

3-2021

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### Recommended Citation

Soom, Kaido and Lehtsaar, Tõnu (2021) "Forms and Roots of Contemporary Religiosity in Estonia," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 41 : Iss. 2 , Article 2.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol41/iss2/2>

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# FORMS AND ROOTS OF CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOSITY IN ESTONIA

By **Kaido Soom and Tõnu Lehtsaar**

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**Keywords:** religiosity in Estonia, secularization, church in Estonia

## Introduction

The Republic of Estonia is a country on the east coast of the Baltic Sea. It borders Russia and Latvia on land and Latvia, Sweden, Finland and Russia on sea. As of 31 Dec 2011, Estonia had a permanent population of 1,294,455 (data from the Population and Housing Census). Estonia is a member of the European Union (2004) and of the Eurozone (2011).<sup>1</sup>

Estonia has often been exemplified as a secularized nation having little regard for religion. Even so, religion is an important topic of conversation in Estonian society. For instance, Ave Tampere asked, in an article in one of Estonia’s major dailies *Eesti Päevaleht*, “Is Estonia the least religious nation in the world?”<sup>2</sup> The striking bulk of comments accompanying the article attested that the issue was a burning one. The task of the present article is to provide a research-based overview of the religiosity of the Estonians. To accomplish the task, let us consider the recent history of Estonian church life, today’s church affiliation, the beliefs of the Estonians and, finally, the unchurched religiosity.

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<sup>1</sup> Estonian Encyclopaedia, [http://entsyklopeedia.ee/artikkel/eesti\\_vabariik](http://entsyklopeedia.ee/artikkel/eesti_vabariik) (viewed on 27.12.2020).

<sup>2</sup> Ave Tampere, (2014). Kas Eesti on kõige vähem usklik riik maailmas? [Is Estonia the Least Religious Country in the World?]. In: *Eesti Päevaleht*, 07.01.2014, <http://epl.delfi.ee/news/eesti/kas-eesti-on-koigevahem-usklik-riik-maailmas?id=67568424> (viewed on 22.12.2020).

## The History of Church Affiliation in Estonia

Historically, the population of Estonia has been within the sphere of influence of two major Christian confessions. For instance, the 1934 census included a question on the religion the respondents considered their own. The responses revealed that the Lutheran faith was claimed by 78% of the population and the Orthodox one by 19%, followed by a number of smaller religious movements.<sup>3</sup> Thus, it may be maintained that church affiliation was the norm at that time. Nevertheless, it was in that same first period of Estonia's independence (1918-1940) that secularization appeared to take root. Although the scientific-atheist worldview was in the minority in Estonia in the 1920s, it started to slowly spread among the populace, accompanied by a gradual rise in left-wing anticlericalism.<sup>4</sup> Such a historical factor may have a solid impact on today's secularization in Estonia. A still stronger influence in this regard seems to be the occupation of Estonia by the Soviet Union, which subjected the country to atheistic propaganda.

In the first years of Soviet occupation in the early 1940s, the state restricted the ministries of the churches. Religious associations were bereft of their legal and social functions and membership fee collection was banned. Part of the congregations' property was nationalized. The state launched atheistic propaganda. During the Nazi occupation in 1941-1944, the churches' rights were largely restored.<sup>5</sup> After the reoccupation of Estonia by the Soviet Union, the atheist policies were resumed and religious associations were ostracized from social life. After the 1949 deportations to Siberia, confirmation classes in the Lutheran church were prohibited. The publishing of ecclesiastical literature was restricted. The church's freedom to act was increasingly suppressed already in the post-WWII period.<sup>6</sup> To compensate for the lack of ecclesiastical ceremonies, the state contrived secular ones.<sup>7</sup>

The changes started in the Soviet Union in the second half of the 1980s reinstated religion in the public sphere. People started to attend ecclesiastical ceremonies, which even became in vogue for a time.<sup>8</sup> When the transition period ended, however, society lost interest in religion.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Lea Altnurme, . *Kristlusest oma usuni* [From Christianity to Own Belief]. (Tartu: Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2006) 53.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 54-55.

<sup>5</sup> Altnurme, Riho . *Eesti kiriku- ja religioonilugu* [The History of Estonian Church and Religion]. (Tartu: Ülikooli kirjastus, 2018), 214-215.

<sup>6</sup> Riho Altnurme, Riho (2001). *Eesti Evangeeliumi Luteriusu Kirik ja Nõukogude riik 1944-1949* [The Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet State in 1944-1949]. (Tartu: Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2001), 300-303.

<sup>7</sup> Altnurme, Riho. *Eesti kiriku- ja religioonilugu*, 216.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>9</sup> Altnurme, Lea. *Kristlusest oma usuni*, 86.

Undoubtedly, such turbulent times have affected church affiliation in today's Estonia. Next, we will examine church affiliation statistics.

### Church Affiliation in Today's Estonia

For historical reasons, the largest church in Estonia is the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church. It publicizes its overall membership (the number of people baptised in the Lutheran Church), which was 155,298 in 2019. One can be skeptical about the total, however, as the congregations often lack data on the deaths of their baptized members if they are buried without ecclesiastical ceremony.<sup>10</sup>

Another way of determining the total of Lutherans in society has historically been the statistics concerning active church members in Estonia, which is indicated by the number of membership fee payers. The payment of the membership fee is voluntary, and an individual would either pay it in cash at the church office or by a bank transfer. Changes in the number of membership fee payers show the share of active Lutherans in society. It is illustrated in Figure 1.<sup>11</sup>

Figure 1. Changes in the number of Estonian Lutheran Church membership fee payers

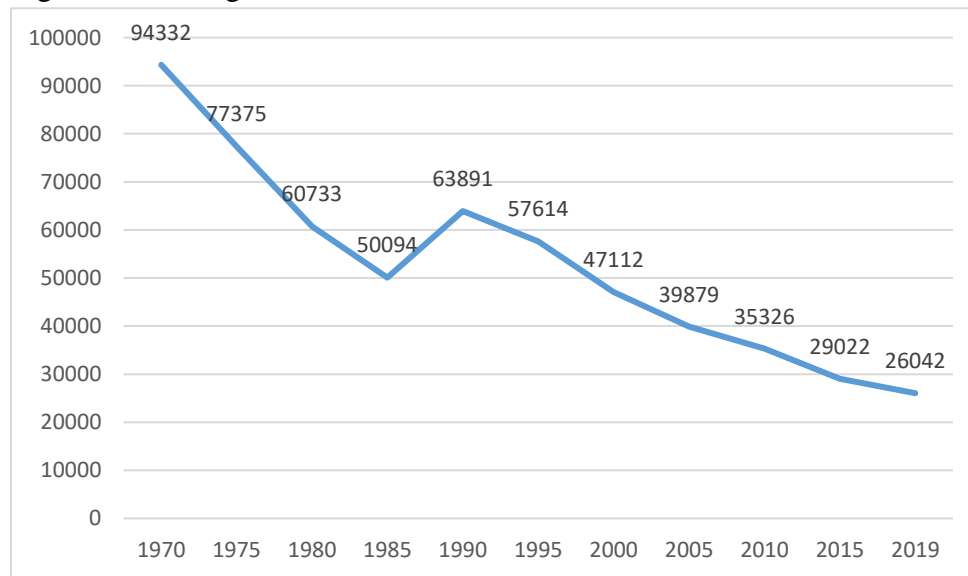


Figure 1 reveals that the total of Lutheran Church membership fee payers decreased steadily during the Soviet era. This may be attributed to the state's restrictions and atheistic work. During the reestablishment of Estonia's independence, the tally of fee payers jumped up due to

<sup>10</sup> Homepage of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, [www.eelk.ee](http://www.eelk.ee) (viewed on 27.12.2010).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

release from restrictions and a positive attitude to the church. Thereafter, the counts of membership fee payers started to drop again, which reflected continued secularization in society.

Other denominations in Estonia also have problems with statistics. Therefore, an important indicator of church membership in society is considered to be the population census, which takes place every 10 years. The last census was held in 2011. Its results show that of the residents 15 years and older (1,094,564 counted), 320,872 (29%) profess a certain religion. The corresponding figure for the preceding census of 2000 was 29%. Hence, their proportion in the population has not changed. According to the 2011 data, the number of Orthodox Christians was 176,773 (16% of the population) and that of Lutherans 108,513 (10%). The remaining 3% was divided between other denominations and non-Christian religious movements.<sup>12</sup> The problem with the census results is that they show the individuals' definition of themselves, not objective data. For instance, a person defining himself to be a Lutheran or an Orthodox has not necessarily been baptized in the respective church. Even so, the census reveals a person's perception of belonging to the sphere of influence of certain religious movements.

Church memberships have additionally been assessed in surveys "Of Life, Faith and Faith Life" ordered by the Estonian Council of Churches, an ecumenical organization connecting churches in Estonia. The surveys are conducted every five years. The last one took place in 2015 among the proportional random sample of Estonian residents aged 15-74 years, who were interviewed in person. The sample included 1,002 people.<sup>13</sup> A question in the said survey<sup>14</sup> read, "Please pick from the list who do you consider yourself to be above all." The list included the largest religious groups. The responses to the question are presented in Table 1.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Homepage of the Statistical Office, [www.stat.ee](http://www.stat.ee).

<sup>13</sup> Telpt, Eve. Kokkuvõte uuringu „Elust, usust ja usuelust 2015“ tulemustest [A Summary of the Findings of the Survey "Of Life, Faith and Faith Life 2015"]. In Eerik Jõks' collection (2016) *Kuhu lähed, Maarjamaa? [Quo vadis, terra Mariana?]* Eesti Kirikute Nõukogu, 36

<sup>14</sup> The 2015 databases of the survey „Elust, usust ja usuelust“ (analysed by the author using the statistics software SPSS), hereinafter abbreviated as EUU 2015.

<sup>15</sup> EUU 2015, Question K21.

Table 1. People’s religious self-identification according to EUU 2015

Above all, I am	No. of respondents	Percent
A Christian	365	36,4
A spiritual but non-religious person	232	23,2
A non-religious person not interested in such issues	206	20,5
An atheist, or a denier of God and of other supernatural things	68	6,7
A religious or spiritual seeker	63	6,2
An Earth believer	43	4,3
Difficult to say	15	1,5
Someone else	12	1,2
Total	1002	100,0

If we examine people’s self-identification with religious traditions, Table 1 reveals that most people perceived themselves as Christians. This suggests that Estonian society has clear Christian influences. The percentage of the respondents to the EUU 2015 identifying as Christians<sup>16</sup> was 36.4%. Of them, 89.8% declared themselves to be baptized. They are people who obviously cherish the Christian worldview and are predominantly baptized. The second-place option, “A spiritual but non-religious person,” may be indicative of new age influences. Of all the respondents, 20.5% regard themselves as non-religious and 6.7% as atheist: they represent categories of people apparently the most alienated from the church. Religious seekers comprise 6.2%. This refers to people who have not yet found their religion but are nevertheless interested in it. Earth believers represent a new religious movement built on the Estonian traditional animistic religion, who are fairly inactive in society. Apparently, many antagonists to Christianity place themselves in this category.

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<sup>16</sup>EUU 2015, Question K21.

This survey, organized by the Estonian Council of Churches, also included the question, “Do you belong to some congregation or religious movement?”<sup>17</sup> Of the respondents, 21% marked themselves as belonging to a congregation, and 79% as not belonging to any. Next, those who answered in the affirmative were questioned about the congregation or religious movement they had joined. The options included the following religious movements: Orthodox, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Baptist, Free Church, Methodist, Adventist, Pentecostal, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Islamic/Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, and Earth believers’ congregations. The respondents also had the option to add a different religious movement. Most of those answering “Yes” to the question were divided between two churches: 40% declared themselves as belonging to the Orthodox Church (8.3% of all respondents) and 35.8% to the Lutheran Church (7.4% of all respondents).

The Orthodox Church in Estonia is split into two parts. One is subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate and the other comes under the jurisdiction of the Constantinopolitan Patriarchate. Of the Orthodox Christians, 81.2% belonged to the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, 15% to the Orthodox Church of Estonia, and 3.8% were unable to define themselves. The distribution between the two major churches, Lutheran and Orthodox, was also largely determined by the ethnicity of the respondents. The majority of the population in Estonia in 2020 were the Estonians, with 909,552 people. The Russians came second, with 327,802 people, while the representatives of other ethnicities totaled 78,387.<sup>18</sup>

The Lutherans were 100% Estonians while, among the Orthodox Christians, 19.3% were Estonians and 80.7% non-Estonians. Of the Lutherans, 98.6% spoke Estonian at home, while, of the Orthodox Christians, 83.1% used a home language other than Estonian. Among the latter, 82.3% of the respondents affiliated with the Orthodox Church of Estonia spoke Estonian at home, while 97% of those belonging to the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate used a home language other than Estonian. Lutheranism is the religion of the Estonians and Orthodoxy largely that of the Russians. Apparently, the considerably greater church affiliation by the Russian-speaking population is due to their ethnic identity being strongly linked with Orthodoxy. Orthodoxy in Estonia is a solid medium of a minority culture and bonds the ethnic minority. While Lutheranism is also an important instrument of identity for the Estonian population, the secular society and culture during the period of political freedom

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<sup>17</sup>EUU 2015, Question K13.

<sup>18</sup> Homepage of the Estonian Statistics Office, <https://www.stat.ee/et/avasta-statistikat/valdkonnad/rahvastik/rahvaarv>, viewed on 29.12.2020.

has favored Estonian national culture and identity, which accounts for the Estonians' weaker bond with the church.<sup>19</sup>

The adherents of the remaining movements numbered less. Jehovah's Witnesses came third (4.8% of those belonging to any religious movement and 1% of all respondents), followed by Baptists, Roman Catholics, and members of free churches. Thus, it may be stated that Christians are a minority in Estonia. According to the census, 29% of the population professes a religion, and based on the survey "Of Life, Faith and Faith Life," 36% of the residents regard themselves as Christians and 21% claim to be members of a congregation. Hence, it may be maintained that the position of institutional Christianity in Estonia is relatively weak. Yet what matters is not only affiliation with the church but also adherence to a Christian worldview. Next, we will examine, based on the survey held by the Estonian Council of Churches (2015), the religion, worldview, and religious practices of the inhabitants of Estonia.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Religion of the Residents of Estonia**

*First, about the Estonians' faith in God.* While institutional Christianity and church affiliation are weak in Estonia, it is important to inquire whether the people nevertheless believe in God. Potentially, people may believe without their belief being connected with the church as an institution. In the survey, people were asked, "What is your opinion on the existence of God?" The responses are reflected in Table 2.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Soom, Kaido. Eestis elavate eesti ja venekeelt kõnelevate inimeste religioossuse võrdlus [A Comparison of the Religiosity of Estonian and Russian Speaking Residents of Estonia]. In: *Usuteaduslik Ajakiri* [Theological Journal] 2/2018, 84-85.

<sup>20</sup> Hereinafter the term "survey" is used to denote the 2015 survey "Of Life, Faith and Faith Life" conducted by the Estonian Council of Churches.

<sup>21</sup> EEU 2015, Question K12.



Table 2. The opinion of Estonian respondents on the existence of God

Options	Percent of respondents
I do not believe and have never believed that God exists	44
I do not believe that God exists but I did in the past	8
I believe that God exists but I did not in the past	14
I believe and have always believed that God exists	24
Difficult to say	10

Adding up the responses to the survey's statements "I believe that God exists but I did not in the past" and "I believe and have always believed that God exists," we arrive at the total of God-believing people in Estonia. And, adding up the statements "I do not believe and have never believed that God exists" and "I do not believe that God exists but I did in the past," we get the number of people who do not believe in God. The option "Difficult to say" represents the doubters. The sums show that in Estonia, 38% of the respondents believe in God and 52% do not while 10% are undecided. A comparison of the figures demonstrates that some people in Estonia believe in God while not being a member of a Christian congregation (according to the survey, 21% of the respondents were members of congregations); hence, believing in the existence of God and belonging to a congregation are not directly related. One can believe in God without joining a church and one can join a church without believing in God.

The survey also scrutinized people's faith in the existence of the Holy Spirit. Of the respondents, 37% fully agreed or tended to agree to the statement "I believe that the Holy Spirit exists."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> EUU 2015, Question K10.12.

An essential part of the Christian doctrine is the teaching on Christ’s resurrection. The survey also studied the stances on the statement “I believe that Jesus Christ has resurrected from the dead,” which 31% of the respondents either fully believed or tended to believe in.<sup>23</sup>

From the responses to this set of topics it may be stated that approximately a third of the population concurs with the Christian dogmas concerning God, which exceeds the proportion of church members. Apart from belief in the existence of God, however, there are other important Christian doctrines, which we will tackle next.

The third survey gauges belief in post-mortem existence. One of the basic Christian teachings concerns faith in life after death. In Estonia, people’s opinion on the statement “A human soul continues to exist even after death” was queried using the options “I fully agree,” “I tend to agree,” “I tend to disagree,” “I absolutely disagree,” and “Difficult to say.”<sup>24</sup> The responses are represented in Table 3.

Table 3. The faith of Estonia’s residents in existence after death

	A human soul continues to exist even after death
I fully agree	17%
I tend to agree	34%
I tend to disagree	25%
I absolutely disagree	11%
Difficult to say	13%

It appears from Table 3 that 51% of the residents of Estonia believe in post-mortem existence. This considerably exceeds the percentage of those believing in God (38%), showing that people have retained some natural spirituality. Thus, the church has an opportunity to attract people by tackling the topic of eternal life.

<sup>23</sup> EUU 2015, Question K10.35.

<sup>24</sup> EUU 2015, Question K10.2.

The survey conducted in Estonia contained a question about the existence of Paradise (Heaven).<sup>25</sup> This is an issue with strong Christian implications. 30% of the respondents believed or tended to believe in the existence of Paradise, which suggests that while people have faith in continued existence after death it is not fully consistent with the Christian concept thereof.

Third, *belief in healing through prayer and religious miracles*. The degree to which people believe both in the power of prayer and in miracles accompanying faith is always very important as it shows the real impact of religion in an individual's life. This issue, too, was introduced in the Estonian survey by inquiring the respondents about the statement "You can be healed through prayer."<sup>26</sup> 34% of the respondents believed or tended to believe it, which suggests that a third of the people are still willing to turn to God for help in an emergency.

The results suggest that belief in the doctrines essential for the church is not correlated with the percentage of the population affiliated with the Church, and the church can support people when they are in trouble by offering the opportunity to pray to God.

Of the respondents to the survey, 28% fully agreed or tended to agree to the statement "I have felt God's guidance and influence in my life,"<sup>27</sup> which implies that people still have personal religious experiences. This probably means that they have prayed in a difficult situation and felt that God has helped them.

### ***Religious Practices in Estonia***

It is not only that religious beliefs themselves are important but also the extent to which people put their religiosity into practice. To determine that, the survey conducted in Estonia (2015) contained questions concerning the frequency of attendance at worship services<sup>28</sup> and the frequency of praying outside worship services.<sup>29</sup> The options were as follows: "Not at all," "Once or twice a year," "3–4 times a year," "Once or twice a month," "Every week," and "Difficult to say."

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<sup>25</sup> EEU 2015, Question K10.9.

<sup>26</sup> EEU 2015, Question K10.8.

<sup>27</sup> EEU 2015, Question K10.18.

<sup>28</sup> EEU 2015, Question K33.

<sup>29</sup> EEU 2015, Question K32.

Table 4. The frequency of attendance at divine services and of praying

	Frequency of attendance at divine services	Frequency of praying
Every week/once or more a week	5%	11%
Once or twice a month/at least once a month	5%	8%
3–4 times a year/a few times a year	7%	8%
Once or twice a year/at least once a year	30%	8%
Not at all/less than once a year	52%	64%
Difficult to say/No answer	1%	1%

Table 4 shows that practicing one’s religion is fairly rare among the inhabitants of Estonia. A mere 10% of the respondents attend a worship service at least once or more a month. Praying, however, is much more frequent. 19% of the respondents pray at least once or more a month. This suggests that for some people, religiosity and relationship with God are unrelated to the church as an institution; instead, people communicate with God directly, outside of worship services.

The fact that 64% of the people of Estonia never pray may indicate the discontinuation of religious socialization in Estonia, as the Soviet era took its toll and the bond with religion was broken. This is supported by the fact that half of the population never attend divine services. At the same time, there are 30% report only going to church once or twice a year, attributable to the custom of the Estonians to attend a worship service on Christmas Eve. Accordingly, a third of the population apparently finds their way to church in Christmas season. At any rate, it must be

acknowledged that half of the population lacks any religious practice, which show the strength of secularization in Estonia. Yet, the other half of the population has retained religion to at least some degree.

Apart from attendance at worship services and praying, Bible reading is an important indicator of personal religious life. The Estonian questionnaires included an inquiry on the frequency of Bible reading.<sup>30</sup> The options provided were “Every day,” “Once a week,” “Less frequently,” “Not at all,” and “Difficult to say.”

Table 5. Frequency of Bible reading in Estonia

	Frequency of Bible reading
Every day	3%
Once a week	4%
Less frequently	21%
Not at all	71%
Difficult to say	1%

As it appears from Table 5, the inhabitants of Estonia read the Bible very little. This suggests that for the majority of the population, Scripture is neither authoritative nor the fountain of their faith. This makes it difficult for the church to argue for its doctrine from Scripture.

### ***Unchurched Religiosity***

For part of the population of Estonia, religion is important but independent of the church. In order to determine the number of such people, the Estonian survey also analyzed religiosity not connected with the Church among the Estonian population.

The statement “My relationship with God is very personal and my faith does not need support from the church” suggests a Christian background and subsequent alienation from the

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<sup>30</sup> EUU 2015, Question K31.

church. The responses to the statement are summarized in Table 6.<sup>31</sup> The same table also outlines the response to the statement “I do not favor any religion or church; I have my own religion,”<sup>32</sup> which implies a negative attitude towards institutionalized religion yet having some kind of spirituality.

Table 6. Religion unrelated to the Church

	My relationship with God is very personal and my faith does not need support from the church	I do not favor any religion or church; I have my own religion
I fully agree	13%	13%
I tend to agree	27%	30%
I tend to disagree	22%	26%
I absolutely disagree	30%	26%
Difficult to say	8%	5%

It may be asserted from an analysis of Table 6 that 43% of the respondents claimed to favor no religion or church and to have their own religion. 40% of the respondents fully agreed or tended to agree with the statements that their religion was personal and did not need support from the church. Such a score suggests alienation from the church and secularization. Yet it also implies that people have their own religion, which is simply not associated with the church. Merely 7% of the Estonian population define themselves as atheists;<sup>33</sup> hence, for many residents of Estonia, religion belongs to their own personal, private sphere and is often unconnected with the Church.

Such a mentality is clearly expressed on an opinion page of the Estonian Lutheran Church’s newspaper *Eesti Kirik* by the well-known atheistically-minded Estonian writer Andrus

<sup>31</sup> EUU 2015, Question K10.34.

<sup>32</sup> EUU 2015, Question K10.22.

<sup>33</sup> EUU 2015, Question K21.

Kivirähk, who states: “If one is to believe in god [sic], the god is found in one’s own heart, not in the church, and to make donations to one’s heart is not particularly practical.”<sup>34</sup> A disposition like that undoubtedly has a strong bearing on the church’s activity and constitutes a complicated starting point for its ministry.

Atko Rimmel, an Estonian theologian, concludes from an analysis of the results that religion will not die out but, as the statistics suggest, the traditional church-centered Christianity may do so. He finds that if churches want to survive the situation, something needs to be changed by examining people’s expectations and needs and then responding thereto.<sup>35</sup>

Although a large part of the inhabitants of Estonia do not need the church for their personal religion, there arises the question of how people view the church as an institution, of what they value the most with the church. This we will address next.

### **The Church is Valued in Society**

Despite the fact that a large part of the people does not need the church for their personal faith, it may be argued that the church is still valued in society. Of the respondents to the survey, 55% fully agreed or tended to agree with the statement that “our national culture is strongly impacted by Christianity.”<sup>36</sup> This indicates that more than half of the respondents value the church as the medium of the national culture. This argument is strongly corroborated by the fact that 47% of the respondents considered the church to be conducive to the survival of the national culture.<sup>37</sup> Of the respondents, 56% fully agreed or tended to agree with the statement that “the church should be more strongly connected with the national traditions.”<sup>38</sup> Hence, the role of the church as the vehicle for the national culture was important for half of the inhabitants of Estonia. The significance of Christian culture for Europe as a whole was rated even higher: 72% of the respondents fully agreed or tended to agree with the statement that European culture should remain Christian.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Kivirähk, Andrus. Süda või kirik? [The Heart or the Church]. In *Eesti Kirik*, 11.11.2020, <http://www.eestikirik.ee/kiriku-liikmeskonna-muutumise-aastakumned/>, viewed on 02.01.2021.

<sup>35</sup> Rimmel, Atko. Eesti ühiskonna religioossusest ja sekulariseerumisest mittereligioossete eestlaste alusel [The Religiosity and Secularization of Estonian Society Based on Non-Religious Estonians]. In: Eerik Jõks’ collection *Kuhu lähed, Maarjamaa?*, 150

<sup>36</sup> EEU 2015, Question K42E.

<sup>37</sup> EEU 2015, Question K41.

<sup>38</sup> EEU 2015, Question K42H.

<sup>39</sup> EEU 2015, Question K42A.

The survey also scrutinized the attitude of the respondents to the involvement of the church in the celebration of national holidays or events, such as the Anniversary of the Republic parade or the inauguration of some monument of national importance. Church involvement was favored by 54% and opposed by 27% of the respondents while 19% found it difficult to decide.<sup>40</sup> This implies that the church is considered significant also on the societal level.

The attitude to the modernization of the church, however, is ambivalent: 72% of the respondents fully agreed or tended to agree with the statement “The church should hold fast to its teaching and moral standards and not go along with all social changes,”<sup>41</sup> and 53% fully agreed or tended to agree with the statement “The church should present and expound its doctrine in a more simple, modern and up-to-date manner.”<sup>42</sup> Thus, the church is seen in society as the vehicle of stability, but this stability might in the people’s opinion be imparted by more contemporary means.

## **Summary**

Estonia is a nation where Christians are in the minority: of the Estonian population, 36% regard themselves as Christians, with 21% claiming to be affiliated with a congregation. Although church membership is small, 38% of the inhabitants of Estonia still believe that God exists. Belief in life after death is held by even more than half of the residents. In an ecclesiastical sense, the Estonian population is fairly passive; a mere 10% of the respondents attend a worship service at least once or more a month. Praying, however, is done much more actively: 19% of the respondents pray at least once or more a month. While just over 40% of the people find that their faith does not need church support, the church is valued as the vehicle of Christian culture, and church involvement in the celebration of societal events is favored. It may be maintained that Estonia is a secularized country, yet it does not at all mean that the people deny God. Rather, they predominantly have their own religion that runs its own course independently of the church.

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<sup>40</sup> EUU 2015, Question K43.

<sup>41</sup> EUU 2015, Question K42M.

<sup>42</sup> EUU 2015, Question K42L.