church. Under such circumstances, only conservative and nationally relatively indifferent people could retain close ties to the church.¹⁴¹⁵

Change became possible only at the beginning of the 1920s, when ethnic Estonians and Latvians took over the church leadership, and the progress could be neither fast nor easy. It was understandably hard to convince anyone that the Lutheran church was an Estonian/Latvian national one, because everybody remembered very well that Germans had been in charge of it until very recently, and, in the case of Estonia, a significant part of the pastors were still ethnic Germans. But at the same time, also “anti-clerical national narrative” appears to have been rarely used in the interwar years.¹⁴¹⁶

¹⁴¹² For example, Indriķis Volbergs emphasized his Latvian nationality, setting up his candidacy for the pastor of Northern Rūjiena (LVVA 3681-1-275, p. 192).

¹⁴¹³ Martin 1978, 101.

¹⁴¹⁴ On attitudes of the church on emerging Estonian and Latvian nationalism, see Garve 1978, 208–232.

¹⁴¹⁵ Such were perhaps some of the Herrnhutians: Jansen 1977, 78–79.

¹⁴¹⁶ The stances of Juhan Kukk, the priest of Paadremaa, are examples of nationally substantiated bias, which was shared by some of the Orthodox clergy. For example, it happened in the context of refuting claims that the Orthodox faith was a „Russian faith” that the priests

Against the odds, attempts were still made to build bridges between national identity and Lutheranism. Notably, the narrative about the deep Christian piety of the forefathers of Latvians was repeatedly promoted in the church's weekly Svētdienas Rīts in the interwar period. However, instead of the official church and its German pastors, the role of Herrnhutian spirit was often emphasized.¹⁴¹⁷ This narrative was used also by Slokenbergs in the polemics with his opponents in Rūjiena. Besides that, reforming the church in the national spirit became a major topic of public debate, but much more so, as it seems, in Latvia.¹⁴¹⁸ Haralds Biezais, among other things, contributed to it with his "patriotic pilgrimages" to the Brothers' cemetery of Riga. However, one could argue that the effect of such efforts could have been, at best, the nationalization of the church rather than the clericalization of nationalism.

In conclusion, it is indeed probable that the German legacy weakened the positions of the Lutheran church in the society of Latvia and Estonia, even though there is little evidence of the national bias of rank-and-file congregation members or the spread of anti-clerical national narrative in the interwar years. Rather, unwillingness and inability to adapt to the needs of changing society on behalf of German pastors was to be blamed, and, on the other hand, also the fact that due to its German legacy, it was relatively hard to link the Lutheran church credibly to Estonian and Latvian nationalism.

Individual Religiosity

Ecclesiastical statistics on church rites are sketchy and not sufficient to make conclusions about the long-term or nationwide trends. To this end, studies encompassing a larger sample of parishes and a longer time frame would be needed. Also, to interpret the data correctly, demographic, economic and other variables must be accounted for, which was beyond this study's scope. For example, the drop in the number of confirmands in the 1930s was largely the result of dropping birth rates during the war years, and the number of marriages and perhaps baptisms as well fluctuated probably following the economic conjuncture. There is

claimed that it was, on the contrary, Lutheranism that was imbued with an alien (*i.e.* German) spirit and culture (see, for example, Uus Elu 1923, no 3 (Ülestõusmispühade number), p. 3). Also, adherents of neopagan movements (*taarask* in Estonia, *dievtūrība* in Latvia) used to claim that Lutheranism was inherently alien to the nations. However, these claims do not seem to have had broad resonance in society. Lutheran pastors tended to complain about indifference rather than anticlerical stances of the people. In case the hostility towards the church can be tracked, it was rarely related to explicitly nationalist arguments, but rather to the claims about reactionary stances of the clergy, contradiction of religion and science, and the like (*cf.* subchapter about the campaign of the 1923 referendum in Estonia). The nationalists, notably Jaan Tõnisson in Estonia, did not usually deny the nation's close connections with Lutheranism but only demanded reform of the church in nationalist spirit (*cf.* nationalist opposition to Erwin von Dehn in Halliste).

¹⁴¹⁷ Svētdienas Rīts, 09.12.1923, pp. 2–3; 12.04.1925, pp. 114–116; 03.08.1930, pp. 237–238.

¹⁴¹⁸ See Tēraudkalns 2012, Misāne 2016, *cf.* Altnurme, L. 2021, 14.

also the danger of misinterpreting data for particular parishes if the context is unknown. For instance, the drop of communicants for Vastseliina does not show the advancement of secularization in the parish; rather, people avoided participating in the Eucharist there for religious reasons as they condemned the immoral lifestyle of the pastor. Therefore, the data presented in the appendix cannot be interpreted as proxies of the secularization in the interwar period. However, it is safe to conclude that observance of church rites was rather stable in some of the parishes, but dropped in most of the others, and in some cases significantly. The latter is the case, in particular, for Estonian parishes studied here, and the introduction of civil registration seems to have had a considerable short-term impact on it.

Church Attendance

It was common to note in the pastoral reports in the interwar years that church attendance had dropped if compared to earlier times. According to subjective assessments of the pastors, usually less than 10% of the parishioners attended services on regular Sundays in the interwar years, and in some parishes, it was less than 5%. However, during feast days, churches were still full almost everywhere. Particularly popular were Christmas services, which in Latvian autobiographical writings are often related to the pleasant childhood memories. Another occasion when religious events served as important gatherings of the community were Lutheran cemetery festivities, which attracted huge crowds, sometimes thousands of people. While being originated from Livland, in the interwar years, they had already become popular both in western Latvia and northern Estonia. Also, they had been adopted by other confessions as well.¹⁴¹⁹

The main reason for the drop in churchgoing was the fact that it had lost its earlier importance as the main social gathering of the parish. In that respect, the assessments of the contemporaries, such as *köster* Sandberg's, chime well in with the thesis of "secular competition" (more on that below). But there were other factors that facilitated alienation from churchgoing in Latvia and Estonia. First, parishes were unusually large if compared with other European countries, and the church was therefore often situated far away from home.¹⁴²⁰ Secondly, attending Sunday services, though seen as important, was not a religious requirement in Protestant countries. In the pastors' reports, low attendance is lamented but not usually seen as a problem needing urgent intervention. If attending the church was not possible or convenient, one could pray, sing hymns, and read the Bible (or book of homilies) at home with one's family. That fostered the privatization of religion and ultimately loosening the ties with the church, as well.

¹⁴¹⁹ Uzule and Zelče 2014. There is no comparable study about Estonia, but at least in case of Haljala, as noted, they were introduced by pastor Nurm since his arrival to the parish in 1916.

¹⁴²⁰ Hope 1999, 500.

Rites of Passage

In rural parishes covered by the case studies, giving up church rites was still exceptional, though relatively more common in Haljala and Halliste. Several factors, such as respect for traditions, the solemnity of the church rites, the opinion of the community, and the wish to appease older, more “churchly” generations (like in the case of Endel Sõgel in Vastseliina) prompted probably to stick to the church rites. As annual reports of the pastors and articles in church newspapers indicate, such attitudes were common also elsewhere in the interwar Lutheran Latvia and Estonia.

Unlike Martin Nurm, several pastors, however, were alarmed that there was a widening gap between how the rites were seen by the church and by the people. Pastor Jaan Kiivit from Viru-Jakobi generalized his impressions about the attitudes to baptism as follows: “The awareness that this is a rite being performed in the name and on behalf of God is disappearing in the congregation, as well as recognition of the fact that there are promises associated with it. The idea is becoming prevalent that it is more like a magical ritual “you may never know for what it would be beneficial”, and at the same time a family party, where relatives eat and drink when a new family member is being welcomed into the family, and nothing else. /.../ It must be mentioned that, apart from those who have left the congregation, no one leaves their children unbaptized, but on several occasions, it can be heard that the baptism occurred due to the insistence of relatives and grandparents, [arguing] that they would be kind of heathens if they do not bring their children to be baptized.”¹⁴²¹ There are other similar complaints of pastors, e.g. that baptism was losing its religious meaning and becoming rather a kind of supplement to a family celebration.¹⁴²²

This had several implications. First, the Lutheran church insisted that children must be baptized soon after birth. In reality, the rite was increasingly postponed to a more appropriate time to arrange family celebrations – sometimes for several years. Second, there are several accounts of unauthorized baptisms. It had become customary in many parishes that lay persons (often schoolteachers) performed most baptisms. Pastors tried to regulate who could baptize, but seemingly not

¹⁴²¹ „Kadumas teadvus, et see on talitus mis Jumala nimel ja ülesandel tehakse koguduses ja et sellega on ühenduses töötused. Esiplaanile tungib mõte, et see on rohkem maagiline toiming mis „mine tea milleks teda tarvis” ja ühtlasi perekonnapiidu, mil puhul sugulastega koos süüakse-juuakse uue perekonnaliikme vastuvõtmise puhul perekonda ja muud midagi. /.../ Peab küll nimetama, et peale kogudusest lahkunute ei jäta keegi lapsi ristimata, aga mõnelgi korral kuuled kuis üks või teine ristimine toimunud sugulaste ja vanavanemate peale käimisel, et kas nad mõned paganad on, kui ei vii last ristimisele.” EELKKA 44-1-45.

¹⁴²² Kaskemäe 1938, 53-54; Konstantin Thomson from Hageri: Eesti Kirik, 23.05.1929, pp. 161–162; Otto Etzold from Harju-Madise: Eesti Kirik, 23.01.1936, pp. 3–4. According to Uzule and Zelče, the growing popularity of the cemetery festivities may be related to the celebration of family values, which spread since the 19th century as part of bourgeoisie culture (2014, 37). It cannot be ruled out that also baptisms and other rites of passage lost indeed some of their religious importance in time, as their secular meaning of celebrating family connections became more important.

always effectively, and sometimes, it was even “forgotten” to inform them about baptisms. In that regard, Rūjiena was by no way a unique case.¹⁴²³

As for the confirmation, it occurs fairly often in autobiographical writings, but almost always its exclusively secular aspects are highlighted, such as the meaning of the rite for becoming adult. Pastors, on the other hand, complained about the lukewarm attitude of the confirmands towards religion and church.¹⁴²⁴

To sum up, the pastors in the parishes involved in this study were alarmed about the dropping levels of church rites and the vanishing of their religious meaning. However, most of the people still considered it important to baptize their children, to get confirmed, marry in the church, and also have church burial. According to the reports of the pastors and newspaper accounts, the situation was similar in most other Lutheran-majority rural areas in Latvia and Estonia. However, the church rites had lost much more of their popularity in the cities,¹⁴²⁵ and also in particular rural parishes.¹⁴²⁶ On the other hand, there seem to have been some pious locations where church rites were also more appreciated than was usual elsewhere, notably in western Estonia.¹⁴²⁷

¹⁴²³ See e.g. Kimmel 1923, 44–45; EELKKA, Pärnu praosti aruanne 1932. Felikss Cielēns, a prominent Latvian socialist politician, shares an interesting story about the secretive, non-church-related baptism of his daughter, carried out by her caretaker in the presence of only Cielēns’s wife: Cielēns, 1963, 400.

¹⁴²⁴ Some pastors also asked the confirmands to write about their motivations. According to Alberts Frejis, most young people saw it as a ceremony of becoming a full member of the congregation. Only for a minority was it about confessing their faith, and, for even smaller part, about “satisfaction of genuine religious longings”. On the other hand, only very few confirmands stated that they went to the confirmation merely because it was expected by their parents or relatives. (Frejis 1939, 204) More pessimistic was an anonymous pastor (also from Latvia) who stated that among 80 confirmands there were only two or three, whose written answers bore witness about genuine Christian faith (Svētdienas Rīts, 05.09.1926, pp. 282–283).

¹⁴²⁵ In 1936, it was noted that 75% of the personal status registration was accomplished by secular clerks in the city of Tartu, but it was added: „Of course, this does not mean turning away from the church because the majority of our people are religious and still baptize their children and bury the dead in the church.” („Muidugi ei märgi see veel kirikust ärapöörmist, sest meie rahvas on enamuses usklik ja ristib oma lapsi ja matab surnuid ikka kiriklikult.”) The clerks had also asked if the people wed by them also intended to opt later for the church ceremony, and about 25% claimed to consider it. However, some of the rest of the people also seem to have had second thoughts later. Interestingly, some people reportedly postponed their church wedding to be held simultaneously with the baptism of their first child – to save money by combining the celebrations (Postimees, 30.06.1936, p. 5). In Tallinn, secular clerks had registered 30,000 marriages within 13 years (Esmaspäev, 22.04.1939, p. 4.).

¹⁴²⁶ The dean of Viljandi noted in 1930: “In Pilstvere parish, during the reporting year [of 1929], half of the children remained either unbaptized or not reported [to the pastor], and 20–25-year-old confirmands can be found in almost every confirmation course” (Eesti Kirik, 31.07.1930, pp. 236–237). There were also many unbaptized children and non-confirmed young people in the Lutheran congregations of Hiiumaa island (Saard 2009, 198), presumably largely due to the impact of free churches there.

¹⁴²⁷ “The religious life is especially lively in Mihkli, where almost 1/3 of the congregation’s members belong to the circle of the pro-church Herrnhutians, where prayer life is still held. It also leaves its stamp on the general life of the Mihkli parish. There are no civil marriages,

Holy Communion

Participation in the Holy Communion was seen at that time as an indicator of the commitment of congregation members to the church. For example, it was repeatedly opined that only such teachers who were used to participate in the Communion were fit to teach religion.¹⁴²⁸ In general, though, at best, only from a quarter to half of the confirmed congregation members used to do it in the studied parishes.¹⁴²⁹

The annual number of communicants fluctuated considerably, sometimes presumably simply due to bad weather conditions on the particular feast days when people were used to receive the Communion. But also, the absence of a permanent pastor may have contributed to the declining number of communicants – and seemingly also the personality of the pastor sometimes played a role (the case of Ermits in Vastseliina). The participation levels varied remarkably in different parts of the countries and, in some regions, appear to have been quite stable. Political events also made a significant impact. The end of the war meant demobilization, and especially in the Latvian case, the return of war refugees. Thus, the number of communicants also rose in the 1920s. In general, however, the slow decline of communicants is evident at the national level throughout the interwar period. In pastoral reports from interwar years, there is generally not much talk about the drop, perhaps because it was slow, with several annual recoveries, and thus not easy to notice. It seems highly likely that the decline of this tradition was related to generational change. The observations of dean Aunver that younger people were significantly less likely to come to the Communion are interesting in that regard, but there are few other traces in sources about that. Unfortunately, there is no statistical data about the age of the communicants.

Other Religious Practices

In all the parishes included in this study, private religious gatherings seem to have been in decline or even disappearing. In earlier times, it was quite ordinary that when the adult family members did not go to the church on Sunday, there was a religious gathering at home, involving readings from the Bible, singing from the hymnal, and sometimes common prayer and listening to the homily reading from a book. The reports of the pastors, as well as some newspaper accounts, indicate

there are no people who keep their children away from baptism on purpose, there are no people who stay away from the confirmation, matters of personal status are not arranged at all in the commune administration buildings, and this is precisely because of religious motives.” („Eriti elav on usueltu Mihklis, kus vast 1/3 koguduse hingede arvust kuulub kirikliku vennastekoguduse ringi, kus peetakse veel palveelu. See vaotab Mihkli koguduse üldelule ka oma pitsati. Ei ole olemas kodanlikke abielusid, ei ole neid, kes oma lapsi ristimisest meelega eemale hoiavad, ei ole neid, kes leerist eemale jäävad, ei õiendata perekonnaseisu asju üldse vallamajades ja seda just usulistel motiividel.” Eesti Kirik, 27.06.1935, pp. 3–4).

¹⁴²⁸ EAA 1205-1-131, p. 215 (report of pastor Saarmann from Rāpina, 1929); Ceļš 1936, no 2, p. 116 (pastor A. Birznieks).

¹⁴²⁹ In the annual report of Latvian archbishop Grinbergs, it was stated that half of registered congregation members in Latvia took part in Communion: Svētdienas Rīts, 30.07.1939, p. 258.

that such gatherings had become rarer in the interwar years. However, several of the autobiographical sources used for this study still referred to such events. True, often only the oldest generations took part (*cf.* the case of Lembit Pütsep in Vastseliina). Some pastors, for some reason mostly in Latvia,¹⁴³⁰ talked much about the need to revive family piety, but apparently no remarkable progress was made in that field.

Participation in wider informal religious gatherings, including members of several families, was common only in exceptionally pious surroundings, such as Nabala and Misso in Estonia. In other places, these attracted only particularly religious people, who were perceived as different from the mainstream society. Several people who attended such gatherings as children remember feeling uncomfortable there because of the unfamiliarity of the experience or a weird, ecstatic atmosphere.

Bible reading rate had also dropped according to the assessments of pastors, and it was true not only to the parishes covered in this study.¹⁴³¹ From earlier times, there are accounts of avid Bible-reading from a very young age on – sometimes because of great importance attributed to it by pious people,¹⁴³² but sometimes because a child had become fond of reading and there were no secular books in the household.¹⁴³³ As for the interwar years, the times had changed. It was – as several pastors claimed – common for people to have the Bible, but not

¹⁴³⁰ Svētdienas Rīts, 19.04.1925, pp. 123–124 (Goba); 30.05.1926, pp. 170–171 (Rumpeters); 29.10.1939, pp. 367–368 and 05.11.1939, pp. 375–376 (Birznieks).

¹⁴³¹ According to Georg Kimmel, the Bible was regularly read on Sundays in 11 families of Uue-Antsla commune (Urvaste parish) out of 160. In the case of major holidays, nineteen more families used to read it. The share of Bible-reading families was two times as high in Sõmerpalu commune of the same parish. The parish was, however, known as exceptionally lukewarm towards religion. (Kimmel 1923, 42). The weekly of the EELC Eesti Kirik, in turn, wrote in 1927: „According to the data obtained by the pastor of a particular parish, 125 of the 127 confirmands could read, 122 have attended school; one Gospel had been read through by 6, the New Testament by three, the entire Bible by none, the David’s Psalter by none; 78 had learned to pray at home; proper morning prayer is held only in one house, evening prayer is not held in any! Perhaps the pastor is right, adding: “The word of God no longer lives among the people.” The large number of the confirmands seems to indicate that the congregation was an urban one. It can be presumed that in rural parishes, and especially in pious Western and Northern Estonia, Bible-reading was still much more common even among youth. („Ühe koguduse õpetaja poolt saadud andmete järele olla 127 leeriõppijast 125 alfabeedid, 122 koolis käinud; ühe evangeeliumi läbi lugenud 6, uue testam. 3, terve piibli mitte üks, Taaveti laulu- raamatu mitte üks; kodus palvetamist õppinud 78; korralikku hommikupalvet peetakse ainult ühes majas, õhtupalvet mitte üheski! Õieti lisab ehk õpetaja juure: „Jumala sõna ei ela enam mitte rahva seas,” Eesti Kirik, 06.01.1927, p. 8.) Pēteris Nesaule, the pastor of Nītaure, who was also the teacher of religion in a local basic school, claimed that only five of his thirty new pupils had been taught some prayers at home (and, notably, by grandparents), while none had any previous knowledge about the Catechism or Bible stories (Vairogs, no 4, 1940, p. 10.).

¹⁴³² Jans 2008, 25; Soosaar 2023, 46.

¹⁴³³ Metsanurk 1946, 121; Johansone 2014, 283; Raudsepp 2011, 150–151. A pastor from Võru deanery noted in 1932 that reading of the Bible had been substituted by reading newspapers (EAA 1205-1-133, p. 11).

to read it. The claim of Nurm that mostly older people were interested in reading the scripture and interpreting it, seems credible. Significantly, reading of the Bible is quite often attributed only to the generation of grandparents in autobiographical sources, too.

Pastors were also invited to visit the sick. The *rationale* for the visit was not to provide spiritual support but to give the Holy Communion before death. The inviting of the pastor was, therefore, an ominous sign about losing hope in recovery. Finally, consecration of dwelling houses by pastors is also mentioned in reports and some memoirs.

References to private prayer can mostly be found in autobiographical sources. In childhood memories, naïve prayers by children are mentioned in the face of frightening situations. Besides that, some authors write about evening prayers, which were taught to children to recite before going to sleep. But even such adult people, who were not particularly religious and not practising often, used to pray in difficult life situations, especially while being sick, at war or unaware of the fate of close ones, as several examples referred to in this study indicate. Attempts to give religious meaning to life events are, however, quite rare in autobiographical texts. There are some examples of interpreting accidents as punishment for sins or good luck as God's reward. Notably, these opinions are often not necessarily shared by the authors themselves but attributed to others, usually older people.

In sum, a systematic comparison of autobiographical sources about coming to age in the 19th century, the late Tsarist era, and the interwar years could contribute much to our understanding of how individual religiosity transformed during these years. It seems probable that there could have been erosion of religious traditions from generation to generation, quite in a way as the proponents of the theory of "secular transition" have envisaged.¹⁴³⁴ Notably, Otto Etzold, a Pietist pastor from Harju-Madise wrote: "In the older generation, there were many members [of the congregation] who were deeply pious and also preached the Word of God. Their children were honest, decent and church-loving male and female heads of the household, but they themselves could no longer preach the Gospel. And the third generation, their children, are already growing up in a completely different world and spirit; they go to church more out of custom and on major feast days."¹⁴³⁵ Also, several autobiographical texts used for this study, notably the memoirs of Arvo Pilt and Lembit Pütsep, seem to indicate similar intergenerational differences.

While there were obviously remarkable differences at a local and individual level, it seems to be quite common that the understanding of being a Lutheran in

¹⁴³⁴ Cf. Stolz 2020, 289–293.

¹⁴³⁵ It must be added that this is an account of a Pietist pastor writing about the area with strong Pietist influences, and therefore is not necessarily typical. "Vanemas põlvkonnas oli palju südameusklikke ja ka sõnakuulutajaid liikmeid. Nende lapsed olid ausad, korralikud ja kirikut armastavad peremehed ja -naised, kes aga ise enam evangeeliumi ei suutnud kuulutada. Ning kolmas põlv, nende lapsed, kasvavad juba hoopis teises maailmas ja vaimus, kes kirikus rohkem kombe pärast ja suurtel pühadel käivad." Quoted in Siirak 2010, 128.

interwar Latvia and Estonia involved identification with the church, attending services from time to time (especially during major feasts, Christmas and cemetery festivities being the most popular occasions), observing the rites of passage, and praying, but rather only in time of need. Besides that, more orderly and respectful congregation members also paid annually their membership fees and participated in the Holy Communion once (or twice) a year. Those who were more pious, or, on the contrary, irreligious, differed from the mainstream community, and there were some prejudices towards them.¹⁴³⁶ Interestingly, some people describe pious people as having higher moral standards than the rest of the people, while for others, they were unpleasant for their odd behaviour or fanaticism.

Autobiographical Texts as Sources on Individual Religiosity

There are significant similarities how the topics of faith and the church are covered by autobiographical texts. Most authors do not write about their own or their loved ones' religious beliefs, experiences or interests. The topic of religion and church is mostly given little attention, usually in passing and only in a few paragraphs, even in memoirs of several dozens of pages long. It is rare that life events are explained by God's will or using religious vocabulary. Specific themes, contexts and motives appear repeatedly in texts by authors from different backgrounds. Noteworthy, many of those concern life difficulties or life-threatening situations. If Bible reading, singing church hymns at home, and family prayers are mentioned at all, they often are related to grandfather or grandmother. People living an intense religious life are often portrayed as different from others and weird, while irreligious and anti-church views are rarely found as well. Church attendance is seldom mentioned, mostly it is related to Christmas. Of rites of passage, confirmation is mentioned the most, almost always in connection with its importance in community and family life; the religious meaning of this tradition is rarely addressed. In addition, many school memoirs mention religious education as one of the subjects, and prayers as one of the traditions of school life, while for some of the authors, religious instruction is also associated with inculcating moral principles.

These mentioned similarities generally apply to all Latvian and Estonian autobiographical literature,¹⁴³⁷ regardless of the circumstances and time of its writing.

¹⁴³⁶ Hugh McLeod's description of particularly working-class religiosity in Europe in that time seems to be, judging on the findings of this study, applicable also to rural Estonia and Latvia: "Acceptance of some form of Christian ethics, strong attachment to the rites of passage and observance of certain festivals often went hand in hand with indifference to doctrine, and disapproval of more regular churchgoing as being an objectionable form of super-piety." McLeod 2006, 23.

¹⁴³⁷ However, it should be mentioned that much more Estonian autobiographical texts have been used in this study than Latvian ones, largely due to the better availability of the former in the collections of the Estonian National Museum and the Estonian Literary Museum. In the case of Latvia, the digital archive of the Latvian Folklore Repository (*cf.* garamantas.lv) offers

As for the circumstances, it should be borne in mind that some of them were written at the instigation of the researchers and based on the questionnaires prepared by them, while others were written on the authors' own initiative. In general, the memory institutions have not paid attention to collecting autobiographical sources on religious topics from the interwar years. However, some questionnaires of the Estonian National Museum have had questions related to religious practices.¹⁴³⁸ In addition, this study also used a number of autobiographical works sent to the contests of the Estonian Life Histories Association, which had more general guidelines, but in many cases they have been worded in a way that seems to encourage writing down also reminiscences related to religion and the church, if they were important for the author.¹⁴³⁹ In other cases, however, writers have had a relatively free hand in what to write about in their autobiography. It is not always easy to identify the motives of their writing, but one common theme is often how the family, village community and school shaped the development of the writer's personality during his or her childhood and youth. However, the treatment of religious themes in texts written for various circumstances does not seem to be very different, although the analysis of a larger sample would be needed to give a more definite assessment.

Despite some minor differences, there are also similarities in covering religious and church-related issues between the autobiographical texts written in different historical and political contexts, including:

- 1) Autobiographical literature published during the Soviet era,
- 2) Texts written during the Soviet era, but not intended for publication. Some of such manuscripts were intended for a narrow circle of readers, such as the author's descendants, and others were intended for storage in memory institutions,

good opportunities for autobiographical research, but there was little material about the parishes covered in this study.

¹⁴³⁸ For example, ERM Questionnaire No. 193 "Daily Life Practices and Rules" contains a question: "Whether and to what extent God was referred to when instilling the "basic truths" of life?" („Kas ja kuivõrd viidati elu "põhitõdede" sisendamisel Jumalale?"). Questionnaire no. 194 contains the question: "Did, and in what situations did, national, religious, and political differences become evident at school?" („Kas ja millistes olukordades tulid koolis ilmsiks rahvuslikud, usulised, poliitilised erinevused?"). It is also worth mentioning that the Questionnaire no. 202, which deals with religious life in Estonia 1940–2002, contains some questions about earlier history as well. <https://www.erm.ee/et/content/kirjasaatjate-v%C3%B5rk-ja-k%C3%BCsimuslehed>, 12.08.2024.

¹⁴³⁹ In case of the competition of autobiographies "Do you remember your life story" (1989): "What has brought joy or worry in your life? What do you believe in?" ("Mis on Sulle elus rõõmu, mis muret toonud? Millesse Sa usud?", Harju Elu, 07.09.1989, p. 3.) In case of the competition of autobiographies "100 life stories of the century" (1998): "The author's childhood, home, era, milieu, political party affiliation, and some situation in the writer's life are important. Events that have determined the fate and fortune of the writer should be emphasised." ("Tähtsad on autori lapseõlv, kodu, ajastu, miljöö, erakondlik kuuluvus, mingi situatsioon kirjutaja elus. Rõhutatud peaksid olema sündmused, mis on määranud kirjutaja saatuse ja käekäigu". Sõnumileht, 14.07.1998, p. 15.)

- 3) Texts published in exile,
- 4) Texts published in freer circumstances since 1988,
- 5) Texts written since 1988 which were intended for storage in archives and museums, thus not written directly with contemporary reader in mind.

The texts published during the Soviet era are obviously the least reliable; in particular, it is conceivable that one could consciously downplay or keep silent about one's connections with the church. For instance, it seems to have applied also to the writer Harijs Gulbis, who lived near Tukums in his youth. However, the account of the church by some authors is remarkably different from the atheistic propaganda literature of the time – which seems to confirm their credibility.¹⁴⁴⁰ Regarding the texts written during the Soviet era, which were not intended for publication, the coverage of church-related topics is, at first glance, not considerably different from those written in exile or in the post-Soviet period.

In exile, the Lutheran churches played a certain role in gathering Estonian and Latvian refugees and preserving their national identity, especially in the immediate post-war period.¹⁴⁴¹ However, this does not seem to have affected significantly the depiction of the church in the memories of the interwar period.

During the period of restoration of independence of Estonia and Latvia, the Christian churches achieved possibly the peak of their influence during the 20th century. This period was characterized by the active participation of pastors and other religious leaders in social and political life,¹⁴⁴² as well as a sharp increase in the number of baptisms and confirmations. Expressing religiosity and church-friendliness publicly was now not only safe but even to some extent prestigious, because the churches had a reputation of being oppositional institutions to the Soviet regime. In the case of some of the autobiographical texts written at the time, indeed, an emphatically benevolent attitude towards the church is evident, even by people who did not consider themselves particularly religious. However, even the authors who assess the church positively, do not often claim that it played an important role in the public life or their own private life during the years of the youth (memoirs by Eduard Leppik from Halliste chapter provide a good example about it). The same also applies to the texts from somewhat later times, when the churches' ambitions to play an important role in society have not been fully fulfilled, and it seems to make no significant difference whether the newer autobiographical texts are intended for publication or not.

How to explain the similarities? On the one hand, the choice of topics and their coverage were influenced by the public discourse of the formative years of the authors, as well as by the traditions of autobiographical literature prevailing at the time of writing. As it can be seen from this study, the public influence of the church was limited in the interwar years, and its media coverage was largely

¹⁴⁴⁰ Among the authors discussed here, Kārlis Miesnieks from Jaunpiebalga should be mentioned, and also the part of memoirs of Alfrēds Indriksons from Rūjiena concerning his childhood and youth.

¹⁴⁴¹ See, for example, Veigners et al. 2009, 132–139.

¹⁴⁴² Rohtmets 2011, Pärnaste 2011.

limited to ceremonial events. Besides that, personal piety or ostentatious religious practice has never been socially prestigious during the lifetime of the writers. Obviously, it also influenced the way religious topics were covered in later autobiographies, notwithstanding the attitudes towards religion of the authors themselves. Indeed, in some cases, when religious topics are given relatively low coverage in writings intended for the general public, the authors did express their intense religiosity in more private writings (e.g. Karl Ristikivi). In other cases, the author did not deal with religious topics in their memoirs but referred to God in their poems (e.g. Ida Raudsepp).

On the other hand, the similarities in covering religious topics may result from the fact that similar lifestyles and social norms prevailed in the writers' childhood milieu. In other words, in many cases there is little talk about the church because it played genuinely a relatively insignificant role in the lives of the authors. Several of the authors state it explicitly,¹⁴⁴³ and it is probably true for at least some of the others who do not address the issue directly. And importantly, it is in line with other evidence of religious indifference and lack of practice, notably from parish reports and contemporary newspapers.

Congregational Life

During the interwar years, the transition from mass customary-based religious practice to voluntary, convictions-based forms of religion was in full swing in most of the parishes studied. It also meant the profound transformation of the congregational life.

Nevertheless, the earlier pattern of congregational life was still prevalent in the parishes studied, with Sunday services as the most important and sometimes almost the only form of collective practice. Besides that, the pastor was visiting people in remote parts of the parish, holding services, distributing Communion to the old and sick, and examining the children's religious knowledge there. These visits did not happen very often, sometimes once or twice a year. *Vööründrid/põrminderi* and schoolteachers usually served as mediators between the pastor and the village people and were often performers of baptisms and burials. However, the old forms of congregational life were already clearly in decline. Perhaps most notably, the examinations of the children were not held anymore in most

¹⁴⁴³ For example, Eha Leek from Jüri, Harri Jõgisalu from Varbla, Arvo Pilt from Vastseliina, and several others. However, perhaps most explicitly it was stated by the Estonian writer and ethnologist Ilmar Talve (1919–2007): "On Pentecost, I and many of my classmates were confirmed in Tapa church. I no longer had any firmer position on the matter of faith or church that I could call my own. I was not a churchly Christian, but I was not anti-religious either. I had no reason to refuse the confirmation, and it would have been also unthinkable, at least regarding my father and mother." („Nelipühade ajal olin koos paljude klassikaaslastega Tapa koguduses leeris. Mul polnud enam mingit kindlamat seisukohta ei usu ega kiriku küsimuses, mida ma omaks oleksin võinud nimetada. Ma polnud küll kirikukristlane, kuid mitte ka usuvastane. Mul polnud põhjust leerist keelduda ja juba isa ja ema pärast oleks see olnud mõeldamatu.“ Talve 1997, 149). Talve lived in exile since 1944, and wrote his autobiography after Estonia had already re-gained its independence.

parishes, or if they were still held (as in Jaunpiebalga and Karuse), only few children were brought by parents to be examined.

In conclusion, the failure to adapt the religious life in the congregation to the changing society probably contributed to the weakening of the ties with the church of some people because it had little attractive to offer them. But if the church had lost its central position in the local life, it was irreversible. Whatever the efforts of the congregation, in already secularized parishes it was probably nearly impossible to win over the hearts and minds of the majority of people again. At least there is no evident example known neither from Latvia nor Estonia.

Youth Work

The need to reform the congregational life to meet the requirements of the changing society was an important topic of public debate in the church. The necessity of launching work with children and youth was especially emphasized. Indeed, in almost all of the parishes which were included in this study, at least some efforts were made in that direction, usually through attempts to establish youth groups, services for youth or children, organizing Sunday schools and distributing religious literature for youth. From the cases studied, the congregation of Tukums had put the most effort into such activities. But nowhere were these attempts particularly successful. The heavy workload of pastors, the passivity of lay members of the congregation, and poor cooperation with schools were cited as reasons for failures. Importantly, there was also no common understanding about how the youth work should have been organized. Some saw it as a means to bring together religious youth, especially those with a pietist mindset; others hoped to attract mainstream youth to strengthen their ties with the church.¹⁴⁴⁴ These approaches were incompatible, and tensions between their supporters can be traced not only in the account of Biezais from Gramzda, but also in other sources. In Estonia, it led to the conflicts among the youth work leaders of the church.¹⁴⁴⁵ In general, pietist youth tended to dominate in church youth groups, and it alienated others. Organizations, such as the YMCA and YWCA, which operated mostly in towns (also in Tukums) and co-operated with the Lutheran church, were more open to secular youth. But in turn, it was seen by some pastors as not paying enough attention to faith.¹⁴⁴⁶ Also, it should be taken

¹⁴⁴⁴ The question of whether the congregation's youth group should focus only on religious life or should also engage in so-called secular activities in order to attract a larger number of young people, caused lively debates, for example, at the first youth work congress of the Latvian Lutheran Church. Svētdienas Rīts, 08.11.1925, pp. 355–356.

¹⁴⁴⁵ An open confrontation occurred in the annual all-Estonian youth gathering in Viljandi in 1935: Eesti Kirik, 29.08.1935, p. 1. See also EELKKA, kirikliku noorsootöö toimikud (1927–35, 1935–38).

¹⁴⁴⁶ The dean of Pärnu, August Grünberg, opined in his report of 1932: “Church youth work should be based on a direct biblical basis. A serious Christian spirit must be cultivated in young people, and not by indirect means. In this sense, I cannot consider the work of the local YWCA

into account that it was difficult to carry out the systematic work with children and youth in the countryside due to large distances to the church. In order to engage lay people in different parts of the parish, it would have been necessary to do it locally, but there was lack of people willing or capable to do it, especially as schoolteachers were lukewarm towards church or burdened with secular obligations (see below).

Other Activities

Besides Sunday services, Bible studies were sometimes arranged, as well as other social gatherings, lectures and performances. But they were, again, much easier to organize in bigger settlements like Rūjiena and Tukums. There is information about public libraries operating in Jūri and Karuse congregations. However, these contained probably mostly religious literature and played a marginal role in the community.

Some congregations organized secular charitable events, concerts and, in Tukums, even theatre performances. However, these were rare in rural parishes. On the other hand, if a rural pastor was ambitious and skilful, he could play an important role in the life of community as one of very few locals who had university education. Haralds Biezais seems to be such a case, and Roberts Slokenbergs had similar ambitions. But usually, pastors did not have good relations with educated locals as the latter tended to have indifferent or critical stance towards the church, or alternatively, the pastors themselves decided to limit themselves only to religious activities. Some of the latter probably were not interested in active engagement in “secular” fields of life, and some pietist pastors tended to abstain consciously (Intelmann for example).

Providing social welfare played no important part in the life of congregations, even though some congregations regularly assisted a small number of the needy. Historically, diaconal work had been accomplished largely by Baltic Germans, and the operation of the diaconal hospitals in Tukums was related to that legacy. However, social welfare had become mainly the task of communes and increasingly also the state. The topic is rarely covered in annual reports of the pastors and church newspapers. Seemingly, the clergy was content to leave that field to secular authorities.

with its masquerades, concert-balls and fancy parties to be correct. It seems to me that the YWCA has descended to the level of secular associations, and the Christian name has remained only a title. Twice a year they come to their “own” religious service. But the saddest thing is that this view blinds people and they think that everything is fine if they are in a “Christian” association.” („Kiriklik noorsootöö seisku otsesel piiblitilisele põhjal. Tuleb noortes kasvatada tõsist kristlikku vaimu, mitte aga kaudsete vahenditega. Selles mõttes ei saa ma kuidagi õigeks pidada kohaliku KNNÜ tööd tema maskeraadidega, kontsert-ballide ja sitsi-ballidega. Mulle tundub, et kristlik NNÜ on laskunud ilmalikkude ühingute tasemele ja kristlik nimi on jäänud vaid pealkirjaks. Kaks korda aastas tullakse „omale” jumalateenistusele. Kõige kurvem on aga see, et selline vaade inimesi pimestab ja nad arvavad, et on kõik korras, kui nad on „kristlikus” ühingus.” EELKKA 1-4-456, Pärnu praosti aruanne 1932.)

In the parishes covered in this study, there is virtually no information about pastoral visits to the homes of parishioners. Indeed, the parishes were usually too large to visit the congregation members systematically.

The Problem of Large Parishes

Rural Lutheran parishes in Latvia and Estonia were of very different sizes, but some were very big (over 10,000 people), being often served by only one pastor (Halliste, Vastseliina).

It is conceivable that the “low density of the church infrastructure” (Hölscher), partly resulting from the late and initially also superficial Christianization, had already made the position of the church in the Baltic countries vulnerable from the very beginning.¹⁴⁴⁷ Nicholas Hope, based on data from 1862, claims that the average number of souls in the congregations at that time was 5,838 in Livland and 6,318 in Estonia. The clergyman/parishioner ratio was there arguably “many times larger than anywhere in town and country in the new German nation-state with the exception of Berlin.”¹⁴⁴⁸ Such big parishes might well have made the church more vulnerable when it later faced the challenge of secularization.

The size of the parish could affect people’s connections to the church in several ways. First, when there were so many people in the congregation, it made the pastor’s job more difficult. This meant that he had fewer opportunities to get to know the members of his congregation well and provide pastoral care for them. Interestingly, however, there are not many complaints about that in the sources (memoirs, newspapers, clergy reports, *etc.*). Apparently, parishioners did not expect from pastors neither provision of pastoral care nor advice on religious questions, and at least the clergy of the older generation did not pay much attention to it, either.¹⁴⁴⁹ Indeed, social distance from the pastor prevented communication with him anyway, and therefore, people may have found it difficult to have a sincere and cordial relationship with him. However, some pastors complained about the heavy bureaucratic workload,¹⁴⁵⁰ which was obviously a bigger problem in congregations with large memberships. In addition, long journeys across the parish were tiresome and time-consuming for the pastors.

Another problem was that in large parishes, the church was often located far from home, which made it difficult to attend Sunday services regularly. In the memoirs from the interwar years, attending services seldom or not taking the

¹⁴⁴⁷ Lucien Hölscher supposes that it might have been one of the reasons why the ties of the people with the Protestant church were considerably weaker in the North than in the South of Germany (Hölscher 2005, 187).

¹⁴⁴⁸ Hope 1999, 500.

¹⁴⁴⁹ On the other hand, Alfrēds Skrodels from Mazsalaca claimed to have made 1100 home visits to his parishioners within the winter of 1935/36 and, based on his experiences, shared recommendations to his colleagues regarding home visits in the church’s weekly Svētdienas Rīts (06.08.1939, pp. 269–270).

¹⁴⁵⁰ Vihula 1936, 24. In the case of Estonia, the workload was further increased 3–4 times due to the state-promoted campaign to Estonianize surnames in the 1930s, as Jakob Aunver, the dean of Ida-Harju noted: EELKKA 1-4-110, Ida-Harju praosti aruanne 1936.

children there is indeed repeatedly substantiated by the fact that the church was located far away. Regular church attendance despite the long distance is, in turn, sometimes cited as an indication of extraordinary piety of either previous generations or some exceptional locals.

On the other hand, historical sources confirm that religious services were well attended in many places in the 19th century, and even the long distance to the church was not necessarily an obstacle. As Ludvigs Adamovičs notes, initially, there had been an obligation to visit the church services, but later it had become an ingrained habit and, importantly, was also a rare opportunity to mix with other parishioners.¹⁴⁵¹ However, gradually regular church attendance ceased to be a social norm, remaining attractive for particularly pious people only. According to Paavo Kortekangas, in rural Häme (Finland), the process started in the 1880s. Initially, it affected especially the winter months, when going to church was particularly uncomfortable due to the cold church buildings and the long journey there.¹⁴⁵² It can thus be well assumed that the custom of frequent church attendance may have started to decline faster in areas farther from the church, and quite possibly it could also be the case in Latvia and Estonia.

Efforts were being made to alleviate both of the aforementioned problems: large congregations were divided up and additional pastors hired, and pastors were also urged to dedicate more time to visiting remote villages. But most importantly, the willingness of lay people to organize religious life in remote parts of the parish proved now essential. Herrnhutians played a vital role in Saulepi (Varbla), Nabala and Vaida (Jūri), as well as church-friendly schoolteachers in Vastseliina. In Jaunpiebalga, the role of Herrnhutian lay people had also been vital, but as for interwar years, the Herrnhutian piety was already in decline. On the other hand, if the lay contribution to religious activities was not available, remote parts of the parish were presumably more susceptible to the weakening of the organized religion. It was largely the case in Halliste, Haljala, Rūjiena and many other parishes. However, it should be taken into account that modern times also provided some new means to take part in religious life, which somewhat alleviated the problems of large parishes. In this study, for example, using trains, cars and buses for going to the cemetery festivity in Halliste and the children's festival in Rūjiena has been referred to. Listening to religious programs on the radio is also a repeatedly mentioned option.

Notably, also two cases from Estonia in this study dealt with extraordinarily large parishes, with more than 10,000 people in each. Importantly, the case of Vastseliina shows that the church could be able to retain its relevance even in a situation where it was not possible to attend Sunday services often and also contacts with the pastor remained infrequent for many people. The importance of the Lutheran church might well have been strengthened there by the fact that the highly religious Orthodox Setus and Russians lived nearby. The tradition of ar-

¹⁴⁵¹ Adamovičs 1940, 272.

¹⁴⁵² Kortekangas 1967, 19.

ranging religious gatherings in remote villages, often by local schoolteachers, may also have contributed.

Another spectacularly large parish discussed in this study, namely Halliste, indeed stood out for the notable spread of individual secularization in the interwar years. Among the possible reasons, the heavy workload of the pastors and the inability to organize the preaching of the word of God in remote parts of the parish were mentioned. But it is not clear how important these factors were, compared to others, such as the influence of the pragmatic, profit-oriented mentality and leftist anticlericalism, which were also characteristic of the parish.

Thirdly, Rūjiena congregation in Latvia was divided into two in the 19th century, and each congregation had its own pastor. However, both congregations operated in the same church, and thus the journey to the church was still long for some parishioners. However, the problems caused by the size of the parish are rarely mentioned in the sources.

In sum, broad-based quantitative studies would be needed to find out if the size of the congregations was indeed an important factor in the loosening of people's ties with the church. Importantly, the situation in the Baltic states should be compared with that of other regions where churches were sparsely located, especially in the Nordic countries. However, based on this study, it can be concluded that people's ties with the church could have been relatively close in some congregations even regardless the extraordinary large membership and territorial extent.¹⁴⁵³

Prevalence of Rationalist and This-Worldly Religiosity

Theological questions are outside the scope of this study. However, it is worth raising the issue of how the religious views preached in the congregations might have affected the ties of the people to the church. In some other European countries, references to supernatural elements of Christianity, as well as prioritizing the issue of salvation, seem to have been still relatively widespread at that time. Brian Porter-Szűcs has argued that in the sermons of Polish Roman Catholic priests, the message of the worthlessness of the matters of this world was prevalent until the

¹⁴⁵³ At the same time, the question arises as to how the size of the parishes could have affected the church life as a whole in Latvia and Estonia. It is possible that the heavy workload of the pastor made this profession less attractive than in countries with smaller congregations. The lack of personal contacts with the pastor could also reduce the expectations towards him and the church, and as a result of that, people's relations with the congregation became more formal and superficial. The sources used in this study do not provide solid evidence for these possible effects. However, there are some interesting accounts of how the large size of the congregation made the relationship between the pastor and the congregation shallower, indeed. Notable is Uno Plank's statement that people living further away from the church did not believe the accusations raised against the pastor Ermits of Vastseliina, because they had not seen his immoral behaviour themselves. It is also noteworthy that there are few mentionings of pastors in autobiographical texts, and this could, to some extent, also be related to the fact that, due to the size of the parish, there was little contact with him. For example, Alfrēds Indriksons mentioned that because Rūjiena's church was far from home, the children were never taken there, and so he never met the pastor in his early childhood.

Second World War,¹⁴⁵⁴ which also may have led to the passivity of many priests in social and political matters.

However, in case of the pastors studied here, a relatively rationalist, this-worldly approach to religiosity was prevalent. Particularly pastors, such as Aunver, Ozols, and Slokenbergs used to refer neither to alleged God's interventions to daily life nor the issue of salvation in their public texts, but rather argued that religiosity had a positive effect on individuals and society. In some of their texts, biblical stories or metaphors were simply put to the service of nationalist ideas. Significantly, also during the debates about religious education, church representatives usually talked about its importance from the point of view of morality and other this-worldly benefits. The pietist fraction (represented by Intelmann from Varbla) that emphasized also the importance of achieving salvation, had little influence in the church.

Importantly, such prevalence of this-worldly themes in sermons and public speeches of the pastors may indicate the impact of the secularization to church itself. When people no longer believe¹⁴⁵⁵ in divine supernatural intervention in the affairs of this world or in the afterlife, the church's influence on them will also decrease. Thus, the pastors, if they wanted to maintain social relevance of the church, had to take this into account and focus on the problems of this world, especially on church's allegedly vital role in securing morality of the nation. However, focusing mostly only on "this-worldly" things, such as providing psychological support, legitimating dominant ideologies and moral concepts, and the like, the Lutheran church was not irreplaceable, but "competed with secular institutions" (Stolz), and in the case of Latvia and Estonia, had several disadvantages in comparison with the latter. The topic deserves more in-depth research in the future.

Non-Lutheran Confessions. Interconfessional Relations

Minority churches could play an important public role in some regions of Latvia and Estonia, but less so at the national level, and certainly not in the Lutheran-majority areas which are the subject of this study. Even so, their presence there could possibly influence the secularization process in several ways.

Orthodox Church in Estonia

The impact of the Orthodox church was more important in the **Estonian** case, and this study also includes chapters about the parishes which had significant Orthodox minorities (Jüri, Halliste, Varbla). However, no commune has been covered, where Orthodox constituted the majority of the population; it would deserve a separate study. As for the parishes covered here, the religiosity of the Orthodox seems not to have, in general, differed significantly from that of the

¹⁴⁵⁴ Porter 2011, 57–71.

¹⁴⁵⁵ Or even if their belief was hesitant and ambiguous, as several autobiographical texts used for this study revealed.

Lutheran majority: attitude towards the church was generally benevolent, but most people did not practice frequently. Even so, there are several ways how the presence of Orthodox minority in Estonia¹⁴⁵⁶ could possibly influence the process of secularization:

1. In some cases, the Orthodox church served as an alternative to the Lutheran church.

In Imperial Russia, the person's decision to convert to the Orthodox faith was often related to the hope of getting material benefits, but it might also be a sign of protest against the Lutheran pastors. The Orthodox church had high status as the state church, and regarding also its uneasy relations with Lutheran church due to the political background, the conversion (or threatening with it) was a meaningful gesture. Even so, relatively few people resorted to it after mass conversion movement of the 1840s. Regarding that, the spread of Orthodox faith in Southern Läänemaa in the 1880s is significant. Could it be that, for some reason, people in some parts of coastal Western Estonia had the inclination to get into conflicts with the Lutheran church? In that case, spread of free churches, the mass conversion into Orthodox faith, and later, in 1920s, uneasy relations between the clergy and parishioners in Karuse and Varbla parishes may have had similar root causes. Perhaps there are also similarities with spread of Baptism in Kurzeme, and again especially on its coast.¹⁴⁵⁷

The establishment of nation-states changed the situation. The orthodox church had lost its privileged status, and after the reorganizing of state and church relations, the religious identity of a citizen had lost much of its importance. Conversion from the Lutheran faith into Orthodox (or, less often, *vice versa*) remained rare. But, as evidence from Varbla suggests, people who were at odds with the Lutheran church used to turn to the Orthodox church for rites or other ceremonies. It can only mean that for some people, confessional identity was not particularly important, but the magical meaning of the ceremony or respect for old traditions mattered much more. It is also noteworthy that some Orthodox priests were „obliging”, offering rites not only for members of the other church but, according to some reports, even following (more or less) Lutheran traditions in performing them. This phenomenon was not necessarily common everywhere but was still noted not only by Intelmann from Varbla but also by other pastors.¹⁴⁵⁸

¹⁴⁵⁶ The following is true about the Lutheran-majority former governorates of Estland and Livland. As for the Setumaa, the situation was completely different. There are several thorough studies which deal with importance of Orthodox religiosity among local Setus and Russians, which, however, do not address directly the issue about impact of encounters with Lutheran Estonians and the secularizing Estonian state. In this study, this topic has been only briefly addressed in the chapter about Vastseliina parish.

¹⁴⁵⁷ David Martin posits: “If regions and areas with a specific religious tone attached to them are listed, they are plainly of various kinds, though often at the border with another country or pressed against the border of the sea.” (Martin 1978, 140)

¹⁴⁵⁸ Joann Randvere, the Orthodox priest of Võru, allegedly buried those whom the Lutheran pastor had declined to bury and wore vestments which were similar to the robe of Lutheran

A supporter of religious market theory would suppose that the competition from the side of Orthodox faith could have prompted Lutherans to put more effort into attracting people and offering more to the community. As seen, it did not work in that way in the case of pastor Intelmann at all. On the other hand, the existence of the Orthodox alternative to Lutheran rites could, in theory, have helped sustain religious traditions. Some people who could not baptize their children or get wed in the Lutheran church because of the strict requirements of the pastor, did not have to resort to secular registration, but could opt for the rites offered by the priest. And if Orthodox church services were more attractive, one could well visit them instead of Lutheran ones without considering conversion. It was possible because many locals (and indeed, perhaps some Orthodox priests also) seem, unlike the pastors, to have had quite a relaxed attitude towards confessional differences. However, this was not necessarily the case everywhere else in Estonia.¹⁴⁵⁹

2. Religious heterogeneity of a nation can contribute to secularization, as it is difficult to associate national(ist) ideas with a particular church.

Indeed, the existence of remarkable Orthodox minority among ethnic Estonians meant that Lutheranism could not be credibly presented as the national faith of Estonians. If Lutherans appeared to do this explicitly or implicitly, it prompted a painful reaction from the side of the Orthodox.¹⁴⁶⁰ Also, conflicts between the clergy of the churches were not frequent, but when they did occur, nationalist arguments could be easily resorted to, as in the case of the row between Kukk and Intelmann in Varbla. In other words, religion was not something that united Estonians, and therefore, it could not be easily used to construct a national identity.

But besides that, the rivalry between the churches could also undermine their ability to play an important role in public life, fostering secularization at the societal level. Notably, several Orthodox priests preferred not to have religious instruction at primary schools at all if there were any doubts that it would be Lutheran in character. Thus, they agitated against it before the 1923 referendum, in effect supporting the secularization of the school. The moderate positive correlation between the percentage of the Orthodox population in communes and voting against religious instruction shows that this factor must not be underestimated, even though, at least in the case of Varbla, rather social and political

pastors (account from 1935, EAA 1205-1-285, p. 137). In 1938 August Grünberg, the dean of Pärnu, noted that relations with other confessions were normal, but added: “Only in a couple of places there are small tensions with the priests of Apostolic Orthodox congregation. who have buried the dead of evangelical Lutherans.” („Ainult paaris kohas on väikseid pinevusi ap.-õigeusu kog. preestritega, kes matnud ev.-lut.-usulisi surnuid,” EELKKA 1-4-642, Pärnu praosti aruanne 1938).

¹⁴⁵⁹ Gustav Ränk reports on strong confessional identities of Lutherans and Orthodox in his native Saaremaa (2010 [1979], 112–113).

¹⁴⁶⁰ See History of Estonian Ecumenism, 2009, 33–38; Rimestad 2012, 210.

grievances than confessional sentiments seem to have been to blame for the miserable results.

On the other hand, the leaders of both churches understood the need to cooperate to achieve their common aims. There were joint initiatives to change the “faith paragraph” in the Constitution in 1932¹⁴⁶¹ and to introduce compulsory and confessional religious instruction under the control of the churches in 1935.¹⁴⁶² Also, the earlier tradition of consecrating public buildings by the representatives of both major confessions continued in the interwar era. It was the case even in some parishes where the Orthodox constituted a very small minority (Jüri). Thus, cooperation seems to have prevailed over rivalry,¹⁴⁶³ and the authorities encouraged such developments. The authoritarian constitution, initiated by the authoritarian leader Konstantin Päts,¹⁴⁶⁴ granted seats in the upper chamber of the parliament for the leaders of both major churches. Thus, certain preconditions existed for the “church duopoly”, which could weaken the impact of religious heterogeneity on the secularization process.

3. Small Orthodox congregations were unviable, and it undermined their religious life and ability to contribute to the public life.

In parishes with small numbers of Orthodox, their congregations were small and had no money to employ full-time priests or make other necessary investments. Therefore, services were not arranged every Sunday, and religious life suffered in general. Aruküla and especially Penuja in this study are examples of it, and the situation there was rather similar to that of small Orthodox congregations in northern Kurzeme, studied by Dzintars Ērglis.¹⁴⁶⁵ In addition, the children of the Orthodox minority attended classes of religion together with Lutheran children, and such supposedly “interconfessional religious instruction” did not support their socialization in their own church. Some Orthodox parents opted their children therefore out of classes of religion altogether. This was a major concern of the leadership of the Orthodox church, prompting attempts at interventions *via* the Ministry of Education.¹⁴⁶⁶

4. Steve Bruce has indicated that religious socialization is more difficult if parents are of different faiths.¹⁴⁶⁷ It is hard to say if this was also the case in Estonia, and this study failed to add conclusive evidence about it. Overall, the topic of interconfessional marriages was rarely dealt with in reports of pastors or media, which seems to indicate that the topic was not perceived as important. Confessional identity seems to have been often relatively weak in some parishes at least and

¹⁴⁶¹ Eesti Kirik, 08.12.1932, p. 399.

¹⁴⁶² Märt Raud mentions such a petition in *Õpetajate Leht*, 08.04.1938, p. 2.

¹⁴⁶³ History of Estonian Ecumenism 2009, 37.

¹⁴⁶⁴ Konstantin Päts himself was an Orthodox, and his brother Nikolai Päts was a prominent priest of the Orthodox church.

¹⁴⁶⁵ Ērglis 2018, Ērglis 2019.

¹⁴⁶⁶ See ERA 1108-3-221, especially pp. 23–37.

¹⁴⁶⁷ Bruce 2011, 110 and 149.

could also make, therefore, little impact on bringing up the children. On the other hand, there is some evidence that the different faiths of the couple prompted them to give up a church wedding or baptism of the children.¹⁴⁶⁸

As for the Orthodox church in **Latvia**, ethnic Latvians were a minority there, and the spread of the faith was also geographically limited among them. As this study did not deal with areas with a significant Orthodox population in Latvia, it has not added evidence about how the activities of the Orthodox church might have influenced the secularization process in Latvia. There is vague information about the favourable stance towards the 1905 revolution by the priest Kārklīņš from Rūjiena, but it appears not to have made much impact on the course of events.

Roman Catholic Church in Latvia

One of the key political problems in interwar Latvia was the integration of Latgale with the “core” (Lutheran) Latvia. The authorities were ambiguous about how to achieve this. On the one hand, favourable gestures towards the Catholic church were made (handing over St. James church of Riga in 1923, and the conclusion of the Concordate in 1922).¹⁴⁶⁹ On the other hand, there were concerns about Catholic and associated Polish influences as hindering the building of Latvian national identity and loyalty to Latvia.¹⁴⁷⁰ It prompted preferable treatment of Lutheran churches in Latgale, notably support for erecting Lutheran churches there in the Ulmanis’s years.¹⁴⁷¹ Even so, there were quite clearly no chances to convert the masses of Latgallian Latvians to Lutheran faith, which in itself limited the importance of faith issues in nation-building.

The problems of integrating Latgale influenced indirectly also Lutheran-majority areas of the state, which were covered in this study. Firstly, the presence of pro-Catholic deputies from Latgale in the parliament influenced the legislation of the whole country. But the influx of cheap labour from Latgale also led to an increase in the Catholic population in some parts of Lutheran-dominated Latvia, and as the case of Tukums shows, there was a long road to “national unity” yet. Latgallians were explicitly seen as “Others” by the local Lutheran pastor, and as a Catholic newspaper suggested, they themselves also felt like living among strangers.¹⁴⁷² Thus, deeply rooted religious identities were a significant hindrance to Latvian nation-building, and consequently, undermining them was necessary to achieve the common sense of national belonging. On the other hand, it should be noted that there appear to have been significant difficulties of integration also between Catholics of Kurzeme and newcomers from Latgale.

¹⁴⁶⁸ Eha Leek’s account in the Varbla chapter may be exceptional because she came from a family with a strong Lutheran identity.

¹⁴⁶⁹ Runce 2013, 200–209.

¹⁴⁷⁰ Even a special parliamentary commission was set up to investigate the question: Runce 2013, 213–214.

¹⁴⁷¹ Runce 2013, 305 and 307–308.

¹⁴⁷² Cf. Tēraudkalns 2009, 136.

Free Churches

In pastoral reports, free churches like Baptists, Methodists, Adventists, Salvation Army and others are usually mentioned briefly due to their active proselytising, which, however, brought almost never significant results in terms of conversions, except in Hiiumaa island and Ridala parish in western Estonia as well as at the coastal area of Kurzeme. Elsewhere, joining the free churches involved usually high costs because of bias of the mainstream society (*cf.* Rūjiena), and therefore they neither constituted serious alternative to the major churches nor played a major role in influencing secularization in individual level. However, in some pious surroundings in both Latvia and Estonia, preachers of free churches could draw large crowds. Notable is their popularity among poverty-ridden smaller urban settlements (like Rūjiena), but their impact was weak in parishes where the Herrnhutian movement was tightly related to the Lutheran church (Jūri).

Even though free churches concentrated mostly on personal piety, they also did not refrain from public activity. In Latvia, Baptists formed their own political party, which, partially at least, sought to rearrange the society according to their convictions.¹⁴⁷³ But overall, the free churches did not make any significant impact on the process of societal secularization either, as their political impact and influence on the public stances on religion remained weak. However, in regions with significant membership of Baptists, there were respected community leaders among them (*cf.* Gramzda). Even so, the free churches had nowhere equal standing with the Lutheran majority church. Their activity was much less often covered by media and their clergy were not invited to public events or perform ceremonies on festive occasions.

Church in the Public Life

Role of the Church in the Community

The structure of this study presupposes differentiation between religious and secular spheres of life. It was not especially difficult to classify the content accordingly, as contemporaries themselves made that distinction. In newspapers, no religious argumentation was used when social, political and cultural issues were discussed. Religious issues were paid more attention during major feasts (such as Christmas and Easter), when in bourgeois newspapers sermons or reflections by pastors were published in relation to these holidays. It is also worth of attention how little information about church life is provided in books of county overviews.¹⁴⁷⁴

The dominant Lutheran churches, in turn, claimed to play an important (though not leading) role in society but, highly notably, usually appealed to the common good of the nation and not to “God’s will” or other religious

¹⁴⁷³ The party had an idealistic aim “to arrange life in a way that all are satisfied”, but it also supported a ban on alcohol and stopping state subsidies to theatre and opera. Tēraudkalns 2011, 382–386.

¹⁴⁷⁴ In case of Estonia, the series „Eesti: maateaduslik, majanduslik ja ajalooline kirjeldus”. In case of Latvia, the series “Dzīve un darbs”.

arguments.¹⁴⁷⁵ However, it was important for several leading clergymen that the nations retained their formal allegiance to Christianity and that the fact, if possible, would also find acknowledgement by state legislation.¹⁴⁷⁶ Besides that, the church was reluctant to give up its role in education and personal status registration. But most of all, it was claimed that the church was indispensable as the promoter of morality in society.¹⁴⁷⁷ In reality, the church was largely not acknowledged as a moral authority in Lutheran-majority regions of Latvia and Estonia, as autobiographical texts indicate. Conceptions of morality of people were not necessarily different from those of the church, but when discussing issues related to morality, religion or church are not usually referred to. Still, some authors do emphasize the connection between morality and religiosity.¹⁴⁷⁸

However, the church was still highly appreciated as a performer of public ceremonies. First, it is especially conspicuous that the contribution of the church was sought in the case of patriotic events, including celebrations of national holidays, commemorations of wars of independence, and (more so in the case of Latvia) propaganda events of the post-1934 authoritarian regimes. Usually, the participation of the pastor is only mentioned in newspapers. However, if his speech is also briefly referred to, usually, “patriotic” and not religious motives

¹⁴⁷⁵ However, in rare cases it was indeed argued that the good life of contemporary Latvians was the outcome of the prayers of forefathers, *etc.* (Svētdienas Rīts, 30.11.1930, pp. 370–371).

¹⁴⁷⁶ For example, in the case of Latvia, the official newspaper of the church expressed disappointment about the failure to add to the Constitution a reference to God: Svētdienas Rīts 06.03.1927, p. 74–75, 13.05.1934, p. 154.

¹⁴⁷⁷ A good summary of such stances, which, as it seems, were common both in the churches of Latvia and Estonia, was made by Johan Kõpp (1874–1970): “By remaining [members of] the church and congregation, the majority of the population basically recognizes Christianity and the Christian way of thinking and submits to the influence of Christianity in one way or another. Despite the moral deficiency of many Christians, it must be considered that Christianity is and will remain a factor in nurturing our nation’s youth and the formation of the nation’s way of thinking, the underestimation of the importance of which would mean a significant loss to the nation’s spiritual and moral development and thereby an unacceptable weakening of the nation’s vitality. Of course, from here follows the obligation and responsibility of Christian churches and congregations and all supporters of the Christian worldview to be and act in such a way that Christianity can fulfil its task and play a part in shaping the destiny of the Estonian people.” („Jäädes kirikusse ja kogudusse tunnustab rahva valdav enamik põhimõtteliselt ristiusku ja kristlikku mõtteviisi ning alistub ühel või teisel viisil ristiusu mõjule. Hoolimata paljude kristlaste kõlbelisest puudulikkusest tuleb pidada kindlaks, et ristiusk on ja jääb ikkagi meie rahva noorsoo kasvatuses ja rahva mõtteviisi edaspidises kujunemises teguriks, mille tähtsuse alahindamine tähendaks tunduvalt kaotust rahva vaimlikõlbelisele arengule ja sellega rahva elujõu halvamist lubamatul kombel. Muidugi järgnevad siit kohustus ja vastutus kristlikele kirikutele ja kogudustele ning kõigile kristliku maailma-vaate pooldajatele olla ja tegutseda nõnda, et ristiusk võiks täita oma ülesannet ja osa Eesti rahva saatuse kujunemisel.” Johan Kõpp in Eesti Kool, 1935, no 2, p. 46.)

¹⁴⁷⁸ Cf. memoirs of Kisand-Saral and Pilt from Vastseliina chapter, Teedearu from Karuse and Varbla chapter, and Leja from Gramzda chapter. The notion that the church has an important role to play in society in terms of promoting morality is, however, typical only of the texts written after 1988 (at least in the small sample of them used for this study). In other cases, it is claimed only that religiosity helps to make an individual more moral.

are highlighted in it. Also, it is worth mentioning that in many cases, congregations were actively involved in erecting war memorials, initiating it in some cases, and raising money for it. Often, the monument was erected next to the church (Jüri), or a memorial plaque was installed inside it (Gramzda).

Secondly, it was customary that the representatives of major churches consecrated new public buildings, such as schoolhouses and village halls (*rahvamaja, tautas nams*). True, in Latvia the involvement of the church in these festivities provoked political controversies in some places (Tukums). Thirdly, also secular associations were interested in cooperating with the church, asking clergymen to hold services and perform religious ceremonies on festive occasions (e.g. anniversaries and consecrations of flags). Fourthly, pastors were seen as prominent local figures who were, among other things, asked to receive and host high guests.

In short, the role of the major churches in public life was now largely limited to ceremonies, and the clergy was obviously not happy about it. For some reason, more open criticism about it can be found, as it seems, from Estonian sources. Especially ambivalent were attitudes of pastors about the invitations to participate in the events of secular associations. They suspected that the leading figures of the associations did not really value the church but intended just to draw in more people to their events, as especially older people were still religious. Several pastors perceived such attitudes humiliating, and the following secular part of the event with heavy alcohol consumption, entertainment and dancing as immoral. The issue was discussed at the Conference of Theologians of Estonia in 1937. After the referent pastor Harry Nuudi had drawn several colourful examples of associated malpractices, it was decided that religious ceremonies should not be performed if their solemnity could be compromised and that detailed regulation about the issue was needed.¹⁴⁷⁹ However, total withdrawal from participation in such events (as in the case of Intelmann in Varbla) was apparently still exceptional.

¹⁴⁷⁹ „Referent tõi kujukaid näiteid selle kohta, missugustest üritustest tänapäev kutsutakse osa võtma kirikuõpetajat kui ametikandjat. Kirikuõpetajaid kutsutakse näiteks pühitsema sügisel koduõlle saaki ja sellega ühenduses olevaid muid sügisandeid, valmissaanud kinosid, teatrihooneid, tapamaju, hotell-restoraane jne. Edasi pühitsetakse üksikuid esemeid, aga ka liikuvaid objekte, nagu heeringapüügile sõitvaid laevu, uusi avatavaid sildu, mitmesuguseid lippe, tulekahju pritse. Näiteks on kutsutud referenti maale koolimajja surnute pühäl jumalateenistust pidama ja kui ta küsinud, et ega teil ometi sel päeval mingisugust pidu ei ole, siis vastatud: „Oli kavatsus küll väikest näokatte pidu teha, kuid et ilm halb on ja karta on, et rahvast vähe tuleb, siis arvasime, et vahest jumalateenistust pidades tuleb ka vanemaid inimesi kokku.” Pidi olema nimelt kaitseliidu pidu – ja sellele üritusele peaks ju ka õpetaja kaasa tundma. Tihti kutsutakse kirikuõpetajaid jumalateenistust pidama peopäeval, mille kava umbes järgmiselt on koostatud: 1. Avasõna selle ja selle seltsi esimehe poolt; 2. jumalateenistus; 3. lippude ülevõtmise ühes pühitsemistalitusel; 4. isamaa hümn; 5. lõbus koosviibimine lauas kapakaljaga ja muu naljaga; lõppeks näidend ja jalakeerutus. Mõtlemata panevad ka viimasel ajal sagedasti n. n. jõulupuud ja nende juures toimuvad vaimulikud talitused, kus sageli tants algab enne kui veel künnladki on kustunud jne.” Eesti Kirik 04.02. 1937, p. 3. Cf. e.g. Kundziņš 1968, 148–149.

On the other hand, the fact that the church was still appreciated as a performer of important ceremonies contributed probably to the continuing prestige of the pastoral office. In any case, it is noteworthy that pastoral elections were bitterly contested even in parishes where attitudes towards church and religion were pretty lukewarm (Haljala and Halliste in Estonia).

Role of Emerging “Secular Competition”

Evidence from this study about the declining social relevance of the church seems to chime well with the “secular competition” thesis by Jörg Stolz, which stresses that religious institutions create not only transcendent but also “immanent” goods, such as social capital, social welfare, counselling, etc. When secular actors start to provide the same immanent goods, they often prove better. The result is the declining importance of religious institutions in society, and ultimately also diminishing demand for “transcendent goods”. The studies have indeed shown that welfare spending and the availability of secular leisure opportunities tend to correlate with the religiosity of the people, although the direction of causality is often not clear.¹⁴⁸⁰ Besides that, historians have especially emphasized the role of voluntary associations, which have thrived since the 19th century as strong competitors of the churches in providing “immanent goods”.¹⁴⁸¹

Also, in the parishes studied here, social life was increasingly concentrated around voluntary secular associations, which reduced the role of the church in public life. It was, besides *köster* Gustav Sandberg from Haljala, observed by several other contemporaries in the parishes throughout Estonia. An account of Joosep Liiv (pastor of Rapla in Northern Estonia) is worth citing in length as it contains several plausible explanations of how rapidly changing lifestyle was undermining the position of the church in the community: “People are forced to take advantage of every moment to keep their work in order, so it is no wonder that after a hard week’s work, the body needs a rest on Sunday and the long way to church is missed. Working on Sundays, which the joint use of machines brings along, also comes into play here; working on Sundays is an ugly and condemnable phenomenon, but lately it is gaining momentum. All of these factors keep people away from church services. But besides that: the church used to be the centre of the life of the entire parish and congregation. The whole life of the parish revolved around the church. Along with going to church, other tasks were taken on. At the church, we got together with relatives and acquaintances who were far away; there were shops where goods were bought; there was a doctor, a post office, a school and other institutions. Now, the situation has changed a lot in this regard. The church and its surroundings are no longer the only centre in the parish. There are village halls in the villages, where meetings are held on Sundays and usually during religious services. Townships are emerging near railway stations and commune houses, where various necessary institutions are easier for the people to reach. And how broad social and political life has become in the

¹⁴⁸⁰ Stolz 2020, 292–293.

¹⁴⁸¹ See McLeod 2000, 176 and Nowak 1995, 185–186 on Germany.

countryside, too! All kinds of organizations and political parties, they all hold their meetings and their parties still on Sundays, even on the first holiday of the major holidays.”¹⁴⁸²

In several sources referred in this study, it is claimed that mass churchgoing (or cemetery festivities) had largely a function of a social gathering. Such claims are corroborated by memoirs from earlier times. For example, Mihkel Martna claims, writing about the second half of the 19th century in pious Mihkli, that people were motivated to go to church mostly to meet other people and to listen to public announcements. Religious needs were of secondary importance; often they were arguably better catered in Herrnhutian prayer meetings.¹⁴⁸³ No wonder, that after the emergence of voluntary associations, secular gatherings (meetings, dance parties, lectures and courses) began to compete with church services. In the beginning the progress of the associations could be hindered only due to the conservative mindset of the peasants, especially in pious surroundings where all secular things were considered sinful (as in Jüri). Besides that, it seems that also some conservative pastors attempted to prevent the spread of associational life. However, on some other occasions, pastors were actively involved in the activities of secular associations and were often even elected as their chairmen.¹⁴⁸⁴

It can be presumed that also older, conservative and (pro-)German pastors were more likely sceptical about voluntary associations, complaining that they tended to drive people away from the church. Jakob Aunver, on the other hand, was an example of a modern pastor, who established good contacts with the secular associations and urged his colleagues in the deanery to do the same. Similarly, supportive of the voluntary associations were Ozols in Jaunpiebalga and Biezais in Gramzda. However, there is no evidence that it had helped to

¹⁴⁸² „Inimesed on sunnitud iga silmapilku ära kasutama, et omi töid korras hoida, ei ole siis ime, kui raske nädala töö järele ihu pühapäeval puhkust vajab ja pikk kirikutee tegemata jääb. Siia juure tuleb veel töötegemine pühapäiviti, mida ühine masinate tarvitamine enesega kaasa toob; pühapäevane töö on küll inetu ja hukkamõistmise vääriline nähtus, aga viimasel ajal õige hoogu võtmas. Kõik see hoiab inimesi jumalateenistustest eemal. Aga veel: kirik oli enne kogu kihelkonna ja koguduseelu keskkohaks. Kiriku ümber keerles kogu kihelkonna elu. Kirikus käimisega ühes toimetati ka muid asju. Kiriku juures saadi kokku eemal olevate sugulaste ja tuttavatega; seal olid kauplused, kust kaupa osteti; seal asusid tohter, postkontor, kool ja muud asutused. Nüüd on olud selles suhtes palju muutunud. Kirik oma ümbrusega pole enam ainuke keskkohk kihelkonnas. Küladesse asuvad seltsimajad, kus pühapäiviti ja harilikult ikka jumalateenistuse ajal koosolekuid peetakse. Raudteejaamade ja vallamajade juure tekivad alevikud, kus mitmesugused tarvilised asutused rahval hõlpsamad kätte saada on. Ja kui laialiseks on kujunenud seltskondlik ja poliitiline elu ka maal! Kõiksugused organisatsioonid ja erakonnad, nad kõik peavad oma koosolekuid, oma pidusid, ja ikka pühapäiviti isegi suurte pühade esimesel pühal.” Eesti Kirik, 29.01.1925, pp. 28–29.

¹⁴⁸³ Martna 1914, 112. The author was a prominent socialist politician and publicist. Compare Gibson 1989, 159 on France in the 19th century.

¹⁴⁸⁴ Johan Kõpp remembers that a fellow pastor used to boast in the end of the Tsarist era that thanks to his active involvement there had been no secular association founded in the parish yet. Kõpp himself was actively participating in the associational life of his parish and had disagreements with most of his colleagues, who saw the spread of associations as one of the reasons for the moral decay of their flock. Kõpp 2010, 540–544.

increase the role of the church in the local community, indeed, or enliven the life of the congregation.

But of course, regarding the co-operation between associations and the church, much depended also on secular public figures. In rural settings, they were often local schoolteachers or other representatives of “local intelligentsia”, who did not always have favourable attitudes towards the church. Probably not everywhere pastors were also able to find secular choirs willing to perform in the church on festive occasions, as in Jüri and Gramzda.

On the other hand, the problems with church music serve as a good example of the effects of “secular competition” for the church. Arguably, it was hard to establish church choirs because talented singers were already engaged in secular choirs, and the work of the church choirs was irregular, as singers were interested only in rehearsing for performances at major feasts (such as Christmas and Easter).¹⁴⁸⁵ Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the choirs in Jüri and Gramzda proved unviable. Famous Baltic song festivals were already major public events at that time, and therefore, the church figures were deeply alarmed by the decision to omit church hymns from the All-Estonian festival program in 1928.¹⁴⁸⁶ In order to support religious music, the tradition of religious song festivals (*vaimulikud laulupäevad*) was initiated in several parishes and deaneries, Jüri being one of them. However, it was complained that such events were often not well organized, and their artistic standards remained low.¹⁴⁸⁷ Hardship to find organists to Gramzda and Varbla may also be referred to in this regard, while the vibrant music life of Rūjiena Northern congregation when Slokenbergs was pastor there, was rather exceptional.

In theory, the church and secular organisations could avoid competition entirely only if they did not offer any similar “goods” at all.¹⁴⁸⁸ This was not the case in the parishes studied. The activities of voluntary associations, as well as the spread of reading of secular newspapers and books among the rural population, meant that going to church inevitably lost some of its previous social importance, and other authoritative figures emerged alongside the pastor. However, the magnitude of the threat for the church depends on how attractive are the “goods” (if to use Stolz’s terminology) it offers to the people in comparison with “secular goods”.

Importantly, the threat was not about people completely turning their backs on the church. In the studied parishes, there were no preconditions for the emergence of an anti-clerical milieu, not even in Halliste and Rūjiena, where left-

¹⁴⁸⁵ Eesti Kirik, 30.04.1936, p. 3; 24.09.1936, p. 1.

¹⁴⁸⁶ For example, Jaak Järve, pastor of Laiuse, interpreted it as a sign of the power of the “enemies of the church”, Eesti Kirik, 14.06.1928, pp. 185–186. Also in Latvia, the church weekly lamented about the absence of church hymns in a song festival held in Riga in 1923: Svētdienas Rīts, 01.07.1923, pp. 4–5.

¹⁴⁸⁷ Hugo Mürk in Eesti Kirik, 22.04.1937, p. 5.

¹⁴⁸⁸ Stolz mentions the following topics: Help with problems; Security, health, success; Inner peace and harmony; Interpretation of the world, meaning; Structuring of life; Social identity, social capital (Stolz –. 2016, 27).

wing sentiments were strong. There are almost no complaints about secular associations being hostile towards the church.¹⁴⁸⁹ On the contrary, there are accounts of cooperation in many places. For example, choirs of secular societies performed at church services. Associations, in turn, were often interested in the participation of pastors in their festive events. From the church's point of view, the main problem was simply that the people's commitment to the church and religion decreased more or less due to the "secular competition". If there was a choice between going to church or a secular event, the latter was often chosen; secular literature was preferred to religious literature, and so forth.

Importantly, however, according to Stolz, "secular competition" was not a big problem before the 1960s, at least in many parts of Europe, as churches managed still to compete quite successfully with secular associations and activities there. Callum Brown has memorably written about how housewives in Britain tended to miss Sunday morning services because they had to prepare the Sunday lunch for their families. However, this did not mean they were alienated from the church, as several congregations offered services and activities at different times that suited them better.¹⁴⁹⁰ Also, evangelical mass publication magazines and popular fiction were widely read in Great Britain, reinforcing the position of religion in society, especially among women.¹⁴⁹¹ And Stolz himself confirms that the youth work of churches in Switzerland met serious problems in socialising young people into the church only in the 1960s.¹⁴⁹² Similarly, in Germany and the Nordic countries, religious life was enriched by various political and theological currents within the churches. A wide range of Christian voluntary associations offered alternatives to secular ones,¹⁴⁹³ and there were relatively conducive conditions for expressions of popular piety.

However, churches in Tsarist Estonia and Latvia were less competitive after secular alternatives emerged, and presumably, the social and cultural conservatism of Lutheran churches was largely to blame for it. Notably, self-initiative and cultural innovation in church life were not encouraged, and free religious self-expression was restricted. That hindered the development of such forms of religiosity, which were more adaptable to the conditions of a changing society, and the result was that the church had something attractive to offer only to those who valued highly tradition or were spectacularly pious.

Serious attempts to face competition from the secular side began only in the interwar years. These included the establishment of Christian voluntary associations, organising church-related youth activities and social or cultural events, as well as attempts to publish media outlets for a wider readership.

¹⁴⁸⁹ It is somewhat paradoxical as schoolteachers, frequently blamed for anti-church stances by the pastors, often played prominent roles in these associations.

¹⁴⁹⁰ Brown 2009, 133–134. As mentioned repeatedly in this study, the pastors of Estonia and Latvia merely condemned secular activities during church service as a sin and occasionally demanded the intervention of the authorities to curb these.

¹⁴⁹¹ Brown 2009, 50–57 and 78–87.

¹⁴⁹² Stolz 2016, 38–40.

¹⁴⁹³ Hölscher 1995, 278.

Ladies' Committees in Latvia were perhaps the most ambitious attempts to engage laypeople,¹⁴⁹⁴ and they operated in all four Latvian parishes that have been studied here.¹⁴⁹⁵ However, as minutes of the conferences of Ladies' Committees of Cēsis deanery demonstrated, their activities were not particularly vibrant, the membership was declining, and their contribution to the life of the congregations was largely limited to decorating the church on festive occasions, fund-raising and charity. Importantly, conservative conceptions of gender roles which are evident in the minutes, including the stances of the pastor Ozols from Jaunpiebalga, did not foster active role of women in societal matters. Yet the latter were clearly more religious part of the parishioners, and their share and role in the "core congregation" presumably increased as secularization proceeded.

Among the parishes discussed here, Rūjiena and Tukums in Latvia stood out in particular by attempts to modernise and diversify their offer for the parishioners. However, it seems likely that if the church's activities had continued unhindered, it would still have been difficult to compete with secular social and cultural institutions that were already well-established at that time. At the same time, many other clergymen were still passive or dismissive of changes, and the church seemed to have largely been still out of touch with changing culture and society.¹⁴⁹⁶

Stolz emphasises that the church also has its advantages in competition with secular organisations, such as its connection with the community and religious ideology.¹⁴⁹⁷ The latter was still important in some areas and for some people, especially in Estonia. Notably, in Nabala, as indicated, many people still approved only such activities that had a religious character. In many other places, the organisers of secular events invited the pastor to conduct religious ceremonies merely with the hidden purpose of attracting people of the older generation, who would not have come otherwise. In general, however, religious ideology appears to have lost already much of its appeal for Estonians and Latvians. Using Stolz's own example, religion was no longer important enough to people that, when choosing between singing in a church choir and a secular choir, they would necessarily have preferred the church choir.¹⁴⁹⁸

¹⁴⁹⁴ Alfrēds Skrodels, the pastor of Mazsalaca, envisaged a key role to the Ladies' Committees in the congregational life, see *Svētdienas Rīts*, 05.09.1925, pp. 283–285.

¹⁴⁹⁵ In Estonia, no Ladies' Committees were operating in the parishes studied here (except in Mõisaküla), and they seem to have been overall rare in the Lutheran congregations.

¹⁴⁹⁶ A vivid example was the book series "Rakstu Avots", published in 1932–40 by the Lutheran Church of Latvia. It contained fiction, popular science, and some other titles. However, the short and inexpensive booklets published in the series did not sell well and attracted almost no public attention outside the ecclesiastical media. According to Jāna Dreimane, the reason was that the books promoted conservative values and a dogmatic worldview, which could not appeal to the general reader of the time, and the series could, in general, not compete with secular fiction also in terms of professional standards. Considering all this, it was still an achievement that instead of the 10,000 subscribers that the initiators of the series had hoped for, there were still about 5,000 of them in 1940 (Dreimane 2024).

¹⁴⁹⁷ Stolz 2010, 263.

¹⁴⁹⁸ Stolz 2010, 263.

Thus, the competitiveness of the church also depended on how important religious practice and identity were to people, and judging by the findings of this study, these were clearly becoming less important for the younger generations. This was another important reason why the church in Estonia and Latvia seems to have been more vulnerable than, for example, churches in Great Britain, as described by Callum Brown.

But even so, the church still had a competitive advantage in providing some specific “goods” – if to keep using the terminology of Stolz. First of all, it was still valued for its association with traditions: ceremonies on festive occasions of both public and private life, the celebration of Christmas and other feasts, and especially everything related to the commemoration of the dead. However, this inevitably meant that a growing number of people had encounters with the church rarely rather than often now, presumably contributing to shallowing of the bond with the church.

Resistance to Secularization of Public Life

Only in some regions of Latvia and Estonia, widespread resistance to the secularization of public life can be identified. In this study, Jüri parish and especially the commune of Nabala was a case. There are a lot of other similar accounts from elsewhere from Northern, but especially Western Estonia and Setumaa.¹⁴⁹⁹ Not unexpectedly, those have often been written by schoolteachers, as they were at the forefront of the struggle against the “backwardness” of these communities. Among distinctive features of “backwardness” were passivity towards associational life, underestimation of the importance of education, superstition, excessive drinking, low standards of living and hygiene, lack of innovations in housing and agriculture, and the like. Importantly, sometimes it was also linked to the perceived extreme piety of the locals, which could amount to suspicion towards all things secular. Closely reminiscent of Nabala were the impressions of trainee teacher Sinaida Post from Putkaste (Martna parish, Läänemaa): “Religiosity had taken hold, and because of this, many things were seen as inappropriate in the school. Gymnastics classes were hated and were called just dancing. They even prayed for us in prayer meetings. Many parents did not allow their children to take part in [the performance of] gymnastics at the Christmas party; it was said: let everyone spend the Christmas event in truth and spirit, but not jumping and leaping. /.../ There was also a meeting of parents, where the religiosity was particularly striking; at this meeting, a new resolution was adopted regarding pupils’ books, too.”¹⁵⁰⁰ Also, Rudolf Põldmäe’s description of his folklore collection in Nissi parish, another stronghold of Herrnhutians, reveals many similarities with

¹⁴⁹⁹ See trainee reports about Petserimaa: EAA 2102-2-1115, p. 62 and 68v; EAA 2102-3-104.

¹⁵⁰⁰ „Usklikkus oli maad võtnud ja selle tõttu nähti koolis paljugi kõlbmatut. Vihati võimlemise tundi ja nimetati seda lihtsalt tantsuks. Paluti isegi palvetundidel meie eest. Paljud vanemad ei lubanud jõulupuul võimlemisest oma lapsi osa võtta, öeldi: Jõulupuul olgu igaüks tões ja vaimus, aga ärgu mitte hüpaku ega karaku”. /.../ „Oli ka üks lastevanemate koosolek, kus eriti usklikkus silmi torkas, sel koosolekul võeti ka uus korraldus õpilaste raamatute suhtes vastu.” EAA 1183-2-47, p. 29.

the accounts from pious Nabala: popularity of prayer meetings, lack of interest in education and associational life, backwardness of material culture, widespread belief in witchcraft. And also there, younger generations tended to stick to the piety and traditional life-style of their parents.¹⁵⁰¹ Similar reports are not rare from other pious localities. Indeed, the Congress of Adult Education (*vabaharidustöö kongress*) in 1935, complained that religious fanaticism (*usuhullustus*) hampered education both at school and outside it significantly both in Läänemaa and Harjumaa.¹⁵⁰²

Besides organized collective resistance, there are a lot of accounts of difficulties in dealing with children from pious families. Adalbert Puulbert noted that in the school of Vaivara-Sirgala (in Virumaa), some children of pious people read secular books secretly because, according to their parents, one should have read only the Bible. Some other children, however, were “excessively pious”, attending prayer meetings with their parents and being convinced that there was nothing else valuable in the world.¹⁵⁰³ Also, in such small towns and semi-urban settlements,¹⁵⁰⁴ where most of the population was of poor labour class origin, pious gatherings organized by free churches seem to have been popular primarily among women. Not only in Rūjiena did it cause a headache also for teachers.¹⁵⁰⁵

In general, though, there was no identifiable collective resistance to the secularization of public life in most parts of Latvia and Estonia anymore, or it was in decline (like in Nabala), which prevented religion-based conflicts between teachers and locals. Non-Lutheran Petserimaa and Latgale probably constitute exceptions to a large extent, which are worth further research.

Church and Politics

Legacy of the Past

The heritage of the Tsarist era made a considerable impact on the role of churches in interwar society. Concerns that especially the Lutheran Church could play a reactionary role in the newly founded republics probably contributed to the attempts to weaken its influence in the 1920s, including attempts to abolish religious instruction at schools and separation of the church from state in Estonia. The situation in Latvia was more complicated, notably due to the need to integrate staunchly Catholic Latgale and also regarding relations with the Holy See.

Besides that, Russian revolutions and World War I had lasting impact on the churches. These were much more profound in Latvia, where revolutionary events were more intense in 1905, the territory was much more affected by the hostilities during the First World War, a large part of the population became war refugees, and both German occupation and Bolshevik rule lasted longer.

¹⁵⁰¹ Põldmäe 2023, 79–89.

¹⁵⁰² Areng 1935, no 1-2, p. 23.

¹⁵⁰³ ERA 1830-1-240, p. 211v.

¹⁵⁰⁴ Latvian *miests*, Estonian *alev* and *alevik*.

¹⁵⁰⁵ Soosaar 2013, 63.

It meant also that pastors in Latvia met also more often hostile attitude and repressions from the side of leftist radicals. For some time, revolutionaries controlled entire towns in Latvia (including Tukums and Rūjiena), while in Estonia armed insurrection was almost absent. Also, no so-called “church-demonstrations”¹⁵⁰⁶ occurred in Estonia. In 1905, five pastors in Latvia lost their lives, and none in Estonia,¹⁵⁰⁷ while 32 were killed in Latvia and four in Estonia during the Bolshevik rule in 1918–19.¹⁵⁰⁸ This experience, as well as closely watched persecution of the church in the neighbouring Soviet Union, probably contributed to the widespread anti-leftist mood of the clergy in both countries. Perhaps it is not coincidental that Latvian pastors of Jaunpiebalga, Rūjiena, and Tukums expressed explicitly anti-leftist opinions, while in the case of Estonia, such ideological bias appears to be less frequent.

On the other hand, revolutions and the popularity of leftist parties also affected attitudes towards the church. In the interwar years, the decline of church attendance, observance of church rites, and diminishing respect towards church authority were widely seen as the legacy of revolutions (and also relaxation of mores during the war years). It prompted hopes about reversing secularization, perhaps again more so in Latvia than in Estonia. Studies about the real impact of the revolutions and the war on the secularization process would be appreciated. It is clear that statistical indicators of church life dropped abruptly after 1905,¹⁵⁰⁹ but how to interpret it? To what extent were political or ideological factors behind that, and to what extent, for example, worsening relations between the pastor and parishioners? Was the effect temporary or had it lasting implications for the identification with the church and religious socialization of the next generations? Evidence from this study hints that in some individual cases, experiences of the tumultuous times could indeed make impact on stances on the church. However, in general, complaints about ideologically or politically motivated anticlerical attitudes among the rural population were rare. It is also highly noteworthy that while the adversaries of individual pastors occasionally reminded their “reactionary” activities in the past, there seems to be no widespread opposition against them among parishioners. Even Martin Nurm, who had actively contributed to the establishment of Baltic German-led duchy in 1918 could continue his service in Haljala and was apparently still widely respected by the locals. Similarly, controversial Latvian pastor Andrievs Niedra appears to have had strong support from some circles of conservative Christians in Latvia (like in Tukums).

¹⁵⁰⁶ During “church demonstrations” (*baznīcas demonstrācijas*) revolutionaries interrupted violently church services to proclaim their political message. Churches were chosen by them simply as major gathering places for village people; no agitation against religion or church usually happened. See Bērziņš 2006, 22 and 240; Runce 2013, 103–104.

¹⁵⁰⁷ Runce 2013, 138; Altnurme, R. 2018, 224.

¹⁵⁰⁸ Runce 2013, 179; Altnurme, R. 2018, 227.

¹⁵⁰⁹ Altnurme, R. 2018, 224.

Parliamentary Period (1918–34)

In general, the political scene in both countries was highly fragmented. The two most important political forces were social democrats and agrarians; also, in rural areas of both countries, the influence of New Farmers' (*asunikud, jaunsaimnieki*) parties was on the rise. Minor loosely Lutheran-church-related parties were able to garner remarkable support only in exceptionally pious localities, such as Nabala commune in Jūri parish, and in some small towns, such as Rūjiena. One of the few strongholds of a similar Baptist-led political party in Latvia was Aizviķi commune in Gramzda.

From the point of view of the Lutheran Church, the widespread support for left-wing political forces was especially worrisome. At the beginning of the independence era, social democrats were the most popular political party in both countries, and their biggest strongholds included Halliste and Rūjiena covered in this study. Exceptionally high for rural areas was in these parishes also support for hard left (pro-communists). The clergy was concerned for the influence of left parties, as it seemed to lead into diminishing the role of the church in the society and spread of irreligion. Even worse, they were convinced that left-wingers were related to the perceived moral decline of people.¹⁵¹⁰ It prompted church-related politicians, such as Slokenbergs and Virbulis, to make failed attempts to win over working-class voters from the left.

Indeed, irreligious and anticlerical views were undoubtedly spreading among ideologically engaged socialists. As for Estonia, there was also a moderate correlation between voting for the leftist parties and against religious instruction in 1923. For instance, low support for religious instruction in Halliste seems to be related to the large impact of the leftist parties there.

Still, the obsession of churches with the socialist menace was largely exaggerated. For many ordinary people, voting for the left was compatible with being a religious and church-friendly person. There are several accounts of active congregation members who became later, during Soviet occupation, even sympathizers of communists, most notably from Halliste and Rūjiena, but also from Haljala, Gramzda, and Vastseliina.

The socialists contrasted themselves indeed publicly to the churches in both countries. Also, they promoted the secularization of society, including by means of the separation of church and state, as well as making restrictions to religious instruction at schools. However, their impact on secularization at individual level remained limited. Tellingly, while attacking the clergy, which was portrayed as pursuing self-interest and failing to embody the genuine ideals of Christianity, the leftist politicians often emphatically denied their intolerance towards religion as such. The referendum on religious instruction in Estonia and election campaigns in Tukums and Rūjiena are cases in point. Whatever their personal

¹⁵¹⁰ A good example of such conviction is a rather curious doctoral dissertation of Hugo Bernhard Rahamägi, professor of theology at the University of Tartu and bishop of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1934–39 (Rahamägi 1924, especially 263–264).

convictions, the leftist politicians evidently understood that most of their voters were still close to the faith and often also to the church.

The attitudes of non-leftist parties were usually more benevolent towards the churches. The most influential of those were agrarians (Farmers' Union in Latvia, Farmers' Assemblies in Estonia). Occasionally stressing their closeness to Christianity and (the Lutheran) church, they probably took into account the attitudes of a significant part of their electorate (relatively well-to-do farmers). Nurm from Haljala was not the only one who saw pragmatic interests behind that. Even more explicit was Ado Kõögardal, the pastor of Keila near Tallinn, in his diary: "Yesterday I held a service for the farmers in the village hall, but the service that I was compelled to conduct in a theatrical manner, seemed to me almost like a comedy: the Farmers' Assemblies have adopted external piety as a sign, but inside they are apparently not religious people. The fact that the crowd in the hall below probably did not sing along, or the orchestra was so loud that I did not hear the singing, estranged me. Let this farmers' service be by all means the last: if they want to thank God, let them come to church. The farmers' bigwigs themselves were not present when I held the service in the fire station more or less at the right time: they showed to K. Einbund, the chairman of the *Riigikogu*, the premises of Keila school building at that time!"¹⁵¹¹

The formal churchliness on the part of the Farmers' Assemblies may have been related to church-friendly attitudes among their electorate, especially farm owners of the older generation. Besides that, ideological confrontation with the socialists played a role: as socialists had a reputation for being internationalist¹⁵¹² and secular, agrarians, as their main adversaries, emphasized their national and church-friendly credentials. This aspect seems to be much more important in the case of Latvia – perhaps because ideological controversies were there more accented in party politics than in Estonia. That is also why Slokenbergs could rely on the support of agrarian politicians to his school in Rūjiena.

In sum, it turned out that the church did not prove disloyal to the newly independent republics. However, not insignificant part of the pastors was indeed not happy with the political changes, as the remarks made by von Dehn (Halliste)

¹⁵¹¹ „Põllumeestele pidasin eila Rahvamajas jumalateenistuse, kuid mulle tundus see jumalateenistus, mille olin sunnitud pidama näitlevalt, peaaegu jandina: põllumeeste kogud on endile küll võtnud märgiks välise vagaduse, kuid seespidi ei ole nad vististi mitte usuinimesed. Võõrastavalt tundus mulle asjaolu, et rahvas all saalis vist kaasa ei laulnudki, või oli orkester nii tugev, et ma laulmist ei kuulnudki. Jäägu see põllumeeste jumalateenistus küll viimaseks: kui nad tahavad Jumalat tänada, siis tulgu nad kirikusse. Põllumeeste peatuusad ise puudusid, kui ma enam-vähem õigel ajal pritsimajas jumalateenistust pidasin: nad näitasid riigikogu esimehele K. Einbundile sel ajal Keila koolimaja ruume!” Diary entry from 01.12.1930: <https://harjumaamuuseum.ee/1930-aasta-paevaraamat/> 11.06.2024. A witty comment on instrumentalization of religion by the agrarian politicians was made also by Hugo Raudsepp in his popular folk comedy „Mikumärdi”: Raudsepp 1930, 27.

¹⁵¹² This was an exaggeration. Among socialists there were also people who appreciated national consciousness and were influenced by nationalist ideology. Estonian historian and socialist politician Hans Kruus is one of those who has in his memoirs described both the development of his national consciousness and socialist convictions (Kruus 1979).

and Nurm (Haljala) indicate. The clergy had been formed in a socially conservative spirit, and radical reforms such as the expropriation of manor land were against their sense of justice. But most importantly, the changes weakened the role of the church in society and thus posed a threat to the previously relatively high social status of the clergy. No wonder it is hard to find any enthusiastic expressions of support for parliamentary democracy from the side of the Lutheran pastors.¹⁵¹³ On the contrary, many of them put their hopes on strengthening of authoritarian tendencies in society. In Estonia, the right-wing populist movement of Independence War Veterans (I WV, *vabadussõjalased*) enjoyed support among a part of the clergy.¹⁵¹⁴ Overall, the Lutheran Church was divided regarding the attitude towards I WV, but majority of the pastors seemingly hoped to exploit the situation to get advantages to the church. Only a relatively small part of them was warning against relying on state power in their hopes to strengthen the role of the church in society.¹⁵¹⁵ Following the adoption of the I WV bill in the referendum, a group of pastors put forward proposals to revise thoroughly the legislation on the relations between church and state. The proposals were approved by the Conference of Theologians in January 1934. Among others, religious instruction was to be made compulsory and put under the control of the church. Besides that, the church was to have a say in the determination of the direction of school education as a whole.¹⁵¹⁶

Authoritarian Period (1934–40)

No wonder the coups of Päts in Estonia and Ulmanis in Latvia (both in 1934) enjoyed wide support from the church. Several of the pastors (including Aunver, Nurm, Ozols, Slokenbergs, and Virbulis in this study) claimed that the political turn also contributed to the rise in religious life. Indeed, both authoritarian regimes adopted laws that both facilitated the operation of church organizations and provided symbolic acknowledgement of their role in society. The latter aspect should not be underestimated because being formally “churchly” was now related to loyalty to the state. That is why “church became fashionable”, and it was especially the case in Latvia, where the authoritarian regime had a pronouncedly anti-leftist character. If one had participated in the ceremonies and rites of the church and had baptized one’s children, it was a sign of probably not being a convinced socialist, and in a similar vein, also a letter of recommendation from a pastor could prove helpful for retaining or gaining a job. In Estonia, the (mainstream) socialists were not perceived as the main enemies of the regime; indeed, the suppressed Independence War Veterans movement had itself used vehemently

¹⁵¹³ Indicative is an excerpt from the report of Ida-Harju dean from 1930: “Report of Juuru says that people are now being served instead of God – it is not asked what God wants, but what the people want”. EELKKA 1-4-107.

¹⁵¹⁴ Saard 2009. As for Latvia, Roberts Slokenbergs’s demeaning remarks on the parliament may be understood in the same context.

¹⁵¹⁵ Jakob Aunver in *Päewaleht*, 15.02.1934, p. 2. Cf. Vihuri 2007, 71–74.

¹⁵¹⁶ EELKKA 1-1-172, p. 11v.

antisocialist rhetoric, and exactly therefore had found also sympathizers among the clergy.¹⁵¹⁷

However, the benevolence of the state was not unlimited and came with a price. The authorities were not interested in fulfilling all the demands of the church,¹⁵¹⁸ and religion had a marginal role in official ideology.¹⁵¹⁹ First of all, the authoritarian leaders expected to return favours. Especially any criticism of the regime was seen as a sign that the churches were ungrateful.¹⁵²⁰ However, in the case of Latvia, the active promotion of official nationalist ideology and contribution to the bizarre cult of personality of Ulmanis was also expected. Slokenbergs from Rūjiena is a vivid example of toadying to the regime, but perhaps not the most extreme one.¹⁵²¹ Non-conforming pastors got into disfavour.¹⁵²² In Latvia, also lukewarm attitudes towards Latvian nationalism were closely observed, especially when these were related to suspicions about pro-Germanness. The inquiry of Bahs in Rūjiena is only one example of it.¹⁵²³

¹⁵¹⁷ Saard 2009, 63–64.

¹⁵¹⁸ In the case of Estonia, a good case in point is the rejection of most of the demands made by the Conference of Theologians in January 1934. Notably, the Lutheran Church was especially interested in enforcing confessional and compulsory religious instruction and the right of the clergy to supervise the teaching of religious instruction, but did not achieve that. Discussing petition of the bishop Rahamägi on that issue, an anonymous official of the Ministry of Education noted: „The bishop’s request indirectly seeks certain authority over school life on behalf of the Lutheran clergy, which does not correspond to the cultural and educational political views of our nation.” („Piiskopi palve taotleb kaudselt teatud võimupüüet koolielus luteriusu vaimulikkude poolt, mis meie rahva kultuur- ja hariduspoliitilistele vaadetele ei vasta.”) ERA 1108-3-221, pp. 14–18.

¹⁵¹⁹ There are differing views about the importance of religion in official ideology. Valdis Tēraudkalns (Hanovs and Tēraudkalns 2013, 224) states that the regime “saw strengthening of the Church as one of its ideology’s goals”. According to Ilgvars Butulis the official ideology was based on glorifying alleged values of traditional peasant community and a (fictional) glorious past. Religion is not mentioned by him at all (15. maija Latvija 2017, 153–187).

¹⁵²⁰ The authoritarian leader Konstantin Pāts was deeply insulted that several Lutheran pastors ran during the 1938 elections against the candidates of the regime and interpreted it as a sign of the ungratefulness of the whole church. Vihuri 2007, 233–234.

¹⁵²¹ For example, pastor Jānis Kangars wrote in his history of Lutriņi congregation: “And as in ancient times God sent prophets and saviours to the nations, who, endowed with His power, did great deeds, so the Latvian nation has been sent a saviour – our ingenious Leader. Thanks to him, the Latvian nation is united and moves towards temporal and spiritual perfection in unity.” (“Un kā senos laikos Dievs sūtīja tautām praviešus un glābējus, kas apveltīti ar Viņa spēku darīja lielus darbus, tā latviešu tautai ir sūtīts glābējs — mūsu ģeniālais Vadonis. Pateicoties viņam latviešu tauta ir vienota un vienībā iet pretim laicīgai un garīgai pilnībai.” Kangars 1938, 88). Cf. Mīsāne 2016, 97–98.

¹⁵²² About repressions against Estonian pastors who had been related to the suppressed Independence War Veterans Movement, see Saard 2009, 71–79.

¹⁵²³ Henzelis, the pastor of Limbaži German congregation, had spoken in the national day service in 1936, emphasizing that Latvia had become independent and since achieved so much thanks to the mercy of God. The representative of the Department of Spiritual Affairs complained in the letter to the Lutheran archbishop Grinbergs that the pastor did not say anything at all about independence being obtained in heavy fighting, and neither did he mention any names of Latvian war heroes and statesmen. LVVA 3170-1-2338, p. 45.

On the other hand, the new church policy met only little determined opposition. Those who were compelled to pay the membership fee debts (in Estonia) or to send their children to the classes of religion against their will (in Latvia) could feel indignation, but there are no signs of mass discontent. Both authoritarian regimes were genuinely popular with the people, as autobiographical sources and, in the Estonian case, also the results of the referendum of 1935 indicate. Regarding the latter, almost unanimous support for the regime of Pääs in pious Nabala is interesting. Does it indicate that religious people were, under some circumstances, especially liable to support such regimes? Indeed, only few pastors were explicitly critical about the regimes and perceived surge in religious life at that time, referring to its superficial character and reliance on secular power.¹⁵²⁴ But the great expectations of the revival of religiosity, shared by many pastors, were not realised fully, as pastors such as Aunver and Arumäe seem to have acknowledged at the end of the interwar era.¹⁵²⁵

State and Church Relations

The establishment of independent statehood also brought along significant changes in the field of state regulation. In both countries, the separation of state and church, largely along the lines of France, was propagated by influential political forces. However, it was accomplished only in Estonia, where the laws on religious associations, registration of personal status, and burial places were adopted in 1925.¹⁵²⁶ In the case of Latvia, the situation remained ambiguous because, despite some efforts, no universal law was adopted regulating relations between the state and churches, mostly due to political disagreements. Instead of this, separate laws were enacted for particular denominations. In effect, as Inese Runce has suggested, state and church were separated *de facto*, but not *de iure*.¹⁵²⁷

The re-regulation of the relations between church and state could have impact on the secularization at least in two important ways:

1. Weakening of the Church Organization

Churches were politically relatively weak and had therefore little to offer to new elites. So, the state was initially little interested in supporting them by providing coercive means to execute the decisions of their administrative bodies. It was especially so in the case of **Estonia** (1925 Law on Religious Associations). As a result, difficulties in disciplining both clergy and regular members emerged. There were instances of indecent behaviour of pastors such as Ermits and Kõiv, reluctance to pay membership fees by regular congregation members, and non-compliance to the decisions of the central administration of the church by the

¹⁵²⁴ Detailed reports of Jaan Kiivit, pastor of Viru-Jakobi, deserve attention in that respect. See EELKKA, Viru praostkonna aruanded 1934–40, and also EELKKA 44-1-45.

¹⁵²⁵ A similar conclusion was made by Oskars Strīters in Latvia: Svētdienas Rīts, 11.06.1939, pp. 205–206.

¹⁵²⁶ See the comprehensive overview by Priit Rohtmets (2018).

¹⁵²⁷ Runce 2013, 194.

leadership of congregations. In case of conflicts with the consistory, the congregation could easily formally leave the EELC as it happened in the case of Halliste and Varbla (but also in Tõstamaa). All of this contributed, in theory, to the decline of the authority of the church and the clergy, although its impact on secularization in the long run is hard to measure.

Secondly, lack of state support prompted some – often so-called Free-synod related – congregations (Varbla) to help themselves, expelling members who failed to pay fees or follow the rites. This was a direct way to foster the alienation of seldom practising people from the church, and therefore, understandably, few congregations resorted to such measures.

As for **Latvia**, central authorities of the churches were stronger, perhaps also because right-wing political forces were more interested in strengthening them as an antidote to the influence of socialists. Notably, liberal pastors such as Biezais complained that church management was not “democratic” enough. But even so, congregations and their members were sometimes able to ignore the will of the Central Board, as was the case also in Gramzda.

During the authoritarian era, the state was in **both countries** more willing to intervene in the internal disorders of the church and shore up its authority. Ostensibly favourable attitudes of the (after all, genuinely popular) authoritarian regimes helped to increase the prestige of the major churches. On the other hand, the prospect of exacting the membership fees by state authorities in Estonia seems to have created defiance among the congregation members (as in Halliste), possibly further fostering their alienation from the church. In a similar vein, the demanding of formal allegiance to the church from the schoolteachers as a sign of loyalty to the state in Latvia, as well as the introduction of compulsory religious instruction, could also foster the deepening of anticlerical mood among some quarters of the society.

2. Introduction of Civil Registration

The secular alternative to church registration was first used by those who were consciously irreligious or anti-clerical. Later, civil registration became more common and gave fresh impetus to giving up church rites such as baptisms and church weddings, as well as indirectly confirmations (as it was a precondition to church weddings). Reasons were, as the reports of pastors and other anecdotal evidence suggest, mostly pragmatical: secular registration was cheaper and more convenient, there were no such preconditions as paying the debts of membership fees, and obviously one could also avoid embarrassing encounter with the possibly moralizing pastor. The introduction of civil registration led, in the case of Estonia at least, to a sharp drop in demand for church rites. True, one can not be sure that this trend would have continued in the future,¹⁵²⁸ but in any case the

¹⁵²⁸ According to Hugh McLeod, the introduction of civil registration in Germany in the 1870s had no direct effect on secularization. When no longer compulsory, popularity of the church rites varied in time, but only few people rejected them entirely. For example, in Berlin it

secular registration made cutting ties with the church considerably easier than before.

The Referendum on Religious Instruction in Estonia (1923)

It has been presumed that the referendum results may be interpreted as indicators of secularization.¹⁵²⁹ However, for contemporaries the voting was not only about the public role of religion and the church but also largely about the political contests between the left and the right-wing parties. Notably, even some public figures who were openly critical to the church called upon voting in favour of religious instruction for that reason. The opponents of religious instruction, in turn, were also trying to win the votes of people who were not necessarily strongly against religion or church, especially by threatening with tax hikes needed to finance religious instruction.

Indeed, parishes where the opponents of religious instruction prevailed in 1923, were not necessarily significantly more secularized than the others; importantly, after the question lost its political controversiality, almost all parents began to send their children voluntarily to the classes of religion. The annual pastoral reports, as well as autobiographical texts from Haljala, Halliste, Karuse and Varbla parishes, appear not to indicate that attitudes of the locals towards religion or church differed there significantly from the rest of the Lutheran-majority Estonia. True, Halliste was also conspicuous for its extraordinarily low religious practice indicators, including those of church attendance and participation in the Holy Communion. But even there, major church feasts still attracted large crowds, religious ceremonies were appreciated on occasion of public festivities, and internal conflicts of the congregation became major events in the life of the whole community.

However, in the localities where church and religion were still at the centre of community life, the referendum was indeed perceived first and foremost as being about the relevance of religion, prompting high turnout and almost consensual support for religious instruction. Besides almost all ethnic minority (*i.e.* Russian, Swedish, but also Setu) communes, it was true for several places of strong pietist tradition (such as Nabala) and areas where ethnic border overlapped with confessional (Vastseliina).

In sum, the referendum results help us to identify, first of all, the most less secularized Lutheran-majority communes of Estonia, which are recognizable by their near-consensual support for religious instruction. As for the rest of the country, variations of the voting results may not necessarily reflect differences in religiosity or ties with the church, but sometimes rather support levels of main political forces.

initially prompted a considerable drop of church marriages and baptisms, but later their numbers rose again. McLeod 2000, 264.

¹⁵²⁹ “Rahvahääletus suhtumist kirikusse peegeldamas.” <https://eestikirik.ee/rahvahaaletus-suhtumist-kirikusse-peegeldamas> (R. Soosaar), 07.02.2024; Gortfelder 2021a and b.

Church and Schools

Impact of Relations Between Church and Folk School Teachers

Folk school was one of the most important “secularizers” in the newly independent state, and a long-term friction between pastors and folk school teachers was a key factor in it. Mutual distrust of teachers and pastors is frequently evident in the sources, including the cases of Haljala, Varbla, Rūjiena and Tukums. There were widespread complaints in pastors’ reports that teachers of religion were not fit as they had allegedly non-orthodox religious views, they were not practising themselves or were failing to conform to the moral standards set by pastors. On the other side, teachers’ organizations had been usually explicitly either against religious instruction at school or at least pastoral supervision over it. There are also some accounts about teachers declining to teach religion.¹⁵³⁰

What caused the tensions? The representatives of the church argued that “Russian influences” were largely to be blamed. They noticed that older teachers who had obtained their education before Russification, were closer to the church, while younger teachers had prejudices towards it.¹⁵³¹ Indeed, there is evidence about the wide spread of the radical political views among the teachers’ seminaries of the late tsarist era, which included atheist and anticlerical stances.¹⁵³² However, it seems that unpleasant personal encounters were more important. Pastors used to interfere in school matters and, importantly, demanded subordination from the teachers. Märt Raud, an Estonian teacher who, later, in the inter-war years, served as an influential educational official, remembers: “Clashes were inevitable with the pastors who lived next to the schools and claimed the right to run the schools. The teacher who came from the Russian seminary did not want to be a servant of the pastor, who could be addressed [in a demeaning manner] „Thou” and called “dear Hans” and “dear Juhan”. On several occasions, the reason for the conflict was that the schoolteachers did not agree to use the kitchen door for their official visits to the pastor. The pastors, in turn, stated quite clearly what they thought of such arrogance and resistance to church authority. They even accused the schoolteachers of being impious, undermining church walls and being atheists. In the memories of all the seminarians, the main theme is the conflict with the pastors and their obedient *kõsters*.”¹⁵³³ Indeed, only regarding

¹⁵³⁰ An example about it was mentioned in the chapter about Rūjiena. In 1920, in Riga, nobody of the 16 teachers in a school wanted to teach religion. In Liepāja, a teacher allegedly even required the children to memorize a lot of material in one day in order to make the subject disgusting to them. *Svētdienas Rīts* 1920, no 11, p. 247.

¹⁵³¹ The dean of Viljandi complained in 1928 that only 1/3 of the teachers did a good job in teaching religious instruction; they were often former students of so-called Hollmann’s seminary (operated in 1873–1887). *Eesti Kirik*, 19.07.1928, p. 232. Cf. *Svētdienas Rīts* 1920, no 4, pp. 10–11.

¹⁵³² Kruus 1979, 72–73; Žukovs and Kopeloviča 1997, 135–136. The importance of the role of teacher’s seminary in the radicalization of the would-be teachers has been emphasized also in the case of Finns of Ingria (Santti 2011).

¹⁵³³ „[P]astoritega, kes elasid koolide külje all ja nõusid enestele koolide juhtimise õigust, olid kokkupõrked paratamatud. Vene seminarist tulnud õpetaja ei tahtnud olla pastori sulaseks,

that context, the impact pastor Jēkabs Ozoliņš made in Jaunpiebalga by treating folk school teachers as equals can be understood.

As for Raud, despite the eminent anticlerical stances that he maintained during his later career as an education official,¹⁵³⁴ he remained a supporter of religious education, publishing even a handbook for teachers. Other teachers could well end up with atheism if their sour relationship with pastors was combined with reading radical literature and adopting left-wing views. However, perhaps most of such teachers did not become irreligious but rather adopted dissenting views, notably becoming supporters of liberal theology (as allegedly was the case in Haljala).¹⁵³⁵ It is, however, clear that at least among organized teachers, supporters of a secular school prevailed at the beginning of the interwar period, as the content of the pedagogical magazines of teachers' unions, as well as debates held and resolutions adopted in the teachers' assemblies amply demonstrate.¹⁵³⁶ As shown above, also in Rūjiena teachers had probably rather differing views on religion, but they were united by common suspicion about the official church. Presumably, it also holds true for many other parishes in Lutheran-majority Latvia and Estonia.

On the other hand, not a small number of the teachers cooperated tightly with the church and even participated actively in the life of the congregation. Some of them continued to lead local religious gatherings and perform baptisms and burials. Jaan Reinbach-Rannap from Halliste is a good example of it, as are also several other teachers in Vastseliina and Jaunpiebalga. Some of such teachers were undoubtedly personally pious Christians. Others just accepted the old tradition that folk school teachers were expected to perform religious roles. Some did it probably willingly, and others reluctantly,¹⁵³⁷ just yielding to the pressure of parents and other locals.

keda oleks võidud sinatada ja kõnetada „armas Hans” ja „armas Juhan”. Mitmel korral oli konflikti põhjuseks, et kooliõpetajad ametlikel käikudel pastori juurde ei olnud nõus kasutama kõõgiust. Pastorid omakorda ütlesid küllalt selgesti välja, mis nad niisugusest upakusest ja kirikuvõimule vastuhakkamisest arvasid. Nad süüdistasid kooliõpetajaid lausa jumalakartmatuses, kirikumüüride õonestamises ja ateismis. Kõigi seminaristide mälestustest heliseb põhitoonina läbi vastuolu pastorite ja nende kuulekate kõstritega.” (Raud 1962, 95–96) For more similar testimonies of the teachers, see Kiirats *et al.* 1929, 202–206. For anti-clericalism among teachers in Czechia, see Petráček 2014, 40 and 107; in Germany: Hölscher 2005, 311–314; in France: McLeod 2000, 64–67.

¹⁵³⁴ He warned against any yielding to the church in educational matters to prevent undermining the non-confessional character of the school: ERA 1108-3-221, pp. 27–28 (*cf.* p. 18).

¹⁵³⁵ Dean of Viljandi claimed in 1928 that most of teachers of religion in the deanery were unfit for the office, being often supporters of the dissenting liberal pastor Theodor Tallmeister. See Eesti Kirik, 19.07.1928, p. 233.

¹⁵³⁶ It is also noteworthy that proposals of professor Peeter Põld for religious education in Christian spirit were overwhelmingly rejected by the Teachers' Congress in 1923. Instead, most of the deputies supported the introduction of religious ideas to pupils in a neutral manner. Most teachers who took the floor during the debate did not use explicitly atheist argumentation: Kasvatus, 1923, no 8, pp. 228–233; no 9 1923, pp. 257–261.

¹⁵³⁷ Cf. trainee report of Helene Kiipus from Kambja (year 1926, EAA 2102-2-1115, p. 10).

If a local teacher was indifferent or hostile towards the church and was an authoritative figure for the children (even if not for their parents), the school obviously made significant impact on secularization. Such teachers even needed not to criticize the church or mock religion in their classes, as some pastors suspected. It was enough just to ignore the church to promote secular mindset and lifestyle. Alternatively, they could even refer in a positive way to the church but attribute to it only marginal roles in the life of society.

In that respect, it was a major mistake from the side of pastors to engage in open confrontation with teachers as it happened in Rūjiena and also in some parishes of the Ida-Harju deanery. Slokenbergs from Rūjiena was able to impose his will by political means, and many other pastors would have probably done the same if possible. On the other hand, relying on force could only worsen the prejudices of teachers against the church. Presumably, it was a better idea to seek mutual understanding and co-operation with teachers on equal grounds. Aunver from Jūri, Biezais from Gramzda, and Ozols from Jaunpiebalga are examples of pastors who made conscious efforts in that regard.

School as an Agent of Secularization

However, school seems to have worked as a secularizer even in places where pastors and teachers had relatively good relations. Namely, the task of school was to socialize the new generations of Latvians and Estonians to the new world envisaged by the new elites, where nationalism and nation-state were to play a major role, but the role of the church was only of secondary importance.¹⁵³⁸ Besides children, teachers were expected to introduce this world to their parents and the whole local community, especially by means of promoting new ideas and lifestyle, and leading local associational life. Teachers seem to have willingly accepted such a role of intermediating between the elites and rural communities. Even some pious and church-friendly teachers may have internalized the secular nationalist ideas, not understanding fully their hidden implications to the role of the church in society.

Role of Religious Instruction

Intricate political fights continued throughout the independence period over the role and essence of religious instruction in public schools. Political forces (socialists, “Christian” parties and to some extent agrarians) as well as church lobby were actively involved in it. The outcome was the limited influence of the church over religious instruction. On the one hand, it presumably helped to slow down secularization on the individual level, as children got at least some religious upbringing at school, too. Indeed, as religious instruction was now not subordinated to the church, it became probably much less controversial for those parents and teachers who had initially opposed it. It is particularly visible in the case of Estonia, where the referendum on religious instruction seems to have been somewhat contributing to the settling of the issue and easing the tensions. Espe-

¹⁵³⁸ Cf. McLeod 2000, 66 on France.

cially astonishing is the fact that participation in the lessons of religion became common in the parishes of Karuse and Varbla, where the overwhelming majority had voted against it. In Latvia, the issue remained slightly more controversial, as the events in Rūjiena, the reluctance of some teachers to teach religion, and the anticlerical tone of the teachers' magazine *Mūsu Nākotne* indicate. Also, unlike in Estonia, in Latvia, religious instruction became a mandatory subject during the authoritarian era, and the Lutheran church had more say in who could teach it. But even in Latvia, the churches were denied full control of the religious instruction teaching.

On the other hand, the church was still a partner in teaching religion at schools. Many of the teachers in secondary schools and some in primary schools were Lutheran pastors (Aunver, Slokenbergs) or Orthodox priests. Clergymen used to write textbooks and prepare teachers for religious instruction; their representatives were also often involved in the debates about the future of the subject.

Even so, the church tended not to be content with religious education at schools, especially before the coups of 1934. According to the frequent accusations of pastors, classes of religion were used for discussing secular issues or even for anti-church propaganda.¹⁵³⁹ Also, several pastors often complained about poor knowledge of the confirmands and linked it to deficiencies in teaching religion. But importantly, from the side of the education authorities, the assessment of the quality of teaching was better.

Indeed, probably it was not the quality of teaching that caused the dissatisfaction of the pastors, but rather a fact that it was not taught “in the spirit of the church”. Conservative pastors complained that religion was not often taught according to their interpretations, which led them to disagreements not only with many teachers but also with more liberal colleagues. The majority of the clergy, however, seems to have expected to use religion classes at school primarily as a means to tie young people with the church. Importantly, the latter was not necessarily a priority for educational authorities or for the teachers, for whom catering to “religious feelings” or preserving traditions may have been more important. Further research is needed to find out how the interaction of different stakeholders, such as the state, political parties, churches, teachers and parents, made an impact on religious instruction at schools. But probably its implications for secularization were contradictory: while the continuation of religious instruction at school reinforced the role of religion both in the public sphere and for individuals, the limited influence of the church upon it was not favourable for the socialization of the youth to the church. True, religious instruction was still

¹⁵³⁹ Such claims were based on rumours (as the pastors often themselves admit) and are difficult to corroborate. Notably, in other sources (including reminiscences of the pupils) such claims are rare. However, as seen, newspaper articles of Rūjiena teachers' newspaper *Rūjienas Domas* contained occasionally indeed mildly anticlerical (though not antireligious) content, and Antons Ore criticized the church institution from Christian position. Similar criticism than his, had, according to the pastor Evald Saag (1912–2004), been made by his teacher of religion in Krabi primary school of Rõuge parish (Saard 2024, 21).

Christian in character, but often it was not anymore about memorizing the religious doctrines and preparing for confirmation.

Religious Socialization at Schools

Importantly, religious socialization at schools remained overall generally superficial. Lessons of religion are often briefly mentioned in autobiographical writings, but only in rather rare cases as making a profound impact on the development of personality.¹⁵⁴⁰ More often, religion is mentioned as one of the subjects among others. If there is anything special in it, it is related to the fact that the subject was abolished by Soviet authorities and was not commonly taught anymore at the time of writing of memoirs. School morning prayers are mentioned as being different from the usual school routine for their solemn character, also tempting naughty boys to make mischief.

Indeed, religion seems to have remained an isolated subject, which did not undermine the overall secular character of the school. In sources of school history for Lutheran-majority areas in Latvia and Estonia, which were used for this study, references to church and religious topics are limited to classes of religion, festive ceremonies, and sometimes problems with dealing with the children from religious families. Besides that, in the Latvian case, formal allegiance to the church was also seen as a sign of the political loyalty of teachers.

In other contexts, education is dealt with in purely secular terms; importantly, the claims of the church that religious education was necessary for moral and ethical upbringing were largely simply ignored. No wonder Estonian pastors demanded from the state not only control over religious instruction but also a say in determining the direction of school education as a whole.¹⁵⁴¹ Systematic analysis of reports of headmasters, trainee teachers and inspectors, textbooks, exam papers, curricula, and the like would be needed to corroborate these findings, and comparative studies with other countries would be especially helpful. For instance, in at least some regions of Finland, religious argumentation seems to have been still invoked in the interwar years, *e.g.*, in the case of patriotic, ethical, and even health and physical education.¹⁵⁴² Anything like that was completely lacking in sources used for this study in Latvia and Estonia.

Conclusion

In sum, it is clear that the church's social importance and authority in the eyes of the people was in decline at that time, and this was part of a process that took place across Europe. However, it is not possible to unambiguously describe the mechanism and reasons of this process. The evidence presented in this study can be used to defend various hypotheses about the causes of secularization. The fact that in autobiographical texts prayer and other religious rituals are often

¹⁵⁴⁰ Harijs Gulbis was a major exception (see chapter on Tukums).

¹⁵⁴¹ EELKKA 1-1-172, p. 11v.

¹⁵⁴² Suni 2005, especially 177–187.

associated with difficulties in life and the threat of death is compatible with the idea that religiosity is related to a lack of existential security. In a similar vein, the importance of the church in society was undoubtedly undermined by the spread of secular voluntary associations, as described by Jörg Stolz. There are also clear signs that the importance of religious practice had decreased across generations, and the perceptions of many younger people seem to fit well with David Voas's concept of "fuzzy fidelity". However, none of the theoretical explanations can be preferred over the others at the current state of research. Attempts to fit the views of different authors into a single comprehensive system would inevitably remain speculative. Also, the previously presented evidence neither confirms nor refutes the claims that the decline of religion, or at least institutional religion, is a universal process, with the result of its social marginalization.

However, it can be concluded that social and political changes in the particular historical context of the beginning of 20th century Latvia and Estonia led to the changing of the public role of the church as well as social norms about people's connection to it. The conservative church could not adapt to the situation where the class structure of the society changed, the level of education rose, and people's lifestyles and cultural tastes transformed significantly. In addition, the spread of nationalism led to the emergence of the national question also inside the church, and the emergence of independent nation-states led to the weakening of its political influence. On the other hand, there is no reason to believe that the role of the church had been equally strong always and everywhere even before modernization. Research done in other countries has shown that the influence of the church varied across different regions as well as social classes in earlier history. It could not be different in Latvia and Estonia.

However, despite the continuing weakening of the church's influence, Latvia and Estonia were undoubtedly part of "Christendom" before the Second World War. Church leaders maintained their ties with the secular elite and having at least some links to the church was still self-evident for the majority of the population. Even so, it is noteworthy that the Christian heritage of these countries was rarely publicly emphasized except by representatives of the church itself. Particularly telling is that unlike in the case of Great Britain¹⁵⁴³ and Finland,¹⁵⁴⁴ there were no direct references to Christianity or God even in the official addresses made by Latvian and Estonian statesmen and military leaders during the crisis of 1939–40.

Future research should explain what part the earlier historical legacy played in the fact that under the conditions of the atheistic regime, the ties of the people with the church were broken so easily. It seems plausible that the weakness of the dominant Lutheran church could have played a role in this, as it had made the church vulnerable to any possible external shock. However, besides the pressure of the atheist regime, the birth of the welfare state and changing gender roles

¹⁵⁴³ McLeod 2007, 31.

¹⁵⁴⁴ Meriläinen 2011, 366.

might well have played a secondary role in the secularization that accelerated sharply in the 1960s in Estonia. Perhaps it was, after all, not a coincidence that the visible disintegration of Christendom began in Estonia at about the same time as in several countries of the West.

CONCLUSION

The main findings of the study are as follows: the influence of the Lutheran Church on politics, economy, culture and other so-called secular areas of life was limited in interwar Latvia and Estonia, but the church was valued as a performer of ceremonial roles. The religious and behavioural guidelines of the church were of high authority only in some regions and for certain social groups (especially for representatives of older generations). The secularization process was faster, where the influence of Herrnhutianism and cooperation between church and school was weaker and where the church had strong secular competitors for influence in the community and engagement of the individuals.

Societal Secularization

It was not customary in the public debate to refer to God's will, to the Bible or the authority of the church. Representatives of the churches did claim authority in certain matters of social life, especially regarding moral issues. However, public opinion did not pay much attention to their positions, and the parties representing their views did not gain much support. Similarly, claims that Latvia and Estonia were Christian nations were also made almost exclusively by representatives of the church but not by other actors. However, even the pastors did not usually refer to the Bible or God's will in their public statements but rather to the wellbeing of the nation.

On the other hand, there were exceptional parishes and communes where religion continued to play an important role, strongly influencing community life, people's lifestyles and political choices. Such areas were characterized, for example, by mistrust of secular schools and voluntary associations. One of such areas was Nabala commune of Jūri parish, which was covered in this study. During the interwar period, however, secularization seems to begin taking hold even there.

The Lutheran Church, which dominated in the parishes involved in the study, made demands for the state to toughen divorce laws, make religious education a compulsory and church-supervised subject, and restrict business and entertainment on Sundays. Some pastors also made a stand on issues concerning class and family relations, gender roles and decency in cultural matters. In general, however, the church had limited ambitions in terms of impact on political decision-making, but even those were not fully satisfied. Particularly notable is that despite the church's considerable efforts, its ability to exercise control over religious education in public schools remained limited.

The most important social role of the major churches was participation in public ceremonies, especially in connection with patriotic events and commemoration of the dead, opening public buildings, celebrating anniversaries, and the like. Also, the office of the pastor still had a high status, and thus he often acted as a representative of the local community, for example, when receiving dignitaries.

The church was suited to perform such ceremonial tasks because of its associations with tradition but also because of the authority it still possessed, especially for the older generations. In addition, the church's visibility in public life had a political meaning. Since, especially in Latvia, leftism was associated with opposition to the church, formal affiliation to the church became a sign of support for bourgeois political parties and, after the 1934 *coup d'état*, loyalty to the authoritarian regime.

Individual Secularization

Pastors' expectations of parishioners varied, but in general, it was presumed that people should have identified themselves as Christians and acknowledged the church to be the authentic representative of Christianity, as well as practised the religion at least to some extent. It was considered especially important for a Lutheran to baptize infants soon after birth and conclude the marriage in the church. In addition to general obedience to the law, parishioners were especially called to the observance of Sunday, moderation in entertainment and alcohol consumption, avoidance of premarital and extramarital sexual relations as well as divorces. Besides that, many pastors considered supporting left-wing parties to be incompatible with Christianity. Some pastors, especially those with a Pietist background, made higher demands on their parishioners.

Some people continued to consider the church's behavioural guidelines authoritative, but these were no longer generally accepted social norms. The authority of the church was declining mainly through the change of generations, but regional differences were also important. Especially, it can be assumed that the municipalities where the support for religious education was almost unanimous in the Estonian referendum of 1923 were still largely untouched by secularization.

In general, however, pastors, as well as other contemporaries, noted that the ties to the church were becoming more formal and superficial for the majority of the people. Rates of religious practice were dropping. Instead of frequent church attendance, it became common to only attend services during major holidays. The custom of participating in communion at least once a year was in decline. Abandonment of ecclesiastical rites of passage for the sake of principle was still rare, but their postponement for pragmatic, especially economic reasons became significantly more common. Some earlier traditions were disappearing, notably religious practices in the family circle, reading of the Bible, and bringing children to the pastor to test their religious knowledge. Besides that, even the explicit agitation of some pastors failed to reduce the support of left-wing parties among their parishioners.

However, despite the significant weakening of the ties with the church and the diminishing role of religion in both public life and private life of individuals, identification with Christianity and the Lutheran Church was still customary everywhere in the Lutheran-majority rural areas of Latvia and Estonia, while explicit irreligion and complete severance of ties with the church remained exceptional.

Impact Factors of Secularization

As for factors contributing to the secularization at the societal and individual levels, the findings are inconclusive, and further research is needed. The most important conclusions are the following:

1. The relationship between secularization and modernization is not straightforward. Among the socio-economically and culturally “developed” parishes, one can find those where people’s ties to the church were relatively strong, as well as those where they were weak. The same is true for “under-developed” parishes.
2. There are no clear indications that the vibrancy of religious life in Lutheran congregations, the personal popularity of the pastor, and active participation in the life of the community on his behalf could significantly boost the position of the church in public life or the religiosity of parishioners. In a similar vein, the unpopularity of the pastor, internal conflicts, vacancy of the pastoral seat, and the like could have hampered church life in the short run but did not necessarily have a long-term significant impact on the secularization process.
3. In congregations with German pastors, some people justified their opposition to them with nationalist arguments. But for the majority of ordinary members of the congregation, the nationality of the pastor was not necessarily an issue. Thus, the national question probably had only an indirect impact on secularization, hindering the congregation’s adaptation to the changing political and social environment.
4. Some clear, though occasional, evidence can be found from interwar Latvia and Estonia in support of secular competition and secular transition theses.
5. One of the factors contributing to secularization could have been the fact that many Lutheran parishes in Latvia and Estonia were large in terms of their territorial extent and congregation membership. On the other hand, there are examples of large congregations where the influence of the church in the community and in the lives of individuals was still remarkably strong.
6. An important factor that strengthened the ties of local residents with the church was the strong tradition of popular piety, which was often related to Herrnhutian heritage.
7. For ordinary parishioners, confessional identity was of little importance in the studied parishes, so the influence of the Orthodox Church or the free churches did not have a significant impact on the secularization process there. However, in the case of mixed marriages, the ecclesiastical rites were sometimes abandoned in favour of secular registration.
8. As for social and political confrontations, support for the left was on some occasions related to grievances against pastors or church leadership and, in Estonia, to voting against religious instruction in the referendum of 1923. However, only a few rural supporters of the left adopted ideological anti-clericalism or irreligion, while a significant number of them remained relatively close to the church.

9. Contradictions between pastors and folk school teachers were common in Latvia and Estonia at that time. In schools where teachers were indifferent or hostile to the church, the pastors were no longer able to have a say in pupils' religious upbringing. This was presumably a major obstacle to the socialization of the youth into the congregation. On the other hand, in some locations, there were teachers who willingly cooperated with the church and continued to perform traditional religious duties, such as leading religious meetings and baptizing children. Some of such teachers were also personally deeply religious. All this may also have contributed to the formation of church-friendly attitudes among their pupils.
10. The secularization process proceeded relatively similarly in Lutheran-majority parts of Estonia and Latvia. However, in Latvia, religious issues were somewhat more important in public life. Firstly, the importance of religion and the influence of the Roman Catholic church in Latgale impacted politics, society, and daily life in the whole state. Secondly, religious issues were politically more relevant in Latvia than in Estonia, especially regarding the context of confrontation between bourgeoisie and socialist parties.

The findings of this study are tentative, as they rely on fragmented evidence and only a limited number of case studies. More similar studies are needed to make firmer conclusions on why Latvia and especially Estonia are among the most secularized countries in Europe nowadays and what role the legacy of the inter-war period played in it.

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SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Sekulariseerumisprotsessist Eesti ja Läti valdades (1920–40). Juhtumianalüüsid luterlastest enamusega kihelkondadest

Läti ja Eesti kuuluvad tänapäeval kõige sekulaarsemate riikide sekka Euroopas. Eriti madalad on nii religiooni individuaalse praktiseerimise kui endi mingi usutunnistusega seostamise näitajad Eestis. Ehkki selle olukorra kujunemine on kahtlemata seotud kommunistliku režiimi pärandiga, pole kirikute ühiskondliku mõjuvõime ega üksikisikute religioossuse vähenemist sellisel moel toimunud enamikus teistes kunagise sotsialismileeri riikides.

Järelikult on Läti ja iseäranis Eesti erandliku sekulaarsuse juured varasemas ajaloos, eeldatavalt tsaariaja lõpus ja omariikluse esimestel kümnenditel, mis olid otsustavad eesti ja läti rahvusidentiteedi kujunemisel. Väitekirja eesmärgiks on välja selgitada, kuidas sekulaarsed olid valitud Eesti ja Läti kihelkonnad maailmasõdadevahelisel esimese omariikluse perioodil ning millised tegurid aitasid tollal kaasa sekulariseerumisprotsessile.

Sissejuhatus

Tänapäeval mõistetakse sekulariseerumist üldiselt protsessina, mille käigus religioon kaotab oma tähtsust ühiskonna toimimise seisukohast. Sotsiaalteadlaste ja ajaloolaste seas puudub üksmeel, kas saab rääkida selle protsessi asetleidmisest tänapäeva maailmas ja isegi Euroopas. Segadust lisab asjaolu, et sekulariseerumist defineeritakse erinevalt.

Siinses uurimuses mõistetakse sekulariseerumist Karel Dobbelaere'i raamistiku järgi kolmetasandiliselt:

1. Ühiskondlik sekulariseerimine kui protsess, mille käigus vanad kõikehõlmavad ja transtsendentsed religioossed süsteemid muutuvad kaasaegses ühiskonnas alamsüsteemideks teiste alamsüsteemide kõrval. Selle protsessi tulemusena kaotavad religioossed institutsioonid kontrolli poliitika, majanduse, perekonna, hariduse, teaduse, kunsti, õiguse ja teiste nn ilmalike eluvaldkondade üle. Selle „diferentseerumise” käivitas Dobbelaere'i järgi moderniseerumine, mis tekitab vajaduse „funktsionaalse ratsionaalsuse” järele.
2. Organisatsiooniline sekulariseerimine, mis seisneb religiooni kohanemises sekulariseerunud ühiskonna uute tingimustega.
3. Individuaalne sekulariseerumine, mis tähendab, et religioossed võimukandjad kaotavad kontrolli indiviidide uskumuste, tavade ja moraali põhimõtete üle.

Sellele raamistikule tuginedes analüüsitakse uurimuses ühiskondliku ja individuaalse sekulariseerumisprotsessi kajastumist Eesti ja Läti maakihelkondade ajaloos allikates. Kõikides valitud kihelkondades oli valdav osa elanikkonnast luterlased. Piirkondades, kus enamus olid kas õigeusklikud või katoliiklased, erinesid oma ilmelt luterlikest, mistõttu neid on otstarbekas uurida eraldi.

Väitekirjas otsitakse vastust järgmistele uurimisküsimustele:

1. Mil määral olid „ilmalikud” eluvaldkonnad, nagu poliitika, majandus, kultuur, haridus, Eesti ja Läti luterliku enamusega maapiirkondades muutunud usu- listest mõjudest ja kiriku kontrollist sõltumatuks?
2. Mil määral oli kirik Eesti ja Läti luterliku enamusega maapiirkondades kaotanud oma autoriteedi üksikisikute silmis, s.t kuivõrd oli loobunud järgimast kiriku usulisi ja käitumisjuhiseid?
3. Mil määral on Balti kirikuloo historiograafia ja sekulariseerumisteooriate seisukohad kasutatavad sekulariseerumisprotsessi tõlgendamisel Eesti ja Läti luterliku enamusega maapiirkondades?

Eesti ja Läti juhtumianalüüsid

Eesti puhul on varasemas kirjanduses sekulariseerumisprotsessi analüüsimiseks maailmasõdadevahelisel perioodil kasutatud 1923. aasta usuõpetuse rahvahääletuse tulemusi. Seetõttu eelneb Eesti juhtumianalüüsidele sissejuhatav alapeatükk, mille eesmärgiks on välja selgitada, mil määral on rahvahääletuse tulemuste kasutamine sekulariseerumise mõõdikutena õigustatud.

Rahvahääletuse eel toimus elav kampaania ajakirjanduses, kusjuures vasakpoolsed ajalehed kutsusid üles vastu, parempoolsed aga poolt hääletama. Seejuures ei käsitletud rahvahääletust sugugi ainult plebistsiidina usu ja kiriku poolt või vastu, vaid sageli oli esiplaanil pigem vasak- ja paremerakondade vastasseisu motiiv. Poolt hääletama kutsunud artiklites esines mõnikord tugevaid kiriku- kriitilisi motiive, usuõpetuse vastased aga hoidusid enamasti ühemõttelistest usu- vastastest väljaütlemistest. Suhtumine usku ja kirikusse oli seega ainult üks olu- lisi tegureid valimistulemuse kujunemisel, mistõttu saab neid vaid mõõndustega kasutada sekulariseerumise mõõdikutena.

Uuritavate Eesti kihelkondade väljavalimisel olid esmatahtsaks kriteeriumiks usuõpetuse rahvahääletuse tulemused.

Jüri kihelkonnas oli kirik säilitanud veel olulise positsiooni, kusjuures ise- äranis kõrge toetuse poolest usuõpetusele eristub tugeva vennastekoguduse traditsiooniga Nabala vald. Kohati veel iseseisvusaja algulgi võis seal kohata umbusku ilmaliku kultuuri suhtes, mis väljendus näiteks lastevanemate nõud- mises, et laste jõulupidu peab olema ainult usulise sisuga. Ent sekulariseerumine näib ka seal olevat hakanud kanda kinnitama koolide ja ilmaliku seltsielu kaudu.

Kõrge toetus usuõpetusele **Vastseliina** kihelkonnas tulenes ilmselt samuti sellest, et kirik oli kohaliku kogukonna elus säilitanud olulise rolli. Kirikusõbra- likust, kuid mõõdukalt usku praktiseerivast enamusest eristus intensiivset usuelu elav vähemus. Kiriku ja kohaliku kogukonna suhete hoidmisel mängisid olulist rolli mitmed kirikusõbralikud kooliõpetajad. Kõrge toetus usuõpetusele oli oma- ne ka teistele kihelkondadele, mis asuvad etnilis-konfessionaalsel piirialal setude ja venelastega. Ilmselt ajendasid kontaktid nendega omaenda usku ja kirikut rohkem väärtustama ka eestlasi, ehkki pole selge, mis viisil see toimus.

Halliste kihelkond paistis silma nii madala toetuse poolest usuõpetusele rahvahääletusel kui ka erakordse loidusega kirikuelus osalemisel. Oma osa

mängisid selles sotsiaalsed vastuolud, sest piirkond paistis silma Eesti mõistes erandliku majandusliku jõukuse, aga ka varandusliku ebavõrdsuse poolest. Mitte kõik kohalikud vasakpoolsed ei näi aga olevat olnud põhimõttelised kirikuvastased, vaid olid valmis suhtumist muutma, kui nendega koguduseelus arvestati Kurioosne on seejuures nõukogude võimu pooldanute katse neile sümpaatiat avaldanud vaimulik 1940. aasta juunipöörde järel vallavanemaks määrata. Üleüldse ei saa Hallistet pidada ühemõtteliselt näiteks sekulariseerunud kihelkonna kohta, sest vaimulikud talitused kogukonna tähtsündmuste puhul olid jätkuvalt populaarsed, surnuaiapühad ja muud kirikupühad tõid kokku palju rahvast ning koguduse sisepinged äratasid 1930. aastatel kohalikus elus suurt vastukaja.

Karuse ja Varbla kihelkondade näol oli tegemist mahajäänud piirkonnaga, kus iseseisvusaja algul olid populaarsed vasakpoolsed parteid. Erakordselt madal poolehoid usuõpetusele seondub seal ebapopulaarsete pastoritega, keda kohalikud seostasid rikka eliidi toetamisega. Pärast kirikuõpetajate vahetumist pole allikates erilisi märke kirikuvastaste meeleolude püsimisest ning usuõpetustki õppis seal suur enamus lastest. Kirikuskäimine oli seal küll üsna vähene ning koguduseelus andsid tooni pietistliku vaimsusega koguduseliikmed. Sekulariseerumise uurimise poolest on huvipakkuv Varbla pastori Kurt Intelmanni keeldumine koostööst ilmalike seltsidega ning samuti tema vastasseis ja omalaadne konkurents kohaliku õigeusu koguduse preestritega.

Haljala kihelkond oli Põhja-Eestis erandlik vähese toetuse poolest usuõpetusele. See on ilmselt seotud rahvusliku liikumise aktiivsusega Vihula valla talupoegade seas juba 19. sajandi lõpust alates, mis põhjustas pingeid kohalike kirikuõpetajatega, ent võib-olla ka rannakultuuri eripäradega.

Läti juhtumianalüüsid on valitud selle järgi, et esindatud oleksid maa eri piirkonnad ning valitud kihelkondade ajaloo kohta oleks piisavalt allikmaterjali (Läti kirikuloo uurimist komplitseerib asjaolu, et sealse luteri kiriku arhiiv põles 1944. aastal maatas).

Gramzda kihelkond paistis silma ühelt poolt kirikusõbralikkusega, ent teisalt ka konfliktide poolest isepäiste ilmalike liidrite ja pastorite vahel. Nappide allikate põhjal võib otsustada, et enamusele kohalikest ei olnud kiriklikkus vastuolus ilmaliku kultuuriga. Nende, sealhulgas eriti usu ja läti isamaalisuse sidumise püüdlustega paistis silma noor liberaalne pastor Haralds Biezais, kes 1930. aastatel kogudust teenis. Seejuures kohtas ta teatavat vastuseisu pietistlike ringkondade poolt, kes traditsioonilise usu elu keskse elukorralduse hajumises nägid allakäigu märki. Kihelkonna usu elu tugevdas vabakoguduste, eriti baptistide suhteliselt elav tegevus.

Jaunpiebalga kihelkonna elule avaldas tugevat mõju vennastekoguduse pärand, mis ilmselt aitas kaasa sellele, et allikates ei ole peaaegu üldse andmeid antiklerikaalsete meeleolude kohta. Kiriklike talituste näitajad püsisid stabiilsetena, ent mõned teated lubavad arvata, et niihästi osavõtt jumalateenistustest kui vennastekoguduse mõju oli juba languses. Kiriku mõju kohalikus elus aitasid hoida koguduse sidemed kohalike seltside ja koolidega. Pastor Jānis Ozols püüdis kiriku positsiooni kohalikus elus hoida ühelt poolt toetusega vennastekogudusele,

teisalt aga taotlusega vähendada ametist tulenevat sotsiaalset distantsi koguduse-liikmetega ning siduda ristiusku sekulaarsete ideedega nagu rahvuslus ja anti-marksim.

Rüjiena kihelkonnale olid, nagu sellest põhjas asunud Hallistelegi, omased poliitilised pinged vasak- ja parempoolsete poliitiliste jõudude vahel. Selle elus andis 1930. aastatel tooni energiline, ent vastuoluline kirikuõpetaja Roberts Slokenbergs. Ta elavdas kohaliku koguduse elu ning rajas koguduse juurde algkooli, et pakkuda konkurentsi kohalikele väidetavalt vasakpoolsetele ja kirikuvaenulikele avalikele algkoolidele. Hoolimata suurest isiklikust populaarsusest ja poliitilisest toetusest väljastpoolt ei suutnud ta märkimisväärselt vähendada poolehoidu vasakpoolsetele poliitilistele jõududele. Samuti pole märke religioossuse tõusust kihelkonnas. Õieti esindas ka Slokenbergs ise pigem katseid ühendada läti rahvuslust välise kiriklikkusega kui tavapäraselt arusaama kristlikust vagadusest. Laialt levisid jutud tema ebamoraalsest, vaimulikule ebakohasest käitumisest. Ka tema kooli õpilaste kirjandid ning hilisemad mälestused ei kinnita, et usulisele kasvatusel Slokenbergsi asutatud koolis oleks tavalisest suuremat rõhku pandud.

Tukumsi kihelkonnale olid samuti omased pinged kodanlike ja sotsialistlike parteide vahel, eriti selle keskuseks olevas linnas. Neisse kisti ka kirik, muu hulgas seeläbi, et tüliõunaks kujunes küsimus, kas uue koolimaja avamisel tuleks korraldada ka vaimulik talitus või mitte. Kohaliku luteri koguduse elu oli aktiivne – korraldati rohkesti usulisi, ent ka ilmalikke kultuuriüritusi, abivaimulikud tegid laste-, noorte- ja hoolekandetööd jne. Pastor Alberts Virbulis avaldas lootust, et vasakpoolsete mahasurumine Ulmanise režiimi poolt aitab kiriku elu elavdada. Sellest pole siiski kindlaid tõendeid, nagu ka sellest, et aktiivne koguduseelu oleks suutnud inimesi rohkem kirikuga siduda.

Uurimistöö tulemused

1. Usul ja kirikul oli luterliku enamusega maapiirkondade igapäevaelus Eestis ja Lätis suhteliselt väike tähtsus. Avalikes poliitilistes, majanduslikes, kultuurilistes või haridusalastes aruteludes ei viidatud Jumalale peaaegu üldse ning kiriku seisukohtadele neis küsimustes ei pööratud erilist tähelepanu. Luteri ja mõningal määral õigeusu vaimulikud olid aga jätkuvalt olulised avaliku elu tegelased. Vaimulikud talitused olid kogukonnaelus pidulikel puhkudel tavaliselt kõrgelt hinnatud, eriti isamaaliste sündmuste puhul. (Samas on Lätist ka tõendeid vasakpoolsete vastuseisu kohta sellele.) Luteri kirik oli poliitiliselt nõrk, kuigi autoritaarsel ajastul tema staatus mõnevõrra tõusis. Kirik suutis kindlustada usuõpetuse jätkumise riigikoolides, kuid kiriku mõju selle õpetamisele jäi piiratuks. Mõnes kihelkonnas osales kirik sotsiaaltöös ja kultuurielu korraldamises, kuid tema roll ilmalike ühenduste ja riigivõimudega võrreldes jäi tagasihoidlikuks. Seevastu mõnedes erandlikes kihelkondades, mis asusid enamasti Põhja-Eestis, mängis religioon kogukonnaelus endiselt olulist rolli. Sekulariseerumine oli aga sealgi hariduse, seltsielu ja massimeedia kaudu levima hakanud.

2. Individuaalne usupraktika erines maakihelkondade lõikes oluliselt. Ent valdav enamus inimesi pidas kõikjal end kristlasteks ja jäi kiriku liikmeteks, järgis selle riitusi ja käis aeg-ajalt jumalateenistustel, eriti suurte pühade ajal. Institutsionaalse kiriku ja pastorite autoriteet oli aga languses ning nende usulised ja moraalsed juhised jäeti suures osas tähelepanuta, kui need olid vastuolus inimeste pragmaatiliste huvidega. Märkimisväärsed näited on pühapäeviti töötamine, kiriklike talituste arvu vähenemine pärast ilmaliku perekonnaseisu registreerimise kehtestamist ning viivitamine laste ristimisega. Mitmes kihelkonnas on alates 20. sajandi algusest täheldatav usu praktiseerimise oluline ja suhteliselt pidev langus. See on suure tõenäosusega seotud põlvkondade vahetumise ja religioosse sotsialiseerumise puudujääkidega. Kuid sidemete täielik katkestamine kirikuga jäi maapiirkondades harvaks, kuigi avalikkuse suhtumine sellesse muutus üha sallivamaks.

3. Sekulariseerumine oli aeglasem herrnhuutliku pärandiga kihelkondades ning ka seal, kus kiriku ja kooli vahelised suhted olid head. Pastori rahvusel oli ilmselt vaid kaudne mõju, kuivõrd see takistas koguduse kohanemist muutuva poliitilise ja sotsiaalse keskkonnaga. Sõdadevahelisest Lätist ja Eestist võib leida ka tõendeid sekulariseerumise teoreetikute esitatud ilmaliku konkurentsi ja ilmaliku ülemineku teeside toetuseks.

Mis puudutab sotsiaalseid ja poliitilisi konflikte, siis vasakpoolsete toetamine oli seotud usuõpetuse vastu hääletamisega Eesti 1923. aasta rahvahääletusel ning mõnel korral ka vastuseisuga pastorile või kirikule kui organisatsioonile. Maapiirkondades viis see siiski ainult üksikjuhtudel antiklerikalismi või religioonist loobumiseni. Märkimisväärne osa vasakpoolsete toetajaist lihtrahva seas olid aga ühtlasi religioossed ja kirikusõbralikud inimesed.

Vähemusundite (õigeusklikud, baptistid) märgataval esindatusel kihelkonnas võis erinevates kontekstides olla nii sekulariseerumisprotsessi takistav kui soodustav mõju, kuid kindlaid järeldusi selle kohta teha ei saa.

Puuduvad selged viited sellele, et usuelu elavus luterlikes kogudustes, pastori isiklik populaarsus ja temapoolne aktiivne osalemine kogukonna elus võis oluliselt tõsta kiriku positsiooni avalikus elus. Sarnaselt võisid pastori ebapopulaarsus, koguduse sisekonfliktid, pastorikoha pikaajaline vakantsus ja muu taoline lühiajaliselt takistada kirikuelu, kuid neil ei pruukinud olla pikaajalist olulist mõju sekulariseerumisprotsessile.

Ilmalikustumise protsess kulges luterliku enamusega Eesti ja Läti piirkondades suhteliselt sarnaselt. Kuid Lätis olid usuküsimused avalikus elus mõnevõrra olulisemad. Esiteks mõjutas religiooni tähtsus ja roomakatoliku kiriku mõju Latgales poliitikat, ühiskonda ja igapäevaelu kogu riigis. Teiseks olid religioossed küsimused Läti poliitilises elus aktuaalsemad kui Eestis kodanlike ja sotsialistlike parteide vastasseisu kontekstis.

APPENDIX

Statistics of Church Rites in Selected Congregations

1. Estonia

1. Data for Estonia is derived in most cases from annual reports of deaneries in EELKKA (in case of Vastseliina, from EAA 1205-1-130.137).
2. Some data is derived from song sheets of the New Year's Eve services of respective congregations. The sheets are from the collections of Library of University of Tartu, copies are held by the author.
Halliste: data from 1933 and 1934.
Karuse and Varbla: all data from 1925–35.
Vastseliina: data from 1931 and 1932.

1.1. Births

Statistics of births can be interpreted as proxy for baptisms; probably pastors did not register the birth of children, who had not been baptized. However, several children were baptized later, after their birth had already been registered civilly, sometimes several years later. Apparently, some pastors registered these baptisms as “births”, while some possibly not.

	Haljala	Halliste	Jüri	Karuse	Varbla	Vastseliina
1921				40	61	
1922		172	105	46	53	
1923		181				
1924			131			300
1925					64	
1926						
1927						203
1928						
1929						179
1930	146	95	76		59	182
1931	124		68	16	51	178
1932	111		60	27	39	203
1933	152	73		28	36	195
1934	114	54		38	35	187
1935	111		64	37		183
1936	133		75	27	44	152
1937		133	52	36	35	155
1938	89	112	62	31		
1939	72	107	68	34	41	
1940	89		44	28	42	

1.2. Confirmations

	Haljala	Halliste	Jüri	Karuse	Varbla	Vastseliina
1921				33	63	
1922		146	44	34	43	
1923		113				
1924			79			193
1925					58	
1926						
1927						156
1928					30	
1929					24	145
1930		84	68	47	33	160
1931			79	28	24	167
1932			55	31	31	148
1933	89	79	50	26	25	
1934	92	31		38	37	186
1935	74		65	19		139
1936	75		36	13	24	102
1937		72	47	24	35	115
1938	87	96	61			
1939	84	65	39	31	26	111
1940	122		98	26	77	

1.3. Church Marriages

	Haljala	Halliste	Jüri	Karuse	Varbla	Vastseliina
1921		102				
1922		88	42	46	53	
1923		90				
1924			28			99
1925					31	
1926						
1927						79
1928					13	
1929					4	78
1930		53	21	15	28	76
1931			21	15	19	75
1932			21	25	13	80
1933	40	41		28	14	
1934	57	13		17	24	85
1935	56		29	14		65
1936	60		20	21	12	51
1937			18	17	14	70
1938	42	44	28	20		
1939	43	27	30	24	25	46
1940	35		44	9	19	

1.4. Communicants

	Haljala	Halliste	Jüri	Karuse	Varbla	Vastseliina
1920						
1921	3379	1170				
1922		1216	1867	1223	1090	
1923		1192				
1924			1482			4468
1925					1146	
1926						
1927						2611
1928					894	2545
1929					751	3217
1930		1192	1427		1099	3047
1931	2196		1322	887	1007	3015
1932	2050				924	2874
1933	1901	408	1177	888	934	2661
1934	1939	809		759	1026	2642
1935	1981		1166	815	1009	2618
1936	1924		1023	831	1110	2274
1937	1922	683	1078	765	661	2167
1938	1650	690	1049	781	1149	
1939	1514	579	950	693	1005	1753
1940	1251		970	443	1264	

2. Latvia

Data for Latvia is derived from: Baznīcas kalendārs, 1927–40.

In the statistical tables of this source, there are some obvious inaccuracies. Possibly this is true also for statistics of baptisms in the congregations of Jaunpiebalga, Northern Rūjiena and Southern Rūjiena in 1933, as they are presented as identical with those of previous year.

2.1. Baptisms

	Gramzda	Jaunpiebalga	Northern Rūjiena	Southern Rūjiena	Tukums
1924	56	81	101	98	226
1925	50	76	94	97	212
1926	55	78	96	102	203
1927	57	93			197
1928	69	101			206
1929	71	112	201	113	210
1930	59	132	94	98	192
1931	47	116	111	120	191
1932	63	114	105	103	204
1933	72	114	105	103	186
1934	52	94	97	94	193
1935	50	93	122	115	190
1936	57	96	98	97	204
1937	49	113	116	123	170
1938		141	117	121	184

2.2. Confirmation

	Gramzda	Jaunpiebalga	Northern Rūjiena	Southern Rūjiena	Tukums
1924	75	124	150	121	326
1925	75	118	110	180	289
1926	54	138	142	155	218
1927	56	121			217
1928	62	126			222
1929	46	126	86	69	185
1930	50	136	130	100	203
1931	53	128	130	96	158
1932	51	97	103	81	153
1933	51	114	111	88	124
1934	58	83	129	118	145
1935	39	79	85	82	100
1936	17	82	72	58	110
1937	42	95	61	54	115
1938		95	119	72	126

2.3. Church Marriages

	Gramzda	Jaunpiebalga	Northern Rūjiena	Southern Rūjiena	Tukums
1924	42	45	44	47	136
1925	20	57	57	61	138
1926	24	65	52	46	99
1927	36	57			103
1928	31	59			102
1929	26	54	40	40	123
1930	29	60	43	43	89
1931	27	50	48	38	102
1932	37	51	47	29	106
1933	41	54	42	51	100
1934	25	40	38	51	93
1935	37	55	64	40	90
1936	28	51	48	33	96
1937	16	63	49	49	87
1938		45	43	36	82

2.4. Communicants

	Gramzda	Jaunpiebalga	Northern Rūjiena	Southern Rūjiena	Tukums
1924		674	3722	3339	
1925	664	712	5575	3607	3481
1926	678	1111	4857	3499	3292
1927	677	759			3404
1928	939	1344			3030
1929	958	1405	3600	3152	2874
1930	969	1329	4765	2902	3022
1931	568	1205	4523	2972	3102
1932	753	1510	4205	2553	2822
1933	824	1258	3788	1429	2612
1934	2113	854	3955	1582	2815
1935	859	854	3898	1591	3076
1936	836	1168	4190	1720	2787
1937	760	1369	4050	1343	2735
1938		1360	4200	2242	1612

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