

Article

Toward Integrity and Integration of the Church(es) Relating to the State in the Secularized Cultural Context of Estonian Society

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Abstract: Classical paradigms of the church-state relations may be reflected in how the church has tried to work and live out her integrity in different cultural-political contexts. The churches in Estonia have envisioned Christian integrity in relation to the state differently in different times and stages of societal and cultural development. One could distinguish the following four types of relationships: *the conflict*, *the harmony*, *the two kingdoms*, and *the social servanthood*. This article will focus on the characteristics of these relationship paradigms along with some personal, communal, and ecumenical examples in the sense of integrity of Estonian church-life from the last century to the present day when social servanthood seems to be most relevant.

Keywords: character ethics; church and culture; church and society; church and state; community of character; ecumenical relationships; integrity; religious freedom; virtue ethics

1. Introduction

“In the history of the Christian church, the issue of the relation between church and state surfaced with new urgency during the seismic political shifts”, says an Estonian expert in patristics, Tarmo Toom (2020, p. 65). It seems so beyond the early church discussions in his concern (Funk 2006). Old questions come alive, again, in new contexts (Kovalenko 2022; Minarik 2020; Romocea 2011; Marsh and Zhong 2010). One could see it also in “the seismic political shifts” in Estonian society toward the end of the 20th and in the beginning of the 21st century. Classical paradigms of the church-state relations¹ may be reflected in how the church has tried to work and live out her integrity² in the best possible ways in different cultural-political contexts.³ So the Christian church in Estonian historical-denominational appearances—denoted as church(es) below—envisioned Christian integrity in relation to the state differently in different times and stages of societal and cultural development (Kilp 2012). One could distinguish the following four types of relationships: *the conflict*, *the harmony*, *the two kingdoms*, and *the social servanthood*. This article will focus on the characteristics of these relationship paradigms along with some personal, communal, and ecumenical examples in the sense of integrity of Estonian church-life from the last century up to the present day.

2. Integrity in Conflict

I was born into an Estonian family of baptistic faith during the Soviet totalitarian atheistic occupation regime. We were considered dissidents by the logic of control of the KGB. Our phone calls were tapped and recorded. Our life was followed. My father, Aamo Remmel, had been expelled from Tartu University medical faculty because of his proclamation of faith. The KGB was concerned and reported about his sermons in different cities and towns and declared his religious convictions to be fanatical along with other believing students (Rahvusarhiiv (Estonian National Archives) n.d., p. 35). My mother, Viivi Remmel, was a typist who secretly printed Christian books at home—five copies at a time through copy paper. So I knew from childhood with my older brother and two



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younger sisters how the truthful church(es) opposed the occupation regime of the Soviet state and its ideology in culture.

In my personal experience, this confrontation culminated in 1985 when I was forced to serve in the Soviet army near Volgograd (formerly Stalingrad), Russia. There I was interrogated for days and nights until the KGB officer pointed his revolver at my head and demanded renouncement of my faith. I never submitted. Instead, I argued for my integrity and religious freedom officially recognized in the Soviet Constitution. At the same time, the young man alone in the middle of Russia realized the irreconcilable contradiction between the Kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness, the church and the state persecuting believers.

The Bible and its teachings from home and the children's Sunday school and youth work, officially forbidden but secretly organized by the church, had prepared us to resist and stand firm in the faith knowing "that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings" (1 Pet 5:9, New International Version [NIV]). Jesus and his apostles along with the persecuted early church embodied the virtue-ethical examples to be followed by the 16th century radical Reformers as well as by ourselves toward the end of the 20th century in Estonia.⁴ Our sense of integrity was developing and sharpening in a conflicting state as we practiced our personal and communal life of faith and virtue of character both in our primary and secondary theology.⁵ We aimed to follow Jesus in his example and teaching: "In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven". (Matt 5:16, NIV).

The model of integrity following Jesus in such a context meant to be faithful and faith-full to the kingdom of light under the Lordship of Christ opposing the kingdom of darkness under the oppression of evil. It might well be reflected in the final conversation between my father in his young age and his academic dean in his age proposing him to keep his student status in the university if only promising publicly to withdraw from the church while privately still able to attend the church if wanted. My father responded: "I could never promise something I would never keep!" The dean concluded: "I am sorry for you leaving the university for such naive convictions . . ." (Rommel and Rommel 2007, p. 32).

So there was a disintegrity regime in the state suppressing and challenging the people of faith who were standing for their religious freedom and convictions concerning their communal character and ethics of integrity. The integrity for believers was measured up by the biblical narrative as the one and only authoritative text. And it was telling a promising story—as the tensional hope (Moltmann 1993, 2008; Meeks 2018)—that such a regime would not last forever. One just could not imagine "how long, O Lord . . ." (Rev 6:10, NIV). But the overall scene in the society changed suddenly in the late 1980s.⁶

3. Integrity in Harmony or Balance of the Two Kingdoms?

After the Chernobyl disaster in 1986, the Soviet system of lies began to shake and disintegrate while the Communist leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, tried to keep the empire in its integrity by so called *Glasnost* (meaning best "transparency") and *Perestroika* (meaning "re-building").⁷ It opened a field to the Estonian environmentalist campaign, called the *Phosphorite War* (*Fosforiidisõda* in Estonian). It was raising up against the Soviet planned economy secrets to develop large and polluting phosphorite mines in Estonia, which led to the so-called *Estonian Heritage Protection Movement* (*Muinsuskaitse liikumine* in Estonian) and finally to the so-called *Singing Revolution* (*Laulev revolutsioon* in Estonian) (Laar 2004; Subrenat 2004). The churches were found, again, as the carriers of historical memory and heritage, and the integrity of the church(es) was recognized across Estonian society (Parman et al. 1995; Rommel 2001). The Bible and biblical stories reflected in the Western and Estonian art and music were introduced in public schools and media. I was personally involved, too, using my background and opportunity as a student from Tartu University going from school to school with the old Estonian version of *La Grande Bible de Tours* showing 226 wood-engravings by Gustave Doré and telling the biblical stories to the students (*Jumala Püha Sõna. Suur Piibel 1938*). The national-political revival movement

was in harmony with the churches and their leaders showing the way forward. Estonian national folk songs and spiritual folk songs were sung side by side by both church and secular choirs. The long-lasting Estonian song festival tradition, growing out of the church choral singing, prepared the way for singing out and envisioning the hope for a free nation on a free land. Estonian artist Heinz Valk, then, coined the term *Singing Revolution* and its slogan: “One day, no matter what, we will win!” (*Ükskord me võidame niikuinii* in Estonian) (Vogt 2005, pp. 20–36). In Estonian ears it sounded in harmony with the Baptist vision of Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream!” (McClendon 1990, pp. 47–66). In a few years, the churches positioned themselves from conflict to harmony in their self-understanding, sense of integrity, and relationship to the wider society and its political ambitions. Two narratives, the national one and the biblical one, somehow joined together into one spiritual whole, at least so in our minds and hearts. And in the music. The Old Testament story of calling and sending the prophet Jonah became a symbolic national story. The oratory *Jonah’s Mission*, created and presented by the Estonian composer, Rudolf Tobias, first in 1909 in Leipzig, Germany, and then re-created and re-presented in 1989 in Tallinn, Estonia, resonated with the cultural identity and society fighting against the foreign political dictation (Rumessen 2008).

At the same time, as a young Christian student leader I found myself in the middle of leadership meetings of the Estonian Christian Society (*Eesti Kristlik Liit* in Estonian), established in 1988 and then divided into two different organizations in 1989: the Estonian Christian Democratic Union to become a political party led by some Lutheran pastors, and the Estonian Christian Association to become an apolitical socially active ecumenical organization. As I was proposed to join the political party, too (and later also by other political parties), I did not accept the offer. As a Baptist youth leader in the Estonian Lutheran cultural tradition, I leaned rather toward the teachings of Martin Luther himself (cf. Luther 1520, 1523; Nygren 2002; Beeke 2011).⁸ His balancing approach between the two kingdoms—God’s and human, Christ and culture, church(men) and state(men), heavenly and earthly citizens, prophetic and political in the mission—guided me along with the other priests and pastors and leaders of the Estonian churches to avoid direct involvement in politics. Yet, there were many pastors, again mainly from the Lutheran background, but also from the baptistic churches, who became involved both in the social and political life of Estonia, especially in the local level elections and governments. Most of them felt uncomfortable in politics later and withdrew themselves from political activity (or few from their service in the church) since Estonia regained its independence again in 1991, and the political life was expecting more and more professional expertise and full-time commitment (Remmel and Rohtmets 2021). According to the Constitution, Estonia was identified as “an independent and sovereign democratic republic” with a parliamentary democracy, and without a state church, just as it had been also before the Soviet occupation (Republic of Estonia 1992, §1, §40, §59–65; Altnurme 2009; Kiviorg 2001).

Now, the “timeless and inalienable” “independence and sovereignty of Estonia” was to “guarantee the preservation of the Estonian people, the Estonian language and the Estonian culture through the ages” (Republic of Estonia 1992, §1). Different churches were empowered to live and serve freely in the free society and organized themselves to “cooperate for the spiritual development of Estonian society based on Christian principles” (*Eesti Kirikute Nõukogu n.d.*). On this vision the Estonian Council of Churches was formed in 1989. Since then, it has integrated ten major Christian denominations in ecumenical cooperation for serving Estonian society in different times, needs, and spheres of life.⁹ In relation to the state, the Estonian Council of Churches has become a balancing dialogue partner to the government concerning religious and/or ethical questions as well as legislative initiatives in the Parliament or governmental ministries (*Eesti Vabariigi Valitsuse ja Eesti Kirikute Nõukogu ühishuvide protokoll 2002; Reinsalu 2019*). Here, the voice of the church(es) has not always been in harmony with the state and the developments in society. For instance, I have had to represent the Council in the Parliament commissions debating about some ethically dividing legislative initiatives in the society, such as a definition of

marriage, sexual partnership, or surrogate motherhood. A sense of integrity, shaped by the authoritative texts and historically extended practices of the church(es), has had to guide and tune the voice of the Christian community relating to different political agendas, parties, and governments.¹⁰ The “two kingdoms” paradigm may be heard in different messages of the church(es) to the public society and policy makers in Estonia when the critical or positive proposals have been expressed with prophetic overtones for a better and sound Estonian society both from the human and godly perspective.¹¹

4. Integrity in Social Servanthood

A few weeks before Estonia regained its independence in August 1991, I had become the pastor of the first Baptist church in Tallinn, established in 1884 and located in a poor area of the Estonian capital.¹² In just a few months, as soon as the “cold winter in Estonia from, 1991 to, 1992” had arrived, the freedom fighters’ slogan that “we are willing to eat even potato skins, the main thing is that we are free” became a real life experience (Vadi 2018). Our people were suddenly in an urgent need for all sorts of humanitarian help. The Soviet Union, along with its economic ties, was gone. The newly developing free market economy was not working yet for the people either. Many did not have work, money, food, or energy to warm up their homes. Our church, just as any other church who received lorries bringing packages of food and clothing from the sister churches in Scandinavia and Western Europe, was integrated into the local community by providing humanitarian help to all in critical need.

In, 1992, when the war broke out between Georgia and Abkhazia, the Estonian Migration Board evacuated native Estonians from Abkhazia, whose ancestors had emigrated and established the Estonian villages there during the Russian Empire in the 1880s.¹³ Since the newly emerged state and local governments lacked the resources to care for the refugees or to help them integrate into society, our church was integrated with the refugee work. In 1992, I also began to teach in Tallinn Medical School ethics and religions as well as crisis counseling and pastoral care. After the tragic ferry disaster on the Baltic Sea in 1994 when *MS Estonia* sank, claiming 852 lives from Estonia, Sweden and 15 other countries, our churches began to provide crisis counseling and pastoral care to those 137 survivors and the family members who had lost their relatives and intimate friends, and also support in grief and memorial services were organized in an ever-wounded Estonian society (Arnberg et al. 2013).

Ecumenical chaplaincy developed in cooperation with different denominations, beginning in the military and prisons, and later in the police, education, healthcare, and even sports (Eesti Kirikute Nõukogu 2022b, pp. 51–78). Personal and organizational mentoring and coaching began to gain importance in and by our churches in the 21st century (Pilli et al. 2017). Meanwhile, together with other specialists, I was involved in the preparation and establishment of professional crisis pregnancy counselors in the Estonian healthcare system according to the agreements between the Estonian Council of Churches and the government and its institutions (Eesti Vabariigi Valitsuse ja Eesti Kirikute Nõukogu ühishuvide protokoll 2002). All those and other similar developments, such as taking care of the street kids in the city of Tallinn in the 1990s, providing shelter and practical help to the adults living on the streets, and establishing the rehabilitation centers for alcohol and drug addicts in the 2000s, made the churches and society in Estonia more and more aware of the need for providing practical and structural help in real loving actions beside the good news shared in oral and printed form about the Kingdom of Christ. In the middle of Estonian secularized society,¹⁴ such Christ-like deeds made both news and more sense to the unchurched generations on the public scene with their skepticism toward institutional religion (Beilmann et al. 2016). So the role and mission of the church(es) was recognized both by the community of faith and the wider community of people in Estonian hypermodernizing culture (Lipovetsky 2005; Remmel 2016, 2017).

In place of the Soviet’s times of conflict in the relationship between the church(es) and society, and instead of the *harmony* and the *two kingdoms* paradigms from “the seismic political shifts” in the 1980s–1990s, the 21st century church(es) in Estonia would tend to realize a servanthood calling in and for the society. The Christian sense of identity and integrity of the churches has caught fire and taken initiatives, for example, in the

environmental campaign “Let’s Do It!” beginning in Estonia and then reaching out to the “World Clean-Up Day” ([World Cleanup Day 2022](#)). In an interesting way, again, collective creation care has built some meaningful bridges between the church(es) and the environmentalist, academic, political, and public people, and networks ([Leinus 2020](#)). So the church(es) in the highly secularized cultural context of Estonian society¹⁵ might move toward integrity and integration in the servanthood spirit.

5. Integrity in Times of Crisis

Crisis is always challenging the ways people and communities have used to live. So it is also with the communities of faith and societies, religious or irreligious. The third decade of the 21st century began with the COVID-19 pandemic hitting the whole world globally¹⁶ and raising new questions both in and outside of church communities all around the world, including Estonia ([Remmel and Remmel 2021](#); [Remmel et al. 2021](#)). A couple of years later, the Russian–Ukrainian war “updated” the glocal crisis and new questions concerning the relationship between the church(es) and its surrounding culture(s), society, and state. There are developing case studies shedding light on many different aspects of the very complex problem ([Stückelberger 2020](#), pp. 561–97; [Martin et al. 2020](#)). As this article is mainly concerned with Christian integrity and integration in the relationships between the church(es) and the state in Estonian secularized society, the following focus is limited to some reflections on the examples of integrity challenges as far as my own free church background and ecumenical cooperation is concerned in the relationships between the church(es) and the state during the last few years.

In the beginning of March 2020 and March 2022, I was asked as the Vice President of the Estonian Council of Churches to draft two particular appeals on behalf of the Council to all Estonian churches and public society. The first one in 2020 was made public right before the COVID-19 lockdown was realized by the Estonian government ([Eesti Kirikute Nõukogu 2020a](#)). Nobody knew, then, what exactly was coming over Estonian society along with other countries near and far, but the address appealed to the congregations and all the people of Estonia to pray and act for the ones suffering and/or working hard due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, and for the sustainability of common life. While expressing concerns about the safety of people and society as a whole, we asked the churches, as well as the general public, to follow the instructions and recommendations given by the Estonian government and relevant institutions along with the international organizations in order to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. At the same time, we asked for prayers for wisdom both for the doctors and scientists to treat and stop the virus, and for governments and international organizations around the world to fight against it.

Since the Council did not right away give instructions concerning church practices during the pandemic, there were some immediate reactions, including social media, about the appeal. Critics from one side were asking for some concrete guidelines from the Council¹⁷ while nobody really knew the specifics about the virus and its prevention, at least not yet. From the other side there was a growing criticism against the restrictions altogether ([Kiisler and Remmel 2021](#)). In the following days, weeks, months, and years, the representatives of the Council and Estonian government had regular meetings to advise each other on the specifics on how to optimize and keep balance between the public safety and religious freedom in Estonia while the pandemic was rapidly spreading, including the issues concerning the vaccination.¹⁸

Now, looking back, one could conclude that the church(es) embodied relevant Christian integrity while cooperating with and balancing the government and its institutions concerning the regulations limiting both civil and religious freedoms during the pandemic ([Remmel and Remmel 2021](#)). The Christian church in Estonia was, after all, acting in servanthood for the whole society and its best possible well-being in the given conditions, not looking for a conflict or harmony per se with the government or rest of the society. While some might have identified the relationship between the church(es) and the state with the “two kingdoms” pattern in which both parties could realize their own role in

a dialectic tension with the other, the social servanthood paradigm might characterize the church–state relationship better.

The chaplaincy service in the healthcare system was introduced just before the lockdown in 2020, and it continued to grow, develop, and provide real service to the patients and medics both in the hospitals and nursing homes.¹⁹ In connection with the outbreak of the coronavirus and the crisis situation, the healthcare chaplain service requested support from the state in order to provide public service around the clock to the people needing pastoral counseling on an open helpline.²⁰ At the same time, my own church, 3D Church, organized a quick hackathon in the beginning of April 2020 in order to develop in a few days and launch shortly thereafter (in the beginning a prototype and later a fully designed) an ecumenical web-platform, sinuabi.ee²¹, for enabling public and free of charge access to Christian counselors and mental health professionals who would be available to provide help to the (younger) people who would visit the platform, read the forums, or contact the specialists with their personal needs.²² As the ecumenical project had already reached up to a hundred specialists, governmental support was requested and received to upgrade and develop the platform for its operational sustainability (*Eesti Kirikute Nõukogu 2022b*, pp. 110–11). Now, by the helpful available network of professionals from different churches, hundreds of people—believers and unbelievers—have open access to professional Christian counseling services for mental and spiritual health (*SINUABI 2020*). One might explore other examples, too, of how the churches in Estonia cooperated with each other and with the state or local governments in order to support ordinary people, healthcare workers and the society as a whole in the spirit of servanthood. The overall understanding was—from the Prime Minister²³ to the general public, including the media²⁴—that the society in crisis was in a real need of mental and spiritual support, and the church(es) could serve the purpose. The government minister of the population, a believer herself, addressed and acknowledged the Estonian churches for their good cooperation with the state for the public good from the very beginning of the pandemic.²⁵ So a good paradigm and a number of best practices in social servanthood modeled how church(es) could relate to the Estonian society and state in times of crisis from 2020 to 2022.

In the beginning of March 2022, the crisis caused by the coronavirus was almost forgotten. The Russian aggression against Ukraine and a large number of war refugees reaching Estonia along with other countries forced the government to lift as quickly as possible most of the restrictions applied earlier in the society of Estonia, such as the mandatory obligation to wear a mask or show the vaccination certificate when entering public places. Now, the most urgent questions were around mobilizing the whole society, including as many churches as possible, for supporting Ukraine and Ukrainians reaching Estonia. Only a few hours after the first attacks from Russia against Ukraine in the morning of 24 February 2022, an ecumenical worship service was held in Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, attended by the Estonian President and members of the government and parliament along with diplomatic and public guests, which was broadcast on national television since it was the national day of independence of Estonia. A public statement and prayer was made by the Estonian Council of Churches concerning the war and integrity of Ukraine and Estonia.²⁶ The Lutheran archbishop emeritus and the president of the Council, Andres Põder, who read aloud the statement during the worship service, published a personal commentary about it a couple of weeks later since some critical voices had appeared in the media, including social media, criticizing the churches and especially the Russian Orthodox Church leaders in Estonia, being part of the Council and its statements, expecting him to say more about the war polarizing the whole world, including the so-called “Russian world”, *Russki mir*.²⁷ The issue has still not been settled.

As mentioned, I was asked by the Estonian Council of Churches in March 2022, again, to draft a statement on behalf of the Council how all ten member churches, including the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate and its head representative, Metropolitan Eugene, living and ministering in Estonia as a Russian citizen, would relate

to the Russian aggression against Ukraine. It was not a big problem to draft a proposal. But it was more complicated to edit the exact wording in the negotiations between the member churches in a way all would accept and sign it.²⁸ It was finally completed after some behind the scenes talks at my last Council meeting in March 2022 as the Vice President before handing the role over to the next leadership. The Vice-Chancellor of the Ministry of Interior and his advisor on religious affairs awarded me with a letter of thanks for the years I worked on the ecumenical relationships between the churches in Estonia and for the partnership between Estonian churches with the Republic of Estonia for the public good. At the same time, they made a request to the Council to issue a long-awaited public statement against the Russian aggression against Ukraine, including the signature of the Estonian Russian Orthodox metropolitan. For some of the church leaders, it seemed odd how the representative of the state could make a statement to the churches in the civil society (which is to respect the religious freedom of the communities of faith in Estonia) about what the churches were supposed to do in order to support the state policy in the critical times of the war. Such appeals have appeared also in other contexts of the world divided by the war.²⁹

Since the Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill of Moscow announced that any Russian soldier who dies in the war in Ukraine is forgiven for his sins (*Patriarch of Moscow 2022*), both the new President of the Estonian Council of Churches, Urmas Viilma, the Archbishop of Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Estonia, Lauri Läänemets, were provoked to take a public stand against such a politically motivated theological statement by the head of the Russian Orthodox believers who also have membership in the Estonian Council of Churches.³⁰ For Viilma, it appeared, first of all, to be a question of theological and moral integrity. For the government ministers, it was a critical political issue, forcing them to make an ultimatum to the Russian Orthodox Metropolitan Eugene in Estonia to distance himself from Kirill's position (*Vasli 2022; Siseministeerium: Eugeni elamisloa tühistamist ei saa välistada 2022; Uiibo 2022; Länts 2022*). Different opinions were expressed in the media, including by scholars and church leaders along with journalists and political commentators, whether a government minister could ever make an ultimatum to a minister of a church in Estonia which is known worldwide for its respect for religious liberty (*Metropoliit Stefanus 2022; Rohtmets 2022a; Nõmmik 2022; Paas 2022; Jaagant 2022*). Lutheran Archbishop Viilma expressed his hesitance concerning such a pressure from the government, arguing it to be encroachment on religious freedom (*Viilma 2022; Hindre 2022*). A similar statement was made by the Russian Orthodox Synod in Estonia (*Õigeusu kiriku sinod: Kirik ei saa pidevalt poliitiliste avaldustega esineda 2022*). Metropolitan Eugene himself calmed tensions down by responding to the ultimatum in time and with a satisfying statement for the ministers, stating that he does not share the position verbalized by Kirill (*Metropoliit Eugeni 2022a*). The case was closed, in a sense.³¹ But a bigger question was still left in the air: what would integrity and integration look like for the church(es) relating to the state in the secularized cultural context of Estonian society? And how would it relate to the freedom of religion or belief in the warlike tensions? (*Juhtkiri: Põhiseadusesse kirjutatud usuvabadusel on piirid 2022; Danilson-Järg 2022; Küüt 2022; Weidebaum 2022*).

6. Integrity under Question

Now, maybe we are back to the main question: "What is integrity after all, and what is integrity expecting from us as church(es) in Estonia?"

Charles Dyer (1997, p. xiv) points out in his book *Integrity* that "integrity is an idea everyone embraces but few can define—an ideal all believe in but few achieve". Etymologically, it may refer to one who is entire, solid, authentic, or upright, says Charles Swindoll (Dyer 1997, p. x).³² "Biblically, the word integrity describes someone whose words and actions match God's written standards. A person of integrity is someone whose talk—and walk—resemble the character and conduct of Jesus Christ" (Dyer 1997, pp. xiv–xv). Followers of Jesus may envision integrity in his likeness as a virtue–ethical telos for human

development³³—the image of God and humanity at its B/best is revealed in the person of Jesus according to the Scriptures.³⁴

Alasdair MacIntyre has provided a virtue–ethical paradigm for interpreting integrity in the philosophical language for a better understanding of its development and relevancy in a particular historical tradition and its cultural narrative and social practices (MacIntyre 2007a, 2007b). It has been helpful also to me to reflect on how Estonians have historically narrated about Jesus as someone embodying their sense of virtue guiding them and their integrity in the midst of a disintegrated world of political powers coming and going over the people.³⁵ “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8, NIV), and so his image in its integrity might provide a virtue–ethical type for a people shaping their moral vision also in national storytelling and folk singing (Remmel 2000, pp. 20, 28, 34–35, 62–64). A sense of integrity in Jesus might “disciple” an *ethnic* group of people on Estonian soil with a virtue–ethical vision about the type of character or community of people being true to one’s self and others before God.

According to Henry Cloud (2009), integrity is more than a moral course of life. It relates to the outcome of the course of life in its achievements as well as in its impact on other people (Cloud 2009, pp. 13–28). Many leaders of the world may become great in their use of power for achieving things while failing in their impact on the people around them since misusing their power. So integrity should mean a more holistic life story combining both achievements and impact for empowering others, whether insiders or outsiders of the community in its particularities. Cloud argues that the people of integrity create and maintain trust; are able to see and face reality; work in a way that brings results; embrace negative realities and solve them; cause growth and increase; and achieve transcendence and meaning in life (Cloud 2009, p. x). Research in neuroeconomics has shown how such integrity would grow trust as a symbolic capital along with the social and financial one (Zak 2012). If a community of character would grow toward such trustworthy integrity, the life of society would benefit, and the culture would begin to change. If the people of Estonia, however secularized, would realize the *telos* of church(es) being in integrity of the *teleion en Hristo* with a real servanthood and empowerment of the people, and not in the institutional power games or two-faced politics, the interaction between the church(es) and the wider society with its political government would make a difference.

Contemporary outsiders of the church(es) in Estonia may criticize the church³⁶—just as they might criticize all who have or use some kind of power in a person-centered secular state and culture—for not living up to her integrity and/or for not using its power for empowering others in the achievements and influence.³⁷ The church or its leaders might argue with their critics. But the critics might not be after the verbal arguments at all. The secular society in a given state might not be even after the moral arguments of the church. The critique might be after some kind of embodied argument for a type of social life or culture the church would need to live out both for insiders and outsiders of the church, empowering the society for better in a given state. A true story and not a fake story of the church (PR³⁸) is needed, and without a double agenda.

Hereby is a good example of how the churches and their pastoral leaders have mobilized themselves for serving the Ukrainian war refugees arriving in Estonia and settling in different cities, towns, and villages. All the churches, regardless of denominational affiliation, including the Russian Orthodox community of faith in Estonia, have been involved in providing practical help, guidance, fellowship, pastoral care, and even shelter to the people in need. I have personally served Ukrainian refugees as a pastoral counselor since March 2022—being and sharing with them day by day and week after week. I have been humbled by listening to their stories, asking pastoral questions, and guiding their thoughts and prayers to trust God as the compassionate personal divine Love in the midst of existential personal and national crises. In many cases, one can do nothing else but be open-hearted and empathetic when people may feel thrown into a foreign land not knowing the language, culture, people, and for how long they should consider such a country as their home. The wider society and its non-profit organizations, state institutions such as the Social Insurance

Board, and political governments both on the local and national level, along with the ministries dealing with the refugees such as the Ministry of Social Affairs, have appreciated such pastoral and social services the churches have been able to provide. Nobody has raised a question about our sincerity, integrity, and (no-to-double) agenda as we have mutually supported each other and the people in need. So we have been able to serve together waves of refugees in and through our country numbering up to 10% of the Estonian population ([Total of Ukraine Refugees with Estonian Temporary Protection May Double 2022](#)).

Nigel Wright (2005), in his book *Free Church. Free State*,³⁹ describes how integrity and empowering relations seem to have been the two virtuous traits of character in the life of Jesus and his followers, achieving something for and/or having a real positive impact on the people and communities in their time and cultural context, whether following Jesus or not ([Wright 2005](#), pp. 204–83). Jesus embodied and developed with his disciples a moral vision for a “touchable church”—the kind of “open access” messianic presence of the people in a given community looking for authentic change in real-life situations (compare Matt 14:34–6 and Jn 13:33–5, NIV). Such an accessive presence of the openly loving followers of Jesus would be needed also to serve in and for the contemporary secular context of Estonia. A *conflict* or *harmony* and even *the two kingdoms* type of relationship might not serve the purpose here. Christ-like servanthood might. “But this is an alternative political existence in which believers march to the beat of a different drum. Where this is lost sight of the church’s potential as a transformative community is diminished” ([Wright 2005](#), p. 234).

Kirill, the Patriarch of Moscow, might live and speak out his own integrity, but following a beat of another gospel, a narrative of the “Russian world”, the ideology of *Russki mir*, not the Gospel of Christ, the authoritative text for the people God who follow Jesus in and for the peaceable Kingdom (cf. [Hauerwas 1991](#)). Estonian churches, Orthodox or not, and people, believers or not, may discern such a demagogically theologizing ideological communication and falsify it altogether because they sense their integrity in “the beat of a different drum”. This “beat” is coming from an alternative “metronome”, and it is followed, for example, by the worldwide known Estonian composer Arvo Pärt. His community of faith is also Russian Orthodox, but his ecumenical faith is derived from the authoritative text which is not of “Russian world” or any other political worldview, but the worldview of the Holy Scriptures. He does not comment on politics, although he was banned during the Soviet occupation because of his Credo in faith and music.⁴⁰ In his prayerful spirituality, he continues to create music for the peace in the world.⁴¹ Yet, in March 2022, after the Russian aggression in Ukraine, he was first to sign a petition to Kirill with an appeal to convey to the Russian leadership “our urgent supplication for an immediate end to bloodshed, and that Russian troops should be withdrawn from the territory of Ukraine” ([Pärt et al. 2022](#)). Such a man of faith and integrity has deserved the deep respect from everybody in Estonian society, including some vocal agnostics among our top politicians and cultural elite. As a living example of Estonian sense of integrity, Arvo Pärt points to a “better beat” for a nation of peaceable singing revolution. He acknowledges the fact that he lives in the highly secularized Nordic-Baltic cultural context of Europe. But his spirituality and music still hum and resonate with our folkways in which our B/best is measured up to Jesus and his integrity. His peaceable “beat” can be found and followed by the “notes of the music”—meaning the authoritative text, the biblical Scriptures telling about the integrity of the Messiah and his followers in the name of Jesus⁴²—and by listening to other “drums beating” beside us—meaning the narratives of the other churches all around the world⁴³—and following the “rhythms” and influences of those social practices which are “in sound” with our common sense of integrity and integration of the church and the country called to serve together in the best practices possible.

7. Toward Integrity and Integration

As Alasdair MacIntyre (1989) has explained, a living tradition is a historically extended and socially embodied argument which might face an epistemological crisis in her course

of development. The previous narratives and practices might be challenged in the newly realized contexts. Carrying a sense of virtue, the tradition needs to look for a renewed approach to its authoritative text(s) by which she has been formed and reformed, made sustainable and able to reflect upon and respond to the critics both inside and outside of the tradition. So the integrity of the tradition along with her narratives and practices is maintained and developed in the course of time (MacIntyre 1989, pp. 138–57).

The church and state relationships in Estonia have gone through several epistemological crises in the last decades and recent years during some “seismic political shifts” in society. So I have experienced and described four different ways the church(es) in Estonia could relate to the state in a given stage of societal and cultural development: *the conflict*, *the harmony*, *the two kingdoms*, and *the social servanthood*. The latter seems to be most relevant today. Estonian churches and their representatives in the midst of secular society, including myself, need to make sure that our integrity and its communication would be integrated with our best social practices, narratives, and virtues understandable to the wider society. In the midst of a globally developing crisis and overskeptical culture, there is a long way to go, serving in the growing number of areas of life and working together for integrity and integration in and for the future of Estonia. Jesus said: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you!” (Jn, 20:21, NIV). So we must go.

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Notes

- ¹ “This struggle has taken various forms in history”, writes Richard S. Unruh (1976), “but, particularly during the medieval-Reformation era, alternative ways of conceptualizing church–state issues developed which have become the classical models for the Christian church. Roman Catholicism sought to include the political order within a comprehensive theological perspective, on the assumption that every aspect of reality should be seen as under the control of a creative, sovereign God. Lutheranism, Anabaptism, and Reformism, on the other hand, developed variations of the idea that church and state were separate orders, each justified in its own sphere of operation”.
- ² The concept of *integrity* in its philosophical, theological, and virtue–ethical connotations will be addressed toward the end of this article illustrating first the actual need for realization of integrity as such. “Ordinary discourse about integrity involves two fundamental intuitions: first, that integrity is primarily a formal relation one has to oneself, or between parts or aspects of one’s self; and second, that integrity is connected in an important way to acting morally, in other words, there are some substantive or normative constraints on what it is to act with integrity”, states Cox, La Caze and Levine in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Cox et al. 2021).
- ³ Estonian church leader and ethicist Robert Võsu, for example, wrote his virtue–ethical approach to evangelical ethics into a textbook first in Russian language for all the baptistic churches and church leaders in 1978 during the times of the former Soviet Union, and then adjusted it into Estonian language and context (Võsu 1996, pp. 7–8). Dealing with the relationship to culture and society he gives the following guidelines: “1. A believer should try to understand the right plans of the government and help from his/her side in the plans which are to increase the well-being of people. 2. Participate in public life, if needed and there is opportunity to do good for other people. 3. To do all what is possible for edifying justice, freedom and peace. 4. Constantly pray for the country, people and government. 5. Say your word out through love, but with full severity in cases of violations of rights and injustice. 6. Fulfill exemplarily and honestly all your duties before the state (Romans 13:6–7). 7. Live in peace, justice and love with other people, being an example to them (1 Peter 2:12). 8. Help to save people from the sinful life, and by that help edify the general moral life of the people” (Võsu 1996, p. 234).
- ⁴ See a virtue–ethical comparison between the Anabaptist and Estonian baptistic communities of faith in my doctoral dissertation (Remmel 2011).
- ⁵ “Primary theology is the church trying to think out its own convictions, and this gets expressed in sermons, prayers, hymns – the sources of its ongoing common life. Eventually, primary convictions by which it tries to live get written down in creeds and confessions of faith or expressed afresh in new hymns and new sermons or simply lived out in the lives of existing members of the community. Secondary theology, which is the main thing that universities are concerned with, is theology about theology. It tries to take a step back from primary theology and ask questions about justification, truth, legitimation, and the significance of primary theology” (McClendon and Smith 1975, pp. 191–92). See more on primary and secondary theology in (McClendon 2002, pp. 17–46;

McClendon 1994, pp. 21–62; and also on the “first-order” and “second-order” language of religion in Murphy 1994, pp. 245–70; Hauerwas 1994, pp. 143–62; Fiddes 2000, pp. 19–38).

6 There are treatises written about the rapid changes in Estonia along with the final collapse of the Soviet Union, for instance: Lauristin et al. (1997). The role of Estonian churches and their moral vision in the process of change is reflected in the author’s book: Remmel (2000).

7 “When Gorbachev started loosening fear in the system, in the absence of a strong enough alternative to both ideology and fear as a means to exert influence upon society, nationalist movements filled the vacuum. It is interesting that this idea is also linked to Chernobyl, as the majority of the nationalist movements in the USSR originated from the early environmental movements. Since Glasnost allowed the expression of concerns about the level of pollution after the Chernobyl catastrophe and its effects on public health, a hope appeared amongst the nationalists that they could also have their freedom of speech” (Kurylo 2016, p. 65).

8 “Luther drew a clear line between spiritual and temporal authority, and expressly emphasized that under no circumstances should these two realms be confused”, explains Anders Nygren (2002). In the *Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate*, Martin Luther (1520) reasoned: “Therefore, just as those who are now called ‘spiritual’—priests, bishops or popes—are neither different from other Christians nor superior to them, except that they are charged with the administration of the Word of God and the sacraments, which is their work and office, so it is with the temporal authorities,—they bear sword and rod with which to punish the evil and to protect die good. A cobbler, a smith, a farmer, each has the work and office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops, and every one by means of his own work or office must benefit and serve every other, that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, even as all the members of the body serve one another” (p. 3).

9 “A beneficial development for the churches occurred on 17 October 2002, when the Government of the Republic and the Estonian Council of Churches, which was founded in 1989 and represented the majority of Estonian churches, signed a Protocol of Common Concerns. The document specified the areas of mutual interest of the churches and the state, and created possibilities for increased cooperation. The areas specified include, among others, religious education, youth work, chaplaincy services, heritage conservation, nursing and social care (deacony), and studies in sociology of religion. According to the Protocol, the partner of the state in this cooperation was the representative organization of the churches, not any individual church” (Altnurme 2009, pp. 230–31). Now, at the time of writing in October 2022, the Government of the Republic and the Estonian Council of Churches celebrated their 20 years of cooperation based on the Protocol of Common Concerns with a conference in Estonian Parliament (Raudvassar 2022; Konverents 2022). It was also appreciated by the Prime Minister on the reception in her office: “I am glad that, in cooperation between the government and the churches, we have been able to focus on the priorities that are relevant at the moment. For example, during the corona crisis, churches helped their congregations to do vaccination outreach, and when Russia brutally invaded Ukraine, they helped people fleeing the war. Difficult times lie ahead. It is important to ensure that the spiritual and psychological needs of our people are met. My thanks to the churches for always being there for people when they need you” (Kallas 2022).

10 For example, the Estonian Council of Churches has verbalized and published its proposals to the political parties for shaping their programs and campaigns in the elections (Pöder 2018; Viilma 2018).

11 See, for instance, *Eesti Kirikute Nõukogu* (2021), pp. 17–192.

12 “The district is now undergoing rapid gentrification with its houses and apartments in high demand by many, including the hipster generation. It is here that you’ll find our church, the only one in Kalamaja”, introduces Tallinn Kalju Baptistikogudus, the church for a visitor on the web (Tallinn Kalju Baptistikogudus 2022).

13 “One hundred seventy Estonians and members of their families were brought from Abkhazia to Estonia using three airplanes (on 23–24 October, 29–31 October, and 21–23 November) in the course of the evacuation operation” (Jürgenson 2018).

14 Compare secularization trends in Estonia reflected in the last population censuses on demographic and ethno-cultural characteristics of the population (Estonia Counts 2022).

15 Population census trends show a developing secularization in Estonian society: “It turns out that the majority (58%) of people in Estonia do not have an affiliation to any religion. 13% were not willing to answer this question. 29% identify with a religion and this percentage has not changed in the last three censuses. However, the proportion of people who do not feel an affiliation to any religion has increased compared with that of previous censuses. While in 2011, the share of such persons was 54%, by 2021 it had risen to 58%. The increase has come mainly from among those who previously preferred not to answer this question. In 2011, the non-response rate was 14%, whereas this time it is 13%. (. . .) 29% of people aged 15 and over in Estonia feel affiliated with a religion. The most common religions are still Orthodoxy (16%) and Lutheranism (8%). People with other religious affiliations account for 5% of the total population. Compared with previous censuses, it is noteworthy that the share of Lutherans has continued to fall: they accounted for 14% in the 2000 census, 10% in 2011, and only 8% in last year’s census. The proportion of Orthodox Christians, however, has increased slightly over the last two decades: from 14% in 2000 to 16% in both 2011 and 2021. The decline in the number and proportion of Lutherans, while the number of Orthodox Christians has increased, is affected by the ethnicity and age distribution of people who feel affiliation to these religions. Lutheranism continues to be the most widespread religion among Estonians and Orthodoxy among Russians and other Slavs. The share of other religions in the population has changed less since the previous census, mostly remaining the same or increasing slightly” (Estonia Counts 2022). In the beginning

of 2022, there were 1,331,796 people in Estonia: 919,693 native Estonians, 315,242 Russians, 90,149 other ethnic nationalities, and 6712 people with unknown ethnic nationality (Estonia Counts 2022).

- 16 The word *glocal* is now used for the world being both global and local at the very same time. According to *Britannica*, glocalization is “the simultaneous occurrence of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies in contemporary social, political, and economic systems. The term, a linguistic hybrid of *globalization* and *localization*, was popularized by the sociologist Roland Robertson and coined, according to him, by Japanese economists to explain Japanese global marketing strategies” (Blatter 2022).
- 17 Something like the guidelines produced later by the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (GEKE/CPCE 2021).
- 18 Deriving from such dialogues the first guidelines were delivered to the churches in Estonia on 13 March 2020 (Eesti Kirikute Nõukogu 2020c). The Council itself never obligated people on medical matters, including concerning vaccination, since such things would be personal issues of informed consent between the healthcare specialists and the particular patient (compare Sander 2021).
- 19 Pastoral care was provided to people in healthcare (Eesti Kirikute Nõukogu 2020d; Eesti Kirikute Nõukogu 2022b, pp. 68–77).
- 20 The Estonian (and in other languages) helpline 116,123 answered to 12,859 phone calls from the beginning of the pandemic until the end of year, 2021 (Eesti Kirikute Nõukogu 2022b, pp. 73–75).
- 21 Explore the Christian platform for mental and spiritual help. ‘*Sinu abi*’ in Estonian language means in English ‘*Your Help*’ (SINUABI 2020).
- 22 Such a new and needed portal made news both in the national TV news and public media (Eesti Kirikute Nõukogu 2020e).
- 23 See the Prime Minister’s letter to Estonian churches on 19 March 2020 (Ratas 2020a) and the letter of appreciation to the Estonian Council of Churches for good cooperation on 11 June 2020 (Ratas 2020b).
- 24 Sunday morning ecumenical devotionals were included in the national TV program when the public was not able to attend the worship services in churches, but only virtually (Eesti Kirikute Nõukogu 2020b).
- 25 “We have a crisis”, said minister Riina Solman in her speech on 17 June 2020, “and that does not make sense to waste it. We can live in a different way—namely better. Here the church is the one who is called and set to act both directly and in the digital world, offering new values, new life, and the sense of being held. With our perception of the visible world, we cannot grasp all the gifts that churches and congregations offer: intercessory prayers and spiritual leadership, dealing with spiritual problems and daily work full of love. (. . .) Working together with our spiritual leaders has been an enriching journey, where understanding and patience prevail. God works with our hearts and minds. The fruits of this activity are not all visible here and now, but there is hardly any doubt about the necessity of this work. I am glad that we also managed to involve the state and the government in supporting this largely invisible work, because believers form a very large part of our civil society, communal approach, and the life of communities” (Solman 2020).
- 26 The appeal to pray for the conflict resolution and peace was prepared and issued a few days earlier on 21 February 2022 (Eesti Kirikute Nõukogu 2022b).
- 27 See, for example, the critique by Estonian church historian Priit Rohtmets (Rohtmets 2022b). The President of the Estonian Council of Churches, Andres Põder, replied on the same national news channel ERR on 13 March 2022: “Just a few hours after the beginning of the aggression, I read the Estonian Council of Churches’ prophetic address at the service held in the Tallinn Episcopal Cathedral on February 24 (which was also broadcast by Estonian TV), emphasizing that it specifically concerns the situation in Ukraine. In the address, the Council called on all people to pray for peace both in Europe and around the world: “Let us pray that the leaders of countries have the readiness to resolve conflicts through diplomatic means. Let us pray that where there are armed clashes, hostilities will end and peace will come”. It is clear that an end is not asked for something that is approved, but still for something that is condemned. Thus, the address gave an assessment of Russia’s aggression in Ukraine and called for action to end it quickly. He who prays also contributes. Care and love do not allow anything else. (. . .) This, the understanding expressed jointly by all the Council member churches, has subsequently been supplemented by several Council member churches with their own positions. The Bible recommends showing your faith not so much in words as in actions. It is gratifying how incredibly large and extensive our nation’s support is for the victims of the conflict in Ukraine. The contribution of churches and individual Christians in alleviating people’s suffering is also significant. Be it making financial donations (. . .), collecting humanitarian aid and delivering it to Ukraine, or accepting refugees” (Põder 2022).
- 28 The Metropolitan Eugene, the head of the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, revealed in his interview to the Estonian national media some of the details concerning the negotiations behind the scenes of the Estonian Council of Churches: “I would like to draw your attention to something that no one knows. The first version of this text talked about Putin and no one else. We were against it. We discussed it among ourselves and proposed to nominate other leaders or none at all. (. . .) Our proposal was as follows: “The leadership of the Russian Federation, as well as the leaders of other world powers, must realize their responsibility for the events taking place in Ukraine and must take energetic and intelligent steps to restore peace”. This wording was not supported and a different draft was adopted” (Metropoliit Eugeni 2022b). The final text in this particular section was as it follows: “The UN General Assembly has condemned Russia’s military activities in Ukraine. As the representatives of the member churches of the Estonian Council of Churches, we agree with this assessment” (Eesti Kirikute Nõukogu 2022a).
- 29 For instance, in August–September 2022 the Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) gathered in Germany, and was addressed by the hosting Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier. In his speech to the WCC he condemned the collaboration

of the Russian Orthodox Church with imperialist Russia. At the same time the German leader was admonishing all the other churches gathered at the WCC to align with the Western countries (Steinmeier 2022). Balancing such an expectation from a Western world political figure to the Christian leaders of the world, the Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill of Moscow praised the Russian President Vladimir Putin as a national leader “selflessly devoted to the Fatherland, sincerely loving the Motherland and giving her all your strength, abilities and talents”. On Putin’s 70th birthday, Kirill said: “The Lord placed you at the helm of power, so that you could perform a service of special importance and great responsibility for the fate of the country and the people entrusted to your care”, listing what he argued are some of the most important achievements of Putin’s reign. Among these, he said, are the “transformation of the image of Russia, strengthening of its sovereignty and defense capability, protection of national interests, progressive socio-economic development, and concern for the wellbeing of fellow citizens”. Thanking Putin for his support for church initiatives, Kirill voiced hope that the “fruitful cooperation” between the Russian Orthodox Church and Putin’s government would assist in the preservation of “the rich historical, spiritual and cultural heritage of Russia” (Allen 2022).

30 There are two Orthodox churches in Estonia both members of the Estonian Ecumenical Council: the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, and the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church, which is an Orthodox church in Estonia under the direct jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. Now, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has expressed his opinion on the issue, too, saying that it would be better for Patriarch Kirill to step down than to support the war: “What is still more painful to us is the fact that the Moscow Patriarchate has come to the level of submitting to the political ambitions of the Russian Federation, supporting and seemingly blessing this violent invasion and unjustified bloodshed. (. . .) We have repeatedly condemned aggression and violence, as we fervently and fraternally appealed to the Patriarch of Moscow to separate his position from political crimes, even if it means stepping down from his throne” (Ecumenical Patriarch: It Is better for Patriarch Kirill to Step Down than to Support the War 2022).

31 Later on, the Metropolitan Eugene commented on his statement in an interview to the Estonian national TV channel in Russian, saying that people may justify whatever, but the final judgment is ultimately God’s (Митрополит Евгений об ультиматуме Ляэнеметса: немножко удивила форма постановки вопроса 2022). In another interview to Estonian national TV, Eugene made a critical comment concerning the way the Minister of Interior had forced him to distance himself from Kirill, intervening in the internal affairs of the church (Kuzmina and Kärmas 2022).

32 “The word is derived from the Latin *integritas*, which means “wholeness . . . completeness”. The root term, *integer*, means “untouched, intact, entire”. One with integrity is solid, authentic, upright. Interestingly, the Hebrew term usually translated “integrity” in the Old Testament (*tome*) means the same thing: “whole, complete, upright, ethically sound” (Dyer 1997, p. x).

33 Apostle Paul argues that Jesus Christ is the *telos* of human life for all the people—*teleion en Hristo*: “God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ” (Col 1:27–28, NIV).

34 “Now we are children of God”, says the Bible (1 Jn 3:2–3, NIV), “and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure”.

35 Uku Masing, one of the most well-known theological researchers in Estonian history, writing in 1938 about a particularly Estonian way of Christian faith and morality in his article *Estonian Christianity*, argued that Estonians with their primitive democracy have not been able to accept hierarchies. Even the Estonian word for the Lord—*Issand*—has historically lost its meaning (*isand* as a lord) in the Estonian mind and has uniquely become a name of the Person called *Issand*. The Estonian God, for Uku Masing, is not a Master over human beings, but as the Father, the Elder, the friendly Brother (Masing 1938, pp. 233–43).

36 In Summer 2021, for example, there were a series of articles and follow-up commentaries published in Estonian secular media concerning the political lobby on behalf of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church and its Archbishop Urmas Viilma. See, for instance, the opening article by Eero Epner, Holger Roonemaa and Oliver Kund (Epner et al. 2021).

37 See, for example, criticism of the public opinions in an interesting academic project of documentary theater concerning the believers in Estonia by Laura Jaanhold (2022).

38 PR stands for public relations.

39 Nigel Wright sums up his vision for integrity in the relationship of a free church in a free society of a free state: “The biblical narrative gives evidence of many different configurations of the public and private in the relationships between God’s people and the wider world. It is possible to be faithful to God in all of them. We may believe that a firm theological foundation better preserves those public virtues which make for the common good. But we do not need to possess the public realm to participate in it. Religious and spiritual truths are at their most potent when they are offered modestly as witness from below rather than requirement from above. But Christian faith can never forsake its public testimony or concerns. Participate we must in order to be true to our ultimate hopes and visions and so that, informed by an ultimate future which puts all things in context, we might seek the welfare of the earthly city in which we are in exile” (Wright 2005, pp. 278–79).

40 *Credo* (Latin for “I believe”) is one of the most important and dramatic collage pieces in the earlier career of Arvo Pärt, premiered on 16 November 1968, in Tallinn, and banned shortly afterwards by the Soviet occupation regime. The underlying text for *Credo* is in fact itself a collage. Pärt has combined a phrase from the Christian Statement of Faith, “I Believe in Jesus Christ”, with an excerpt from the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel according to Matthew, which defines the essence of Christianity: do not

respond to evil with more evil. As does the text, the music too brings together two conflicting worlds. “It was as though I had bought myself freedom, but at the cost of renouncing everything and being left completely naked. It was like turning the new page in my life. It was a decision, a conviction in something very significant”, confessed Arvo Pärt later in his 70th jubilee radio series (Pärt 2005).

- ⁴¹ Arvo Pärt laments the lost peace in godly and human relationships in his *Adam’s Lament*. Its world premiere took place in Turkey, the intersection of three monotheist religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The work was commissioned by the two Capitals of Culture, Istanbul, 2010, and Tallinn, 2011, and the event was a joint performance for these two cities. The premiere took place on 7 June 2010 in Istanbul’s Hagia Sophia, formerly the world’s biggest Christian cathedral, then a museum, and now a Moslem mosque. Arvo Pärt commented: “For the holy man Silouan of Mount Athos, the name Adam is like a collective term which comprises humankind in its entirety and each individual person alike, irrespective of time, epochs, social strata and confession. But who is this banished Adam? We could say that he is all of us who bear his legacy. And this ‘Total Adam’ has been suffering and lamenting for thousands of years on earth. Adam himself, our primal father, foresaw the human tragedy and experienced it as his personal guilt. He has suffered all human cataclysms, unto the depths of despair” (Arvo Pärt Centre 2022). As in Pärt’s other compositions, here too the structure of the text has dictated the course of music down to the tiniest details. Punctuation marks, the number of syllables and word emphasis all play an important role in Pärt’s *tintinnabuli*-composition (cf. Brauneiss 2017).
- ⁴² Jesus taught: “You’ve observed how godless rulers throw their weight around, how quickly a little power goes to their heads. It’s not going to be that way with you. Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not be served—and then to give away his life in exchange for the many who are held hostage” (Matt, 20: 25–28, *The Message*).
- ⁴³ The Revelation of Jesus repeats seven times to the churches to listen to what the Spirit might say also to the other churches: “Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 2, NIV).

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