

# NEW AND OLD RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN 20TH-CENTURY ESTONIA, ON THE EXAMPLE OF WEST ESTONIA

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West Estonia has been the main centre of Christian religious movements in Estonia from at least the 18th century onwards. At the end of the 20th century, as before, religious life in West Estonia appears to be more active than elsewhere in Estonia.

To explain the relative vitality of religious movements in West Estonia as compared to the rest of the country, I will first present an overview of religious movements in West Estonia from the 1740s to the end of the 1980s, also throwing some light on religious life elsewhere in Estonia and on the political events which have exercised considerable influence on Estonian religious life in the 20th century. Finally I will give a survey of religious communities in Estonia and especially in West Estonia since the end of the 1980s. After the occupation of Estonia by the anti-religion Soviet Union, the data on Estonian religious life are fragmentary. We also lack trustworthy statistics on Estonian religious movements and their adherents in the 1990s. Therefore I shall limit myself, in the final part of my paper, to the preliminary results of my research on West Estonian religious life.

## OVERVIEW OF THE RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN ESTONIA, PARTICULARLY WEST ESTONIA FROM THE 1740S TO THE END OF THE 1980S

### 1. RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN WEST ESTONIA FROM THE 1740S TO THE 1940S

Beginning with the Lutheran reformation which reached Estonia in the year 1524, Estonia has been a predominantly Lutheran country similar to the neighbouring Finland and Sweden. Lutheran Church has dominated Estonian religious life up to the present day and held a particularly influential position in the Estonian society up to the year 1940. Nevertheless, after the 1740s several religious movements have occurred in Estonia occasionally conflicting with the established Lutheran Church, and after the 1880s, various Protestant churches sprang up and developed into a considerable power side by side with the Lutheran and the Orthodox Churches; the latter began to win wider support in the 19th century. The new confessions got the opportunities for free development only under

the Republic of Estonia, in 1918–1940, and gathered new momentum again after the collapse of the Soviet power in Estonia, from the end of the 1980s onward.

Throughout the discussed period, the main hubs of the new religious movements have been in the coastal areas of West Estonia and on the islands – the present-day counties of Läänemaa, Hiiumaa and Saaremaa – inhabited up to WW II not only by the Estonians, but also by the community of the Estonian Swedes, among whom many of the new Estonian religious movements first got their start.

More serious christianization among the formerly Lutheran Estonians began with the advent of the United Brethren (Moravian) movements in Estonia which spread widely in the 1740s and gained especially strong support among the Western Estonians and Estonian Swedes of the Noarootsi and Vormsi parishes in Läänemaa county (see: ILJA 1995; GIRGENSOHN 1869: 453; RUSSWURM 1855: 159, 283–284; PHILIPP 1974: 405–409; PÕLDMÄE 1935: 127–128; PÕLDMÄE 1940).

Around 1814, one of the most charismatic movements within the Brethren congregations of Western Estonia – the Movement of ‘Heaven-Travellers’ emerged (see PÕLDMÄE 1935). Within the movement there arose several visionaries and prophets who claimed they had seen revelations and conducted their own charismatic prayer meetings. Some of the so-called prophets from Hiiumaa, accused of celebrating the Holy Communion among themselves (RUSSWURM 1855: 235), and various other enthusiastic adherents caused much trouble to the Lutheran pastors and the Moravians. In the early 1820s that ecstatic movement gradually died out, but the Brethren congregations of Western Estonia continued their activities.

Both the Brethren congregations and the Movement of the Heaven-Travellers, however, stayed inside the Lutheran Church. The first new Protestant denominations in Estonia came into being together with new religious movement which can probably be regarded as the most extensive revivalist movement in West Estonia during the 18th–20th centuries. The ‘Awakening of Läänemaa’ began with the arrival of two Swedish missionaries, T. E. Thorén and L. J. Österblom, in 1873. Due to their active preaching, new religious awakening began to spread among the Estonian Swedes and soon after among the Estonians, too. Realizing how sinful they were, people began to strive for a better moral life and salvation of their souls, finally experienced a religious awakening and were ‘saved’. There appeared more and more local ‘readers’ (preachers) and ‘prophets’ whose followers went in for peculiar practises, such as ecstatic jumping, dancing, laughing, and hand-clapping at the prayer meetings (see: ÖSTERBLOM 1927; SCHULTZ 1880: 580–581; ÖSTERBLOM 1885: 39–43; NORMANN 1885: 113; BUSCH 1926: 32; *Protokoll...* 1883: 5, 1884: 6).

In the 1870s–1880s, religious awakening swept all over Läänemaa and Hiiumaa and spread on to the neighbouring counties (*Protokoll...* 1880: 15, 1881: 5, 1882: 5; SCHULTZ 1880: 579). At the beginning of the 1880s, many converts lamented that they could not remain members of the Lutheran congregations because of the immorality and lack of real faith among the members there. The awakened people began to secede from the Lutheran Church, which first happened in 1880 in Vormsi Island inhabited mainly by the Estonian Swedes (*Protokoll...* 1881: 5–6; BUSCH 1928: 28–29; SPINDLER 1893: 156–157, 161; *Walgus*, No. 5, 19, 1884).

As the persecution by the authorities (including Lutheran Church) grew more vigorous, the movement dispersed into several factions: converts organized the first Baptist, Irvingite and Free Believers' congregations in Estonia; many accepted the Greek Orthodox faith in the 1880s<sup>1</sup> (*Protokoll...* 1884: 6–7). Among the new members of the 'Russian church' there were also hundreds of Estonian Swedes (*Protokoll...* 1885: 7; *Istorko-statistitcheskoje...* 1895: 540; *Iz Arhiva...* 1910: 39 ff.). Many converts lost their intense religious feeling or turned back to the Lutheran church.

Up to the turn of the century, the most numerous of the new denominations were the Free Believers' congregations which also became popular in Saaremaa county, at the end of the 19th century. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the most influential among the new congregations in West Estonia have been the Baptists.

Religious life outside the Lutheran church in the main centres of these religious movements in West Estonia remained active also during the Estonian Republic: in the 1920s and 1930s, several new congregations arose in addition to the former ones and one could find in West Estonia Baptists, Free Believers, Irvingites, Methodists, Pentecostals, Urshanists, Adventists, Moravians and different Free congregations (*Teekäija*, No 10, 1924; EDERBERG 1935: 107; *Eesti Kirik*, Nos 9–10, 1934: 70). The Pentecostal congregations in Läänemaa and Methodist congregations in Saaremaa<sup>2</sup> stood out among them as the most influential new religious movements in addition to Baptists and Free Believers.

Although in West Estonia the relative number of sectarians was higher than anywhere else in the country, their percentage of the total population was not very high, particularly as compared with that of Lutherans. At the same time it can be said that whereas most of the sectarians could be considered deeply religious (many denominations like the Baptists, Free Believers, Pentecostals, Methodists and various Free Congregations granted membership only to the really faithful or 'awakened to faith' and did not baptise nor consider as members children), the percentage of the relatively indifferent church members was actually much higher among the Lutherans. The registers of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (subsequently the EELC) listed 847 600 souls in 1936, but only 30.8 per cent of them paid the church dues in the same year (GNADENTEICH 1995: 102).

According to the census of 1922, the population of Lääne- and Hiiumaa totalled 75 991; 82.8 per cent of them were Lutherans, 12.9 per cent Orthodox, 2.8 per cent Baptists (2156 people) and 0.9 per cent adhered to other religious communities (701); 315 persons were non-believers and confession was unknown in 372 cases. In the island of Hiiumaa by itself (from the 16th century up to 1946 Hiiumaa formed part of the county of

<sup>1</sup> The accepting of Greek Orthodoxy in Lääne- and Hiiumaa was the first and last mass conversion of Lutherans to Orthodoxy in North Estonia. In South Estonia, a major conversion to Orthodoxy inspired mostly by economical reasons, took place already in the 1840s. However, Saaremaa became the greatest centre of Orthodoxy in Estonia and even in the year 1901, about 40 per cent of its population were Orthodox (*Saarlane*, No 20, 1901).

<sup>2</sup> The first Methodist congregation in Estonia was founded in 1910, in Saaremaa. In 1924, 411 souls or 45 per cent of all the Estonian Methodists belonged to the Methodist congregation in Saaremaa (KLAOS 1924: 31).

Läänemaa), 74 per cent of the inhabitants were Lutheran, 12.9 per cent Orthodox, 6.6 per cent Baptists and 2.6 per cent belonged to other religious communities; only 170 persons confessed no religion and confession was unknown in 190 cases (1922... 1924: 13, 36–7).

Thus, in 1922 altogether 2857 persons (3.7 per cent) in Lääne- and Hiiumaa admitted that they belonged to some Free Church congregations; by the year 1934 the number had risen to 4458 persons or about 6 per cent of the population, considerably outstripping the other counties; next came Saaremaa with 2333 (EDERBERG 1935: 115). Out of the 13 congregations belonging to the Estonian Association of Free Believers in 1934, for instance, 8 were situated in Lääne- and Hiiumaa and 3 in Saaremaa (see: Eesti evangeeli-umi... 1937); the Free congregations of the Estonian Swedes of Läänemaa had not joined the Association (EDERBERG 1935: 110). In 1934, Läänemaa also stood out by the greatest number of people officially not belonging to any confession – it was 1117 persons (EDERBERG 1935: 173).

It would seem that as the domination of Lutheranism weakened, the influence of the other religious communities among the believers of West Estonia remained strong and within the framework of the Free Church congregations there also survived the features characteristic of the Awakening of Läänemaa – occasionally occurring minor awakenings, manifestations of religious ecstasy, a more popular conception of Christianity. From the year 1940 onward, however, the whole religious life of Estonia underwent major change in connection with political events.

## 2. RELIGIOUS LIFE IN ESTONIA UNDER THE DOMINATION OF FOREIGN AUTHORITIES (1940 – THE END OF THE 1980S)

In June 1940, the Soviet Army occupied the territory of the Estonian Republic and it was annexed to the Soviet Union. The Soviet laws on religion and churches, enforced in 1929 and decreeing the suppression of the Church and religion as phenomena opposed to the official atheist ideology, took force in Estonia, too.

The new authorities set out to restrict the activities of churches and congregations in Estonia: the property of the congregations was nationalized and voluntary donations from members remained the only economical foundation for religious activities. Church wedding lost legal validity, religious instruction at schools was banned, religious publications were forbidden. The libraries of many congregations were destroyed. Child and youth education, diaconal and missionary work, and foreign relations were forbidden. Besides, the new authorities engaged in active antireligious propaganda and persecuted the clergy. From the very beginning of the occupation, the more outstanding religious activists of various movements began to disappear (KIIVIT 1995: 103–5).

The WW II entailed the occupation of Estonia by Germany, in 1941–1944. Even under wartime circumstances, the new foreign power brought some relief to the Estonian religious movements.

In 1944, about 70 000 Estonians, among them the greater part of the Estonian clergy, left their home country in order to escape from the advancing Soviet Army (KIIVIT 1995:

106). Almost all the Estonian Swedes left Läänemaa for Sweden and the Estonian Swedish congregations in Estonia ceased to be. After the reoccupation of Estonia by the USSR, arrests and deportations to Siberia in the families of the leading Estonian church activists who had stayed in Estonia continued till the 1950s.

The war had left its destructive marks upon many church buildings. A number of these remained vacant after the war and crumbled away or were taken into use as cowsheds, granaries, garages, etc., of the collective and state farms formed during that period. The buildings of the Orthodox Church are in a particularly sorry state up to the present: in Hiiumaa, for instance, only one Orthodox church and a small congregation continued working in 1997, and even then services were held only a couple of times a year, when a priest from Tallinn visited the island; the other two Orthodox churches stood in ruins.

The activities of the religious organizations of the Estonian SSR were regulated with the so-called "temporary directive" drawn up in 1945, which remained the legal foundation for the activities of churches and congregations until 1977 when it was replaced by a more detailed "Statute of Religious Organizations" aimed essentially at restricting congregational activities and specifying their obligations.

According to the directive of 1945, the congregations existing in Estonia had to be registered; registration could be applied for by at least 20 grown-up congregation members and permission to act was granted only to congregations which had a clergyman (parson, minister). This requirement forced congregations to fill the vacancies with unqualified people, since many of the clergy had fled from the country or been repressed. The EELC, for instance, had no more than 154 congregations and only 79 parsons and assistant clergymen left by the year 1948 (KIIVIT 1995: 108).

In 1945, a great part of the Estonian Free Churches (Baptists, Free Believers, Pentecostalists and other Free congregations) were forced to join into an alliance subordinated to the All-Union Council of the Evangelical Christians and Baptists seated in Moscow. Different authors have estimated that before occupation, as many as 15 000 members belonged to the Estonian Free Churches which made up the new alliance. In the post-war period, some 10 000 members were left in the joined congregations. During the Soviet period, several Russian congregations joined the alliance, too, but the number of members diminished. In 1989, the Evangelical Christian and Baptist Union of Estonia (subsequently ECBUE) with 80 congregations and about 5800 members was formed on the continuity of the previous alliance. By 1996, the ECBUE united 86 congregations with 6328 members, among them seven Russian-speaking congregations with about 800 members.

Independent activities were carried on during the Soviet period by the United Methodist Church in Estonia (subsequently UMCE); in Latvia and Lithuania, at the same time, Methodist churches were abolished. In 1940, the UMCE had 21 congregations with about 1600 full members. After the war, just 12 congregations continued work and membership had declined by almost 50 per cent. By 1990, the UMCE had 1748 full members. The Seventh-Day Adventists (subsequently SDA) also continued independently of other Estonian congregations; many denominations, however, were forced to stop their activities or worked on illegally.

In Soviet Estonia, religious life underwent a long period of decline which lasted till the end of the 1980s, although there were short-lived upsurges in some confessions. Thus, for instance, in some congregations of the ECBUE there even occurred sporadic bursts of awakening, but naturally these could not spread very wide under the general oppression (How... 1997).

After Stalin's death, in the years 1955–1958 the activities of churches and congregations in Estonia appeared to be normalizing again. The membership of the EELC, for instance, was growing, the number of the confirmed increased and was approaching the level achieved at the end of the 1930s (KIIVIT 1995: 109). But the liberalization to a certain extent of the internal policy of the Soviet Union during the second half of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s did not concern religious life. On the contrary, ideological repression of religion and surveillance of the religious grew even more severe. A campaign was launched to establish secular ceremonies, and membership of some denominations or visiting of their services could bring about serious complications in obtaining education or getting a job, a flat, etc. Also, the taxes exacted from the congregations were raised even higher.

From the beginning of the 1960s, the membership of most Estonian congregations, participation in the services and religious ceremonies began to fall rapidly. The same applies to the Lutheran Church, where in 1966 the number of baptisms fell by more than one fifth, the number of confirmations to five and of weddings to eight per cent of the respective numbers for 1958.

Bishop J. Kiivit suggests that the greater part of Estonians adjusted during that period and resigned themselves to the order and ideology enforced by the Soviet occupation authorities (KIIVIT 1995: 109–110). As a matter of fact, there are other reasons for the Estonians' growing indifference towards religion during the discussed period: first the general secularization of society – a 20th-century phenomenon characteristic not only of the socialist system – and naturally also the almost complete lack of contacts with the rest of the world and the impossibility of missionary activities in Estonia. Kiivit estimates that the lowest point in the activities of the Lutheran church was reached in the mid-1970s and the first signs of revival appeared only in the 1980s (KIIVIT 1995: 110). Obviously the same could be said about the other denominations active in Estonia and about West Estonia, too.

## THE REVIVAL OF RELIGIOUS LIFE IN ESTONIA SINCE THE END OF THE 1980S

In the years 1987–1988 we can already speak about the beginning of the national reawakening in Estonia largely inspired by the 'perestroika' in the Soviet Union. The search for a national identity and personal origins again brought the Estonian Lutheran Church into the focus of interest, increasing interest was felt for religion in general.

In December, 1987, the Estonian radio broadcast Christmas carols and for the first time after the war, the people were wished a merry Christmas over the state radio. The bolder ones began to attend church, either for curiosity or other reasons, and at least at

Christmas time the churches were packed full again for the first time over decades. Going to church became a fashion at the end of the 1980s, as well as being baptised and getting married at church. For many people, the discovering of a new field of life practically closed off during the Soviet rule certainly played a role here, too.

At the end of the 1980s, the number of EELC members and all kinds of church ceremonies grew considerably; the life of most of the other churches that had remained active in Estonia revived and many new members, mostly young people, joined the congregations. New denominations and religious movements began to spread, too, often introduced into Estonia by foreign missionaries. Wider attention was attracted by the "Word of Life" movement, the *Taara* and heathen movements trying to reconstruct a national religion close to the nature, and the so-called Satanists. As for the other non-Christian organizations and movements radically different from traditional Christianity, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Jewish and Islamic congregations, Baha'i congregation, Krishnaists, Buddhists and others were represented in Estonia by 1995. In addition to the above-mentioned ones, congregations of the Old Believers, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Armenian Apostolic Church are active in present-day Estonia, as well as the Association of the Estonian Evangelical Charismatic Congregations, the Association of the Estonian Full-Gospel Congregations, the Quakers, etc.

Greater freedom in the activities of various denominations was accompanied by the distributing of religious literature and religious education which had been forbidden during the Soviet period. At the end of the 1980s, we may even speak about a boom of religious literature.

After the restoration of the Republic of Estonia, in 1991, legislation on religious life had to be brought up to date, too. In 1990, the Board of Religion was created in order to regulate the relations between the state and religious associations. According to the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, there is no established state church in Estonia, and the law of churches and congregations passed in 1993 decrees that each person has the right to freely choose, witness and profess his religious convictions.

Estonian religious organizations are legalized after they have been registered, and by the year 1995 about 500 religious associations or congregations had been entered in the church register.

After the opening years of the 1990s, wider public began to lose interest in different churches, denominations and religious movements. By the mid-1990s, the number of members of most Estonian churches and denominations had stabilized or even begun to decline.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> A pretty good idea of the years of upsurge and decline during a period revolutionary for Estonia is offered by the reports of the EELC for the years 1987 (before the upsurge), 1991 (the culmination, perhaps already exhibiting a tendency towards decline: the absolutely greatest number of baptisms in the 20th century was achieved in 1990, namely 18361 persons), and 1995 (a certain decline and stabilization).

Year	Baptisms	Confirmations	Weddings	Burials	Donators
1987	1834	1179	307	3339	49354
1991	13382	8383	1243	5006	70209
1995	6727	4071	620	4965	55058

(KIIVIT 1995: 111)

The decline tendencies following the increase in the number of congregation members can be explained basically by a high mortality rate since the majority of church and congregation members are people advanced in years, the middle-aged ones having been denied access to religion by the Soviet regime. In many of the older congregations the majority of the members are old or else relatively young people. Quite a few new congregations have been formed in Estonia in the 1990s for the Russian-speaking population, too (e.g. the new congregations of the UMCE, the ECBUE).

The exact number and membership of all the religious organizations and movements active in present-day Estonia cannot be specified as yet, since part of the congregations have not yet registered (the greatest among them probably the Russian Orthodox Church in Estonia) and those which have are not required to present exact numbers of membership. The existing data of the Board of Religion quote 248 421 or about 16.6 per cent of the population as the total number of adherents to religious communities in Estonia in the year 1995. The number is highly approximate.<sup>4</sup>

Out of that 16.6 per cent, membership in the EELC accounts for 69.2 per cent;<sup>5</sup> members of the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church (subsequently EAOC) form 12.0 per cent (30 000 persons) and congregations of the ECBUE 2.6 per cent (6500 members) (HELLERMAA 1995).

## RELIGIOUS LIFE IN WEST ESTONIA SINCE THE END OF THE 1980S

The above observations of the general trends in Estonian religious life after the year 1940 are valid also for Lääne-, Hiiu- and Saaremaa, where religious life underwent the same kind of high and low tides as elsewhere in Estonia. However, West Estonia has still retained its peculiarity, namely the relatively greater adherence of the population to various churches, congregations and religious movements than is usual in the other counties.

The results of field work made by the author in Läänemaa in 1996 and Hiiumaa in 1997, but also other sources (How... 1997) show that by the year 1997, the following congregations were active in the counties of West Estonia:

In Saaremaa there were 14 congregations of the EELC, 14 congregations of the EAOC, 9 congregations of the ECBUE; 4 UMCE, 1 Pentecostal, 1 SDA and one independent Christian congregation. All in all, there are 44 active Christian congregations in Saaremaa.

<sup>4</sup> The numbers presented by many of the congregations that had registered by the year in question appear to be very approximate and sometimes even overestimated. Some congregations have apparently also taken into account persons who may stand in the registers but do not actively participate in religious life. A considerable part of the 172 000 members of the EELC in 1995, for instance, are probably quite estranged from the activities of their congregations. Adopting the paying of church dues as a criterion of active membership we see that in 1995, the EELC received the church dues from 55 058 members.

<sup>5</sup> That is to say, Lutherans made up 11.5 per cent of the population of Estonia in 1995; in 1936, some 75 per cent of the population were formally registered in the books of the EELC (GNADENTEICH 1995: 102).



In Hiiumaa there were 11 ECBUE, 5 EELC, 2 independent free congregations and 1 Orthodox congregation, all in all 19 organized congregations. In addition to those, there were members of the Estonian Christian Pentecostal Church (ECPC) and reports of the activities, in the 1990s, of members of the Word of Life, SDA, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons and probably other movements, which, however, had not left particularly noticeable traces by the year 1997.

In Läänemaa there were 13 EELC, 10 ECBUE, 2 ECPC, 1 EAOC, 1 SDA, 1 UMCE, 1 Full-Gospel and 1 independent Christian congregations, all in all 30 Christian congregations.

Furthermore, a small group of the members of the Estonian Brethren congregation survives in Läänemaa. Whereas in the mid-19th century Lääne- and Hiiumaa could boast of some 15 Brethren's chapels with almost 5000 members, the number (6–7) of the only remaining Brethren in Läänemaa and their venerable age do not give much hope for the future of this religious group. There are also a very few Urshanists remaining in Läänemaa.

There are also members of non-Christian movements acting in Läänemaa. One of the most conspicuous new religious groupings today is the congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, having more than 60 preachers at present whose active missionary work and witnessing has given rise to negative feelings. Out of all the religious communities active in Estonia, it is the Jehovah's Witnesses who have earned the most negative attitudes among the inhabitants of Lääne- and Hiiumaa which is shared alike by believers and non-believers. The most positive attitudes of both the members of various sectarian congregations and non-believers, however, are reserved for the Lutheran Church.

In addition to all that, there is a shrine with stupas in Läänemaa, the founder of which is called 'the Buddhan', that is, Buddhist, by his neighbours; according to his own opinion, he witnesses the 'faith of the immense'.

The doctrines and rituals characteristic of the earlier awakening movements persisted within the framework of West Estonian Baptist and Free Churches all through the Soviet period up to the present day.

As before, the greatest ECBUE congregation in Läänemaa is the Baptist Congregation of Ridala which has developed from the Ridala Free Believers' congregation founded in 1882. In the 1930s, the Ridala Baptist Church had over 700 members (BUSCH 1928). During the Soviet period the number of members decreased gradually. The church experienced a new rise only in 1988 when the number of members grew from 43 to more than 100; at present, there are ninety-odd members there.

Most of the former Free Believers have adopted not only the name, but also the better balanced religious views of the Baptists. The vivid and emotional spirit of the one-time great awakenings is nowadays kept alive in Läänemaa by various new congregations of the Pentecostal character founded there at the end of the 1980s and beginning of 1990s.

The greatest among the latter is the Full-Gospel Free congregation comprising more than 60 members and meeting at least twice a week; the meetings are noteworthy for the speaking in tongues, healing with hands, exorcism, falling down and the praising of God with cheerful song and witnessing to God's miraculous deeds.

Considering the West Estonian congregations, we can see that compared to the rest

of Estonia, the number of Orthodox congregations is still great in Saaremaa, whereas the ECBUE congregations are numerous all over the region. The situation has been pretty much the same ever since the Awakening of Läänemaa in the last quarter of the previous century. In 1997, as many as 32 of the 89 congregations of the ECBUE were located in Saane-, Hiiu- and Läänemaa (How... 1997).

The counties of Western Estonia rank first in Estonia as to the number of Christian congregations per number of inhabitants. According to a research made by the Estonian Evangelical Alliance (EEA), Lääne- and Hiiumaa had more evangelical congregations and working points per population than any other Estonian county; Hiiu- and Läänemaa were the only counties having 1 evangelical congregation or working point for less than 1000 people<sup>6</sup> (in Hiiumaa, 1 for every 584, in Läänemaa for every 959 inhabitants). Saaremaa ranked fourth in Estonia with 1 congregation or working point for every 1164 inhabitants; however, had the 14 EAOC congregations of Saaremaa been taken into account, too, Saaremaa would have stayed second only to Hiiumaa as to its number of Christian congregations/working points (764). In all other counties, the number of inhabitants per one congregation/working point was much higher (see: How... 1997).

In 1996, the author of the present paper did field work in five parishes of Läänemaa which had been centres of the historical religious movements discussed previously. A random selection of more than 200 (and older than 18 years) inhabitants of Läänemaa were questioned; 19.2 per cent of them belonged to various religious organizations and 33.2 per cent admitted that they were believers.

A similar research made in Hiiumaa in 1997 proved that in the two examined parishes (which were also centres of old religious movements), 17.1 per cent of the random selection were members of some congregation or church, whereas 25 per cent of the selection considered themselves religious.<sup>7</sup>

Lutherans made up the majority of the members of various religious movements in both counties – 17 per cent of the selection in Läänemaa and 12 per cent in Hiiumaa; the percentage of adherents to other confessions did not rise over 2.

Proceeding from these data we can say that even though the number of different Christian congregations in West Estonia is still comparatively greater than elsewhere in the country and most of them have experienced a certain revival during the last decade, the general proportion of believers has considerably decreased as compared to the 1920s and 1930s. Presuming that these counties are still relatively most receptive to religion in

<sup>6</sup> Thereby, the EEA research recognized as 'evangelical' the congregations of EELC, ECBUE, UMCE, ECPC, the Association of Full-Gospel Congregations, the Association of Christian Free Congregations, the Association of Evangelical Charismatic Congregations, and certain independent congregations which could be regarded, in the opinion of EEA, as preaching the Gospels. Thus, the congregations of EAOC, the Old Believers, the Catholics, the Adventists and other Christians were left out, as well as the congregations not recognized as Christian ones.

<sup>7</sup> Following are the numbers for the same parishes of Hiiumaa in 1922: in Käina parish, 81.5 per cent of the total population were Lutherans, 8.0 per cent Orthodox, 6.2 per cent Baptists, 2.3 per cent members of other movements and 0.6 per cent non-believers; religion was unknown in 1.0 per cent of the cases. In Emmaste parish, 70.5 per cent of the population were Lutherans, 4.5 per cent Orthodox, 13.9 per cent Baptists, 7.2 per cent members of other movements; 1.4 per cent were non-believers and in 2.3 per cent of the cases religion was unknown (1922. a. ... 1924).

Estonia, it seems that the role of different religious movements in Estonia has grown rather insignificant despite the temporary flourishing at the turn of the 1980s–1990s. A further decline in the numbers of West Estonian religious groupings can be prognosticated for the next few years, considering the relatively advanced age of the majority of their members. The young, however, are attracted to new congregations and movements which offer perhaps the same kind of intense and fresh religious experiences as did the one-time great awakening movements in West Estonia in their hey-day in the 18th and 19th centuries.

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